

There is a *deja vu* quality to Margaret Priest's sculptures that comes from their subtle but multiple references to modernism, as well as their mixed up traces of the familiar and functional. The 'object versus thing' discussion is obviously in play when you need to discourage people from setting a wine glass down on your sculpture. Spatially these two works are reminiscent of early Cubist constructions and Bauhaus assemblages with their cantilevered planes and paired down inventory of elements. On closer inspection however the polished stone and metal parts belie a more up to date resemblance to the playful Memphis derived furniture of the eighties and the granite countertop excesses and mixed modern renovation mania of the nineties. They are time capsules of contemporary material fetishes and interior decoration.

An important function of these sculptures for me is how they stage and present a particular kind of human absence. They recreate an imaginary moment in art history when the figure was banished from cubist abstraction, opening up the path to color field painting and minimalism. These sculptures fictionally re-enact the site of that uncomfortable exchange when the figure was finally asked to leave. I like to imagine being a fly on the wall that afternoon as the room cleared of people and just the raw materials remained. The chrome plated tubular ghost of Marcel Breuer drifts through the sterilized terrazzo counter top of 'The Critic's Armchair: Untitled Table No. IV' like an apparition. The black marble slab of 'The Critic's Armchair: Untitled Table No. III' bears the buttock imprint of a theoretical Henry Moore bronze figure, just after it stood up and walked away, allowing the abstract elements to take over and speak among themselves for a while, their elegant language of form and space.

Viewing apparatus have been added to each piece; on one a magnifying lens, the other a circular frame, both referencing the retinal. Instead of offering up aspects of the outside world they are self-reflective and contain hand drawn representations of the material from which the sculptures are made; terrazzo and black marble, rendered in pencil. It makes for a circular type of logic that the eye of a sculpture would be made of stone and that it would only be able to see itself; a muted form of narcissism that I see as being more of a critique or memory of Clement Greenberg, and his strict parameters for the discussion of formal abstraction, always returning the dialogue back to the material.

These are didactic works that set up complicated relationships to art and materials. The only found object I could detect in these deceptively simple constructions was what at first appeared to be a polished white marble block, then revealed itself as the upturned cistern tank of a modern toilet, using Duchamp's imaginary but sturdy, porcelain shoulders as a foundation.

Tubular Ghosts

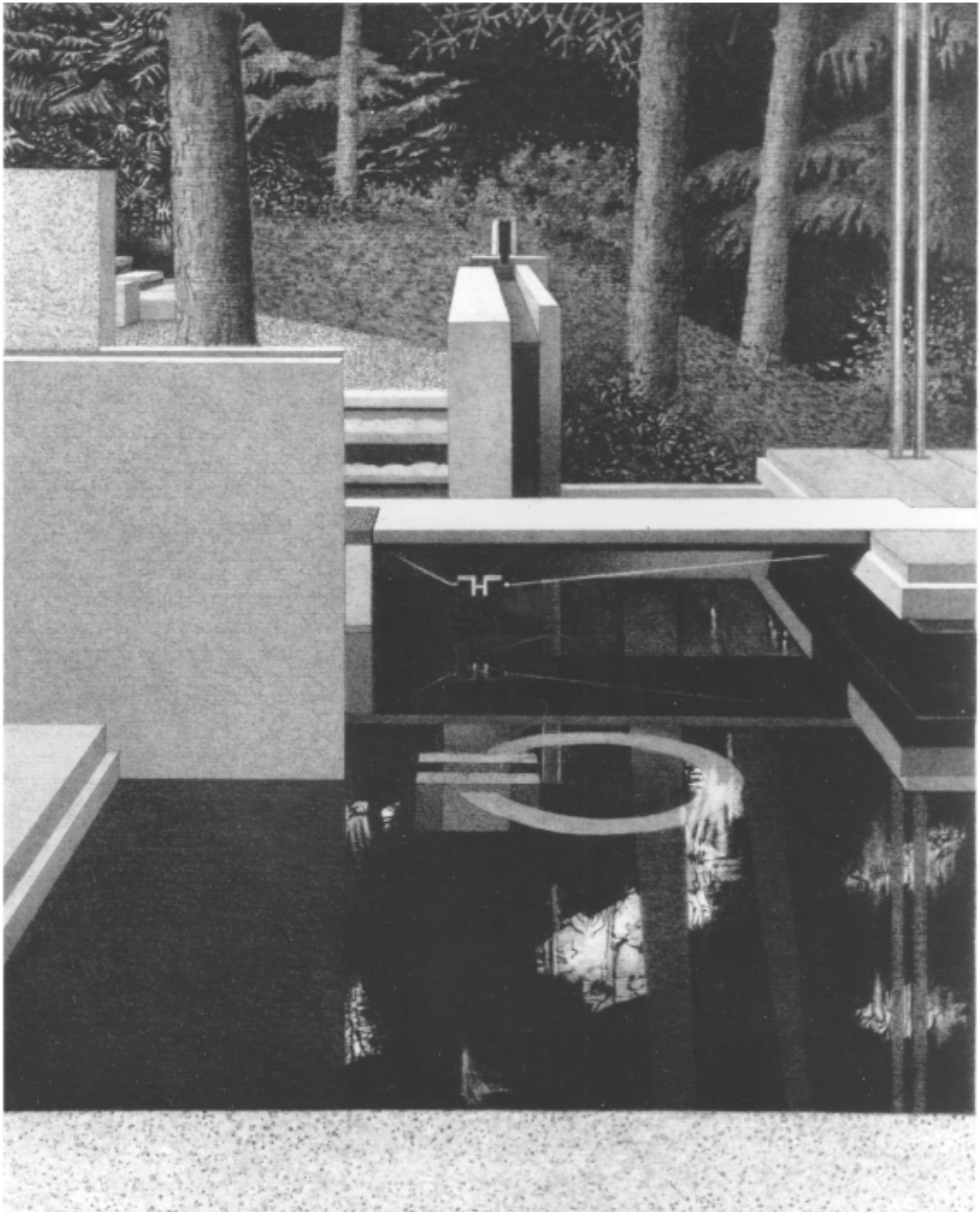
Peter Bowyer on Margaret Priest's
"The Critic's Armchair"



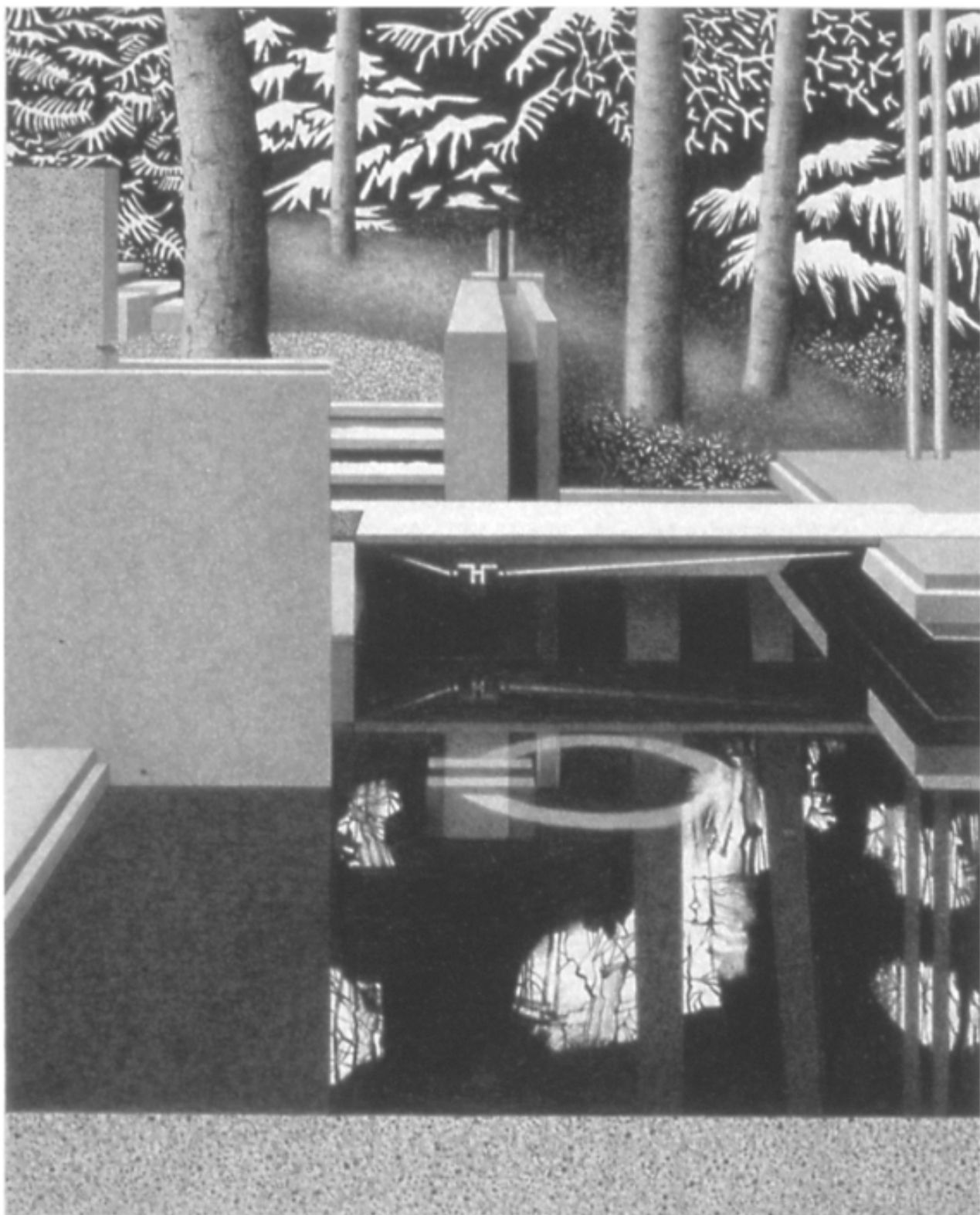
Untitled Table No. IV
series: The Critic's Armchair
1998-99
terrazzo, aluminum, chrome plated steel, and graphite drawing on handmade paper



Untitled Table No. III
series: The Critic's Armchair
1997- 2000
marble, porcelain, stained ash, chrome plated steel, and graphite drawing on handmade paper



The Reflecting Pool I
series: Water
1988
pencil on handmade Fabriano paper



The Reflecting Pool II
series: Water
1988
pencil on handmade Strathmore paper