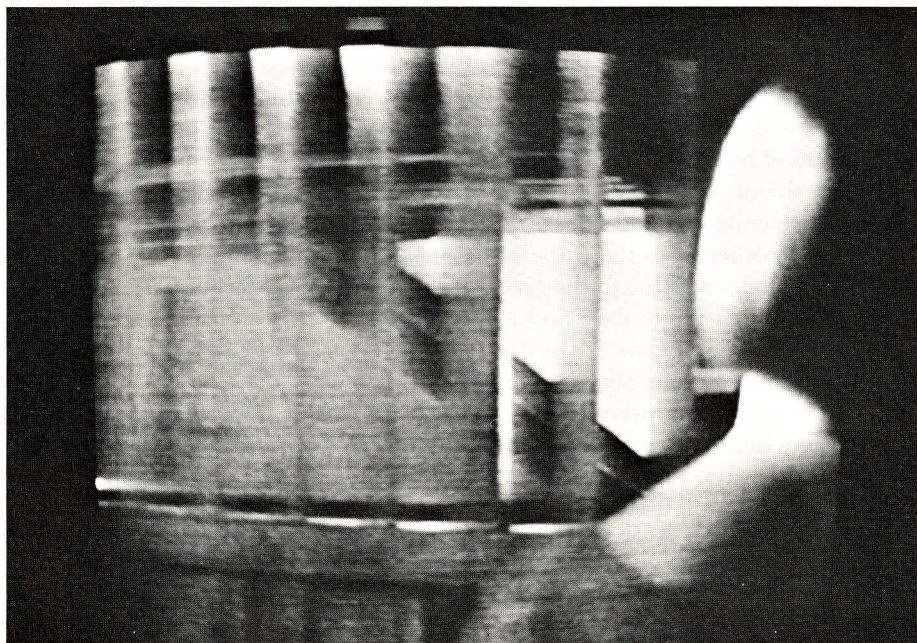


## Cate Rimmer / SOUVENIR RECOLLECTED

The site of Joey Morgan's most recent installation work, *Souvenir: A Recollection in Several Forms*, was Park Place, 666 Burrard Street, Vancouver. I entered a dark, womb-like elevator veneered with a mural of barely visible trees which took me to the thirty-first floor. A male, electronic voice announced my arrival.

I was deposited in an unexpected environment. Instead of immaculate, tastefully decorated executive quarters, there were bare concrete floors and bare white walls. At one end of the island of elevators stood a video machine surrounded by chairs. Each chair was equipped with a set of headphones designed to isolate the individual listener from those around him as he sat to view *Video Perfume*, the first major component of *Souvenir*.



*Video Perfume* consisted of a soundtrack and visual action. The viewer saw Morgan, her back to the camera, riding up and down a freight elevator. Glimpses of an indistinct, unspecified building could be seen through the bars of the elevator cage. In soft, gentle tones over an occasional musical accompaniment, Morgan recounted her memories of a perfume bottle which had once belonged to her grandmother, then to her mother.

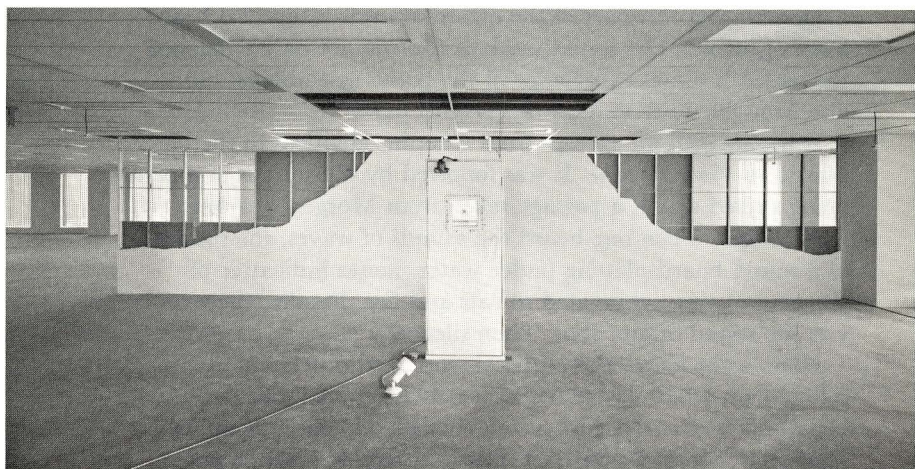
In Morgan's recollections, the perfume bottle becomes a symbol of the three women's relationship. Entangled with memories of it were expressions of love, estrangement, disillusionment and loss. The video was sensitive and contemplative. And although self-explanatory, it remained open-ended enough to allow the spectator an opportunity to pursue his or her own thoughts and associations. The air of intimate confession which encompasses the piece enabled Morgan to forge a bond between herself and the viewers. This bond, once established, encouraged the spectator in further attempts to understand this and the other more perplexing elements in the installation.

I moved next to *Murmurings*. This part of the exhibition consisted of several doors of varying design, grouped into a stepping stone pattern. On the white fronts of each door (some of which were ajar), the artist had inscribed passages from the text of *Video Perfume*. These passages were written lightly in pencil, lending an ephemeral appearance to the text. On the backs of each door the surfaces had been layered with texture and colour. One door was given a wrinkled, scarred quality that resembled aging skin, a reference, perhaps, to Morgan's grandmother or to the withering of memory and emotion. The colours applied to the backs of the doors varied from soft and delicate to dark and moody.

On a pane of glass at the centre of each door, Morgan had attached a 35 mm. slide. In order to discern what they portrayed, it was necessary to inspect them closely. The small images depicted the destruction of a piano in a variety of unusual ways. It was dismembered, infested with rats, submerged in water, set on fire and, finally, shot with a gun. Where one expected to find a document of the perfume bottle alluded to in the track, one found instead a bizarre, ritualistic enigma.

It was clear, however, that the doors represented the various paths and steps in both Morgan's and the viewers' lives. A Chopin étude could be heard in this space, cut into by noises that spilled in from another as yet unlocated source.

Dividing *Murmurings* from the sculpture that concluded the installation was a bare white wall. Part of the drywall had been cut and torn away to expose the interior supporting metal skeleton, a gesture akin to the stripping away of the present to reveal a memory that lies within.



The sculpture—an assemblage, or still life composed of battered piano parts arranged on a bed of shattered glass—was bathed in natural and artificial light. The beauty of the broken remnants drew me closer. The piano keyboard resting on the crushed glass was reminiscent of a slide I'd seen of the instrument in water on one of *Murmurings*' doors. Here the glass flickered and glistened in the light as though it were a liquid surface. The broken green and transparent glass of the sculpture tied in with the glass panes on the doors and echoed the image of the perfume bottle. I knew from previous experience with her work that the piano fragments alluded back to Morgan's *Fugue*.



Dominating this part of the exhibition was a tape I'd heard hints of before. The sound track of *Oratorio* not only enhanced the viewer's visual experience of the piano assemblage, but also brought unity to *Souvenir*'s several parts.

It began with an excerpt from Chopin, identical to the one played in *Video Perfume*. It was followed by the sounds of a piano being prized apart, a passage taken from Morgan's earlier work, *Fugue*. Then one heard the sounds of waves, the sounds of a sound board playing under water, noises indicative of the piano being subjugated to rats and fire. Finally, there was the sound of gun shot. Then silence.

Here, as in *Fugue*, the music championed order and refinement, while the destruction noises signified disorder and brutality. In *Oratorio*, however, the track and the fragments alluded to Morgan's past art, just as surely as *Video Perfume* referred back to an imaginatively constructed recollection of her past life.

I looked, then, through the large blinded and unblinded windows that encircled the floor of Park Place. The entire city—the commercial core, the North Shore, English Bay—was visible. The cars and people below were so small as to be abstract. The isolation from the world one experienced while considering the scenes through the window was an important element of the experience of *Souvenir*, and the reason Morgan had chosen the site for her installation.

Upon re-entering the elevator to make my descent—an act which paralleled in some measure Morgan's own actions in *Video Perfume*—I reflected upon the many twists, the journeying and exploration in *Souvenir* which remained with me as I left the site.