

FINE ARTS
LEISURE**Weekend**

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

Hope Sandrow
'Water Life'*Whitney Museum of American Art
at Philip Morris
120 Park Avenue, at 42d Street
Manhattan
Through Oct. 9*

Hope Sandrow's installation at the Whitney's lobby gallery in the Philip Morris building has great raw materials in its favor. Its centerpiece is nearly 10,000 moon snail shells, all carefully sorted according to color, size and condition and neatly displayed in shallow cardboard boxes stacked in the middle of the gallery.

The shells define a muted rainbow of pinkish whites, grays and rusts. Their varying sizes intimate the mollusk's life cycle. Their numbers suggest the work of a slightly mad marine biologist. Their varying condition evokes the vicissitudes of the sea in which they live.

The gallery walls are ringed by 10 large color photographs, which, while patently generic, further conjure up the natural environment: they are bright blue images of light-riddled water, taken at or below sea level, that suggest the ocean's incessant, indifferent motion and occasionally convey vague hints of shorelines, fish or bodies.

According to essays in the accompanying brochure, "Water Life" is organized on the theme of time and is the third in a trilogy of installations that began with "Memories" and "Spaces." The essays suggest biographical interpretations and discuss the artist's involvement with the body.

What comes across here, however, is mostly and specifically nature, both living and still, rampant and catalogued, as well as the sense that the artist has relied too completely on one of installation art's cardinal conventions, which is that large accumulations of almost any small object, whether natural or man-made, are bound to make an impression.

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