

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2010

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

The Museum
Revisited



\$10.00

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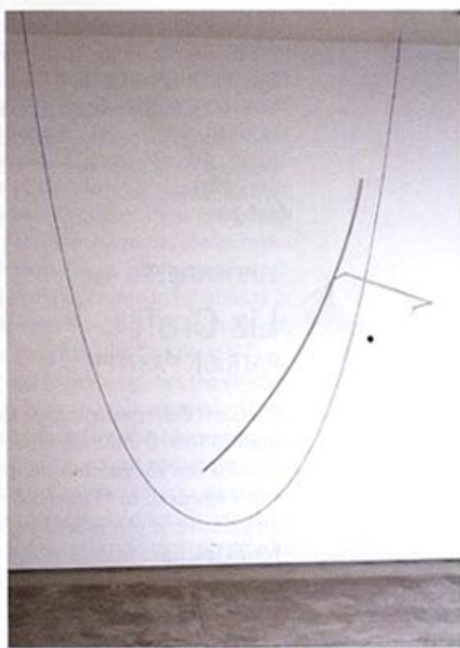
addition to *drawing 1*) that date from 2007 to 2009.

Installed in the main gallery, *Parabola*, 2008, typifies Caldas's spatial poetics. A stainless-steel armature is affixed to the wall near a period-like black vinyl circle. A strand of purple wool thread drapes from the ceiling and through the armature, echoing the curved part of the steel while forming a parabola in three-dimensional space. Whereas the parabolic form may signal a play on the work's title, the piece as a whole acts as a single, expressive statement. *Shade*, 2009, hanging opposite, similarly contains these three formal elements—yarn woven through a steel structure, with the vinyl dot represented by a suspended black granite ball—as does *drawing 3*, 2009, which reduces the scale of *Shade*'s visual lexicon by incorporating the black head of a pin and a thin string that mimics the thick strand of yarn.

Not only does Caldas's material vocabulary recycle and repeat such formal punctuations (from all periods of his career), it also revisits the dialectic of the Brazilian Neo-concrete artists of a previous generation, reinterpreting their dynamic and sensual strain of geometric abstraction. Emerging in the late 1950s and early '60s (just prior to Brazil's military dictatorship), Neo-concretists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape freed Constructivist-based painting and sculpture from its rigid, mathematical logic and commingled its forms with the everyday. Like those artists, who aimed to eliminate the frame or pedestal and instead situate the viewer's body as an artwork's "support," Caldas draws the viewer into proximity with his objects to set up an experiential exchange; in this exhibition, the sculptures were installed around the perimeter of the gallery, allowing the viewer's body to occupy the otherwise open center. From this vantage, the space could be considered either as a constellation of interconnected points or as a series of formal permutations in two and three dimensions.

Caldas's lexicon is a clean, vibrant, and seemingly effortless collection of "simple" figures. And while *simples* may be an apt label for these works, the word's literal appearance in this exhibition (via *drawing 1*) is an exciting complication of the subtler mechanics of the artist's style. Perhaps the simple innovation of spelling out an idea will open up new possibilities for Caldas's material constructions.

—Catherine Taft



Waltercio Caldas,
Parabola, 2008,
stainless steel,
wool thread, vinyl,
11' 8" x 10' x 2' 3".

LONDON

Kaye Donachie MAUREEN PALEY

The modest proportions of the six paintings in Kaye Donachie's latest exhibition served only to sharpen the focus of the gaze she turns upon her subjects—a gaze that makes visible a kind of fruitful incoherence (to use artist Susan Hiller's endlessly useful and provocative term). To say, then, that Donachie's subject here is women's contributions to modernist thought and practice would be to oversimplify. What it is to be present, to be active, to have a voice, and to assume, ultimately, some

measure of control over the fate of one's productive labor are all questions that these paintings bring to bear. This may be why Donachie's colors, for example, nod to the dance between domesticity, ornament, and the avant-gardes. The white and yellow blobs of paint in several of the canvases are immediately arresting, suggesting the theater lighting and leisure spaces of fin de siècle Paris; the pale greens and mauves in *Know my substance when it speaks* (all works 2010) bring to mind Bloomsbury and the Omega Workshops, while the blue-green gloom of *In the glass that mirrors me* hovers between symbolist poetics and the darkness addressed in art of the mid-twentieth century.

Figures—female figures—appear in all of the paintings. There are heads seen full-face and in profile, silhouettes, hand gestures, and bodies performing, either onstage or in pursuit of some more abstract idea of physical movement. These elements often appear as overlapping veils, building the image out of so many ghostly and insubstantial fragments. The handling is assured in its shrewd, self-conscious diversity, mixing delicate line, tonal modulation, and spatial modeling with areas of more thickly applied, almost aggressively worked paint. While all six canvases play with the language of portraiture, only two are of specific figures: *The world stood still and I am wild* uses an image of Claire Goll, while the head floating above the hillside landscape in *I do believe that most of me, floats under water* is that of Edna St. Vincent Millay. Elsewhere, the figures allude more generally to the shifting idea of the modernist woman artist. The sources of both the formal language Donachie uses here and the sense of a dynamic presence articulated by a voice of uncertain gender could be seen in the sequence of short film excerpts, selected by the artist,

playing in the upstairs gallery. There, a reading from Millay's "Journal" and outtakes from Maya Deren's lost film *Witch's Cradle* (1943) were augmented with two visual poems by James Broughton. The play of shadow and light, substance and absence in Francis Bruguière and Oswald Blakeston's *Light Rhythms* (1930), which completes the program, also provides a key to the layered composition of Donachie's paintings.

The figures in Donachie's paintings and in the films she chose are under the spotlight in various ways. The paintings—all of which, incidentally, are titled after lines in Millay's journal—impress upon us that the by-now-familiar idea of gender as performance is much more than mere theory. In signing herself Vincent, Millay can be understood as proactive as much as defensive. Moreover, our inability



Kaye Donachie,
*Myself I think shall
never know, how far
beneath the wave
I go*, 2010, oil on
canvas, 24 x 17 1/4".

to place the careers of, say, Goll, Nina Hamnett, Mina Loy, or, again, Millay within established categories remains a challenge to the perennial expectations that artists should exhibit professional or stylistic consistency and rational progression. The fevered strokes with which Donachie describes Goll's almost blinded, almost weeping, discomposed eyes in *The world stood still and I am wild*, or the hand that simultaneously points to, shades, impresses upon, and protects the woman's upper thigh in *Know my substance when it speaks*, protest this bias.

—Michael Archer