

VISUAL ART

Jinny Yu

by Michael Rattray

Gallery performance or the “Hotel” series, is only half-accurate as, in having described these very locations as “studios” he reveals his attachment to the traditional idea of the artist’s studio. The adaptability and conceptual possibilities located within the temporal constraints of alternate sites of production are questioned. In a recent four-diptych cycle titled *In the Studio 2008*, Wallace, situating himself in his own studio, staged a photographic recreation of “At Work.” The model of work in this self-reflexive, *mise en scène* includes upgraded technology, increased scale (arts economy) and an explicit reference to monochrome painting and the photographic image, a signature of Wallace’s current practice and signifier of his conceptual art origins and the traditional dialectics of modernist art.

Conceptual art proved to be the game changer in late-Modernism and Ian Wallace, as a participant in that experiment, set out by examining Formalism’s boundaries and painting’s limits in the vertical monochromes, 1967, the *Plank Pieces*, 1968, and the “White Line” works, 1969, some of which were recreated and shown at the VAG. These works were all minimalist by description and oriented to self-referential material and optical meaning in an effort to question the premise of art’s autonomy and the ideals of high modernist Formalism. Wallace’s critique of Formalism’s aspirations revealed that monochrome painting emptied of all external content achieved non-objective abstraction or formal purity, but as we learn in the retrospective and from the artist’s writings, this limitation and strength, while unique to art, was essentially closed to historical, societal and cultural contexts. This

absence influenced the artist’s turn to photography, specifically the urban subject and the street.

Later in his monochrome-photography composites these historical antagonists are placed together in their most definitive states (field and image) engaging the parallel discourses that run throughout modernist art history: a Kantian-influenced ideal of art’s autonomy and of Hegelian subjectivity and socialization. Through a conceptually grounded montage, juxtaposition of individually distinct units, concepts of abstraction and representation, and figure and ground, are not only imbricated but ironically united into a new and ambiguous pictorial Formalism. In this achievement, it is also necessary to acknowledge Wallace’s continued inspiration from and reference to literature, to Stéphane Mallarmé in particular, for whom the “blanks” were important when words were dispersed upon the surface of a page. Mallarmé once said something to the effect that his work did not at all break with tradition, he just adjusted it enough to open some eyes. ■

“Ian Wallace: At the Intersection of Painting and Photography,” was exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery from October 27, 2012 to February 24, 2013.

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For the Italian theorist Renato Poggioli, in his book, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 1971, Avant-Gardism is characterized by a declassé sensibility motivated by vocation—a kind of quasi-transnational *avant la lettre*. The genesis of this distinct and unique feeling arose from a new-found historical awareness and reflexivity singular to artists in the age of mechanical reproduction. Now, with the age of the global artist and digital reproduction upon us, I find the former an apt point on which to open this critique on Jinny Yu’s current exhibition.

“What Is to Be Done” is a recent collection of works that continue a trend in Yu’s oeuvre that has been under development since roughly 2005 and is characterized by the use of aluminum as material form. Consistently, the artist has reduced her canvases (I use the term loosely) from complex, geometric-based abstraction to a gestural-based abstraction typified by a lessening of the hand, replaced with a heightened sense of place and underscored by material form and concrete experience. This recent exhibition consisted of 14 works noted for utilitarian titles such as *Halves*, *Folded* and *Bent*, and the aporetic “Non-Painting Painting” series.

Materials included mirrors, aluminum and a digital video scored by Korean born musician, Jung Hun Yoo. In addition to a minimal palette, Yu further abstracts the material base of her paintings through the structural alteration of the tableaux. These interventions into traditional structure include bends, folds and cuts. In this way, many of the objects jut out from the wall, reflecting and betraying



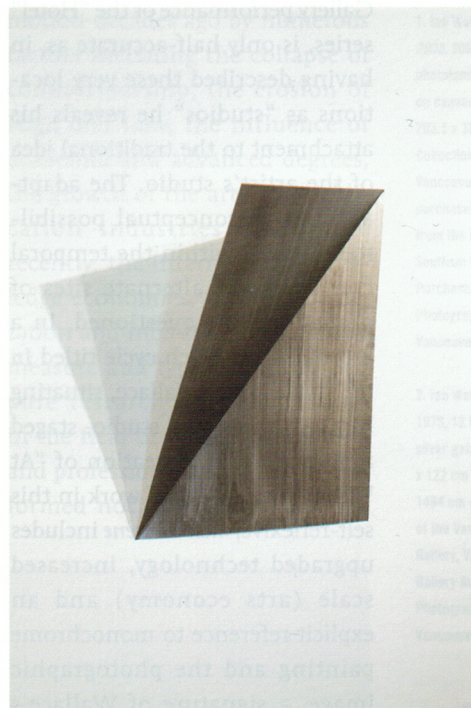
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an allegiance to situational aesthetics. Thus, physical position and phenomenological experience inform the overall structure, composition and material choice. Yu demands a total experience, her work seeking to envelop and reveal the space of its exhibition to claim it as its own. Indeed, it is difficult to experience these works without engaging with the space around them and the juxtaposition of conflicting forms.

Mere Mirror Painting (2012), a diptych of two mirrors placed leaning against the wall in portrait style, manipulates in a cunning way. One mirror is untouched save for the cracks that break up its image space into quarters. The second mirror is coated in Yu's signature brushstrokes, highlighting the material form of the paint/brush, fracturing the sign-function of the mirror and realizing its limit point and distortive potential. The work operates philosophically somewhere between Nam June Paik's *Zen for Head* (1962) and Donald Judd's *Untitled Work in Milled Aluminum* (1982).

Bent, 2012, *Halves*, 2012, and *Folded*, 2012, each deconstruct surface. The titles act as cues

to material process and general functionality. *Bent*, consisting of brushed oil on aluminum, is divided in two, illuminating the triangular twin born of the square. Slightly folded from the middle, the monochromatic palette is skewed through the play of light and movement in space. The piece disjoints from formal considerations but is neither clearly sculptural nor painterly—thus the grey area of perception vis-à-vis medium fixity is stretched to a limit point, a process exposing the liminal position in-between. *Halves* follows a similar methodology of execution, yet in function, confounds expectation. The tableaux has been cut in two, ending off what was begun in *Bent*. The two peaks rest parallel to one another, leaning against the gallery wall, on the floor. Mimetic and repetitious of the other, *Bent* and *Halves* augment a sense that the artist is moving closer and closer to a zero point of execution where material form and artist's intention collapse. *Folded*, then, sees the image space double over, the aluminum left to its own devices and hanging from the gallery wall, its contents hidden away from view.



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This interest in breaking down the physical structure of the aluminum and the ideological structure of the painted surface comes to the fore in the "Non-Painting Painting" series. One work consists of a plain aluminum sheet resting against the gallery wall, accompanied by a painted sheet that again is hidden, this time standing up on end and folded over, coerced into a new stasis. Yu has reduced the entirety of her practice to a hidden meaning, eclipsed by the very material that she's exploited. The experience overrides the object's simplicity and it appears that what Yu may be searching for with these works is a way in which to convey the dire need for physical presence in the critical engagement with the painting as medium. As such, *Bent in Motion*, 2012, abstracts the material form and renders visible the translation of physical objecthood to digital image. The piece is a single 180-degree pan shot passing over *Bent*. Tellingly, once translated to digital projection, all sense of

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Rosemarie Trockel

by Daniel Baird

1. "Jinny Yu, What Is to Be Done?" 2012, installation view at Art Mûr, courtesy Art Mûr, Montreal

2. Jinny Yu, *Bent 2*, 2010, oil on aluminum, 61 x 48 cm, courtesy of Art Mûr, Montreal

3. "Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos," installation view. Left wall: "From a French Magazine" series, 2005. Right wall: *Dress - Stage 2*, 2012, wool, 127 x 127 cm. Image courtesy the New Museum, New York. Photograph: Benoit Pailley

spatial depth is removed and what is left is a perceptual shift. The work, a lament to the poetics of space and time, echoes constructivist concerns of universal form, which is further punctuated by a nearby homage to Malevich's *Black Square*, 1915, that occupies a space typically reserved for a corner relief.

"What Is to Be Done" does not ask us so much to consider the art of painting as it does the art of looking at painting and experiencing the real-time presence of space. Much of these works in arrangement and composition signal the unavoidable consequence of our digital landscape—they will be experienced and mediated through the screen, another frame with which the tableaux must compete. As a result Yu postures an avant-garde agonism that beckons for the return of space itself, the value of position, the potential for transcendental experience, not as a reproducible constellation of digital offering but a contingent and visceral immersion within the space of contemplation—where no reproduction can touch the unique experience of being there. Further, the exhibition is a reduction of the artist's hand in exchange for the specificity of a material-based abstraction; a zero point has ultimately been achieved. The question is then not so much what is to be done, but what will be done in the aftermath of work such as this? ■

"Jinny Yu: What Is to Be Done?" was exhibited at Art Mûr in Montreal from September 8 to November 3, 2012.

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One of the principal criteria for an artist's being significant is that he or she creates not just individual works that are beautiful or original or engaging, but rather assembles a body of work that articulates an encompassing and singular vision of the world and our place in it. If art is to be something more than decorative, if it is to be something beyond a brief intervention into the aesthetic and social issues of a particular time and place, then it has, of necessity, to be speculative and visionary. This is as true of Titian and Rembrandt as it is of Willem deKooning, Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Beuys.

Born in Schwerte, Germany and educated at the Werkkunstschule in Cologne, Rosemarie Trockel, who turned 60 in November and whose career has been both distinguished and highly idiosyncratic, almost certainly belongs in this company. And "Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos," curated by Lynne Cooke of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid, in close collaboration with the artist, which occupied three floors of the New Museum in New York through January 20, is a perfect introduction to this artist's vision of the world.

The exhibit is not a retrospective and hardly encyclopedic. Rather, it includes important selections of core aspects of the artist's work, as well as an eccentric and illuminating sampling of artworks and artifacts that have, in one way or another, inspired her.

Trockel emerged as an artist in the late 1970s in a Germany still haunted by the Second World War and racked by political upheaval, and in an art scene dominated by aggressive male painters like Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke and George Baselitz. These were artists who worked solidly within the Western pictorial tradition, who more often than not worked on a vast scale and in the register of the tragic and the sublime. Trockel's conceptually astute work, fueled in part by a feminist critique of the often bombastic and romantic view of creativity common among her contemporaries, has always resisted easy classification in terms of either style or medium: she has worked with ease in wool, ceramics, oil paint, photography, video and performance.

The fourth floor of "A Cosmos" is devoted to Trockel's ceramic works. *Magma*, 2008, for instance, consists of three lumpy, fragmented