

COVER IMAGE

DEREK SULLIVAN
Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #13, 2006
Coloured pencil on paper
127 x 98 cm
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley Art + Projects. Toronto

GASOLINE RAINBOWS

ELI BORNOWSKY, GEOFFREY FARMER, ELI LANGER, DEREK SULLIVAN, KIKA THORNE & HOLLY WARD

JANUARY 26 TO MARCH 18, 2007 CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY, VANCOUVER

...so I'm in the Tate and I'm looking at a Hockney. And oh sweet Jesus there is something about that blue that touches me deep inside, makes me want to step outside. I'm sweating, I'm sweating. I begin to palpitate I can't help myself. I just can't help myself.. Modern Art makes me want to rock out .. Art Brut

In the process and product of formal investigation, not a lot means something specific I can talk about formalism as an artistic practice that gestures towards meaning. It is a practice that is more interested in ambiguity than acting as a vehicle for clearly translating specific meaning or functioning as a pedagogical model to tender understanding. The formal signs of an abstract painting, sculpture, video or film do not engage as solid signs. A random shape, repeating pattern or soundless rhythms do not build obvious relationships between work and viewer or viewer and viewer. The works in *Gasoline Rainbows* do not unravel like a novel or come together like a puzzle. They are not a problem to be solved or looked up like a definition. Their meaning occurs as experience We relate to them in a manner that reflects the sensory way we encounter the world.

In their song *Modern Art*, Art Brut comically articulate an incomprehensible experience of looking at art by describing the physical effects one color can have on the body. They mock a romantic notion of viewership that links looking with feeling and further equate this feeling with the experience of listening to music. The power of music is something most of us can relate to. Its physical effects can't be ignored. It literally moves us, makes us move. Art Brut uses a particular way of listening and experiencing music – rocking out – to aptly reflect this romantic notion of looking. It is an isolating action and individual experience that is distinct from dancing in sync with a prescriptive rhythm and in semi-unison with others on a packed dance floor. Rocking out implies letting go, allowing a response that is unscripted and free-form. This is reminiscent of traditional (and overwrought) approaches to viewing art particularly associated with viewing formalist and abstract work. "How does it make you feel" is an exemplary question, one that has no wrong answer You can't miss a beat when you're rocking out. Can you experience an abstract artwork incorrectly? In understanding the effects of form subjective interpretation is privileged over shared experiences. There is little attempt to formulate where viewers might enter the work collectively

This exhibition brings together work by six multidisciplinary artists who take abstraction to the edge of representation Eli Bornowsky. Geoffrey Farmer, Eli Langer, Derek Sullivan, Kika Thorne and Holly Ward question the use of abstraction through their own formal explorations. Many of the works directly refer to and, as such, represent the modernist paradigm in relation to the visual arts. In some ways the works are like caricatures of Modernism, simplifying and exaggerating its familiar aesthetic canon, typified by artists working in the mid-twentieth century, as if stuck in the move away from representation. This reappraisal of formal concerns is a turn toward the processes of abstraction and onto a plane of surfaces linked to this paradigm through visual and conceptual references. It follows a return to the studio in order to focus on formal and material relationships, which attempt to address the intangible and unstable relations between artist, viewer and object.

My curiosity leads me to look for something common to the artists' approaches, and to articulate the particularities of each formal and material process. This investigation into form for form's sake is not to set up Modernism as a foil, but to illuminate the specific qualities of aesthetic exploration, using form to shape ideas. Vivid colours, bold forms, elaborate compositions become tangible objects that evoke intangible ideas, materializing abstract thought through abstract forms. There is intention. With varying deliberateness each of the artists allude to something. Their intentions are not left to the illusions of splintered subjectivities, but are rendered on the surface as a shared opening.

For the works in *Gasoline Rainbows* it happens on the surface, which becomes a charged point of entry or more accurately a site of multiple access points. The artists in the exhibition use formal elements not to appeal to the individuality of subjects, but to establish a common ground. Kika Thorne's *Pink Black Hole*, 2006 clearly sets up such a ground. The two pink and black suspended spandex planes held in tension give form to an abstract idea, the idea of the black hole. She responds aesthetically to an idea of something that is speculative but is believed to exist, only in an imagined form. The black hole is a theoretical description of a total gravitational collapse of a giant star or a group of stars. The centre is thought to contain so much matter in such a small space that light cannot even move through it or escape from it. The density is known as a "singularity" and it is this imagined space where Thorne situates her scheme. The form is very simple; using the basic physics of a parabola, Thorne draws

a diagram for a discussion space where ideas, no matter how impossible to materialize, are physically caught. The "singularity" becomes a place where Thorne responds to the form with a specific situation, positing her own singular idea and imagining it as space where others can posit theirs. But overall, *Pink Black Hole* maintains its status as a form that is part of a larger phenomenological practice that exists as a sensory experience where viewers can enter collectively. The subjective position isn't denied, but is only possible after the idea is presented as a form--as an abstraction of an abstraction.—

Holly Ward similarly plays with the representation of ideas through abstract means, but she does so systematically. She constructs The Shape of Things to Come, 2006–2007 nine unique Plexiglas polygons, as a means to disseminate a collection of contemporary lectures from a variety of disciplines, including microbiology, ecomomics, ecology, anthropology and critical theory. Within the white geometric shapes are small sections of linear configurations of LED lights that are attached to audio devices of recorded public lectures. The lights are triggered on and off by each speaker's voice, flashing in rhythmic sync with their speech patterns. The lectures, from varied sources, include Nature Revealed, a lecture by the biologist Edward O. Wilson who discusses the urgent necessity of understanding how micro-organisms will adapt to climactic changes as a strategy for our own survival; and Between Fear and Trembling by the philosopher Slajov Žižek, who discusses the power of appearance, deeming empty gestures as vital political actions. All of the lectures are pragmatic discussions that argue for significant paradigm shifts within their fields. Ward translates the scientific and theoretical positions of each lecture into individual shapes and patterns in an effort to give the expressed anxieties a unique and distinct form. She uses repetition to capture an anxiousness that runs at the core of each lecturer's message. In this way, the varied forms, even in their silence, register multiple speakers, but in an overall composition that unifies their meaning. In all her works the underlying questions are related to abstraction. What is its use? What drives us to use these forms? And how do they convey meaning? The relation between language and the material forms of The Shape of Things to Come is abstract and this physical presence is the key to drawing similarities between all of the works. In translating the lectures into objects Ward denies immediate access to the specific discussions but she also offers viewers another way of engaging by providing web links to the lectures from the gallery's website.¹ —

For Umwelt Compositions and Comparisons (deferring reception), Geoffrey Farmer uses language as a primary formal element, but in this piece sounds, tones and rhythms begin a conversation that articulates an abstract quality in relation to an overall composition Farmer has displaced the gallery reception, moving the desk into the reading room and replacing the publication shelves with a mirror of the same proportion. In its new position, the desk is reflected in the mirror so it still visually occupies its original position on entering the gallery. In relation to the mirror and in place of the desk, Farmer has positioned a bench on which he has composed a musical interpretation of events, objects and activities that occurred over the 6 hours he observed the space. Mixing synthetic sounds with sounds recorded on site, Farmer has made nineteen compositions over the course of the day, titling them individually 12.00 noon to 12 15pm, Fabric in tree, 165 die, partially obstructed by a cement truck for 30 seconds. ² The compositions not only refer to what he is experiencing at that moment but as well to more abstracted information that he has received from other sources throughout the day These compositions are played in the space, in sync to his day (Monday, January 22, 2007) for the duration that the gallery is opened to the public. His title refers to Thomas Sebeok's use of the term "umwelt", describing how semiosis takes place in a significant environment. The umwelt is the part of the environment that an organism "chooses" to inhabit and is its perceptual or subjective universe that is constantly being interpreted. Here Farmer's gestures and interpretations of the specificity of time and place become the things that are abstracted and how he combines them in comparison to the projected viewer experience becomes the abstraction

What are implied actions in Farmer's piece are physically rendered in the work of Eli Langer. In his two oil paintings, *Visible Painting* and *Who wants to live forever? Not me!* Langer empties the surface of the canvas, painting in a way that is similar to Farmer's emptying of the gallery's foyer. But here it is as if Langer is erasing his marks instead of applying new ones. The marks are made in a manner that feels like taking a step backwards instead of forward, as if he is trying to avoid his own painting, the act of painting, any reason for painting. He even removes colour, reducing his palette to grey scale. It is as if he hates painting. But still the lines are there, the paint is applied and he paints. For Langer the work is in the making. This also comes across in his wall sculpture 5 *Lines*, five painted wood strips arranged into a

geometric form, a sculpture that plainly illustrates its title. It is a prop where the seams can be seen, where the lines are cut and joined according to the angle of their cuts, regardless if they are irregular. The seams need to be shown because that is where integrity breaks down and intention begins. It is the jarring moment where the collective experience and the subjective position flip. The artist's intention is visible there, but the follow-through seems missing. The subject is a disruption that transforms the object from a compelling surface into something that is open to change. The original idea is altered into something other—into another shape, line or texture.

Derek Sullivan marks this precarious line by opposing everyday signs culled from graphic design, and fashion styles with art historical references from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, mainly quoting from the High Modernist period into Minimalism. The specificity of the reference is undermined by the graphic use of common forms, rendering seemingly familiar abstract compositions in pencil crayon or using gingham as the abstract patterns Sullivan's use of historical references is not direct and he intentionally creates confusion by misquoting the original sources. The six drawings in *Gasoline Rainbows* are from *Standing on the Shoulder of Giants*, a series of large scale drawings. The title of the series comes

from the title of the UK band Oasis's fourth album, which was an unintended misquote of Sir Isaac Newton, which correctly reads "standing on shoulders of giants". The band's mistake reflects the way the viewer might look at Sullivan's drawings. It is not that he intends to dupe his audience into thinking they are looking at something they are not, but he uses this tactic to directly address the different ways with which these modes (high art versus pop culture) resonate - which one carries more aesthetic impact, lingers longer in the cultural and subjective memory and how each might differently affect the experience of viewing. For example, in looking at these works one might shift between an intellectual and sensory mode of viewing or one way of looking might be privileged over the other. It is a quasi-experiment, a testing of different aesthetic genres and hierarchies, which is also played out in *Amnesiacs*, a series of sculptures modeled after Brancusi sculptures. The sculpture is just a base for which Sullivan layers additional material from coloured paper to printed matter until the shape underneath starts to lose its form. Both the drawings and the sculptures work to eradicate these hierarchical distinctions and genuinely question aesthetic practice. What value does it have? How does it function? How do we read it? How do we decipher meaning? And what is its impact?

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière draws a line between aesthetic and political practices in order to discuss the manner in which they intersect. For him, "[a]rtistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relations they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility." ³ This relationship to aesthetic production is a distinction that sets artistic practices apart from other modes of understanding. It establishes a means of engaging in society in general and more specifically, a means to function as a political being.

Rancière uses the classic notion of Modernity as a paradigm to establish a distinction specific to artistic practices, but also to show how it operates as a shared and common mode of entry. He celebrates Modernism for its attempt to define what it did — what is particular to aesthetic practice — and chastises it for separating itself from all other ways of being and for not understanding its power. This power, the power of form, is that its meaning becomes foreign to itself and that it has "the intention of the unintentional." ⁴ Simply stated,

"The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from an hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres." ⁵ The regime or realm Rancière is describing is a place where artistic practice enters into the realm of the political, in part as "evidence of democratic equality." ⁶

What is particular to the way in which the artists in *Gasoline Rainbows* place an emphasis

on aesthetic form is the attempt to create an expanded and common point of entry, drawing viewers and response without relying on familiar imagery embedded into already established hierarchies of looking that contain traceable meanings. The abstract and undeniable articulation of material becomes a democratic invitation for engagement. The point of entry is preferential, privileging a desire for the work to be experienced over the delivery of a concrete message. In each work in this exhibition the relationship between material and content is established through formal considerations while remaining somewhat indiscernible. It is not important for meaning and form to come so directly together and maybe it is more essential that they hover outside of the normative hierarchies of understanding. The purpose of the formal play is to remind us of this indeterminacy that no artwork will retain its original integrity or its intended meaning. This is not a cynical approach, but more of an understanding of the power of appearance that invisible meanings translate into formal substance, which in turn materialize into specific and meaningful experiences.

Jenifer Papararo

List of recorded lectures: Ronald Wright (Anthropologist), A Short History of Progress, Massey Lecture Series, 2004 http://www.cbc.ca ideas/massey/2004.httml: Edward O. Wilson (Biologist), Nature Revealed. American Museum of Natural History Science and the City Series 2006 http://www.amnh.org/podcast/snc/?src=p_h; Jelfrey Sachs (Economist), Is Sustainable Development Feasible? American Museum of Natural History Science and the City Series, 2006 http://www.amnh.org/podcast/snc/?src=p_h; Joseph Stiglitz (Economist), Globalization & the 21st century Enlightenment. University of Edinburgh, Enlightenment Series, 2005 http://www.ed.acuk/explore/av/enlightenment/2006/psephstiglitz.html; Noam Chomsky (Linguist/Media Analyst), Imminent Crises; Paths Toward Solutions, Binghamton University 2006 http://stream.publicbroadcasting.net/production/mp3/wskg/local-wskg-502740.mp3; IreneKhan (International Lawyer), The War on Terror: a War on Liberty?, University of Edinburgh, Enlightenment Series, 2006. http://www.ed.acuk/explore/av/enlightenment/2006/podcast/index.html; Kerry Emanuel (Planetary Scientist) & Ernest Moniz (Physicist), Meeting Global Energy Demands Sustainably, WGBH Forum Network, 2006. http://lorum.wgbh.org/content/florum/3271-2006_10_18.mp3; Slavoj 2/izek (Philosopher), Politics Between Fear and Terror CRCA, University of California, San Diego 2006. http://www.calif2.net/events.popup.php?id=902; Richard Dawkins (Evolutionary Biologist), The Strangeness of Science, CBC Ideas 2007 http://www.cbc.ca.podcasting/includes/ideas.xml.

2 Uwelt Compositions and Comparisons musical arrangements composed live and played back in the same place and time of their origin, recorded on January 22, 2007 in the reception area of the Contemporary Art Gallery: 12:00-12:20pm: Fabric Wet, Hanging, Desperate, then Partially Obstructed by a Cement Truck: 12:20-12:30pm: You with the Sad Eyes Walking to my Drums (A White Dog, No Umbrella. Wet Jeans): 12:30-12:45pm: If it Were Possible to Express the Feeling of: Transporting Concert Slabs to Drone Music: 12:45-1:00pm: For Nobody Knows Themselves if They are Only Themselves And Not Another at the Same Time; 1:00-1:10pm: Seriously Engaged in Oblique Stategies; 1:10-1:30pm: Searching, Paintings, Passwords: 1:30-1:45pm: Now.; 1:45-2:00pm: A Billion Black Shoes Invade the Street at a Few Minutes to Two; 2:00-2:07pm: India's Space Capsule Recovery Experiment Returns to Earth; 2:07-2:15pm: Being Here Now But Thinking of Then and When; 2:15-2:30pm: Woman pulls up track pants while talking on phone. (Possible Ringtones): 2:30-3:00pm: A Song for a Woman, With a Single Rose. Who Wipes Rain Off Her Glasses: 3:00-3:17pm: Considering Disembodied Voice of the Philosopher. Holly Ward's Work Reflected Off the Windows, then Reflected Again Off of the Mirror: 3:17-3:30pm: Another Truck Load of Dirt Taken Away Until No Dirt Is Left? 3:30-3:45pm: Art of Noises: 3:45-4:00pm: Untilled: 4:00-4:15pm: The Cruel City; 4:15-4:30pm: Your Day Against my Day; 4:30-4:45pm: The World Situation that I Can't See, while Rush Hour Begins Again; 4:45-5:00pm In the End the Beginning Might Look Something Like This. (Irom Non-Musical Sources): 5:00-6:00pm: Silence.

- 3 Jacques Rancière. The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible. Continuum. New York, 2004, p13.
- 4 Ibid. p23.
- 5 Ibid, p23.
- 6 Ibid, p14.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

FILL RORNOWSKY

Eli Bomowsky holds a diploma of Visual Communication: Design and Illustration from the Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton (2001), and a BFA in Visual Arts from the Emily Carr Institute in Vancouver (2005). Bornowsky has participated in solo exhibitions, In Advance of the Coffee Table Book. Or Reterritornalized Deterritornalizations of a Stream of Consciousness at the Helen Pitt in Vancouver (2003) and Great Drinker and Chandelier at the Lobby gallery in Vancouver (2006 as well as group shows including Chamomile Testerosa at the 1066 Project Space in Toronto (2003). Dept at the Other Gallery Banff Centre in Banff (2005), and most recently Way Crafty at Blanket Gallery in Vancouver (2006). Bornowsky has also performed at various sites including untitled sound pieces at Blim in Vancouver (2004, 2005), and collaboratively with the Tokyo Orthodox Noise Choir at Studio 80 in Tokyo, Japan (2001). Bornowsky lives and works in Vancouver and is represented by Blanket Gallery Vancouver where he has an upcoming solo exhibition.

FILLANGER

Eli Langer was born in Montreal in 1967. Langer has been exhibiting both internationally and within Canada, including solo exhibitions at Daniel Hug in Los Angeles (2006), Paul Petro Contemporary Art in Toronto (2005) and Platform in London, UK (1999). He has also participated in various group exhibitions at the Helen Pitt in Vancouver (2001). Ben Kaufmann in Berlin (2006) and Raster in Warsaw (2006). He currently lives and works in Los Angeles and Canada.

GEOFFREY FARMER

Geoffrey Farmer has exhibited widely holding solo exhibitions at The Power Plant in Toronto (2005), the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver (2003) and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (2002). He has forthcoming exhibitions scheduled at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal in Montreal in 2008, Witte de With in Rotterdam in 2008 and the Drawing Room in London, UK in 2007, Selected group shows include the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Antwerp, Gasworks in London, UK, Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh, Vancouver Art Gallery, Seoul Museum of Art, Melbourne International Biennial and forthcoming at Tate Modern. Farmer lives and works in Vancouver and is represented by Catriona Jeffries Gallery He is currently exhibiting Announcements for Art School at the Chelsea Space in London, UK.

DEREK SULLIVAN

Derek Sullivan was born in Richmond Hill, Canada. He received a BFA from York University in 1999, and an MFA from the University of Guelph in 2001 His work has been featured at the 2004 Toronto International Art Fair as well The Power Plant in Toronto in 2005. His work has also been shown at ARTFirm. Red Gallery and YYZ in Toronto, as well as exhibitions in Montreal. Vancouver Shanghai, Berlin and New York, In 2001, Sullivan was the youngest artist awarded a permanent outdoor sculpture commission for the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre's Sculpture Park at the University of Guelph. He is completing projects for the Art Gallery of York University and Optica in 2007. Sullivan is currently based in Toronto

KIKA THORNE

Kika Thorne graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in Media Production and Cultural Theory in 1990. For a decade she has made film and video art which spans the super 8 underground, experimental public access television, and mainstream broadcasting. In the late 90s, Thorne participated in the October and February Group actions against the Ontario Conservative government. She has had solo shows at the Helen Pitt Gallery Vancouver (2001), Kino Arsenal in Berlin (2003), Group exhibitions include A Better Place, McKenzie Art Gallery (2000); Substitute City The Power Plant (2001); Zones, Art Gallery of Hamilton (2003); 25hours, CCCB, Barcelona (2003); Metro Ago-Go, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2004): Old Habits Die Hard Sparwasser Berlin + touring (2004-6); and E-Flux Video. KW Berlin (2005-7). Based in Toronto, she is completing her MFA at the University of Victoria.

HOLLY WARD

Holly Ward recently received her MFA from the University of Guelph, Ontario, Ward also holds a BA in English from the University of New Brunswick, and a BFA Interdisciplinary degree from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Her work has been shown in solo shows across Canada and internationally including the Or Gallery in Vancouver and Oeil Du Poisson in Quebec. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions at the Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto, Art & Idea in Mexico City and the VTO Gallery in London. Recently Ward's work was featured in Until Then Then at Western Front in Vancouver as well as How Soon is Now at the Western University ARTLAB in London, Ontario, She currently lives and works in Vancouver.

LIST OF WORKS

WINDOWS

HOLLY WARD

The Shape of Things to Come, 2006-2007 Plexiglass. electronic components, wood, mp3 sound files of nine lectures that are available through links at www.contemporaryartgallery.ca

GALLERY ENTRANCE

GEOFFREY FARMER

Umwelt Compositions and Comparisons (deferring reception), 2007 Sound sculpture

dimensions variable

Courtesy of Catriona Jefferies Gallery Vancouver

BC BINNING GALLERY (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

ELI BORNOWSKY

Untitled, 2006 Acrylic on canvas 152.4 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of Blanket Gallery Vancouver

ELI BORNOWSKY

Untitled, 2006

Acrylic on canyas

152.4 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of Blanket Gallery Vancouver

ELI BORNOWSKY

Action, 2006

Acrylic on canvas

152.4 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of Blanket Gallery Vancouver

KIKA THORNE

Pink Black Hole, 2006

lycra, aircraft cable, rare earth magnets,

792 x 366 x 305 cm

ELI LANGER

Who wants to live forever? Not me!. 2006

Oil on canvas

158 x 132 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Hug. Los Angeles

ELI LANGER

Visible Painting, 2006

Oil on canvas

190 x 163 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Hug, Los Angeles

ELI LANGER

I'm Late. 2006 Oil on canvas

91.4 x 137 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Hug, Los Angeles

BALKIND GALLERY (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT)

DEREK SIIII IVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #2, 2006 Coloured pencil, gouache on paper

127 x 98 cm

DEREK SULLIVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #4, 2006 Coloured pencil on paper

127 x 98 cm

DEREK SIILLIVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #8, 2006 Coloured pencil, gouache and collage on paper 127 x 98 cm

DEREK SIII LIVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #14, 2006 Plexiglass 127 x 98 cm

DEREK SULLIVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #1, 2006 Coloured pencil, gouache on paper 127 x 98 cm

DEREK SULLIVAN

Standing on the Shoulder of Giants #13, 2006 Coloured pencil on paper

127 x 98 cm

All drawings courtesy of Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Toronto

DEREK SULLIVAN

Amnesiac, 2005 - ongoing

plywood, various printed papers and glue

193 x 35.6 x 35.6 cm

Courtesy of Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Toronto

ELI LANGER

5 Lines, 2006

Wood with board, paper 202 x 27 x 21 cm

Courtesy of Daniel Hug. Los Angeles

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