

Artforum, Nina Canell, Text/Arthur Solway, P288, March 2017

ARTFORUM

/IEWS

by errant elbows. And the thinness of the material allows the stretcher to emerge as a constituent part of the pattern; the canvases are stretched over a Saint Andrew's, or X-shaped, cross, whose vectors are often echoed in bright lines of paint.

Bonnefoi here clearly traffics in the high-modernist precepts of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, approaching the painting not as a picture plane but as physical material. Art history is palpable in his works, and the descriptions of his paintings often make recourse to other artists: He describes the vibrant, large-scale *JANAPA II*, 1978, of jaunty red, yellow, and white shapes, as marrying the differing approaches to color of Matisse and Mondrian. The geometric collage *HYPERION III*, 1978, is held together with pins in a nod to Picasso's use of pins in his early collages. Yve-Alain Bois capitalized on this symbol in a 1992 essay on Bonnefoi's work, figuring the pin as a metaphor for how any work binds disparate art-historical theories. Indeed, the retrospective is a reminder of how auto-theoretical painting used to be, as well as how circumscribed. If Bonnefoi's work is not exactly weighted down by a need to support his substantial art-historical knowledge, it also stays very much within a formalist field of inquiry: painting about itself and its possibilities.

Ironically, the most moving section of the show meditated on emptiness and lack of provenance via three monochromatic, minimally painted works from the "JANAPA" series, 1978, as well as the equally austere canvases *Pur détachement de l'effet II 5/1979* (Pure Detachment of Effect II 5/1979), 1979, and *EZECHIEL (DHUL-KIFL)*, 1976. "JANAPA" is taken from a line in a poem by Antonin Artaud: "Ja na pa / à papa-mama," a slightly nonsensical rendition of "Je n'ai pas papa ni mama" ("I have no mother or father"). The paintings' attempt to reach a ground zero of meaning and signification here chimed unexpectedly with the Biblical and Qu'ranic allusions of the other titles, and I couldn't help thinking of Laura Marks's analysis of geometric abstraction in Islamic art: the idea that repeated abstract motifs bring the mind away from material manifestations and toward contemplation of the divine itself. With the room's painterly echoes of Mark Rothko's chapel, what seemed most intriguing was less Bonnefoi's formal reflections than his apparent engagement with one of art's most fraught subjects: that of religion and faith.

—Melissa Gronlund

SHANGHAI

Nina Canell

LEO XU PROJECTS

"Reflexology," the title of Nina Canell's first solo exhibition in China, seemed an apt topic for a culture that has long purported the medicinal benefits of foot massage. Entering the sparse ground-floor gallery space, which was carpeted in a dingy, low-shag, wall-to-wall industrial charreusse, one immediately noticed the imprint of the sole of a single shoe or slipper seamlessly inlaid into the carpet's surface. At first it appeared to be a house painter's accident, a haphazard mistake, but closer inspection revealed a tattered and well-traveled history. As the title piece to the exhibition, the work, *Reflexologies*, 2016, also suggested a scruffy foot map of pressure points. But where was the other foot? This lone imprint appeared like a clue to a mysterious event or an inconspicuous biography.

Metaphors of dislocation or absence, displacement, and disconnection run consistently through Canell's work. Often, she transforms recycled objects and discarded materials—the detritus of everyday life, and of the world of communication technology in particular—into understated sculptural relics and improvised installations. Here, in the carpeted ground-floor space, there was also *Softest Corner*, 2016, con-

sisting of two copper tubes or pieces of conduit of unequal lengths running along the edge of the wall and floor. These tubes were spliced together by a short, connecting piece of white neon bent casually, intended to not conform perfectly to the corner's ninety-degree angle. In an adjacent alcove, one heard *Interiors (Wavy)*, 2016, an audio work made from an old sleeping-aid machine tucked in the corner, its inner workings and components exposed while playing a delayed, scratchy recording of crashing ocean waves. Throughout the exhibition, one sensed a dialogue with precursors such as Arte Povera or Fluxus. This felt most evident in the acrylic-encased cuttings and cross sections of high-voltage subterranean and subsea telecommunication and electricity cables, from the series "Brief Syllables," 2014–, installed in a somewhat more formal manner on the second floor of the exhibition.

Included in her 2014 exhibitions at the Camden Arts Centre, London, and at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, "Brief Syllables" began as a close study of the intricate interiors of high-technology cabling, examining how cables are made, color-coded, bundled, and sheathed, based on their specific purposes or functions. In the new works from the series shown here, modest-size cable cuttings, suspended within solid acrylic cubes usually no bigger than six inches square, were displayed like high-tech specimens on narrow concrete columns. The use of cast concrete and her bare-bones presentation were part of Canell's extended conversation with the city itself. More than just aestheticizing advanced industrial wiring, Canell here suggested a potential breakdown or failure of communication, a loss of energy, in a world that has become totally dependent on an uninterrupted circulation and flow of power and information.

Nearly all the works in "Reflexology"—and the materials used—were made or sourced in Shanghai. This brought a local specificity to Canell's project. But the issues it raised are ever more universal today as we share a "collectively extended nervous system," as the press release calls it. Whether we choose to remain on or off the grid, plugged in or disconnected, we still might manage acts of solitude within a vast technological plexus, especially those networks that continue to advance or erode our experience between public and private terrain.

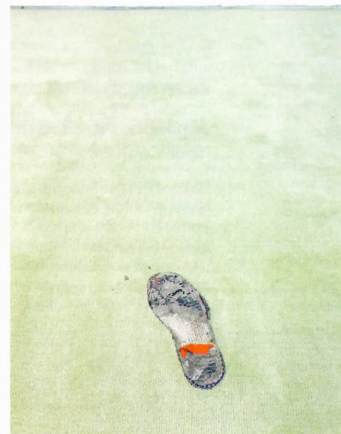
—Arthur Solway

MEXICO CITY

"Se nos cayó el teatro"

LODOS

Lodos inaugurated its new space with the group show "*Se nos cayó el teatro*" (Our Theater Has Fallen), which presented the work of eight international artists and collectives. The wide variety of works, from painting to sculpture to video to photography, coalesced into a sensitive, poetic reflection on the challenges of art- and exhibition making in this current climate of political instability.



Nina Canell, *Reflexologies*, 2016, mixed media, dimensions variable.