



## SATIN IONS NINA CANELL

VIEW REVIEW BY JAYSON CHOI  
ARKO ART CENTER

KOREA, SOUTH

Sixteen of Swedish artist Nina Canell's old and new works installed across three rooms at the Arko Art Center in Seoul—for her first solo exhibition in Asia—produced poetic results through unexpected marriages: an ultrasound generator and concrete; green socks and static; water and surface tension; mastic gum and gravity; and magnetic fields and nails. The show began with *Perpetuum Mobile* (40kg) (2009), in which ultrasound waves generate mist from a basin of water, which is accompanied by an open bag of cement placed nearby. At Arko, the bag of cement gradually hardened over the course of the exhibition. Also on view was *Days of Inertia* (2015), a pool of water on top of an irregular slab of stone, with the former retaining the silhouette of its base in an indefinite manner. In the second room of the exhibition, *Thin* (2015), a delicate ensemble of nails resembling metal strips, gently clung to the walls. Elsewhere, visitors encountered *Three Long Milliseconds* (2015), an upright log standing on the museum's cement floor, which slowly became enveloped by oozing, bubble-gum pink, mastic gum. By the end of the exhibition's run, a pool of pink resin had gathered at the base of the work.

The third room, composed of three new works, was Canell's response to the miles upon miles of fiber-optic cables that are buried underground in Korea, which served as the foundation for the country's modern wireless revolution. *Shedding Sheaths* (2015) comprises fibre optic cable sheaths collected from recycling plants in the outskirts of Seoul, which were placed throughout the gallery floor. Neither fully melted nor completely repurposed, these sheaths—gutted of their functional core—have been transmuted into dense plastic clumps of immaterial distance. Meanwhile, a sculptural piece entitled *Satin Ion* (2015), a 5000-volt neon light draped on bent copper pipes nailed to the wall, hung in a corner. Elsewhere, a shrill sound, which moved in an out of audible range, emanated from a waveform generator that was part of the third work, *Thin Vowel (Stretched)* (2015).

The exhibition was illuminated throughout by

parallel rows of strong, fluorescent tube-lights, which magnified what the artist describes in the exhibition handout as “something that I find in my sculptural vocabulary—an extra-linguistic or non-verbal modulation of content articulating the impurities of a medium or assemblage.” In the first room, the refraction from the harsh, flat lighting barely rendered visible the 2014 work *Green (Diffused)*, a stray green sock caught between two planes of glass and transfigured by friction into a flattened dissemination of fibers. The physical ebb and flow of a second installation, *Attenuate Attenuate* (2014), a loose mesh woven from copper wire threads, was visible only upon closer viewing.

If the titles of the two aforementioned works are near-literal translations of the energy Canell describes in her statement, the invisible qualities of sculpture seemed to crescendo further in the second room. Here, one contemplated the force of time while observing the viscosity of mastic gum, anticipated the sound of a falling nail—in the possibility that the magnetic field that holds *Thin* together may lose out to gravitational pull—and were drawn to the piercing hum of *Thin Vowel (Stretched)* that leaked in from the adjacent room.

In the final room of the exhibition, fluorescent tube-lights seemed to compress the space and encase the displayed works in mysticism. The draped neon light in *Satin Ion* appeared faint and weak in comparison. The work evokes the Pietà, but it also holds a resemblance to a dormant snake that, in any moment, could recoil and strike—as though the fragile coexistence of threat and tender embrace that has marked the history of civilization has been condensed into a single piece. The concrete bricks set next to the lumps of fiber-optic cable sheaths in *Shedding Sheaths* bring about comparisons to human excrement and industrial waste: what once transmitted vast amounts of information and knowledge—and thereby human energy—have been metastasized into remains that are at once vulgar and beautiful. Here, Canell accelerates time. The celebrated products of today's technology have succumbed to tomorrow's breakthroughs.