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LAURI FIRSTENBERG AND IRENE SMALL	CO-CURATORS
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MEMORY OF FORM IRENE SMALL

Multitude is an investigation into the memory of form. It is interested not in origins but the agency of process, mobility and dissolution. The migration of these works of art between production and materiality refuses fixed meanings, proposing instead a movement across the space of interpretation. This exhibition thus begins with the relationship between modernity and difference and gestures towards its contemporary manifestation within the "smooth world" suggested by Deleuze and Guattari and Hardt and Negri.¹ The multitude is therefore a repetition that does not resolve, but rather swarms and scatters in the zone between representation, language, and history.

Do-Ho Suh's *Painting That Has Blinded Its Painter* is the sculptural repetition of a painting. An original acrylic canvas is cast in aluminum and then wax. Each panel of the triptych sabotages those adjacent to it: gesture is cancelled by rigidity, permanence by fragility. The painting thus "blinds" in the co-dependence of image and form. This migration of meaning also occurs in the art object as a container of memory: the accumulation of refuse in Orit Raff's *(Dis)located Land* photographs or the "found space" of Jean Shin's installation *Hair Wall*. In each case, the work of art acts as an archive of intimate history and an indexical record of the work's own production.

The city, with architecture as its organizing frame, emerges as an ideal metaphor for the spatial appropriation of discourse. It is imagined as mutating skin in Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber's *Framing Location II*, as projective space in the architectural drawings of Cari Gonzalez-Casanova, as collection of transient information in Corine Borgnet's *Tower of Babel*, as scrim in Nayia Frangouli's *Home*. Architecture offers the ability to fashion alternate histories, yet it also threatens to collapse this world-envisioning capacity into the flatness of representation.

"Landscape" is at once geopolitical space, physical terrain and immaterial image. For Sharon Ya'ari, landscape is a political text both reclaimed and dissolved through growth and banalization. As symbol, landscape is contested in the performative rituals of Txuspo Poyo's *Black Tree* and Rick Buckley's *Untitled*. At its other extreme, landscape is distilled into object. In Shin's *Korean Shaped Coral*, a recognizable form is repeated until drained of referentiality. Sung-Hee Choi's *Concrete Slate Border*, meanwhile, uses the passive, form-filling medium of concrete to monumentalize the non-place of geopolitical barriers. Choi's sculpture mimics the 38th parallel dividing North and South Korea; yet as a work of art it turns the political border into material abstraction.

Geography is rewritten as a pure texture in Taiji Matsue's *Desert*, part of the artist's larger project *Collection of Place Names*. Matsue's rigorously flattened, horizon-less views refuse the transparent correspondence of image and place normally employed by traditional landscape photography. The act of assigning sign to referent is thus stalled at the sensual surface of the photograph. Matsue's titles thus act as arbitrary substitutes for their objects of representation.

The deceptive nature of language as a mode of knowledge is likewise invoked by Ararat Sarkissian in his print series and video, *Archetypes*, which reproduce the alphabets of lost and dead languages. In the paper-works, the embedded alphabets retain the material memory of the impressing form, yet are completely divorced from their original signification. In the video, meanwhile, the echoing overlay of the recited alphabets functions as a formal exercise of sound alienated from history. The utterances stammer towards language, but are always after language, after history. Signs are therefore stripped of context until they become pure aesthetic representation: abstracted, tactile form and meaningless noise.

Orit Raff's *Palindrome* takes its name after the linguistic phenomenon of a text that can be read forwards and backwards. This semantic reversibility takes the form of a series of unsymmetrical halves that undermine the basic circularity of the video loop. In this lopsided replay, something is always left behind: a visual stutter or a narrative accumulation. Like Kamrooz Aram's *Coming and Returning*, in which an underlying grid is consumed in the sensual process of painting, *Palindrome* suggests a seriality that is not repetition.

For the artists in this exhibition, then, the concept of "multitude" is simultaneously a model of subjectivity and a mode of production. Within this framework, the work of art is a hybrid entity in which a strategic mistranslation of form acts as the conceptual resistance to stasis.

1 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1987 and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

JEAN SHIN



KOREAN SHAPED CORAL.....1999
PAPER AND THREAD..... 10X10X6-INCHES
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.....MULTITUDE-17

SPACE AND SUBJECTIVITY LAURI FIRSTENBERG

This exhibition questions discourses of difference through the concept of "multitude," a reading of culture and subjectivity as forces of flux and proliferation resistant to a controlling order of meaning. In a range of media and conceptual strategies, the artists address identity, language, history, memory and place as mutable, plural, and generative constructions. The show dwells on the pressures of translation and interpretation within this field of multiplying perspectives, featuring work that attempts to elide easy appropriation into established categories of cultural identity and aesthetic values.

The work addresses the collapse of cultural boundaries, examining the paradox of an infinite spectrum of cultural specificity and the ambivalent desire for absorption into the network of globalist logic. A structure for the examination of indistinct spaces, temporalities, and subjectivities, *Multitude* provides for a web of complex and politicized propositions in the guise of modernist grids, monochromes, and minimalist photographs.

Many artists seem to offer experiences akin to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's model of a mobile mass of variability in which "subjectivities glide," vacillating between local legibility and global alliances.¹ The intention of this exhibition is thus to be self-conscious in the refusal to reconcile international styles and regional, national, or other vectors of cultural subjectivity. Perhaps it is the monster or mantra of globalization that prompts artists to seek aesthetic models that dislocate or obfuscate their cultural position, to anticipate the threats of homogenization by pre-emptively embracing it. *Multitude* is a means of signifying alterity and art, addressing the moments of both its definition and accession.

In Orit Raff's film *Palindrome*, the artist performs a repetitive and cryptic task, rolling a mound of felt fabric inside the confines of an igloo in an atmosphere that is obscurely foreboding and oppressive. This footage is sutured with appropriated images of a coyote in the natural habitat of a winter landscape. *Palindrome* is part of a larger project, *Hunt-the-Slipper*, in which the artist utilizes various media, from photography to video to architectonic installation, in order to re-enact fractured memories and encounters. Memory and myth are central to the creation of a cultural anti-narrative in which operations of defamiliarization create a circuitous reading of dislocated coordinates of identity.

Raff's larger project is based on the recounting of a privatized history, translated into ethereal visual terms. Her engagement with a unique mode of minimalist photography marks a distancing from corporeal representation and speaks to the overdetermination of the figure in the visual field. Raff has invented a kind of portraiture – or anti-portraiture – that does not rely on the body, but indexes subjectivity abstractly. Photographs of faint bodily trace – the white interiors of vacant freezers, stained linens, scarred pots, and graffitied desks – serve as specters of the absent subjects. In the case of her *(Dis)located Land* series, the bodily surrogates are dust and detritus from the artist's apartment, aesthetic and abject materializations of the uncannily unnameable individual subject.

Jean Shin's production is characterized by sculptural proxies for the body in the appropriation of found objects – shoes, umbrellas, pants. Shin's *Hair Wall* is a kind of diagrammatic abstract drawing bearing the inscription of the artist's own body; her hair sited in holes in the gallery wall. This randomized mapping produces a kind of unintelligible cosmology of corporeality. However, an imaginary suturing of the distinct traces of the body is futile and the constellation is in fact aleatory. Her work speaks

to a chaotic dispersion of identity in opposition to notions of cultural definition, totality, or appropriability. In *Korean Shaped Coral*, originally installed in a Natural History Museum vitrine display of coral samples, her sewn paper map of Korea masquerades as specimen and curio, imperfectly camouflaged as a natural object.

Sung-Hee Choi's *Concrete Slate Border*, a cast sculpture that replicates the dimensions of the border in the Joint Security Area of the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea, is the impossible indexing of a physical boundary that is wholly cultural. It demonstrates the near invisibility of the structure whose unremarkable appearance is in inverse proportion to its critical political signification. In re-concretizing and de-contextualizing the border, the arbitrary power of this charged zone is underscored.

Txuspo Poyo's video *Black Tree* is a theatrical staging of a random and surreal dispute – a battle of tree branches in which place is obscured and time is undefined. His choreography of an abstracted action, geography, and, in the words of the artist, "cultural conflict," provides a screen for projecting a collection of imaginary historical circumstances. Correspondingly, Rick Buckley's *Untitled* video presents two protagonists balancing in handstands, mimes tracing invisible or imaginary borders. Represented only by their hands and forearms, the performers play out an ineffectual encounter for "territorial gain."

Taiji Matsue's *Desert* is an ongoing photographic series of black and white, formal, anti-Romantic landscapes which span the territories of Yemen, the Kalahari Desert, Cost Rica, the Alps, Israel, and Egypt. Appearing to be aerial photographs, the works are actually taken on the ground and of the ground, resulting in a flattened panorama of rock, mountain, and plain. The even light and gray tonal quality of the photographs neutralizes the spectacular function of the landscape genre, creating homogeneity throughout a monochromatic geographical grid. Matsue's photographic abstraction provides a topographical inquiry into the impossibility of determining location. The work demonstrates the draining away of difference via repetition. The perceptual play of differentiation and similarity of site disrupts the grounding of identity in place.

Sharon Ya'ari's landscape and architectural photographs also evade geographical specificity, by focusing on utopic or banal scenes of vague terrain. His grandmother's *Home* reads as standard suburb. His painterly landscape *Wet Blue Strip* is a picturesque view of the Israeli countryside and his generically modernist *Chairs* (from a funeral home) are completely detached from their overdetermined location. Ya'ari's efforts at displacing both subject and viewer are systematic. His work is a repetitious documenting of unexceptional non-places within a land of intense geopolitical claims, distancing site from politic.

Sabine Bitter and Helmut Weber's video projection, *Framing Location II*, sutures disparate cityscapes from airport aerial views of Paris, Mexico, New York, and Vienna to propose a flattened homogenizing view of international metropolises. Emphasizing the cityscape as a serial construct, Bitter and Weber reiterate the redundancy and interchangeability of postindustrial global geographies. In Nayia Frangouli's *Home*, a similar operation is negotiated, although transposed from cityscape to urban interior. The artist records a series of rooms in British architect Denys Lasdun's modernistic

housing project, reflecting on the constitution of subjectivity through the lens of living-spaces.

Rather than examining concrete architectural influences on social, cultural, political, and psychic subjectivity, Cari Gonzalez-Casanova collapses the real into imaginary propositions for living space. She produces impossible habitation schemes and faux-utopic building proposals in a coalescence of fantastical drafting and photography, literalizing the notion of "non-place."

Hong Hao takes the traditional Chinese scroll as a readymade, using it as a platform for photographic collage panoramas. Mapping the cityscape from a car or from an airplane, Hao occupies the position of nomad or tourist. He constructs the city by pasting it together in a cinematic narrative without a core.

It is loss and memory that fuels the archival strategies of retrieval and reconfiguration in the paintings of Ararat Sarkissian. *Paradise Lost* is a series of monochromatic Armenian cityscapes, pictures of the Medieval city. Sarkissian's traditional genre painting is duped by his video *Archetypes* in which fragmented subjects recite alphabets that are highly distorted by the artist, performing the irrecoverability of the origins of his national history and culture.

Corine Borgnet's *Tower of Babel* represents an architectural structure for the accumulation of discourses, historical and personal. Borgnet collects language, housing it in her tower of thousands of post-it notes. Consisting of discreet messages, quick communiqués, and notes to herself in an array of languages, in these potentially unending collections, culture becomes a repository of statements overlaid, superimposed, displayed, concealed, and exchanged.

Kamrooz Aram's diptych paintings are based on Sufi traditions and are mediations on what the artist describes as "contradiction, transformation, longing." Beginning with a grid, Aram attempts at achieving unity in his compositions, manifested visually through Islamic geometric patterning. The parameters of the painting are indistinct. The work *Coming and Returning* is frozen in the process of constitution or dissolution.

Do-Ho Suh's early minimalist triptych signals a turning point in his career, his last "painting," which is in fact a multiple sculptural casting of a canvas. Displacing again and again the defining conditions of the traditional medium, this material estrangement is compounded by the fact that each of the three panels undermines the appearance of those adjacent to it. The de-deterritorialization of painting as a defined location – namely the canvas – is played out across these detached surrogates. This heterogeneity within the series and the displacement of origins speaks to notions of cultural deterritorialization which are characteristic of the artist's work to date.

The open and flexible concept of *Multitude* provides a way to address the concerns dominating contemporary international art, particularly the displacement of the identity-concept of difference. From the global to the transnational, *Multitude* directly addresses the anxiety between homogenization and difference in the constitution of subjectivity. This exhibition presents artworks which question the forces of de-differentiation and pluralism attributed to contemporary postindustrial "world" culture. *Multitude* reflects the expediency and the threat of fluid inscriptions of space and subjectivity at stake in the larger negotiation of local and global inflection and identification.

1 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass. and London, 2000), p.198.

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