



Obituary

Ceal Floyer obituary

Conceptual artist whose work derived humour from shifting points of view, puns and double takes



📷 Ceal Floyer in A Nail Biting Performance at Birmingham Symphony Hall, 2001. Photograph: Photo by Hugo Glendinning, courtesy of Ikon Gallery

Around the time that Ceal Floyer, who has died aged 57 of a brain tumour, was arriving on the stage of the international art world in the 1990s, she was already developing the idea of a performance in a major concert hall that spoke to her nervousness and unease about her newfound status. However, when she approached the Sydney Opera House with her proposal as part of the city's 1998 biennale, it was turned down, deemed somehow disrespectful.

■ ■ *Confused at first, the audience quickly caught on to what Floyer was doing, and was transfixed*

Three years later, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, in collaboration with Ikon Gallery, granted her wish. On the night at Symphony Hall, prior to a programme featuring Stravinsky's Rite of Spring and Beethoven's Leonore Overture No 2, and billed simply as A Nail Biting Performance, Ceal stepped on to the conductor's podium, leaned towards a microphone and began biting her nails. There is no question that she was nervous, but she stayed for a full five minutes, paying close, slow attention to each of her fingernails. The audience, confused at first, quickly caught on and became transfixed by this diminutive figure dwarfed by the cavernous space around her, standing among empty chairs soon to be occupied by orchestral musicians.

A Nail Biting Performance - a "live sound piece", as she called it - was as excruciating and touching as it was smartly funny. It took place on the eve of Ceal's solo show at Ikon Gallery, of which I was then the director, and was the only work in which the artist was physically present. "Initially I really didn't want it to be myself on stage doing this thing," Ceal said, "but somehow the idea of directing a performer to do it seemed not only extraneous ... but ultimately, and ironically I suppose, a little bit pompous or egotistical."

This sentiment was typical of Ceal, an artist who temperamentally could not have been less like an art star. "Often ... what informs my practice is a certain dissatisfaction with being an artist, with operating in this art context, even if it is the very situation that accommodates, and tolerates, my sort of work," she said. "By admitting this scepticism I make myself vulnerable, and then by manifesting this uncertainty as art, I compound the situation still further. It's a bit like being in a really loud and crowded room - a party, say - and suddenly the music stops and you're the last one left talking, and your words just sort of hang there in the air."



📷 Floyer's 1994 installation Mousehole, at the Museo Madre, Napoli, 2009. Photograph: Peppe Avallone/Museo Madre, Courtesy the artist, Museo Madre and Esther Schipper Berlin/Paris/Seoul

Ceal's artwork was marked by a particular sense of humour derived from shifting points of view, puns, double takes and an idiosyncratic reordering of everyday phenomena. It conveyed simultaneously the possibility of creativity in any situation, and a taste for the absurd. As a student at Goldsmiths College, London (1991-94), she replaced existing push/pull doorplates on the way to staff offices with new ones inscribed "pushed" and "pulled".

Light Switch (1992-99), another early work, involved a slide projector beaming the actual-size image of a light switch directly on to a wall. Any illusion was undermined by the close proximity of the image to its source; the image was obviously projected. At the same time, Ceal was suggesting an inversion of the relationship between her subject matter and the medium of electric light.

A similar "switch" occurs in a much later work, Hammer and Nail (2018), a video piece that features stock footage of a nail being hit into a plank of wood. Through an adjustment in the cropping of the image, the plank appears to push itself up towards the head of the nail with every hammer blow, rather than the nail being violently driven downwards, reversing the action.

Ceal's aesthetic was minimalist. Overgrowth (2004) is a photographic image of a bonsai tree magnified through slide projection to assume regular tree-sized proportions; Mousehole (1994), is a Tom and Jerry-style cartoon mouse hole drawn on a sheet of A4, propped up against a wall. Monochrome Till Receipt (White), from 1999, lists white items bought from a supermarket. The latter was acquired by Tate for considerably more than the £48.44 printed at the bottom of the receipt.

Born in Karachi, as Cecile, to David Floyer, chief executive of Burmah Oil Company, and an Austrian mother, Gerlinde (nee Mayer), she spent some time as a young child in Sydney and Rabat, Morocco, before settling in Devon in the UK with her family from 1975.

She studied at Goldsmiths in the wake of the Young British Artists (YBAs) who had emerged from that institution in the late 80s, and before she graduated was already being noticed by well-placed critics and curators. She was part of the group exhibition General Release, organised by the British Council for the 1995 Venice Biennale, and subsequently had many significant art outings including the Tate Triennial (2003), Shanghai Biennale (2006), Singapore Biennale (2011), and Guangzhou Triennial and Documenta 13 in Kassel, Germany (both 2012).

In 1997, Ceal was awarded a scholarship to take up residence at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, and soon made that city her home. In 2002, a malignant tumour was found and, following surgery, she recovered to a remarkable extent, continuing to exhibit regularly with Lisson Gallery, Esther Schipper in Berlin and elsewhere, and winning a number of awards such as the Preis der Nationalgalerie für Junge Kunst, Berlin (2007) and the Nam June Paik Art Center prize (2009), before the cancer returned last year.

Ceal is survived by two brothers, Mark and James.

● Ceal (Cecile) Floyer, artist, born 18 April 1968; died 11 December 2025

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The New York Times
17 December, 2025

The New York Times

Ceal Floyer, Incisive Conceptual Artist, Dies at 57

Her work had a clean, minimal aesthetic at odds with the ambiguities it suggested. It was also unusually accessible.



Ceal Floyer around 2010. “She would just pin something down,” the gallerist Esther Schipper said, “and people would understand immediately.” Hugo Glendinning, via 303 Gallery, New York



By **Will Heinrich**

Dec. 17, 2025

Ceal Floyer, a conceptual artist whose elegant installations and performances charted the surprisingly heartfelt territory where philosophical propositions meet comic one-liners, died on Dec. 11 in Berlin. She was 57.

Her death, in a hospital, was caused by a malignant brain tumor, her half brother James Floyer said.

By the time Ms. Floyer started working as an artist, it had long been established that anything could be an artwork if it was presented as such, including a store-bought object or a phrase lettered on a wall. Ms. Floyer used manufactured objects and wall texts alike, as well as many other forms. What she added to them all was a precise, uniquely self-aware sensibility that could turn even a work as simple as a color photograph of a pool of water in an overturned umbrella (“[Umbrella](#),” 2018) into an acute satire of the human need to make sense of the world.



“Umbrella” (2018), a simple photograph of an upturned umbrella, is a comment on our need to make sense of the world. via 303 Gallery, New York

The typically clean and minimal aesthetic of her work was an ironic nod to the self-serious conceptualists of the 1960s. But it was also a way of removing anything that might come between her and the clearest expression of a given idea. Emblematic of this economy was a work called “[Conversation Piece](#),” which comprised nothing but a pair of black vinyl quotation marks placed high on either side of a doorway. Leading into an art gallery, these quotation marks suggested that everything in the exhibition, if not all of art history that came before, constituted a series of quotations or hypotheses, or a single, composite work of art, or a joke.

Two of her best-known pieces were “[Light Switch](#)” and “[Nail Biting Performance](#).” In the first, a slide projector, sitting on a plinth near a gallery wall, projects a life-size color image of a light switch — a “switch” in the viewer’s perception effected by the projector’s “light.” Ms. Floyer changed the projected image to match the location, so that visitors who encountered the piece in Japan or Canada would see a Japanese or Canadian light switch. The anxious nail biting — which debuted before a City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra concert in Birmingham, England, in 2001, and was reprised in 2012 in Kassel, Germany, as part of Documenta 13 — she executed herself, earnestly, into a microphone.



“Light Switch,” on display in 2017, is one of Ms. Floyer’s best-known works. MSU, Esther Schipper



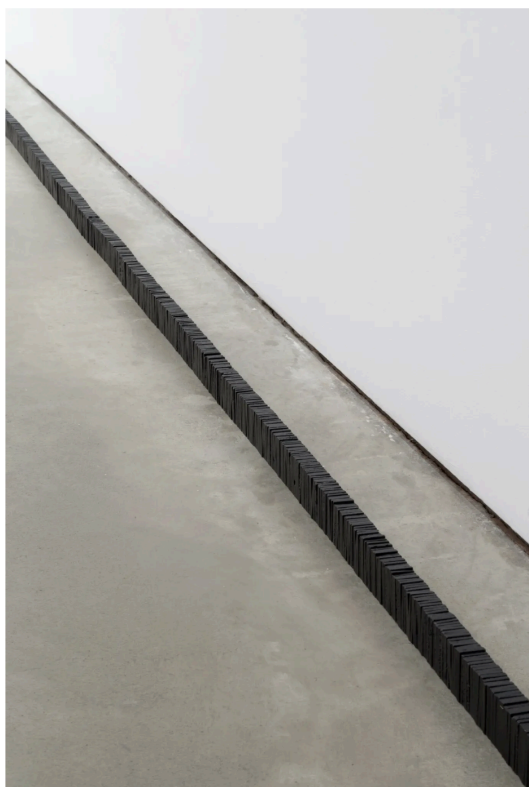
“Nail Biting Performance” debuted in Birmingham, England, in 2001. Hugo Glendinning, via Esther Schipper

“Very conceptual work is often very complicated for a broader public to understand, but with Ceal we never had that,” the gallerist Esther Schipper recalled in an interview. “She would just pin something down, and people would understand immediately — but then the image opens in your head.”

The apparent clarity of Ms. Floyer’s pieces set up a potent contrast with the ambiguities and unresolved questions they tended to conceal. Lurking behind a piece like “[Ladder \(Minus 2-8\)](#),” an aluminum ladder with all but its first and last rungs removed, were insoluble philosophical and linguistic problems: Is it still a ladder if it can’t function as one? And if it isn’t a ladder, what is it?

If images like an unclimbable ladder, an umbrella full of water or a [line of dominoes](#) too tightly packed to fall down have an absurdist humor to them, the fact that none of us can help wrestling with such absurdities has an unmistakable pathos. Ms. Floyer’s work could be read as expressing a defiant kind of fatalism, a commitment to thinking, living and making art despite their inevitable conclusion.

“She had a lifesaving sense of humor,” the artist Thomas Demand, a close friend, recalled in an interview. “In the worst situations, she would crack a joke.”



“Domino Effect” (2015). via 303 Gallery, New York



“Untitled Installation (Dotted Line)” (1993-2022). Andrea Rossetti, via Esther Schipper

Cecile Anne Floyer was born on April 18, 1968, to Gerlinde (Mayer) Floyer and David Floyer in Karachi, Pakistan, where Mr. Floyer, a Canadian, was a representative for British Petroleum.

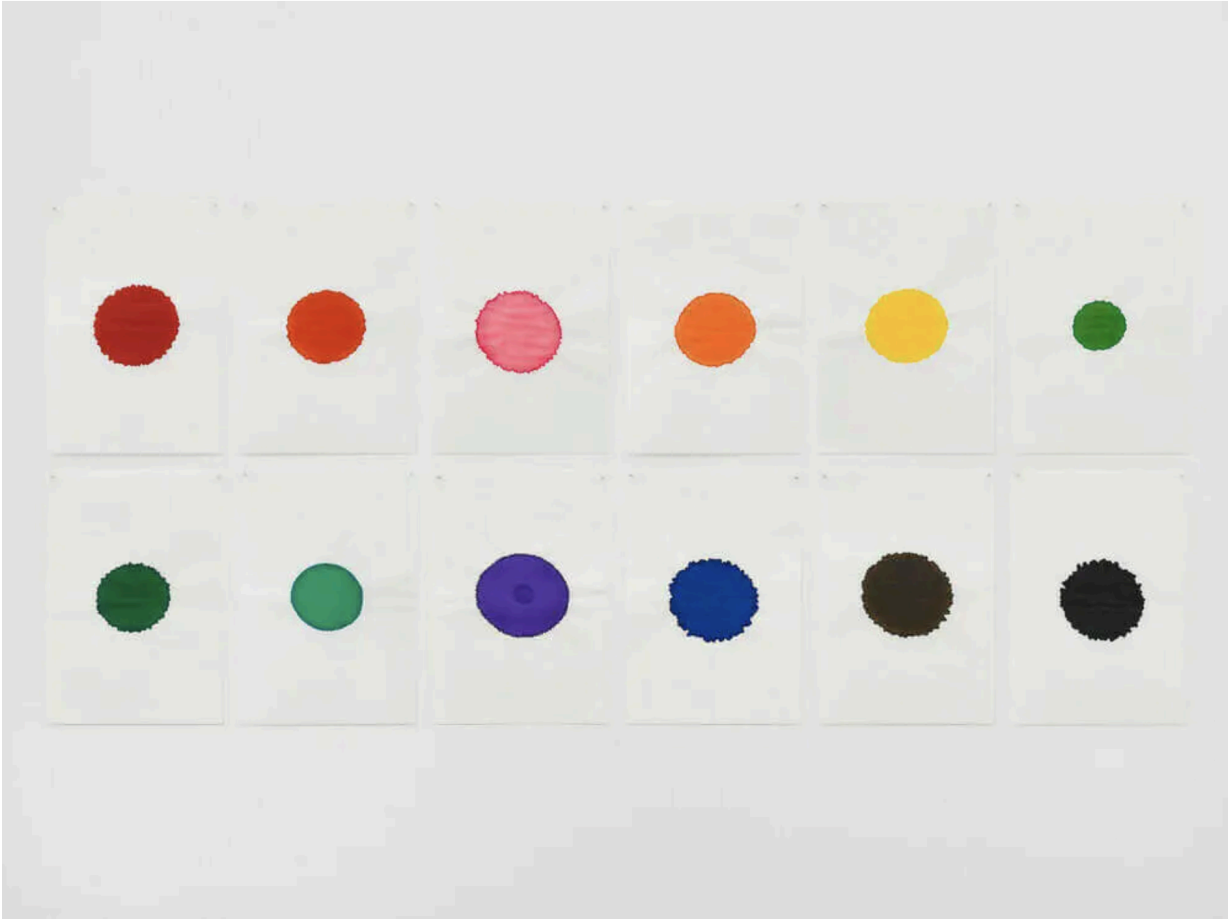
Never fond of her given name, Cecile began going by Ceal in early childhood. A natural mimic, she acquired new accents in Sydney, Australia, and in Rabat, Morocco, where her father's job took the family after Karachi; speaking German as an adult, she sounded like her Austrian mother.

By the time Ceal started school, the family had settled near Exeter, in England. Later they moved to Dittisham.

After a year of studying theater at Dartington College of the Arts in Devon, she moved to London and enrolled at Goldsmiths College (now Goldsmiths, University of London), where she earned a B.F.A. in 1994.

By 2002, she had settled in Berlin, though her life remained mobile. Over the years, she was a visiting artist, guest professor or instructor at De Ateliers in Amsterdam and HFBK Hamburg in Germany, among other institutions. Students remembered her as a dedicated teacher who approached the job with characteristic rigor.

“As in her work, a minimal intervention — a single question or brief comment on our work, often delivered with dry humor — was enough to produce a lasting shift in how one approached one's own work,” Sonia González, a curator who studied with Ms. Floyer in Hamburg, said in an interview.



“Ink on Paper (Set of 12)” (1999). via Lisson Gallery

Gina Fischli, an artist who also studied with Ms. Floyer in Hamburg, said: “As a student, no one takes you or your art seriously. So when your mentor does, it’s a big gift — and it challenges you to take yourself just as seriously.”

Ms. Floyer’s work is in the permanent collections of museums around the world, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Museo Jumex in Mexico City and Tate Modern in London. She was represented by Esther Schipper in Berlin, Lisson Gallery in London and 303 Gallery in New York.

Ms. Floyer was first diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in 2002. Though she was operated on successfully, her doctors gave her five years to live. With an experimental treatment, radiation and chemotherapy, she survived for more than two decades — but always with the knowledge that the cancer could recur.

Experiencing coordination problems earlier this year, she had an MRI that revealed that the cancer had indeed returned and was too advanced, and too aggressive, to treat.

In addition to Mr. Floyer, a hotelier, she is survived by another half brother, Mark Floyer, a poet.

In her final months, her friend Mr. Demand said that he helped Ms. Floyer realize a piece that she'd had in mind for years: a stock photo of sheep grazing in a verdant pasture, to which she would add a small, black number on every sheep. The photograph, just over two feet wide in a clean, white frame and titled "[644](#)," is included in "Seriously.," a group show currently on display at Sprüth Magers gallery in London.

"It's kind of typical Ceal," Mr. Demand said of the piece. "There's something very cold about it, very conceptual and rigid and radical. And there's also something very funny and warm."



"644" (2025) is currently on display in "Seriously.," a group show at Sprüth Magers gallery in London. via Sprüth Magers

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El Anatsui in Nigeria, and big ideas in Smallpaper*



Hussein Chalayan

III. Meaning of Happiness

Ceal Floyer

The Berlin-based artist's playful redirections of everyday objects are engaging, disorientating, and a lot of fun

Writer Charlotte Jansen

At Ceal Floyer's first exhibition in the early 1990s in London, the artist presented a photograph of a light switch, projected onto the gallery wall at precisely the height you'd intuitively find it at home. When the penny drops, you realise what you're looking at is an image – then you understand that, in fact, what you're looking at is an idea.

Titled *Light Switch*, the work has since been restaged in different editions. As she explains, *Light Switch*, like pieces such as *Overhead Projection*, 2006, *Auto Focus*, 2010, and *Fallen Star*, 2018, presents the fulcrum of an object as 'an essential, highly visible component of the work'. The equipment that creates the images is left out in the open, in the middle of the gallery space. 'Nothing is hidden behind smoke and mirrors. The way each work works is on full view for all to see.'

At first, Floyer's objects might seem like a cruel joke on the viewers (certainly, the artist is such an incisive thinker that you can't help but feel slightly blunt next to her). Are we missing something? She insists that political interpretations are beside the point. 'I would say that I am mainly working with nouns and verbs rather than with metaphors. I'm more interested in what the objects are and what they do,' she tells me.

Born in Pakistan in 1968, Floyer went to Goldsmiths College, graduating in 1994 – the same year Martin Creed formed his rock band and Damien Hirst produced his lamb suspended in formaldehyde. There's a touch of insouciance and rebellion about Floyer's oeuvre too, but she isn't showy about it. Subtlety and detail are her key ingredients. Take *Garbage Bag*, one of the works in her first show at Lisson Gallery, in 1997: a black bin-liner puffed up majestically with air. Floyer makes standard household stuff beguiling,

the line between art and the everyday suddenly far harder to grasp. Even when we recognise what we're seeing, we laugh in disbelief. It's a disorienting sensation. 'I suppose my interest in making sense of simple phenomena and reframing familiar objects and situations continues. The essence of my practice has remained consistent,' says Floyer of the evolution of her work over time.

Now based in Berlin, she's travelled all over the world, exhibiting across Europe, the US and in China, and is currently showing work in Denmark and Japan. 'Of course, the perception of the work can be either sustained or subverted by the degree of familiarity one has with an object in a certain cultural context. This is also why I often "adapt" the work to the specifics of the site or country I'm showing in. Overturning a sign's meaning can only work if the specific audience is familiar with the sign.'

Her use of everyday objects and readymades is indebted to Duchamp, but Floyer has also paved the way for other artists; Ryan Gander and Turner Prize-winning Helen Marten, for example. They share an acutely tuned and purposeful humour that is missing in much of the contemporary art world. 'I work with the dissonance between our acquired expectations and literal juxtapositions overturning the former. There's a degree of literalness that permeates my work and is the ground for the humour inherent to it.'

It takes painstaking attention to make things look effortlessly simple. This is clear in a work she made last year, *Hotel Rooms*, made up of promotional photographs of hotels around the world, mounted onto two Plexiglas panels. The pictures, as you'd expect from Floyer, are organised into a clear system.

'It was default observation: noticing patterns, visual rhetoric,' says Floyer. 'Flipping through travel brochures, you see that rooms are almost always shot from the right side or from the left side. In very few cases I found images looking straight-on at the bed, and it's interesting because these don't look like hotel rooms, or the way that we are accustomed to "reading" images of hotel rooms.'

Floyer's work is an invitation to notice the intricacies and absurdities of the world. An object will give her an idea – and act as a starting point to subvert its behaviour. She cites *Drill*, 2006, as an example of this: 'Its title describes the name of the object, its function, and the action required to install it.'

In *Hammer and Nail*, 2008, Floyer similarly sought out ways to flip expectations. She collected material from the internet, 'with the sole intention of "correcting" it. I wanted footage that demonstrated the action being carried out in the most straightforward way.' Floyer then 'altered the framing of the footage incrementally so that the nail stays in the same position throughout the video clip's duration, despite appearing to be hammered flat into a plank'. What we see is the effect of the rationalisation of the composition in post-production, she explains. 'The altered framing seemingly raises the plank containing the nail to meet the hammer's head, to the effect that the video is not only showing the action of hammering, but rather appears to be "performing" it.'

Whether it's a bin bag, a ladder or a plumb line, Floyer finds poetry in banal objects and familiar actions, creating a place for poetry and pause. Once you've entered her way of seeing the world, it'll never look quite the same again. ★

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Hussein Chalayan: **If you were to look at the horizon for a long while, what kinds of thoughts would pass through your mind?**

Ceal Floyer: **Would this be as good upside-down?**

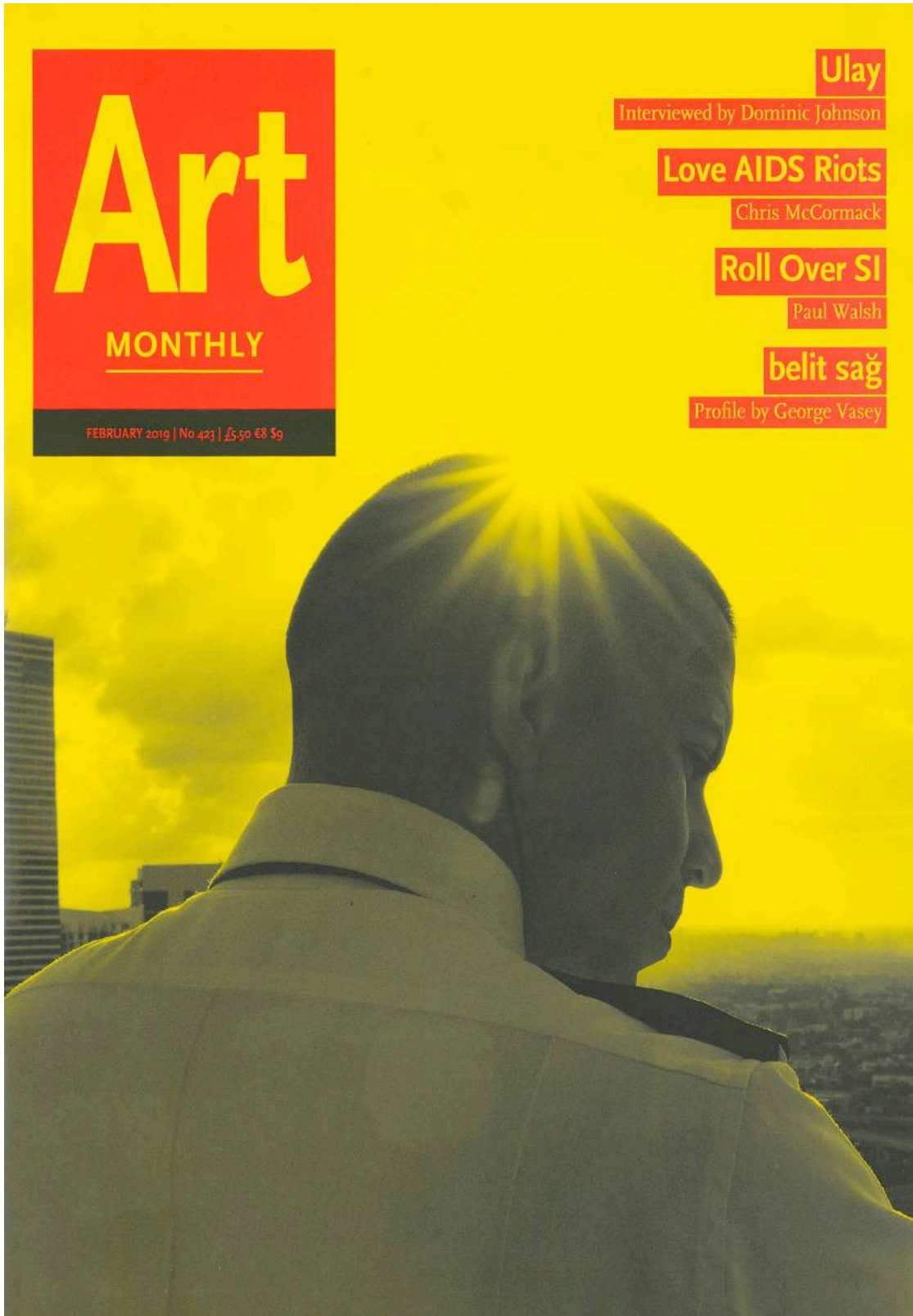


Top right, a portrait of the artist, by Hussein Chalayan

Clockwise from left, *Secret*, 2009; *Will Return*, 2018; and *Reversed*, 2005, all by Ceal Floyer

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Art Monthly
February 2019



Ulay

Interviewed by Dominic Johnson

Love AIDS Riots

Chris McCormack

Roll Over SI

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Profile by George Vasey

referring to the time when there are no shadows, the high noon at which conflicts come to a head in the tradition of the cinematic western – suggests a climactic point of resistance to the impositions which have historically accompanied those obsessions. The contempt which Godard ascribes to Camille is personal. In Siegel, it is more universal: an act of resistance aligned to the #MeToo movement. ■

Paul Carey-Kent is a writer and curator based in Southampton.

Ceal Floyer

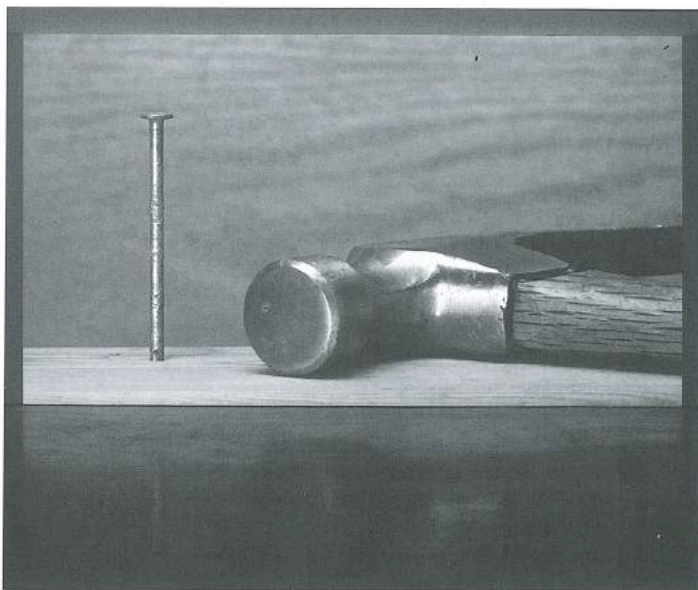
Lisson Gallery London

16 November to 12 January

Our perceptions are askew: our eyes see the world upside down (our brain corrects for it); our experience of the sun suggests that it revolves around the earth (centuries of science have corrected that for us); as Italo Calvino once speculated, if we walk the streets and hear a phone ring, we assume that someone calls for us (most of the time they haven't). It is in the everyday that these distortions are most readily found. Perhaps this is because we are working with readymades: programmed technologies, culturally encoded objects, and spaces we have been trained to respond to and behave within. Yet we have them back to front.

Ceal Floyer's exhibition at Lisson Gallery invokes similar reversals. In the first room, Floyer's large projection *Hammer and Nail*, 2018, performs a Heideggerian double-take. As a hammer strikes a nail into a piece of timber, the frame of the video contracts with the visible length of the nail. As the nail disappears inside the wood, the video retreats, blow by blow, to the top of the screen. Riding up and lifting off, the video scales the wall, the first of a number of vertical plays in an exhibition concerned with limit and the perspective of our viewpoint. The video's disappearance is also its appearance: it becomes an object of thought as the work points to the structure of video projection: if the ephemeral image jumps in accordance with its subject, this is because it does not behave and separate itself from that which it depicts. The

Ceal Floyer
Hammer and Nail
2018 video



video shows but acts too: it is both ready and present at hand.

Facing Bell Street outside, a glass parabolic dome is hung in the next space, sound emitting beneath it. To stand underneath is to first go from hearing nothing to hearing static, which quickly, strangely, becomes a sound like rainfall. Perhaps this is prompted by its visual rhyme: *Untitled (Static)*, 2018, uses the proximity of the dome to the shape and proportions of an umbrella: drenched in sound from above, the work reveals that sound is not autonomous, but emerges from the noise of the signal: its sense, like language, is projected by a receiver who fills in its gaps.

The German art historian Peter Geimer, in his study of the early history of photography, *Inadvertent Images*, stakes a claim for some revisions rooted in how we conceive of our experience through technological media: in that most industrial object, the photograph – which both Walter Benjamin and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy speak about in the same breath as the transmission of sound through the radio – demonstrates that abstraction did not emerge from representation, but the other way around. Chance prevailed before codification, uses came before invention; the crystalline photograph emerges from the grainy haze of abstract chemistries, mistakes, fogs and disruptions. So too sound comes from static. Floyer's toolkit has often involved the sleight of hand, bait and switch, and the short circuit. But we can add to this list the fact that she engages also in a kind of reverse engineering. She peels back the codified layers of an object and returns it to a place before its function is solidified. We get a proper look at that object as a result.

Across the room from the parabolic dome, a 'Max. Headroom' sign is affixed to the top of the window (*Maximum Headroom*, 2014/18). The sign marks and measures the space in a gesture that resembles Mel Bochner or Kanji Wakae but, with its language of limit and caution, it appears to prevent an activity that is comically unspoken. It speaks in a language of restriction, but seems, as a result, not to stop, but to propose the unthinkable, the lifting of the roof of the space. In this sense it pokes fun at the ego and bloat of monumental sculpture, the gallery too low for those ambitions. But the sky is not the limit, it is also caving in. Upstairs, *Fallen Star*, 2018, is composed of a masked projector tilted at an angle towards a mirror on the ceiling. Light is bounced back to the ground, echoing a satellite reflecting a signal, where its star-shaped image meets the floor. Illuminated and glowing, it has fallen to earth. The star is a shadow of its former self: it claims attention – recalling as it does the Hollywood Walk of Fame – but it is tragicomic nonetheless. Floyer brings us down to earth. ■

Duncan Wooldridge is an artist, writer and BA (Hons) course director in Photography, Camberwell College of Arts, London.

Forms of Address

Laure Genillard London 1 December

to 2 February

Bringing together a noticeably intergenerational group of artists – including poetry from Gertrude Stein recorded in 1911 alongside work from Taiwanese artist Yun-Ling Chen, born 80 years later in 1991 – 'Forms of Address' manages to span a significant chunk of time. For the most part, the work in the exhibition has been made within the past few years, but, even so, artists like Chen or Ella McCartney, whose practices are still relatively in their infancy, are placed with artists such as Alan Charlton and Olivier Mosset,

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Studio International
9th January 2019

studio international

Ceal Floyer

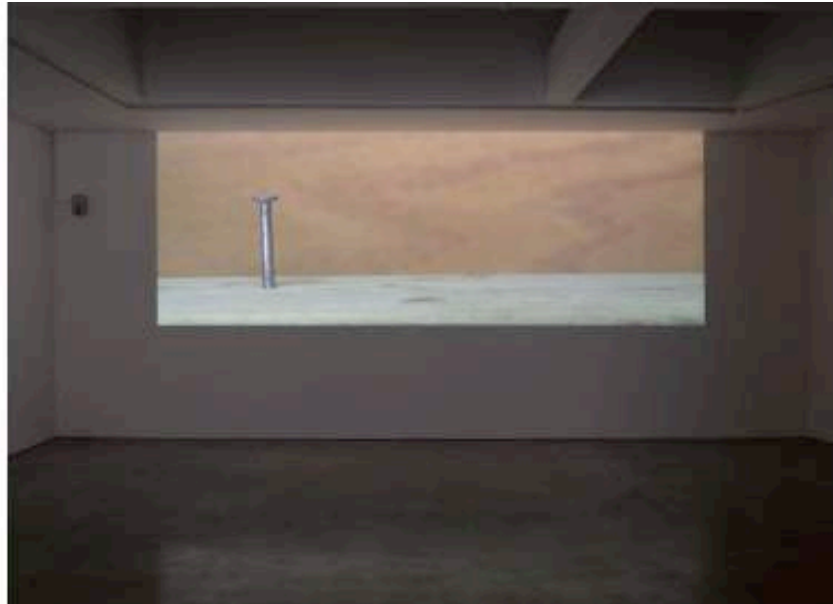
Ceal Floyer's subversion of everyday objects continues her meditation on materiality in private and public space



Lisson Gallery, London
16 November 2018 – 12 January 2019

by HATTY NESTOR

For centuries, artists and philosophers have theorised about the relationship between private and public space, materially and conceptually. In Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), he discusses the relationship between personal and private life as an "interconnectedness", where our internal and external lives mutually inform one another. Particularly in urban settings, the ramifications of how we live among, and indeed with, everyday objects have been the subject of artistic address. In her exhibition at the Lisson Gallery in London, the Berlin-based artist Ceal Floyer (b1968) – renowned for her poetics of the everyday – through a myriad of forms and mediums embarks on a terrain of the familiar, subtle and uncanny. I interviewed Floyer to get a sense of her practice and to discuss the body of [new work she is exhibiting at the Lisson Gallery](#).



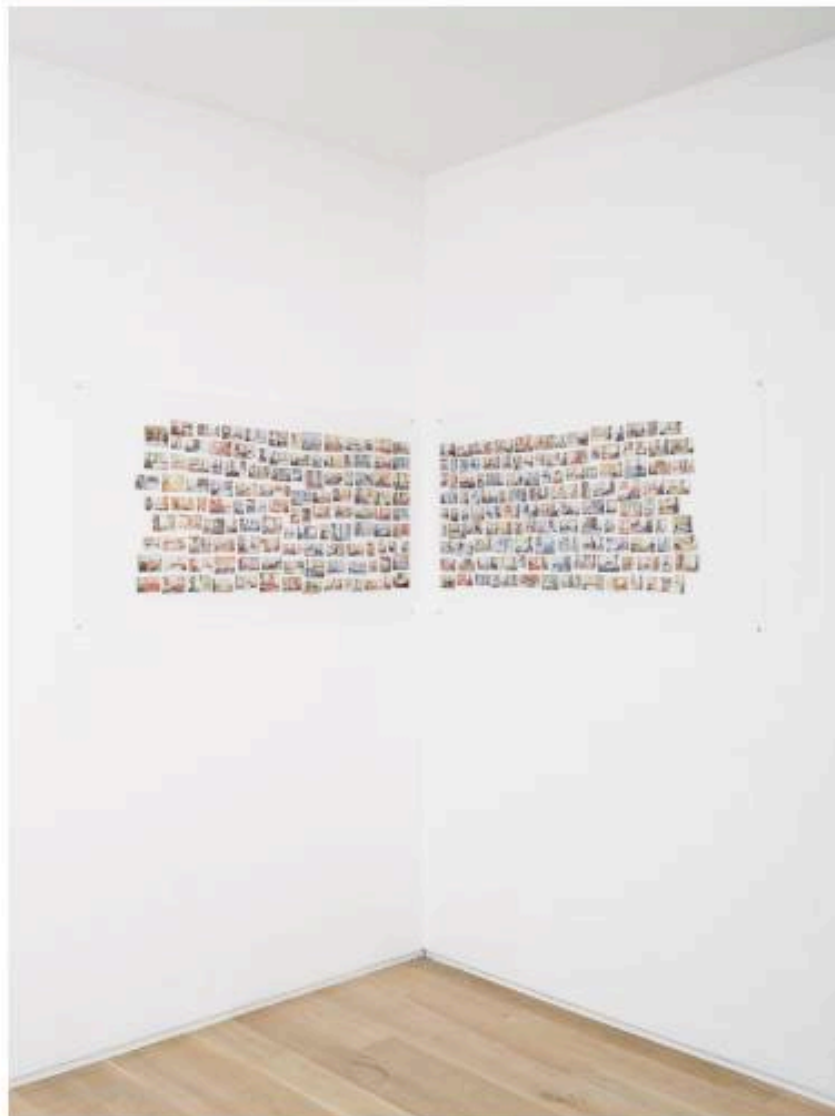
Ceal Floyer. Hammer and Nail, 2018. Video projection with audio, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Floyer's show, her first appearance at Lisson London since 2011, examines existential questions of the self through mundane objects. Her work creates interventions into the everyday – bearing witness to the simplicity of objects that surround us in our domestic and professional lives. This is immediately apparent in *Hammer and Nail* (2018), an oversized video that greets visitors to the exhibition, where stock footage depicts a hammer beating a plank of wood. I was perplexed by the physical and visual space that a hammer – an object that holds many connotations – was given: such weight and space. Where was the footage from? Floyer says: "The final video is the result of the rationalisation of the composition in post-production."



Ceal Floyer. Hammer and Nail, 2018. Video projection with audio, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

She expands: “As a consequence, the hammer is denied the result of its hammering action, because it’s really the altered framing which appears to raise the plank containing the nail to meet the hammer’s head.” On further inspection, I realise that, without its functionality, its primary use is suspended, left to render it an aesthetic art object. In an uncanny gesture, Floyer resituates our relationship to the everyday, while reformulating, in this instance, the hammer’s properties and functionality.



Ceal Floyer. Hotel Rooms, 2018. Scanned and printed promotional images of hotel rooms mounted on matte Plexiglas panels, diptych: 120 x 65 cm (47 1/8 x 25 1/2 in) each panel. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Moving upstairs, I am confronted with *Hotel Rooms* (2018) – myriad photographs of bedrooms, taken from advertisements in consumer magazines and travel brochures. Here, photography is presented as an imagined meditation on reality. Yet, despite this piece deriving from advertisements of hyper-realist lifestyles, Floyer’s presentation frames the rooms in a renewed context. She attributes the two perspectives found in these magazines as an artistic gesture, presenting the functionality of hotel rooms societally.



Ceal Floyer. Hotel Rooms, 2018. Scanned and printed promotional images of hotel rooms mounted on matte Plexiglas panels, diptych: 120 x 65 cm (47 1/8 x 25 1/2 in) each panel. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

In Floyer’s recontextualisation of the bedroom, the viewer is oriented in direct reference to the subversion of the everyday – a recurring theme throughout her work. The diptych of photographs resides in the corner of the gallery framed by two opposing walls. “When a visitor stands there,” Floyer explains, “s/he is also recasting her/himself in the position of the photographer.” Perhaps this incompleteness is a type of agency in its own right, a method of demonstrating that we all are mutually intertwined with our private and public life, whether visually apparent or not.



Ceal Floyer. Hotel Rooms, 2018. Scanned and printed promotional images of hotel rooms mounted on matte Plexiglas panels, diptych: 120 x 65 cm (47 1/8 x 25 1/2 in) each panel. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Floyer's practice confronts complex questions of value, semantics and perception. In documenting everyday life, photography plays a crucial role in creating histories of personal and public settings. The hotel photographs are organised systematically, says Floyer, with "pictures representing the rooms shot from the left, on the left of the diptych, and pictures representing the rooms shot from the right, on the right of the diptych. Standing between the two panels of the diptych, there is also a nod to the act of looking and flipping through the pages of such a brochure." She continues: "In a few cases, I found images looking straight-on at the bed, and it's interesting because these don't look like hotel rooms, the way that we are accustomed to 'reading' images of rooms shot from the right or left side (not unlike commercials for watches, which conventionally are depicted at ten past ten or ten to two)." Their placement on the two opposing walls feels casual, done without much precision or consideration, much like Polaroids on a bedroom wall.

But what was the process of collecting and archiving for Hotel Rooms? Floyer says: “The process involved cutting the pictures from the magazine pages (in the best cases, I had two copies of the magazines so I could make use of both sides of each sheet, if they had good images on both sides). All the cut-outs were then scanned into the computer, printed, cut out again, and, finally, fixed on to the surfaces of Plexi panels.” The collage of rooms, then, is like a narrative – there is a feeling that each photograph is in dialogue with another.



Ceal Floyer. Fallen Star, 2018. 35 mm slide projector, slide mask, mirror, telescopic AV stand, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

In *Fallen Star* (2018), a slide projector placed in the middle of the gallery projects one singular star on to the gallery's ceiling, from where a mirror sends it falling back on to the floor. The work's meaning and subtle purpose, like most of Floyer's practice, isn't readily obvious to the viewer. The relationship between the unique properties of an object – in this case the projector – and the poignancy of what it translates – light, appears to be central.



Ceal Floyer. Fallen Star, 2018. 35 mm slide projector, slide mask, mirror, telescopic AV stand, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

As Floyer describes it, when constructing the work she “was thinking about the song title Catch a Falling Star (sung by Perry Como), but didn't realise how sentimental the lyrics are until after the fact. The work is not meant to be sentimental.” Encountering *Fallen Star*, the projected star is reminiscent of being a child lying in bed at night and looking at the stars I had on my ceiling – a quaint reminder of how the unknown, such as space, can be made familiar in the everyday.



Ceal Floyer. Fallen Star, 2018. 35 mm slide projector, slide mask, mirror, telescopic AV stand, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Familiarity is a theme throughout the exhibition; the hammer, the stars and hotel rooms all prompt us to focus closely on the details of each piece, to look for differences and diversions from the norm. In *Maximum Headroom* (2014/2018), this feeling is most acute. Two aluminium printed traffic signs showing the maximum headroom both inside and outside the gallery are installed on a window, collapsing the boundaries of inside and outside. The piece, says Floyer, has a satirical quality: “The common traffic sign is an immediately recognisable, standardised example of vernacular life. Its familiarity allows us to transcend the sign and observe and interpret the almost absurd minutiae of detail that is therefore permitted to shine through.” Surely, here as viewers we witness strategy and measurement in art as something quantifiable with experience, as a tool to reimagine the everyday.



Ceal Floyer. Maximum Headroom, 2014/2018. Site specific custom printed aluminium sign, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Maximum Headroom requires viewers to orientate themselves physically. Floyer meditated on this reorientation herself through specific measurements and calculations. “The figures are given to the nearest millimetre and eighth of an inch (both metric and imperial systems, which is the convention for UK signage),” says Floyer. What similarities are apparent in this piece? Asked about subtle details, Floyer said: “There are two signs installed back to back – one inside the gallery and one outside on its facade.



Ceal Floyer. Maximum Headroom, 2014/2018. Site specific custom printed aluminium sign, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

The sign causes us to remark that even though the two signs are in the exact same position, the implication is different because each sign hangs above a different floor height (the depth of the floor inside is far greater).” Indeed, the preoccupation with space is also theorised in *Untitled (Static)* 2018, a clear, parabolic dome containing a speaker, which hangs from the ceiling, much like a light. It is easy to miss; on entering the gallery space, one briefly wonders what the work actually is. Yet when immersed in the recorded distortion that emanates from the speaker, the visitor quickly acclimates to the feeling of entrapment and physical absorption.



Ceal Floyer. Untitled (Static), 2018. Parabolic speaker and ready-made sound effect, dimensions variable. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

It is surely the visibility Floyer creates through her meditation on the internal and external spaces we inhabit that bears witness to the ever-changing individual and collective experiences of art. If attention to such mundanity allows a preoccupation with what is often overlooked, then Floyer is a master of our everyday. Yet the consideration of how this might materialise, by virtue of the artist, or indeed the gallery space, is a contention Floyer tentatively unfolds at the Lisson Gallery. Although form and composition veer widely, her precedent runs clear; the everyday presents an infinite terrain from which to inquire about our reactions, emotions and, most of all, agency. The next time I find myself in a hotel room, or using a hammer, I will certainly look beyond its practical functionality.

LISSON GALLERY

Cultured Magazine
October 2018

THE TWENTY NINE FIVE

We've gathered 25 exhibitions, happenings and moments that have caught our attention—and we think they'll capture yours, too.



On November 16, Berlin-based artist **Ceal Floyer** makes her triumphant return to London with a solo show that takes over the recently renovated Lisson Gallery. Known for her sly sense of material humor, Floyer's upcoming exhibition promises to address—or perhaps more accurately, undress—the updated white cube. “The subtle but significant remodeling of Lisson’s space since my last show there seemed to call for a subtle but significant change of approach (even the door has moved around the corner),” she says nonchalantly. You can almost hear her smirk.
LISSONGALLERY.COM

Ceal Floyer's Overhead Projection, 2006

COLLECTION MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, BOSTON, MA; COURTESY OF JENNIFER AUBREY, 2015.15.6 BLUE WILLIAMS, 300 GALLERY, NEW YORK

LISSON GALLERY

Art Review
March 2016

In Floyerland

by Mark Prince



How Ceal Floyer invites viewers into a world in which
everything that is asserted is denied

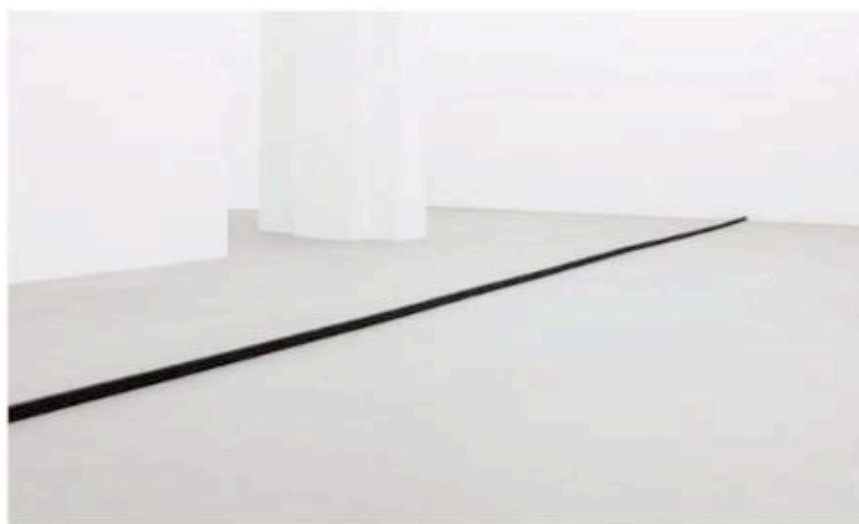
The art of Ceal Floyer presents itself, and is typically presented, in banally deterministic terms. The pairing of reproduction and textual summary reduces an artwork's conceit to an itemised recipe. A title wittily encapsulates an installation's point. The catalogue accompanying last autumn's Floyer exhibition at Kunstmuseum Bonn is a page-by-page directory of her works to date, presented in this vein. Each double-page spread has a photograph on the right, facing a title, a date, a list of constituent elements and an explanatory paragraph on the left. The text/image binary is presented as a transparent equivalence. The layout issues paragraphs in the spirit of keys required to activate the images, which are mostly perfunctory. This pattern is familiar from the exegesis around Floyer's art, which often reads like a self-satisfied explanation of a series of one-liners. Whereas most art catalogues are intent on generating an aura of mystery and significance around the art they document, Floyer's are as tersely factual as a pharmaceutical brochure. Many of the images show what at first glance looks like an empty gallery in which a second glance reveals a minor intervention. If the work is an audio piece, the gallery may actually be empty of art objects. The effect is to emphasise the correspondence between concept and form, and the latter's synonymy with the former, casting the image – or visuality itself – as subservient to the reflexive conceit it manifests.

But the experience of Floyer's art belies this cut-and-dried format, and returns us to it aware that the emptiness of the images is a positive value. Her work is brief but it claims the space it occupies as its fictional world. Those almost-empty galleries signify the precincts of that world, not merely the expedient foils against which art objects articulate themselves. The Canadian poet Anne Carson once remarked that she considers the imaginative worlds created by certain writers – Beckett, Euripides – to be too bleak to dwell in. Something similar might be said of Floyer. Her spaces are sparsely furnished, comfortless, almost colourless, repetitive, tautological, self-circling, indeed full of circles of all kinds, or signs reiterated to the point of dysfunction, like words repeated until they cease to make sense. They are mostly white

– a white broken only by a few black glitches. It is a world of logical processes that wind into Escher-like conundrums. It keeps telling us that our presence and engagement is pointless. It makes us feel foolish for persisting in the face of such hostility. It is always clean and dry. If you're not wearing the chic artworld uniform of all black, minimally cut, you feel like an eyesore. That it presents itself as a hipsterish decor is a joke on us – the viewer, the culture – and on the expectations we bring to looking at art. Floyer is always using simple illusions to make us think about our vulnerability to delusion.

The resolution of an abstraction into the materialism of decor, and the confirmation of an assumption in order to reject it, are both forms of irony, which is another reversal given that Floyer's crucial antecedent is early conceptual art of the late 1960s and 70s, which was unwaveringly earnest. Irreverently, she bites the hand that feeds her. Early Conceptualism was telling us that art should be an objective communication, a missive in the consensus terms of language. It should transmit a datum instead of resting, like a modernist painting, on the laurels of its aesthetic autonomy. It was saying – in the words of Queen Gertrude, the mother of Hamlet – 'more matter, with less art'. The idea was the thing, the look of it a delivery mechanism that should dematerialise once it has served its purpose.

But visual art can't escape its look, and what this intention produced was not a 'non-look', but a *déclassé*, plain, objective look, which, of course, as the technologies on which it was contingent have dated, has begun to look very much like a look. It is now difficult to know whether British conceptualist Stephen Willats's recent silk-screens – with their Xeroxed, typewritten layouts – are art in the early conceptualist style or a nostalgic referencing of that style – a retro idiom. What was originally intended to circumvent art's reliance on appearances – its 'retinalness', in Duchamp's phrase – has become a set of appearances. That Floyer's art conforms to the look of art aloof from a concern with its look, and converts that look into a form of brand decor – the corporate identity of Floyerland – is an act of historical assimilation as well as a remote satire. It intimates that ideas



above *Domino Effect*, 2015, domino tiles, dimensions variable. Photo: Andrea Rossetti.
Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin

facing page *Half Full*, 1999, colour photograph mounted on aluminium, 105 × 105 cm. © the artist, vG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015.
Courtesy the artist; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London; 303 Gallery, New York



Light Switch, 1992, 35mm slide projection, dimensions variable.
© the artist, vG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015. Courtesy the artist;
Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London; 303 Gallery, New York

are contingent on the world in which they find form, the space that expresses them and brings them down to earth. Conversely, her titles always have the air of too-clever puns, self-consciously summarising the conceit that sublimates idea into object, as though reminding the object of the idea that triggered it, and which it can't escape. I'm reminded of something the critic Adrian Searle said of the painter Gary Hume – that his paint never belies the look it had in the pot. That Floyer, like Hume, was among a generation of British artists who emerged during the late 1980s to international acclaim, most of whom were associated with Goldsmiths in London, makes her early-conceptual inheritance anomalous. Producing bold, Pop-effective, art-professional products, these were artists whose work had more to do with the pragmatism of the post-1970s British market state, with its distrust of anything too abstract, Platonic and economically unviable, than with what might be its antithesis: Conceptualism's severe distrust of art's commodification.

The contrast between Floyer's work and that of her peers was immediately apparent when I saw it for the first time in Manchester, during the early 1990s, in one of the first British Art Shows, in which Steve McQueen and Douglas Gordon also participated. All three showed filmic or photographic projection, but the gallery-filling installations of McQueen and Gordon couldn't have been further removed from Floyer's apparently humble *Light Switch* (1992) – a lifesize cut-out photographic image of a standard British domestic switch panel projected onto the white wall of an entranceway by a slide projector on a plinth so close to it that it seemed to belittle the image it produced.

Light Switch looked like a rogue, nihilistic cell in the midst of the exhibition's youthful self-promotion; a tautological construct so airtight it cancelled itself out in an endless loop of form and meaning. Light triggers an illusion of the object that triggers light (even that sentence resembles an extended palindrome). *Light Switch* heralded Floyer's programme by proposing an artwork's occasion as one of futility. It asks us to pay attention to the image of an object that is usually there to be unobtrusively functional, and exacerbates the futility of this demand by making the image contingent upon what the object would be only there to produce: light. Whereas Duchamp divested his bottle rack of its function, releasing it into functionless art space, Floyer makes an object's function the tool by which to denote the art object it produces as futile. She uses its function to invalidate rather than liberate the object. *Light Switch*'s lack of function – except in the sense that an artwork is a calculated trap for aesthetic contemplation – is made synonymous with its futility. After all, what is the point of a light switch that not only doesn't work but needs the energy it is meant to release in order to appear? The piece even goes so far as to qualify aesthetic contemplation itself as futile.

And yet in its power to generate conceptual narrative, *Light Switch* is anything but miserly. A sign ('light switch') unpacks as both illusion (photograph) and material (light – in the sense that light is Dan Flavin's material), each a sign for the other (photography requires light); only for that material to signify and name the sign it creates. Even minimalist materiality – defined by its resistance to figuration and analogy – is here double-edged. Light is revealed as capable of

What is the point of a light switch that not only doesn't work but needs the energy it is meant to release in order to appear?

Floyerland is like the ultrasanitised hospital ward that brings to mind the bacterium that no amount of disinfection can exterminate

dissolving an object into the abstraction of a sign, a sign for a light switch but also for the medium of light. Light is both material (particle, in the language of quantum physics) and archetype – a symbol for illumination and enlightenment, as the cartoon image of the 'eureka' moment is the lightbulb coming on above the genius's head.

In Bonn, *Light Switch* differed from the version I saw in Manchester in that the image projected was of a German-style switch, as much a standard for its context as the English one in Manchester. The varying versions (there have also been Japanese, Irish, American, French, Italian and Turkish ones) denote the specificity of the wall onto which they are projected. As much as the generic form of the switches

abstracts their images into an unlocatable language, their variety specifies the place the image occupies (ie a wall in Manchester or Bonn), as that place claims it as local. This

ambivalent site-specificity was underlined by the Kunstmuseum's installation of *Light Switch* in a large unlit gallery, otherwise empty. The projector placed the switch image at the end of a wall, where it gave onto the entrance into another gallery, as if the switch were an afterthought, or rather – like a switch in relation to its domestic setting – an appendage to the interior it serves. Floyer's passive-aggressive claiming of a context through the agency of an over-seizable intervention is the equivalent of her catalogue installation shots, in which the almost-empty gallery that appears to be a superfluity signifies the negative space that each work's narrative draws into its orbit.

But if her interventions claim the context they occupy, they treat it squeamishly. They demand an ideal, white-cube gallery, and given that that is always an ideal, proceed as though the space were a neutral backdrop against which they can enact their conceits with as few impediments as possible. The genericism of the objects is matched by that of the interiors the objects can only require and imply. The empty black *Garbage Bag* (1996), puffed up and scrunched in to look full, languished in a corner. It looked just like it always has. This continuity depends on the generic bag, as ideally standard as the 'ordinary flashlight' that Jasper Johns told David Sylvester he had in mind to use as a model for a work, and expected to find in every hardware store, only to discover that it was far more elusive a product than he had imagined.

But in Floyerland, the ideally standard trash bag, light switch, ladder or handsaw is always at hand, ready to divest itself of its specificity and resolve into a sign for its function.

It is as if the conceptual reversal on which *Garbage Bag* turns – an image of content that proves to be its absence (we take on trust the wall plaque's listing 'air' as one of its ingredients) – were paramount, and the specificity of the bag had to be disowned in order to manifest it as transparently as possible.

The paradox is that Floyer's reduction of her objects to generic signs makes us conversely aware of the specificity they reject. Floyerland is like the ultrasanitised hospital ward that insistently brings to mind the bacterium that no amount of disinfection can exterminate. It makes us conscious of a sign's inadequacy, either by forcing it to over-compensate in its function – to get stuck in a reiterative loop; to keep saying, but saying nothing – or by exposing it as a covert particular. Her two identical photographs of a half-filled glass – one entitled *Half*

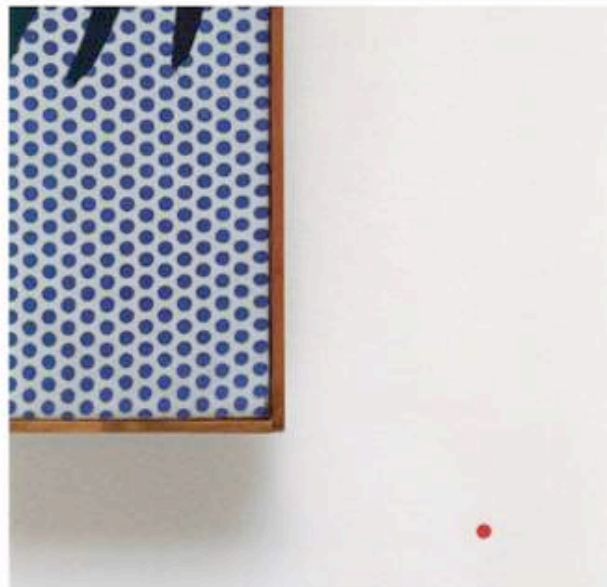
Empty, the other *Half Full* (both 1999) – expose the cliché of the upbeat adage their titles allude to by presenting us with *photographs* – representations that insist on an empirical reality that the blithe saying and Floyer's bland photography are set on disregarding. The medium is a spanner in the works' abstraction. The photographs further expose the pretensions of conceptualist abstractions by satirically alluding to a famous but facile work of British conceptual art: Michael Craig-Martin's (one of Floyer's Goldsmiths tutors) *An Oak Tree* (1973) – a glass of water on a shelf that a text explains has been transformed into an oak tree as though by the power of language. Floyer's photographs are the critical inverse of Craig-Martin's gung-ho alchemy. They show that language's – and, by extension, reason's – possession of reality is pathetically limited; that reality is neither half-full nor half-empty but inexorably resistant to such glib generalisations.

Interpreting the generic object, the cliché, the mean value, as forms of wishful thinking belied by recalcitrant reality, Floyer qualifies her conceptualist heritage as of the British kind, which was always more concerned with empirical pictorial representation than its American or German counterparts. This is the lineage of Richard Wentworth's (who also taught at Goldsmiths) photographic series *Making Do and Getting By* (1973–) or Susan Hiller's *Dedicated to the Unknown Artists* (1972–76). Wentworth's photographs capture makeshift manifestations of human ingenuity applied to urban entropy. Minor adjustments to the prevailing chaos – a shoe used to prop up a sash; a railing spike proffering a lost glove – are models for a rational, human ideal (many of the 'interventions' are endearing and charitable). Hiller's diptychs combine grids of vintage British tourist postcards, representing stormy seas bombarding a coastline, with typewritten analysis. It is impossible to determine whether the statistics are ironically assiduous, or if we are projecting irony onto an early-conceptual mindset that precludes it. Either way, the images function figuratively. The shorelines cannot contain the sea's battery, as Hiller's art is overwhelmed by the information it strives to assimilate.

She can only rail against the impenetrability of history to her act of remote representation.

As Hiller alludes to an art convention through a mass-produced cipher, and takes that contrast as a cue for a meditation on the resistance of history to representation, Floyer's *Monochrome Till Receipt (White)* (1999) pitches a disposable receipt as a white monochrome – a modernist form that abjures information and reference in favour of optical purity. The list of purchases intimates a world of consumer objects as overwhelming to the *carte blanche* of the monochrome as the high waves to Hiller's Romantic coastlines. That all the listed products are white makes them symbolically invisible by imaginatively converting them into art signs, putative readymades, aligned – in their art-ness – with the monochrome paper. White paper and white objects expose the words describing the purchases (in black ink, the colour of the exception in the white of Floyerland) as an unassimilable excess. Their local specificity (each time the work is realised, the items are purchased from a nearby supermarket) is another aspect of their clashing with the generic monochrome they qualify. As the receipt is abstracted, so the purchases – but not the language that represents them – are generalised as white objects. The black print in its local language represents all that threatens the dominion of abstract art's aesthetic preserve, and that it consequently rejects.

It is consistent with the anticommodity stance of Floyer's conceptual models that this threat is made synonymous with consumerism. *Sold* (1996) imputes the travesty of specific objecthood to the clumsy, dated art-market convention by which a gallery indicates paintings as sold by sticking a small red circle on the wall. But it may also be imputing that travesty to painting as the default medium of the art commodity. In Bonn, a hole was drilled in the wall at the corner of a Georg Baselitz painting and filled with red paint. Perhaps it was not coincidental that Floyer had chosen to place her dot in conjunction with the work of one of the avatars of the resurgence of large-scale figurative painting in the 1980s, which at the time was considered



Sold, 1996, cadmium red oil paint, 7 mm hole, 7 mm diameter.
Photo: Axel Schneider. © the artist, vG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015. Courtesy the artist:
Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London; 303 Gallery, New York

by proponents of Conceptualism as a travesty of the advances that movement had made in the 60s and 70s. This miniature minimalist vignette overcompensates for its occasion – the abstraction of the red dot – with its material specificity: a hole drilled into the plaster-board wall and filled with cadmium red oil paint, as plump as putty. Extrapolating phenomenological experience from a cipher, the paint redeems the convention it mimics, transforming the artwork as a sign of market value into a specific object. A cynical confirmation of consumerism proves to be its discreet nemesis. But the fact that *Sold* is also a painting – a modernist monochrome as much as a demonstration of minimalist materialism – derails any simple binary between painting as commodity and the red dot as its anti-consumerist inverse. Parity between Baselitz and Floyer is restored at the last moment.

Sold's conflation of conceptualist abstractions and Minimalism's phenomenological specificities, each undermining the other, is the structural baseline of Floyer's art. As much as the specific object challenges a sign's abstractions, the sign's slippery illusiveness, its refusal to correspond to any particular object, challenges the certainties of empirical perception. Floyer likes to make something that looks like an objective phenomenon – the light under a door; a drip landing in a bucket – prove to be an illusion, a sign that stands for all the instances of which it is not one. This making generic of the object by its image is a means of holding the nostalgia of the found object – its function as a trace of its own past – at arm's length. When Floyer engages with nostalgic sentiment, she places it in inverted commas; has it default to her medium, by making it synonymous with the artwork's self-reflexivity. Hence her use of pop songs – that most nostalgic of artforms – as in *Things* (2009): 50 white plinths with embedded speakers, each emitting a clip of the word "things" extracted from various pop tracks. The ideal minimalist object, a plain-sided box, is forced to do what minimalist orthodoxy forbids: refer. And yet, by making reference an act of self-reference – as the installation's title implies, the plinths double

as the 'things' they are naming – the minimalist object is made self-conscious (nostalgia, of course, is one of the forms self-consciousness takes), and this self-reference is extended to encompass art-historical allusion (a kind of art nostalgia), in this case to Robert Morris's seminal conceptual/minimalist *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961). Containing a tape recorder playing the sound produced by its construction, Morris's plywood box compromises the ideal, minimalist art object – the unadorned cube – by means of the recording it contains which enables its self-reflexivity.

Helix (2001) is a curious exception in Floyer's art, in its accommodation, rather than testy rejection, of the function of objects as traces, even as nostalgic keepsakes. The exception is signified by the work's buzz of consumer-product colour, a telling crack in Floyer's sternly black-and-white universe. Various found objects are inserted into a metric template's holes to precisely fit their spectrum of circumferences. The work's title is even more ingenious than usual. It refers to the template's product name at the same time as comprehending how the objects three-dimensionalise the holes by extending them into vertical space, transforming a geometrical abstraction into a found-object particular, resonant with traces of individual history. It is as if the found object were managing to squeeze itself into the parameters of an abstraction, while remaining standing within it to flout its attempt to generalise it. A dictionary defines 'helix' as a three-dimensional extension of a geometric shape, as a coiled spring extends a circle. But the extension is also temporal, into the pasts of the objects. Standing in their allotted holes, a shower head, a jumbo marker, an egg timer, a perfume sampler, a keyring, a button and a screw resemble a miniature model of a New York-style highrise skyline (*Helix* was first produced in the year of 9/11), another image improvised out of the stuff of a reality that belies it. ar

Ceal Floyer: *On Occasion* is at Aargauer Kunsthau,
Aarau, through 10 April



Helix, 2015, shelf, Helix template, assorted objects,
dimensions variable. Photo: Andrea Rossetti.
Courtesy the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin

LISSON GALLERY

Mousse Magazine
February 2016

MOUSSE

THE PROS AND THE CONS

British artist Ceal Floyer operates in the field of conceptual art, film and installation: transforming the familiar into the extraordinary with subtle ease.

BY CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI

[Can you tell me a little bit about your recent exhibition in Bonn?]

CEAL FLOYER

The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Bonn wasn't designed to be a show of new work. Being a museum show, it had a different kind of resonance. For a long time we discussed what may or may not be included. We were quite happy to work within the palette that already existed and, if anything, to find intelligent ways of combining, or having the works talk to, or against, each other.

CJ It seems to me that I'm laughing a lot about your use of language. Just hearing now that you didn't do many interviews until now, especially with journalists.

[long pause]

CF Surely, you can imagine how much I hate interviews. It's normally not such a big deal to start talking in order to answer people personally. When I later see what it's been transcribed, it always takes me hours, or days, to rewrite it—and that's even if you have time, and get the chance. Everyone says, "Oh, of course we wouldn't release anything without checking it with you first." So there's that, which normally is complete nonsense, but then there's the fact that I hate hearing myself interviewed. There must be a technical term for people who are allergic to hearing their own voice.

CJ When it's written, it seems different, from the audio you hear.

CF Yes. Well, when it's written out, you have the emoticon possibilities.

CJ Emoticon?

CF You know, those smiley, silly expressions made out of punctuation...

[both laugh]

CF ...often they are the only clue as to whether something was meant ironic or not.

CJ If you're thinking about the perfect situation for you in which you can start working, let's say you're working on an idea, and you saw the exhibition space and its architecture. What does inspire you? The language, the architectural situations, or the people that want something from you?

CF Good question. I think those rules are rewritten every time. Honestly, it depends on knowing why someone wants to make a show with me...is it possibly the same for you? I don't know, I'm not the most prolific of artists, I don't churn stuff out. A lot of the work is a result of rethinking, or revisiting, the work. Sometimes something might come into fruition that's been lingering as an idea for a long time, that hasn't made it into the real world yet, and that's not studio based. It almost requires some sort of scenario before it's put into play, which could be architectural, but it also could be "inspired"—whatever that means—I tend to see it motivated by connections, synaptic connections between my new work and the past work. That can be tricky because themes can become overly obvious, when it's media-related—for example light works, audio works, and so on.

CJ Can you categorize something like this? In your early pieces



Untitled (Suggestion Box), 2008.
Courtesy: Esther Schipper, Berlin.
Photo: Carsten Eisfeld

Christian Jankowski (Göttingen, 1968) studied at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg (Germany) and is currently based in Berlin. In his artistic actions and media artworks, he makes use of film, video, and photography, but also painting, sculpture, and installation. Jankowski's work consists of performative interactions between himself and non-art professionals, between contemporary art and the so-called 'world outside of art'. During the course of his artistic career, Jankowski has collaborated with magicians, politicians, news anchors, and members of the Vatican, to name just a few. Jankowski registers these performative collaborations using the mass media formats in which he stages his work—film, photography, television, newspapers. This procedure lends his work its populist appeal. Jankowski's work can be seen both as a reflection, deconstruction, and a critique of a society based on spectacle. In his view, art has turned into a spectacle, and as a result, has undermined its critical potential.

up until now, is there something like the development of different phases?

CF Not really phases. I suddenly see, and can go back and trace ideas, and think, “Okay, that’s the light-based version of an audio piece.” Literally, I might think, “That’s what I was trying to do with this, but in a different medium.” It’s an equivalent, if not a stunt double, kind of a ghost of a previous investigation. It’s a good question. I often see reoccurring themes.

CJ Right, because you sometimes hear this from galleries, or somebody tells you, “Oh yeah, I feel something new starts here” but you also think, “Is this really so different from what I did some years ago? Is this even good that it’s different? *Should* it be different?”

CF That’s the thing! It’s either really miserably going over the same thing, covering the same turf over and over again, sort of Sisyphusian—or, it’s something really poetic and delightful, to think: okay, I was obviously interested in something that was worth being interested in because it’s still interesting to me now.

CJ Right.

CF It really goes from being a verb to a noun.

CJ What I like about your work in contrast to other people’s is that they often suddenly just have the option to make it much larger, or grander.

CF Yeah! But, I want to be one of them. [laughs]

CJ I must say that I really like this in your work, that there’s not this intention to impress by being louder, by taking more space than it needs to, to say something. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you couldn’t produce something because you couldn’t afford it? That your idea was...

CF ...often, a lot of ideas don’t make it off the notebook. I don’t try and make everything I think about making. But usually, I’m lucky enough, at this point in my working life, that if I really do want to produce something that expands on the normal framework, somebody somewhere is prepared to back its production. But if not, then yeah, it sort of languishes in that world of ideas waiting to be realized. Sometimes the work I make doesn’t manifest itself in a concrete way. But talking about things being gradual, *Overgrowth* (2004) is a play on that. It’s the projection of a bonsai tree, but with a projector that is on a stand that’s clearly moveable. If you move it back, the image gets bigger and bigger and bigger...until it’s the size of a normal tree. It’s not rocket science, is it? You just roll the projector back and suddenly it’s an installation! [laughs]

CJ Do you actually like to produce? I think many conceptual artworks have these ideas, and then you can give them to good assistants, and people who manufacture them. Do you like to touch material?

CF Only if necessary. I’d rather have the idea, give it to someone technically proficient, and then carry on where I left off... The trajectory between the idea and the result, if there’s something developable, then it’s important. Otherwise, I find that sometimes being too “hands on” can be detrimental.

CJ Do you work with a consistent team of assistants? Do you have long-term relationships with them, or is it an ever-changing group?

CF We are a pretty small team. One side is more administrative, one more technical. More recently, the boundary is becoming very blurred and lately they have been serving as an insulation between me and German-ness.

[CJ laughs]

CF It’s very small. Basically, it consists of a handful of people I trust a lot. They help me technically, and provide a sounding board.

CJ Did you produce most of your works when you were already living in Germany, or did you also produce work when you were still based in London?

CF Funnily enough, I first came to Berlin on a stipend. And when I moved back to London, I needed to get a “proper” job in order to finance myself being an artist.

CJ Which year was this?

CF 1994, I think. But then I went back to Berlin without a stipendium—the real world, right? Chronologically, most of my professional working time I’ve lived in Berlin. I grew up as an artist here for sure.

CJ When a work is finished, do you keep it in your studio situation for a while...for exhibitions, do you test work in the studio?

CF I try to, but it’s a recent phenomenon. For quite a while, I wasn’t a “studio”—studio artist. As a rule, I’m more of a “kitchen-table”—studio type. Since I’ve had the option to have space, I do dummy runs, mock-ups etc. It would be great to have access to a white cube once regularly to do dress rehearsals, but that’s not realistic. To that extent, more often than not, the exhibition is its first rehearsal. That’s what makes exhibition-making quite terrifying.

CJ When your work is in front of you—in the studio or the gallery space—what would be a way to describe the moment of seeing the work first installed, when this finished work is in front of you?

CF I can tell when an idea might be good because I get butterflies. I also know that sometimes something that seemed theoretically good work just doesn’t work. Unfortunately, that realization sometimes comes too late. Why fill out a show with something I don’t believe in? If a work doesn’t sit well with an other, it can jeopardize everything. It’s like having a group show with oneself.

CJ Are you influenced by other people in this process a lot, or is it something where you don’t really care what other people say? Do you care about the audience?

CF Not really.

CJ Really?

CF OK. I do, but it depends on who the audience is.

CJ Can you describe that a bit more?

CF It’s going to get really tricky now...important audiences would be other artists. They’re the toughest audience, apart from myself, of course. There’s no real litmus test to find out whether a work works, or doesn’t work, until it’s in the public sphere. Otherwise, it’s kind of like the tree falling in the empty forest.

CJ How much importance does the end of one project have on the creation of the next? How much energy informs that? Can it be the audience that either stimulates you by not liking what you do, or by just clapping their hands and liking it. Where do you get energy to continue this routine of doing one work after the next? Are you working at the same time on multiple works?

CF Very much so. Often a work is the result of unfinished business. It’s like slow dissolve from one thing to another, or a formal-conceptual hangover.

CJ Could you work without being pressured to work?

THE PRO AND THE CONS
C. JANKOWSKI



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Of course, you have many shows lined up—how would it be if you had no requests right now? Could you have a studio practice without knowing when to show something?

CF At the moment, I actually think I could. But for a long time, I relied on that sort of pressure to do it. Now, I actually think I could produce work without a gun held to my head.

CJ I always have this feeling like somebody is waiting for something for a long time.

CF Maybe it's that I don't distinguish making art from daily activity...

CJ What did you do before art school?

[both laugh]

CF I spent some years barking up wrong trees. How do you say that in German?

CJ Barking up the wrong tree?

CF Like a dog. It's a figure of speech. Actually, I studied theatre, mainly directing and writing and also a bit of performance.

CJ You were performing theatre? Fantastic.

CF I was interested in writing, and then slowly, it dawned on me that my idea of theater didn't necessarily involve people. [laughs] My performances would start once the audience had left the building... I have spent large portions of my life not knowing what I wanted to do, but knowing what I didn't want to do. Or what I could not do. If you want to do something, you can get it done, or make yourself able to do it, within limits. To decide what you want, that's the tough one. What's the essence of this?

CJ Many times, I used to answer that I wanted to have more choices.

CF [shudders] Choices are the kinds of things that keep me awake all night. In theory, I love the idea of scaling down, simplifying things, but I'm not very good at simplifying. It amuses me a lot, when people think they know the artist by their art, that they have an insight into the artist.

CJ Because they know their art, yeah?

CF Anyone would be forgiven for thinking I'm sort of puritanical or quite spartan, but actually, for every bit of minimalism in my exhibitions, I can match it with maximalism backstage. Chaos with 90-degree angles!

CJ What do you think was taking your attention so strongly into language, the notion of language?

CF This interview is becoming tedious now, isn't it? I talk about language as much as I use it. It's always something I've enjoyed. Actually, it's the words that I like.

CJ People don't always understand your sense of humour immediately, like me.

CF Whenever I go back to England, which I don't do nearly often enough, I can't help but overhear people talking in public places and it almost makes my ears bleed, because it's too much information. I don't want to understand everything. It's times like that, that I feel that language is really being taken for granted. People just get to use it to do something, rather than just to enjoy it for itself.

CJ Sometimes you address quite dark topics in your work; that

everyone will have to face at some point in their lives. Death, for example.

CF Death? In my work? Maybe you are referring to *Working Title (Digging)* (1995), but here the motive was structural. It's about the look of minimalist sculpture and the sound of stereo. It's literally sound going from one speaker to another. So any connotation of grave digging is...

CJ ...it's one reading. I think that's good for a work when it has multiple interpretations, even if you don't think about it like this.

CF It can be unnerving when something so simple can give rise to so many interpretations. Works can be misread, as with the work *Door* (1995), where a thin strip of light is projected onto the very bottom of a door. It's not completely impossible that someone might try to interpret that as "seeing the light" – in the biblical sense!

CJ But do you think you can control this kind of interpretation?

CF Not all the time. One can't stomp around, saying, "this is what it isn't" as much as one can't say "this is what it is."

CJ Yes, yes.

CF That's a bit didactic as well. It's a delicate operation, and depends on people understanding what the backstory is, or isn't, in order to make informed decisions. As an artist, the art work isn't finished until it's in the world; its completion happens on its way out of the studio door. I wouldn't show certain works of mine alongside others, because I just know they'll have a lazy conversation. For example, two pieces in the same medium become two halves of one piece, instead of two autonomous pieces. They can undermine, rather than reinforce, one another. It's a minefield, isn't it? And that's just the formal part. Sometimes it's better to have two tight monologues, than a sloppy dialogue.

CJ It's true. That's a good end. I like this.

Ceal Floyer's work often uses everyday objects or images to introduce defamiliarizing and somewhat startling moments into the spectator's experience of a space. Slight alterations to found objects, that are usually familiar from everyday experiences (like a hairbrush, the sign for an emergency exit, or the projection of an image of a nail) create often surprising interventions that heighten the awareness of our surroundings. The play with expectations and the misuse of technical equipment (in effect, removing or subtly subverting its intended function) are another continuous themes in Ceal Floyer's work. Often the artist mixes visual and linguistic references, often also to the site, combining semantic levels in a disorienting and witty way.

Previous spread

1 *Sold*, 1996. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist; 303 Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London. Photo: Axel Schneider

2 *Saw*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

3 *Drop*, 2013. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London

4 *Bars*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

5 *Circle*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London

Opposite

6 *Mutual Admiration*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

7 *Still*, 2014. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London

8 *Helix*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

9 *Mirror Globe*, 2014. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York; Esther Schipper, Berlin; Lisson Gallery, London

10 *Domino Effect*, 2015. © Ceal Floyer. Courtesy: the artist and Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

L'artista concettuale britannica Ceal Floyer usa film e installazioni per trasformare, con sottigliezza e semplicità, il familiare nello straordinario.

CHRISTIAN JANKOWSKI [Puoi parlarmi della tua recente mostra a Bonn?]

CEAL FLOYER La mostra al Kunstmuseum di Bonn non era pensata per presentare opere nuove. Dato che era in un museo, aveva un altro tipo di risonanza. Abbiamo discusso a lungo su cosa esporre e cosa no. Eravamo soddisfatti di lavorare con opere esistenti, di trovare modi intelligenti di accostarle, oppure di farle parlare tra e contro di loro.

CJ Il tuo uso del linguaggio mi diverte molto. Scopro solo adesso che finora non hai concesso molte interviste.

[Lunga pausa]

CF Puoi immaginare quanto detesto le interviste. Di solito non è un grande problema trovarsi a parlare di persona. Quando poi però vedo la trascrizione, ci metto ore, se non giorni, a riformulare tutto. Sempre che ne abbia il tempo e la possibilità. Tutti dicono: "Ma certo, non pubblicheremo mai nulla senza prima verificarlo insieme". Di solito è un'assurdità, però è anche vero che odio ascoltarmi durante le interviste. Dev'esserci un termine tecnico per chi è allergico al suono della propria voce.

CJ Le parole scritte hanno un gusto diverso.

CF Sì. Quando sono scritte, ci sono gli emoticon.

CJ Emoticon?

CF Ma sì, quelle stupide faccine sorridenti fatte con la punteggiatura...

[ridono entrambi]

CF ...Spesso sono l'unico indizio per capire se qualcosa è detto in modo ironico.

CJ Se pensi alla situazione perfetta in cui lavorare, cosa t'ispira? Il linguaggio, le condizioni architettoniche, le persone?

CF Bella domanda. Credo che cambi di volta in volta. Onestamente, dipende dal perché qualcuno vuole fare una mostra con me. Per te è la stessa cosa? Non so, non sono l'artista più prolifica del mondo. Molte opere sono il risultato di un ripensamento, di una rivisitazione di altre opere. A volte prende forma un'idea fuori dallo studio. Prima di entrare in azione ho bisogno di uno scenario, che può essere architettonico o anche un'"ispirazione". Di solito mi sento motivata da connessioni sinaptiche tra le opere nuove e le vecchie. Può essere complesso perché i temi possono diventare ovvi, quando sono legati ai media... Per esempio, per le opere legate alla luce o al suono.

CJ Dalle tue prime opere a oggi, c'è una specie di sviluppo in fasi diverse?

CF Non sono proprio fasi. Di colpo capisco, torno indietro, rintraccio le idee e penso: "Ok, questa è la versione con la luce di un'opera sonora". Davvero, a volte penso: "Ecco cosa stavo cercando di fare, ma usando un mezzo diverso". È un equivalente, se non una controfigura, una specie di fantasma di un'esplorazione precedente. Spesso vedo temi ricorrenti.

CJ Certo, perché a volte lo senti dire dalle gallerie: "Sì, sento che qui comincia qualcosa di nuovo", e intanto ti chiedi: "È davvero così diverso da quello che ho fatto qualche

anno fa? È positivo che sia diverso? Deve essere diverso? "

CF Proprio così! Rimuginare sulla stessa cosa, esplorare ancora una volta lo stesso territorio, un po' come Sisifo, può essere davvero penoso... oppure è poetico e incantevole e ti dici: "Capisco perché m'interessava, è ancora interessante."

CJ Esatto.

CF Si passa da un verbo a un sostantivo.

CJ Altri hanno la possibilità di fare lavori molto più grandi o imponenti.

CF Sì! Voglio essere una di quelle persone.

[ride]

CJ Devo dire che mi piace molto questo aspetto del tuo lavoro, il fatto che non vuoi fare colpo alzando la voce. Ti sei mai trovata nella situazione in cui non riuscivi a produrre qualcosa perché non potevi permettertelo?

CF Spesso. Molte idee non lasciano il tacquino. Non cerco di realizzare tutto. Ma a questo punto della mia vita professionale, di solito, se voglio davvero produrre qualcosa fuori dalla norma, qualcuno da qualche parte è pronto a finanziarla. In caso contrario resta a languire nel mondo delle idee, in attesa di essere realizzata. A volte ciò che creo non si manifesta in modo concreto. Parlando però di cose graduali, *Overgrowth* (2004) gioca proprio su questo aspetto. È la proiezione di un bonsai, ma il proiettore è su sostegno mobile. Sponstandolo all'indietro, l'immagine diventa più grande... fino a raggiungere le dimensioni di un albero vero e proprio. Non bisogna essere scienziati, no? Basta spostare il proiettore all'indietro e di colpo ecco un'installazione! [ride]

CJ Ti piace produrre? Credo che molte opere concettuali partano da idee che poi possono essere affidate ad assistenti validi e alle persone che le fabbricano. Ti piace toccare i materiali?

CF Solo se necessario. Preferisco avere l'idea, affidarla a qualcuno competente a livello tecnico e poi continuare dal punto in cui mi sono interrotta. La traiettoria tra l'idea e il risultato è importante se c'è qualcosa che si può sviluppare. In caso contrario, penso che a volte essere troppo "sul campo" possa rivelarsi deleterio.

CJ Lavori con una squadra nutrita di assistenti? È un gruppo in continuo cambiamento?

CF Siamo una squadra piuttosto ridotta. Un lato è più amministrativo, l'altro più tecnico. Ultimamente il confine sta diventando molto confuso, e ormai fanno da filtro tra me e la germanicità.

[CJ ride]

CF È un gruppo molto piccolo. In sostanza è composto da poche persone di cui mi fido molto. Mi aiutano sul piano tecnico, mi fanno da cassa di risonanza.

CJ Hai prodotto la maggior parte delle tue opere dopo il trasferimento in Germania o ne producevi già quando vivevi ancora a Londra?

CF Fa ridere, ma quando mi sono trasferita a Berlino avevo una borsa di studio. E, quando sono tornata a Londra, ho dovuto cercare un lavoro "regolare" per finanziare la mia carriera artistica.

CJ In che anno è successo?

CF Nel 1994, credo. Poi sono tornata a Berlino senza una borsa di studio... il mondo

reale, no? Da un punto di vista cronologico, per la maggior parte della mia vita professionale ho vissuto a Berlino. Di sicuro qui sono cresciuta come artista.

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CJ Quando un'opera è finita, la mostri nel tuo studio?

CF Ci provo, ma è un fenomeno recente. Per un bel po' di tempo non sono stata un'artista con un vero studio. Di norma, sono più tipo da "il tavolo della cucina è il mio studio". Da quando mi è stata offerta la possibilità di avere uno spazio faccio prove, modelli eccetera. Sarebbe fantastico avere accesso regolare a un *white cube* per fare prove generali, ma non è realistico. In questo senso, la mostra è quasi sempre la prima prova. È questo che rende tanto spaventosa la sua organizzazione.

CJ Come descriveresti il momento in cui vedi una tua opera installata di fronte a te, in studio o in galleria?

CF Capisco che un'idea è valida quando mi vengono le farfalle allo stomaco. So anche che a volte un lavoro che sembrava buono su carta non funziona nella realtà. Purtroppo, a volte questa consapevolezza arriva troppo tardi. Perché riempire una mostra con qualcosa in cui non credo? Se un'opera sta con un'altra, può mettere in pericolo tutto. È come fare una collettiva da soli.

CJ Gli altri t'influenzano molto in questo processo, o non ti preoccupi molto di quello che dicono?

CF Non molto.

CJ Davvero?

CF Ok, sì, ma dipende da chi è composto il pubblico.

CJ Mi spieghi meglio?

CF Il pubblico più importante è composto dagli artisti. Sono il pubblico più difficile, escludendo me stessa. Non esiste una vera prova del nove per scoprire se un'opera funziona, finché non entra nella sfera pubblica. Altrimenti, è un po' come l'albero che cade nella foresta deserta.

CJ Quanto peso esercita la fine di un progetto sulla creazione del successivo? Quanta energia richiede? A fornirla può essere il pubblico che ti stimola perché non apprezza quello che fai, oppure che applaude perché gli è piaciuto. Dove trovi l'energia per creare un'opera dopo l'altra? Lavori a più opere allo stesso tempo?

CF Sì. Spesso un'opera è il risultato di qualcosa lasciato in sospeso. È come una lenta dissoluzione da una cosa all'altra, o un *hangover* formale del concetto.

CJ Hai molte mostre in cantiere. Cosa faresti se non avessi richieste? Riusciresti a lavorare in studio senza sapere quando esporrai?

CF In questo momento credo che potrei farlo. Ma per molto tempo ho fatto affidamento su quella specie di pressione. Adesso credo che potrei produrre opere senza una pistola puntata alla tempia.

CJ Ho sempre la sensazione che qualcuno aspetti qualcosa da molto tempo.

CF Forse dipende dal fatto che non faccio distinzioni tra il creare arte e l'attività di tutti i giorni...

CJ Cosa facevi prima di studiare arte?

[ridono entrambi]

CF Ho passato diversi anni ad abbaire agli

191 alberi sbagliati. Come si dice in tedesco?

CJ Abbaire all'albero sbagliato?

CF Sì, come un cane. È un modo di dire. Comunque ho studiato teatro, mi occupavo soprattutto di regia e sceneggiatura, ma anche di performance.

CJ Hai fatto teatro? Fantastico.

CF Mi interessava la scrittura e poi, piano piano, ho capito che la mia idea di teatro non prevedeva necessariamente persone. [ride] Le mie performance cominciavano quando il pubblico ormai se n'era andato... Ho passato lunghi periodi senza sapere cosa volevo fare, sapevo solo cosa non mi andava. O cosa non potevo fare. Se vuoi fare qualcosa, puoi riuscirci, o metterti nelle condizioni di riuscirci, entro certi limiti. La parte difficile è capire che cosa vuoi. Qual è l'essenza di tutto questo?

CJ Un tempo, rispondevo che volevo più scelta.

CF [rabbrivisce] Le scelte sono tra le cose che mi tengono sveglia di notte. In teoria adoro l'idea di ridurre, di semplificare le cose, ma non sono molto brava a semplificare. Mi divertono le persone che credono di conoscere un artista attraverso la sua arte, di averne una comprensione...

CJ Perché conoscono l'arte, giusto?

CF Qualcuno potrebbe pensare che in un certo senso sono puritana o spartana, e avrebbe le sue ragioni. In realtà, bilancio ogni grammo di minimalismo nelle mie mostre con il massimalismo dietro le quinte. Caos con angoli di novanta gradi!

CJ Come mai sei così attenta all'idea di linguaggio?

CF L'intervista sta diventando noiosa, vero? Parlo del linguaggio nella stessa misura in cui lo uso. È una cosa che mi è sempre piaciuta. Anzi, sono le parole a piacermi.

CJ Non tutti capiscono subito il tuo senso dell'umorismo.

CF Ogni volta che torno in Inghilterra, cosa che non faccio spesso, non posso evitare di ascoltare le conversazioni della gente in pubblico e, quando capita, mi sanguinano quasi le orecchie: troppe informazioni! *Non voglio* capire tutto. In momenti del genere ho l'impressione che il linguaggio sia davvero dato per scontato. La gente lo usa per fare qualcosa, anziché goderselo e basta.

CJ A volte le tue opere toccano argomenti un po' tetri, che tutti prima o poi dovremo affrontare. Per esempio la morte.

CF La morte? Nelle mie opere? Forse ti riferisci a *Working Title (Digging)* (1995), ma in quel caso la ragione era strutturale. L'opera parla di scultura minimalista e del suono stereo. Si tratta di suono che si sposta da un altoparlante a un altro. Il riferimento allo scavare una fossa è...

CJ Una delle interpretazioni possibili. Credo sia positivo che un'opera offra letture diverse, anche se non la vedi in questi termini.

CF Qualcosa di tanto semplice che dà spazio a tante interpretazioni può essere snerante. Le opere possono essere fraintese, come per esempio *Door* (1995), in cui una sottile striscia di luce è proiettata sul fondo di una porta. Non è da escludere che qualcuno cerchi di interpretarla come "vedere la luce"... in senso biblico!

CJ Ma pensi di poter controllare questo tipo d'interpretazione?

CF Non sempre. Non si può puntare i piedi e dire: "Non si tratta di questo", proprio come non si può dire: "Si tratta di questo".

CJ Sì, sì.

CF È anche un po' didattico. È un'operazione delicata, il cui esito dipende dal fatto che la gente capisca qual è (o non è) il retroscena, per prendere delle decisioni consapevoli. Come artista, un'opera non è completa finché non è nel mondo: il suo completamento comincia non appena varca la soglia dello studio. Non esporrei alcune mie opere insieme ad altre, perché so che non funzionerebbero insieme. Due opere che usano lo stesso mezzo, per esempio, diventerebbero due metà di un'unica opera, anziché due opere autonome. Possono indebolirsi a vicenda, anziché rafforzarsi. È un campo minato, non trovi? E questa è solo la parte formale. A volte è meglio avere due monologhi serrati che un dialogo stentato.

CJ È vero. È un bel finale. Mi piace.

LISSON GALLERY

Mousse Magazine
May 2014

Mousse Magazine

News

Ceal Floyer at Lisson Gallery, Milan and Museion, Bolzano

Share



Ceal Floyer tests, teases and skirts around the boundaries of what art can or should be in her first exhibition at Lisson Gallery in Milan, which coincides with a major presentation of her works at Museion in nearby Bolzano. Floyer's 2008 work, *Taking a Line for a Walk*, in which a machine that creates the white lines on sports fields is driven around and takes its title from Paul Klee's assertion in the introduction to his *Pedagogical Sketchbook* of 1923 that a drawing should be: "An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for walk's sake" Floyer's own meandering line through space – a performance and a sculpture, as much as a drawing – will be recreated throughout the galleries, drawing visitors downstairs. A rectangular swathe of grass in the garden, entitled *Greener Grass* (2014), will indeed – as the old saying goes – seem brighter than its counterpart in nature and more vivid than real life.

Another genre-defying sculptural work, *Press* (2014), is a single sheet of creased newsprint with the sole impression of a hot iron placed at its centre, both an attempt to iron out the imperfections in the paper and a play on the double meaning of the word "press". A new photographic piece and another new sculpture will also question what we are seeing and hearing, with a still image of a high-speed spinning top and an audio piece which reiterates and echoes a song concerned chiefly with the visual medium of video.

Floyer's survey of work at Museion, also in northern Italy, features ten installations, including *Scale* (2007), an assemblage of speakers resembling a flight of stairs leading up to a ceiling that plays the sound of what could be ascending steps; *Drop* (2013), a video that waits for beads of water to drip (or literally a drop to drop) and *Exit* (2006) in which the artist cut out the iconic shape of the door from the sign for an emergency exit, thus creating another exit entirely.

[Catalogue by Mousse Publishing](#)

[at Lisson Gallery, Milan](#)

until 16 May 2014

[at Museion, Bolzano](#)

until 4 May 2014

Above – *Taking a Line for a Walk*, 2008

Ceal Floyer at Lisson Gallery, Milan







Taking a Line for a Walk, 2008





Press, 2014



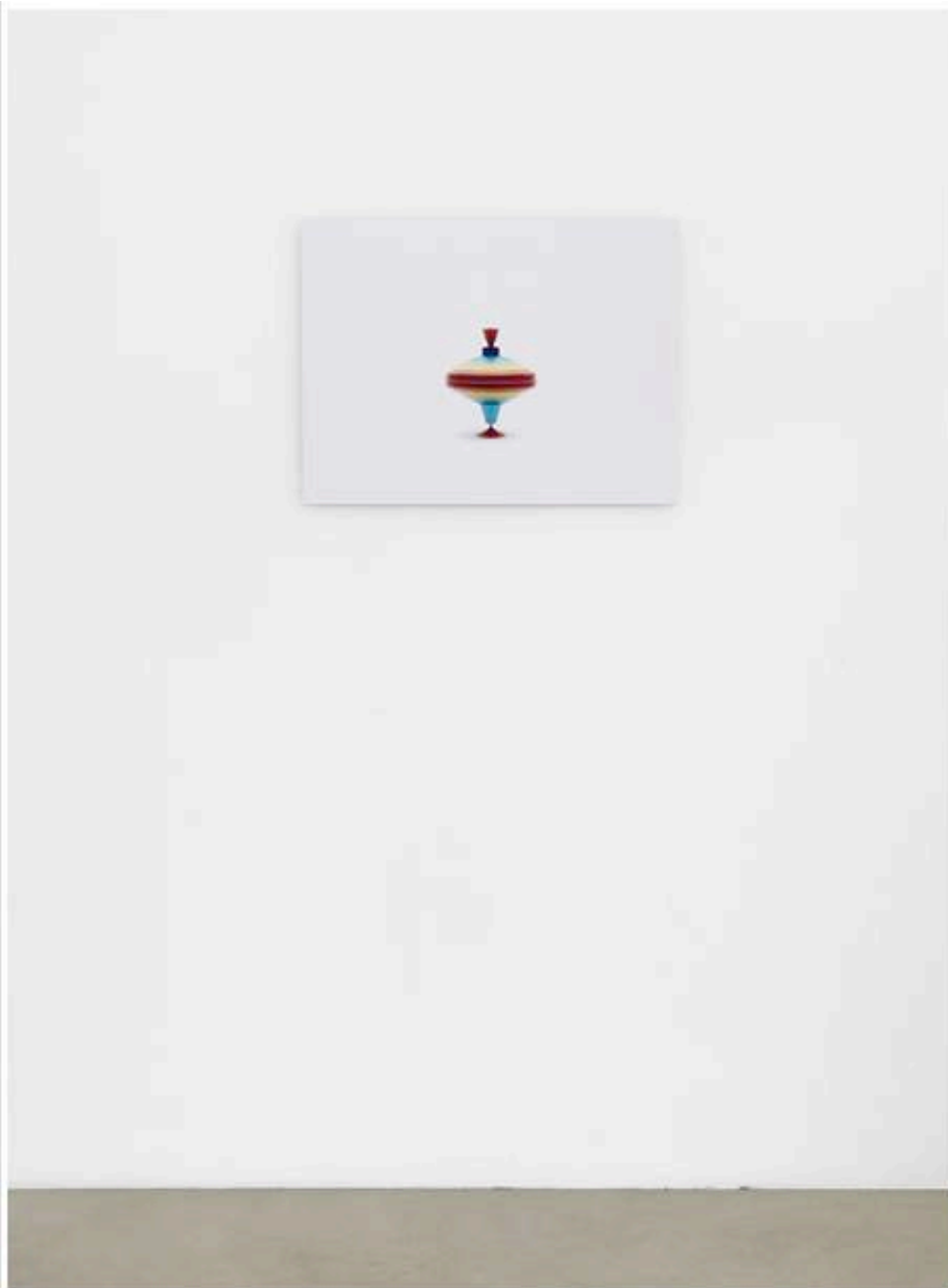
Max Headroom, 2014



Mirror Globe, 2014



On The Video, 2014



Still, 2014

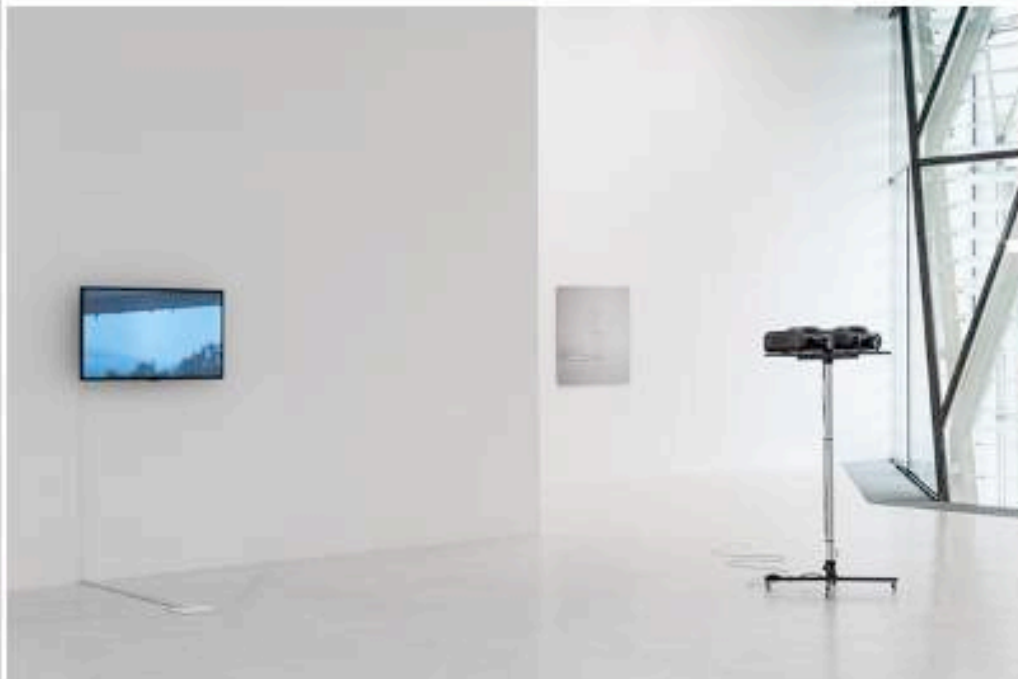
Ceal Floyer, installation view at Lisson Gallery, Milan, 2014

Courtesy: the artist and Lisson Gallery, London/Milan/New York/Singapore

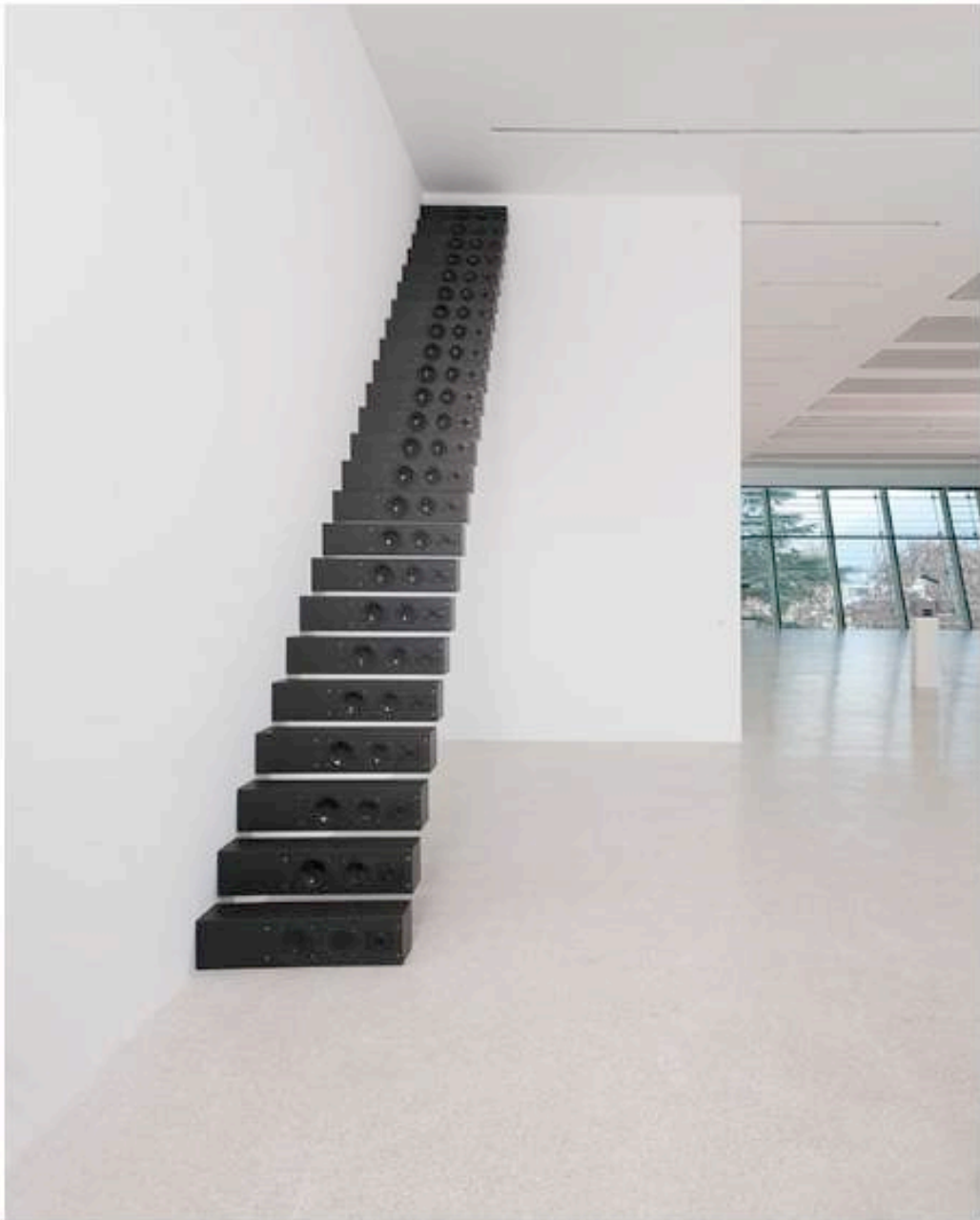


Overhead Projection, 2006





UntitledCredit Roll (AIW), 2013





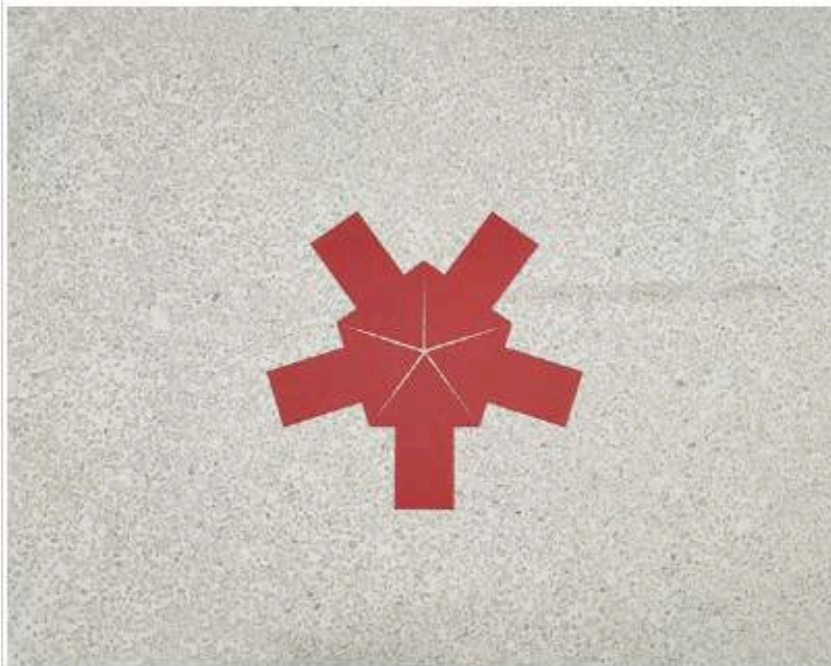
Scale, 2007



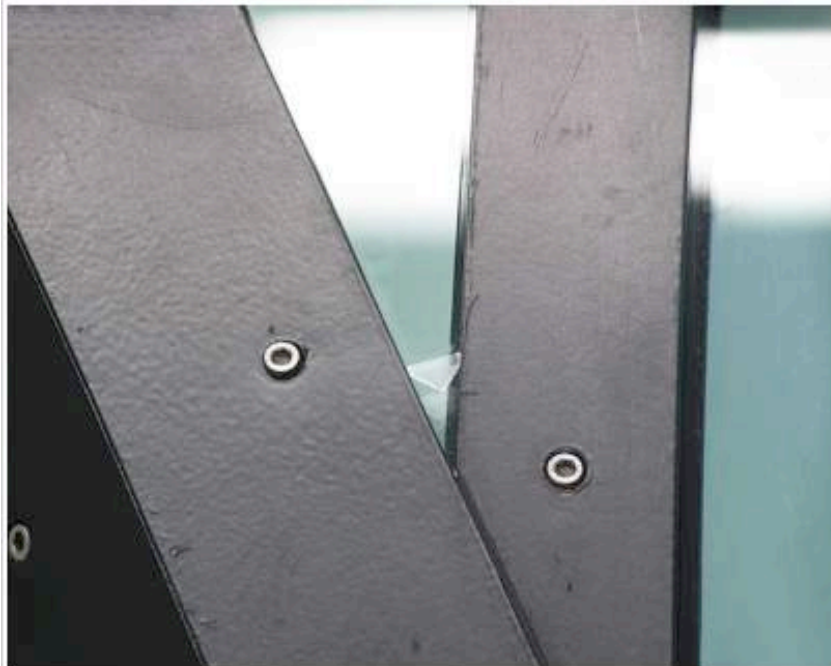
Order, 2007



Exit, 2006



Meeting Point, 2013



Blick, 2014

Ceal Floyer, installation view at Museion, Bolzano, 2014

© Ceal Floyer and VG-Bildkunst. Courtesy: 303 Gallery, New York; Lisson Gallery, London/Milan/New York/Singapore; Esther Schipper, Berlin. Photo: Luca Meneghel; Augustin Ochsenreiter.

Art Review
October 2011

ArtReview

CEAL FLOYER

Ceal Floyer
Esther Schipper, Berlin
9 June - 27 August

It doesn't get whiter or cooler than this: in the new exhibition space occupied by Esther Schipper, in a converted architect's office not far from the Nationalgalerie in Berlin, art is presented as something of a game of hide-and-seek. And as we know from Richard Hamilton's cover for the Beatles's 1968 *White Album*, white on white requires a particular kind of concentration from the viewer. This applies no less so to the seven minimalist artefacts that Ceal Floyer is showing in her third solo exhibition at her Berlin gallery. For instance, there's a white sculpture standing - lying? - in the otherwise almost entirely empty white cube of this chic gallery space. At first sight it looks like a solid plinth. As you get closer,

however, you soon see that this piece, *Paper Pile* (2010), is a stack of sheets of white paper. Or more precisely, a stack of 8,680 sheets of white paper, according to the legend 'Page 8680 of 8680' in the bottom right-hand corner of the top sheet. In order to check the truth of this statement, to see if the next sheet down is numbered '8679', you would have to lift up the top sheet. The work – rather in the tradition of Felix Gonzalez-Torres's stacks of posters for visitors to take away – would suddenly seem that much less solid.

Subjecting everyday items to close visual scrutiny and perplexingly alienating them in the process is still Ceal Floyer's preferred artistic strategy. A few metres away from *Paper Pile* is a short aluminium stepladder (1.25m in height) leaning against the wall. However, since all but the topmost rungs are missing, the ladder is completely unusable. With these 'omissions' Floyer presents a tragicomic variation on a theme that recurs in various forms in art – as in Peter Land's *Step Ladder Blues* (1995), to name but one example. Floyer's own particular game of hide-and-seek continues in her wall piece *Diptychon (Pending)*, of 2011. A folded and perforated piece of white (of course) paper serves as a monochrome picture. This time the viewer's mind may well turn to Robert Ryman's anti-illusionistic monochromes, mercilessly ribbed here by Floyer in her wall piece.

But it is at this point, if not before, that a problem emerges in this (nevertheless-very-worth-seeing) exhibition, a problem that was already in evidence in 2009 in Floyer's solo exhibition at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, in Berlin: Floyer's art does not benefit from being viewed en masse. The juxtaposition of a number of individual pieces drains them of the

enigmatic mystery that is so appealing in other circumstances. This happens because, in conjunction with each other, the syntax of her minimalist art looms too clearly into view and becomes too readily comprehensible, all the more so since it openly refers to art that is rather familiar in the white cube context.

Yet as the viewer departs, the mood lifts again, for lying at the doorway leading into the exhibition is a doormat (*Welcome*, 2011) with the word 'Welcome' written upside down so that it is only legible as we make our exit. It would be nice to see Floyer indulging her sense of humour like this more often. After all, a smile can open our minds to new horizons much more effectively than any number of art-historical allusions.

RAIMAR STANGE

Translated from the German by Fiona Elliott

L I S S O N G A L L E R Y

Artforum

September 2009

ARTFORUM

BERLIN

KW INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Auguststrasse 69

August 23 - October 18, 2009

Travis Jeppesen

The recent profusion of sparseness in high-profile group exhibitions such as the 2008 Whitney Biennial and this year's "Political/Minimal" at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin have suggested that we are indeed entering a new era of restraint, understatement, subtle irony, and small gestures. Following on this trend, the latter institution has aptly chosen to open the season with a Ceal Floyer solo exhibition, the artist's fourth in her adopted city. Floyer has mastered a minimalist language of deceptive simplicity and quiet humor; her obvious affection for objects, language, and games permits a philosophical supplement to the material paucity of the work. One can't help but smile at the exhibition's title, "Show," which serves as both a defensive identifier and an ironic nod to the word's synonymous conflation with spectacle; in this case, the show consists of sixteen pieces, many of them barely visible, spread over the institution's four floors. But with Floyer, what you don't see is often what you get—her pieces leave one to ponder their possible implications well after encountering them.

To those already familiar with her work, the exhibition may seem like a grab bag of Floyer's signature tricks, though a few more recent surprises make the show worthwhile. Of the former, one might point to *Double Act*, 2006, the projection of a simple red curtain on the wall, or *Monochrome Till Receipt (White)*, a work Floyer created in 1999 and reactivated for this show. Here, what at first appears to be a neglected wall turns out to house a single grocery receipt consisting entirely of white foods and products. But these are worth trudging past to arrive at the debut of *Things*, 2009, a sound installation in which the artist has isolated the titular word in a variety of pop songs played at random through speakers embedded in fifty white plinths, or *Works on Paper*, 2009, Floyer's collection of small pieces of paper that are inscribed with scribbles from customers testing pens at stationery shops, arranged across three walls and forming a scrawled archaeology of the present.

ARTFORUM

LONDON

Ceal Floyer

LISSON GALLERY

Seen first from the street through the gallery's large front window, *Genuine Reduction*, 2006, carries out a subtle subversion. A small readymade sign with white letters against a red background, the piece bears a title that coincides precisely with its printed words, which motivates a play on its context. Joining art gallery facade to department store display window, the sign announces a double sale. But since there's nothing else to advertise in the large, otherwise bare gallery, the work markets only its own reduction, which the artist has literalized by chopping off the final *s* at the end of the second word.

Floyer's is an art of humble gestures that intervene in everyday perceptual experience, gingerly altering appearance to give pause—that is, if the viewer takes notice. The risk with such slight maneuvers, delivered with deadpan expression, is that they won't. With minimal means, Floyer's conceptual alterations throw the world of expectations into confusion, gently recasting pedestrian objects and conscripting them into a puzzling new world. The work recalls Duchamp's language games (think of his altered commercial paint sign, *Apolinère Enameled*, 1916–17, its rearranged letters creating a gnomic inside joke) as well as those of Bruce Nauman—for instance his photographs of himself performing idiomatic expressions to the letter (e.g., “eating my words”). But Floyer's project has emerged at a later moment, when originality's obsolescence is old news and the assumed linguistic transparency of Conceptual art has long since been debunked. Instead, it is against the numbing effects of consumerism's sensationalized

visual culture that these modest gestures gain the momentum of their poetic charm.

Reversed, 2005, offers a close-up photograph of a pitched “Reserved” sign (like those commonly seen on restaurant tables) on a white ground. Here the word appears backward, causing a gap between perception and recognition, undermining the certainty of whether the mirror effect is photographic or

actual. The title also switches the sign’s letters (*s* for *v*), doubling the play and referencing in turn the linguistic operations of Jasper Johns and Sol LeWitt, whose work occasionally turned the austerity of modernist visuality irreverently into fun and games. *Drain*, 2006, presents a small tweeter facing upward in the middle of the gallery’s floor. It gurgles with the sounds of water flowing down a drain. A wire connects it to a stereo system that simultaneously abets the *trompe l’oreille* effect and betrays its source.

While Floyer’s strategies suggest demystification, a familiar move, they enact something more complex: a masterful suspension of the division between belief and doubt, allowing for a paradoxical simultaneity of possibility—both illusion and revealed system at once. This practice becomes meaningful in a context where simulation and appropriation have acquired an expectedness that this art wryly disrupts, as in *Double Act*, 2006, which consists of a theater spotlight that illuminates a wall of pleated red curtains, soon discovered to be a projected illusion. The artist’s light touch rejects the heroic gestures of critique for the playfulness of a humble magic act, whose conceptual trick the viewer must perform.

—T. J. Demos



Ceal Floyer, *Double Act*, 2006, light projection, photographic gobo, gobo holder, and theater lamp, dimensions variable. Installation view.