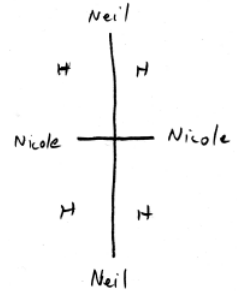


Exhibition//23 February – 6 April 2013
Curated by Eli Bornowsky

After Finitude

Neil Campbell, Hanne Darboven,
Nicole Ondre, Cheyney
Thompson

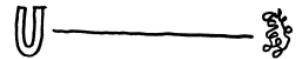
I decided to curate a show in the same fashion that I would paint a picture. Rather than having a theme or investigating ideas about exhibitions, institutions, or histories, I gave my responsibility to the experience of art in general, and to my practice as an abstract painter in particular. I tend to work intuitively, but intuition in tandem with art can be very difficult. This text is my improvised encouragement.



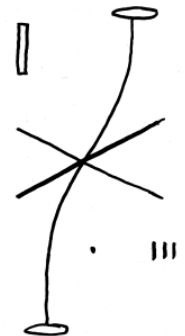
I wanted to exploit one of the great tensions in art: that tension between the intellectual and the sensual. First I chose two artists whom I know personally, and whose work could be positioned on the farthest poles of this tension: phenomenological works by Neil Campbell, contrasted with conceptual paintings by Cheyney Thompson. Campbell makes work specifically for the energy of the human body—they are physically experiential—while Thompson creates paintings in order to talk about them in a specific way: art as a system of production and reception. His works refer to ideas.



This simple polarization was fascinating to me but it wasn't enough to make a decent composition. I visited Nicole Ondre's studio and it became clear that her work occupies a position within the polarity I had set out. She uses oil painting materials to emphasize sensuality, and the form of these materials is realized in relation to the context of their production, such as her studio and the gallery walls and floors. They seem to privilege materials, colours and marks as much as the self referential.



After this discovery, I had a triangle with an artist at each point. I began drawing diagrams of the potential exhibition and it was obvious that I was thinking of symmetry. Diagrammatically, if Ondre's work was positioned in the exact middle point between Thompson and Campbell, the symmetry would be maintained, but I was sure her work could easily shift to one side or the other. Further, the diagram was only symmetrical if Thompson and Campbell's work were envisioned as the same shape (dots), and that, I was certain, could not be the case either. This was an exciting observation because it meant that I could expand my two-dimensional model into a three or even four-dimensional model. Playing with the models I use to represent the world to myself is a habit I formed especially after reading Henri Bergson's essay "The Idea of Duration" and Giorgio Agamben's "The Time That Remains". Both books take the liberty to complicate the

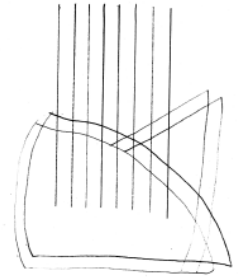


common representation of time as a straight line. Experiencing art, of course, is a perfect context for experimenting with the representations and stories we tell ourselves about the world.

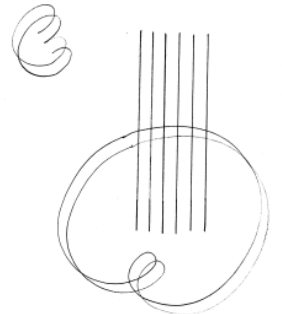
It made sense for me to include the audio work of Hanne Darboven in the exhibition. I admired Darboven for delivering sensations through seemingly dry conceptual operations. (I also realized that given Vancouver's extreme appreciation of conceptual art, Darboven's work had barely registered locally. It seemed fruitful to present it.) I am especially interested in her musical compositions and it occurred to me that diagrammatic space¹ is suitably pure to be filled with sound, much like the white-walled gallery has been designed to be filled with paintings. A musical score is a diagram that instructs one how to fill space with sound. I thank the Hanne Darboven foundation in Hamburg for giving me access to the full collection of recordings documenting the rare moments when her difficult and very long compositions were performed. Her musical pieces are appropriate because they are themselves based on diagrams: her drawings that iterate formulas structured by calendar dates. I also think of her as the grandmother for the exhibition. (I developed another diagram about the composition of the exhibition in relation to the artists' relative ages: Baby Ondre, Father Thompson, Old Man Campbell, and Great Granny Darboven.)

Returning again to symmetry, the work I selected from Ondre's studio is nearly symmetrical. It occupies two opposing walls, positioning the viewer in the middle between her two large bright yellow monochromes. The Or Gallery space is rectangular, and it occurred to me that I could make a cross-shaped installation. Ondre agreed to install her piece in the middle of the gallery and Campbell agreed to design a black painting for each of the two end walls.² This made for an interesting shift in how we think about the relation between the artists. Where the original impulse for the exhibition was to create a polarization between Campbell and Thompson, this organization of works emphasized a perpendicular relationship between Ondre and Campbell with a sprinkling of Thompson's paintings and Darboven's notes all around.

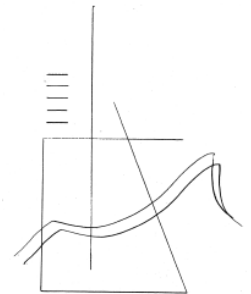
Each work in the exhibition was generated by a rigorous and austere system. "Systems" could have been a lamentable theme for the show. But themes are for historical analysis in museums and these works are too fresh and diverse to be



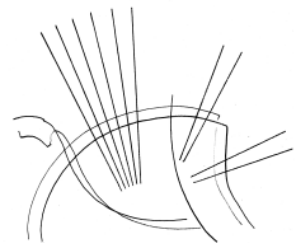
Hanne Darboven



Neil Campbell

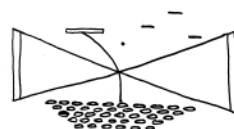
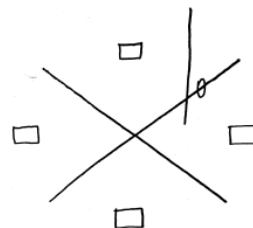


Cheyney Thompson

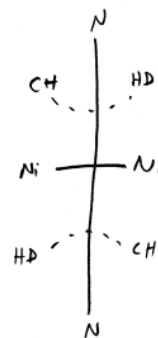
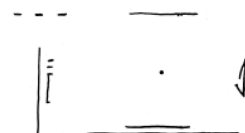


Nicole Ondre

codified together³. A system is an assemblage or combination of things or parts forming a complex whole. It can also be a scheme or plan of procedure, so my impulse to draw diagrams about how the exhibition would come to be makes sense. However my curatorial drive was intuitive. I was less interested in the systems themselves than the artistic experiences engendered by them. I certainly had no particular system for choosing the works. I felt them out. They have informed my life in various ways. Even Thompson's paintings, despite being generated by a system of calculating colour ratios from Munsell's three dimensional colour system and distributing these amounts of pigment across each canvas surface, had a specific identity that registered even without knowing these facts or the formula of measurements described in each work's title.



Ultimately I was designing a collection of four artistic worlds that spanned the original tension described above: the relation between sensation and intellection. A generic tension, but generic in the sense that it could encourage us to say something like "art and human experience". Existential! I like being alive; experience is what we are made for. How do we think about our sensations? How do we sense ourselves thinking? How does this play itself out day to day? A lot of what is called "critical" in the art world is an attempt to illustrate how ideology and power dominate this sensual/intellectual relation. *After Finitude*⁴, taking a big cue from Jacques Rancière, asserts that human subjects are full of agency to navigate the day-to-day struggle with ideology. Therefore an illustration of criticality is less useful than encouraging free space to think for oneself. And so the exhibition, like a painting, could be for seeing as much as thinking. Each artwork was chosen as a compositional component, and the relationships were designed to be modular. Campbell's black paintings are figures drawn on Ondre's cadmium monoprint ground, just as much as the entire exhibition is structured by Darboven's music that sounds within the space. Moving through contrasting artistic worlds and testing relationships is just as much the pleasure as it is the freedom.



– Eli Bornowsky, February 2013

1 So much of painting discourse is a conversation about space. The diagram represents its own kind of clean, generic, infinite space.

2 I see the black paintings referring to the black line of a diagram and the extreme precision that Campbell exercised—I once worked for him measuring 64ths of an inch—was an amusingly psychedelic image of zooming in on a drawn diagram to see that its form was even more precise than what it represented.

3 Darboven passed away in 2009. There are a number of great photographic portraits in which she appears eccentric and powerful, and almost all of them include her smoking a cigarette. Admittedly her work is now beginning to undergo historical analysis but the intimate relation I have with her work makes me want to snatch it away and hide it before it becomes rarified by discourse.

4 It should be noted that *After Finitude*, the name of this exhibition, is also the name of a recent essay by a young French philosopher named Quentin Meillassoux in which he mounts a polemic against the philosophical notion that it is impossible to get out of one's head (out of one's constructed subjectivity; out of one's ideology) in order to experience an object in and of itself. He privileges the number as universal and uses our recent scientific understanding of pre-human events in the universe such as the accretion of the Earth in order to pose problems of the absolute to what he calls "correlational" thought: thinking that privileges relations over the objects related.

1. Cheyney Thompson
Ten Metres
tinpoint
2013

2. Cheyney Thompson
Ten Metres
silverpoint
2013

3. Cheyney Thompson
Ten Metres
copperpoint
2013

4. Cheyney Thompson
RP31.55-G31.55-y1.31-b1.31-yr1.31-pb1.31(65.72ml)
acrylic on linen
2013

5. Cheyney Thompson
P31.55-YG31.55-r1.31-b1.31-bg1.31-yr1.31(65.72ml)
acrylic on linen
2013

6. Cheyney Thompson
R31.55-BG31.55-p1.31-y1.31-yg1.31-pb1.31(65.72ml)
acrylic on linen
2013

7. Cheyney Thompson
Y31.55-PB31.55-g1.31-r1.31-bg1.31-rp1.31(65.72ml)
acrylic on linen
2013

8. Cheyney Thompson
YR31.55-B31.55-g1.31-p1.31-yg1.31-rp1.31(65.72ml)
acrylic on linen
2013

9. Nicole Ondre
Cadmium Yellow Window
oil paint on wall and oil paint on paper monoprint
2013

10. Neil Campbell
Hangdown
vinyl acrylic on wall
2013

11. Neil Campbell
Probe
vinyl acrylic on wall
2013

12. Hanne Darboven
selected musical compositions

