

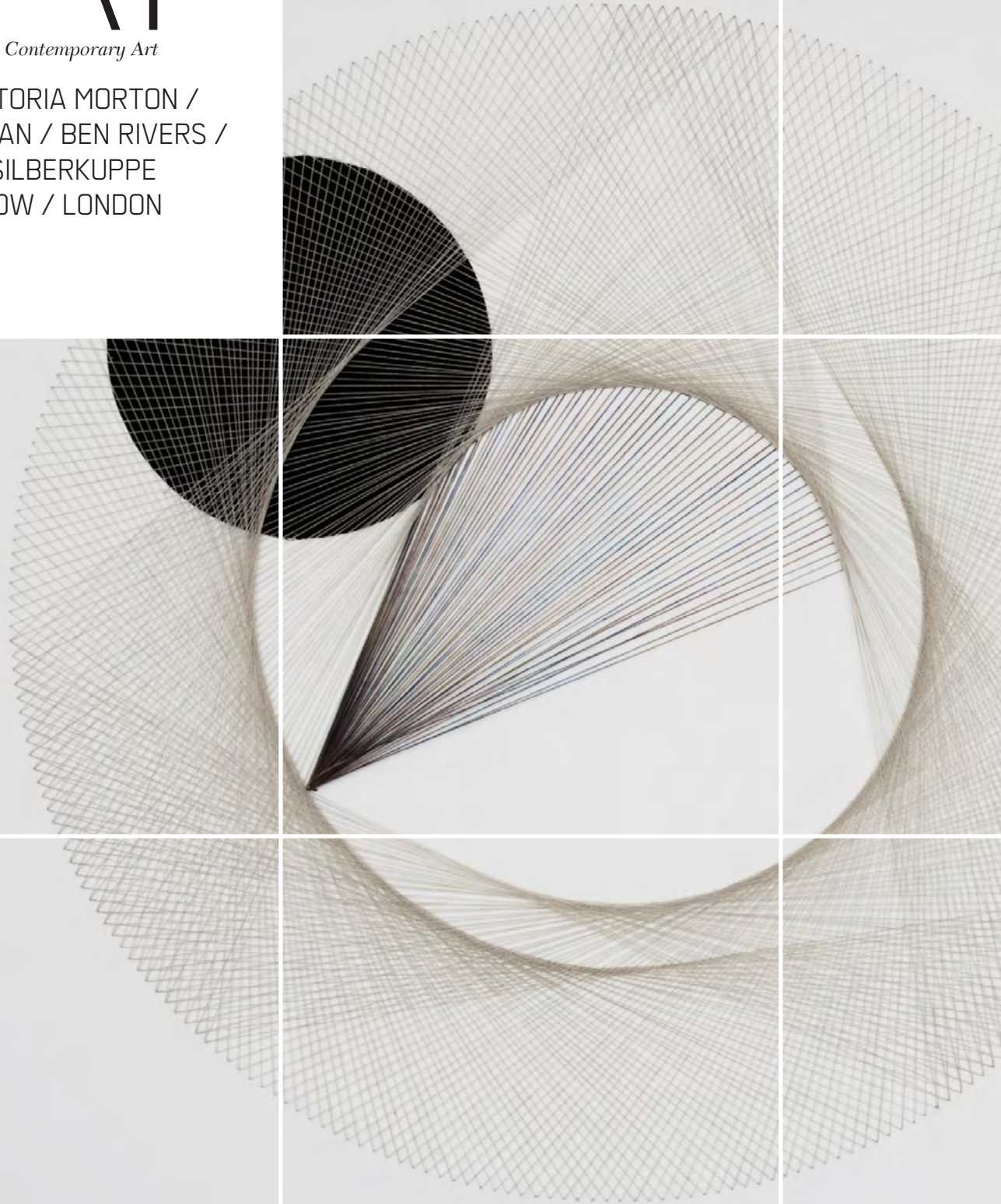
The approach

MAP

You are here: Journeys in Contemporary Art

KATY DOVE / VICTORIA MORTON /
NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN / BEN RIVERS /
BENOÎT MAIRE / SILBERKUPPE
VILNIUS / GLASGOW / LONDON

Issue 21
Spring 2010
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MAP's two-year residency at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design in Dundee has come to an end and we'd like to extend our sincere thanks to the exhibitions and fine art departments for being such generous hosts.

True to our nomadic practice we're now moving on. From 20 February we can be contacted at our new address at Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts, where we look forward to a two-year stay in a city that has become known for its dynamic and varied art scene, one which continues to influence art production both locally and beyond. Working from these bases in Scotland, as well as from locations abroad and online, we build relationships directly with the communities the magazine reflects and informs.

MAP meanwhile continues to seek alternative ways to engage with critical writing and publishing. Collective concerns and peripatetic practice are both evident in this issue. Berlin-based curatorial duo Silberkuppe have, within a year, developed an exciting exhibition model which relies heavily on collective gathering and thinking and can move around the world freely. Ben Rivers has been visiting islands around the world on a quest for knowledge. Mary Redmond reveals a glimpse of her research from abroad, while Glasgow-based artists Katy Dove and Victoria Morton, who work independently in a studio context, are also becoming more interested in collaborating with others, most particularly as members of the band, Muscles of Joy.

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Cover image:
Sophie Bueno-Boutellier, 'Cosmic Time n°005', 2009, wool, canvas and nails. Courtesy Galerie Circus, Berlin. See Arbitrating Space feature page 46



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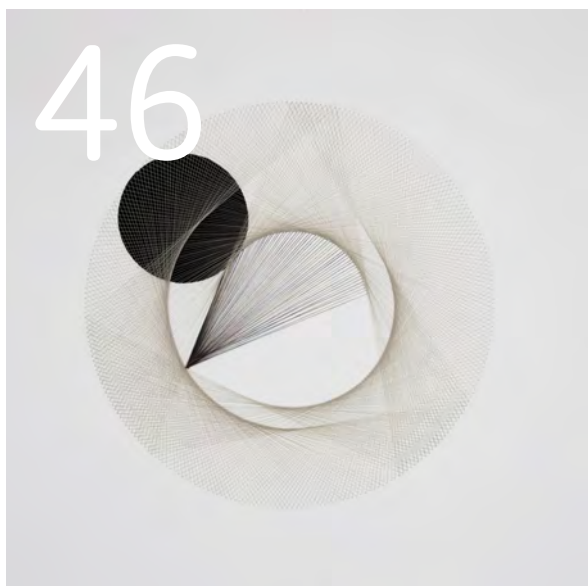
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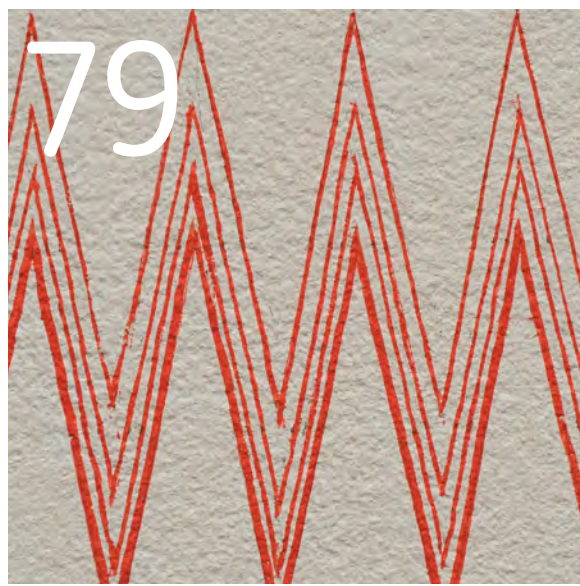
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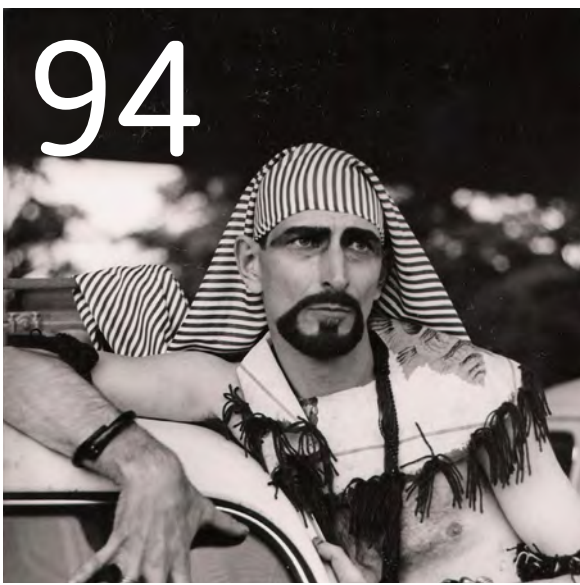
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A R B I
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I N G S
P A C E

Steven Cairns considers the function of the gallery through 1960s minimalist concepts



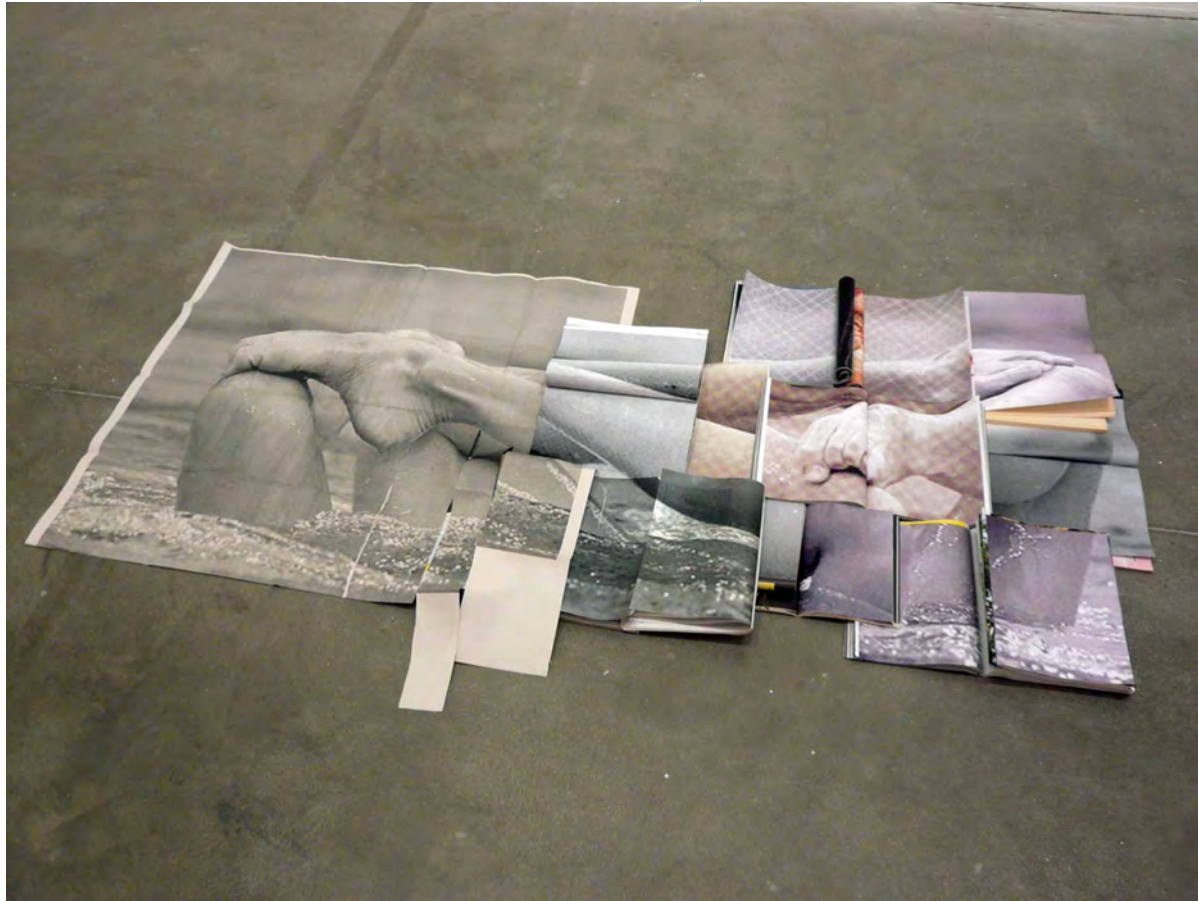
Asking if there is anything left to learn from minimalism may seem like a rather candid question, but it is nonetheless a significant one. More specifically, it is significant to the generation of artists which has emerged over the last ten years and shares a similar sensibility when producing composed, arrangement-based works. For this generation minimal art is confined to history, segregated by a 40 year barrier and a transatlantic divide, with only a smattering of anthologised and contradictory magazine articles and exhibition catalogue essays to define the discordant term. So, from this position asking if there's anything left to learn from minimalism seems reasonable.

Categorising the movement (let's call it that for the sake of argument), or staking a claim on a post-post-minimal standpoint, is however, something I don't want to do. When you acknowledge that defining, researching and refining art historical terms simply exposes a quagmire of self-perpetuating idioms – idioms that are continually revived, hijacked or rebranded by people with well-meaning intent – this is beside the point. What does seem significant is the way we have negotiated this rather vague lexicon, and how it has shaped what we know to be our contemporary contexts. It's cynical to suggest we've reached the limits of artistic possibility, but pointing out the fact that the re-appraisal of old ideas is constantly foregrounded by current cultural contexts begs another, more complex question – if that is the way it is, what do we get out of it and where do we go from here?

More importantly, how long has this been the case? To lay the groundwork, a clear, if not simplified account

of a minimalist artwork would be one that describes it as a refined or abridged art object that bares no sign of the artists hand, a reaction to abstract expressionism's value system. There are of course deviations from these simplistic rules, the work of Robert Ryman or Claes Oldenburg being two examples. They all, however, share similar concerns of form and volume and it is their architectural and spatial affinities that I want to discuss here. A condensed description can crudely equate many of the works from this period, if not concerned with the volume they consume within the gallery, with references to characteristics of the gallery itself: Frank Stella/floorboards, Carl Andre/floor tiles, Dan Flavin/fluorescent lights or Anne Truitt's plinth-like works. All of which can be interpreted with a term referred to by Robert Morris in one of his many *Artforum* essays on his practice as *gestalt* (a straight forward example would be the vase/face illustration that demonstrates or perceptions of space and volume). So, it appears that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of it's parts in this instance.

If what we see – that is, the work – engages with what we don't see, the assumption that the gap between the two is filled by the viewer seems reasonable. So, the question to be asked is... can we learn anything if we apply the same interpretations to the gallery as to the work, and then view the work under these terms? After all, many minimal artists were keen to draw our attention to spatial references. Morris' adoption of *gestalt* could be the key to understanding concepts that may as well have been ripped up and scattered to the winds in the critical tug of war that took place over minimalism's definition in the 1960s.



PREVIOUS PAGE COURTESY: GALERIE CIRCUS BERLIN

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The role the gallery plays, its primary intention in other words, is isolating the artwork for the viewer, but at the same time it entrenches itself in its own dogma

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Previous page: Sophie Bueno-Boutellier, 'Iron sky opens', 2009, wood fabric, iron, ceramic marble

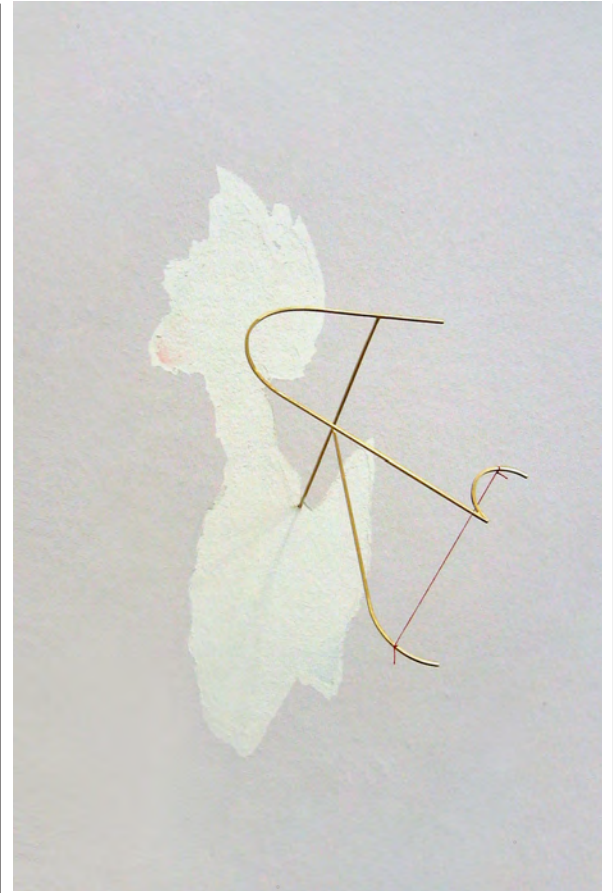
Left: Luca Trevisani, 'A chain of chains', 2008, magazines, laser prints on paper

Right: Bojan Sarcevic, installation view (detail), Sometimes a Man Gets Carried Away, Kunstverine Heilbronn, 2006

Engaging with an artwork on these (ie Morris') terms, is one thing, but is it conceivable to engage with the gallery in the same way? If you consider the trajectory of the exhibition space from domestic salon to industrial white space, it seems like a likely option, especially as many of them exude the characteristics of industry, albeit clean and slick: Tate Modern, London; KW, Berlin. The polished concrete floor and white wall typify today's contemporary gallery space, while during the 1960s minimalism period, galleries often took on a different form, for example, low ceilings and wooden or carpeted floors.

The 21st century white spaces now aspire to the industrial qualities of a Donald Judd or Anne Truitt, untouched by human hand. In a contemporary context, the gallery space has been shaped into a volume that exhibits many of the characteristics minimal art strived to achieve. You'll never see a nylon carpet or someone's ill-fated attempts at interior décor: these spaces define themselves by universal, slick, monochromatic tones and smooth surfaces.

The relocated New Museum's inaugural exhibition, *Unmonumental*, was arguably such a success due to the much publicised monumentality of the building that houses it. In the new space, works selected for their 'un-monumentality' were fetishised to such an extent that the large group show has become one of the most undeniably significant shows of recent times. This show emphasised the value we place on objects that in real terms constitute very little. The artist's choice to use such materials surely isn't pragmatic, and yet they are also not solely aesthetic, an understanding conveniently shared with the curators. The role the



gallery plays, its primary intention in other words, is isolating the artwork for the viewer, but at the same time it actually entrenches itself in its own dogma.

So, artists now have a convention, acknowledged or not, that these spaces not only culturally elevate the status of the work but intervene in its understanding. These universal terms are now a given in contemporary art and institutional spaces; terms which also prop up the credibility of commercial spaces and art fairs.

There are of course a number of universalities to exhibiting work in a gallery space, but the manner in which we engage with these works is unique in each instance. As a spectator of the mixing of these digressions, we ultimately perpetuate them.

Milan-based Luca Trevisani's work can quite clearly be viewed with these concepts in mind. Trevisani's work courts the bounds of both the found object and the hand crafted one, and in this state works such as, 'A Chain of Chains', 2008, exhibited in the second Turin Triennial, or the more recent 'A Chain of Pearls', 2009, coalesce with the gallery's function. Neither a completely conceptual work, nor a purely aesthetic one, pieces such as these propose the gallery as a neutral sounding board onto which they are mounted directly, circumventing more conventional modes of display: the plinth, framed boundary or canvas.

In order to achieve success, something which Trevisani does, the work must exist within a gestaltian framework. 'A Chain of Chains' was laid out on the floor, and at first appeared as an encouraging comparison to the predominantly projected and wall-based works at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo



where it was shown. One of Robert Kusmirowski's elaborate installations was housed in the adjoining gallery providing a clear comparison to an example of pure 'installation art'. Trevisani's piece engaged with installation at a different level. Outspread on the floor, the work overlaid the exhibition and its themed and imbued contexts.

There are also undeniable links to *arte povera* in works such as these, especially when shown in Turin. But *arte povera* was founded on a set of reactionary values, a factor missing from most contemporary practices. This new type of composition work is comparable in its sense of poetic balance, but not with regard to the artists' motivations. Berlin-based Sophie Bueno-Boutellier is profoundly articulate in such poetic renderings. 'Iron sky opens', 2009, clearly depends on aesthetic sensibility in its realisation, but its very existence is facilitated by the gallery's refined and simple construction. In this piece the gallery acts as the invisible other in the composition and in turn it can be seen quite clearly as a counterpart to the work, functioning in a way akin by minimalism.

It is by coincidence that these works are minimal in their physicality; minimalist art is quite different and not to be confused. Rather, these works are proportional in many respects to the space they inhabit, but are minimal in the sense that they comprise few and simple artefacts.

In 2006 Bojan Sarcevic's work in the exhibition *Sometimes a Man Gets Carried Away* at Kunstverein

Heilbronn addresses this proportionality in a directly physical way. Sarcevic papered the gallery and painted the walls grey, tearing out sections to provide a base for his intimately constructed works. 'The vertical plane and the big surface of the walls seemed to be the necessary requirement to reveal the delicate punctuations in space,' he told me. Exposing the white wall underneath, Sarcevic's pragmatism contradicted the contexts defined by the gallery's form. His negotiation of the space in this instance acknowledged the possibility of the gallery rendering the work invisible, consuming it entirely. Similarly, in his recent exhibition at carlier|gebauer, Berlin, an acrylic construction with vertical and horizontal planes housed the work, intensifying its presence within the space.

The voluminous facilities of the gallery are not however always defined with physical objects by the artist. Reto Pulfer's recent performances of 'Kröwats 412.22', 2008, deal with space and sound in a different manner. In this work Pulfer plays a self-made bullroarer (an ancient wooden musical instrument attached to a cord) by swinging it in a circular motion around his head. A whirring emanates from the instrument, creating a rich dislocated sound that demonstrates the Doppler effect. The music created in 'Kröwats 412.22' could quite easily be described as minimalist music, but it is the relationship between Pulfer's performances and his wider practice that provoke questions which go beyond this description.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BALICE HERTLING PARIS PHOTO ALEXIS ZAWALOFF



Above: Thea Djordjadze, installation view, endless enclosure, Kunsthalle Basel, 2009

Left: Reto Pulfer, 'Kröwats 412.22', 2008 performance, 10 Min, Montgomery, Berlin

Pulfer's practice encompasses drawing, painting and sculpture; when exhibiting, these works inhabit space in a similar way to the aforementioned artists, and likewise his performances do the same. As Pulfer swings the coloured bullroarer the audience is at once aware of the gallery's volume, due primarily to the close proximity of the wooden object as it flies around at head height. 'Kröwats 412.22' poses a physical threat and each viewer's reactions are highly individual as they quickly assess the variables of the situation. What is unique in this instance is that the piece is duration sensitive – ten minutes – in comparison with his static wall and floor-based works. During this time the viewer is unknowingly (presuming the bullroarer is an unfamiliar instrument) put into a situation that sums up the work's relationship between artwork, viewer and gallery and highlights their interdependencies. 'Kröwats 412.22' would have a very different set of properties if it existed outside this location.

Thea Djordjadze's 'Deaf and Dumb Universe', 2008, in the largely sculptural segment of the 5th Berlin biennial (bb5), at the Neue Nationalgalerie, relates to the space in a similar way. In this instance Djordjadze made significant references to the domestic, her frame-like constructions alluding to domestic spaces, a set of shelves and chairs providing explicit comparisons. Within the Mies van der Rohe building, the spindly white frame-like sculptures simultaneously acted as a demarcation of space and as an artwork that mirrored the gallery's glass-walled construction.

Similarly in her more recent solo show at Kunsthalle Basel in 2009 titled *endless enclosure*, she underlined her interest in the domestic. Here she used rugs and table-like structures; in doing so she makes direct reference to the space, but also to the domesticity of the Salon and traditional exhibition history. The proximity between the works in the Neue Nationalgalerie and in Kunsthalle Basel were significant in their structural composition – exposing the relationships between objects is one of Djordjadze's greatest strength, and this can be seen in both instances. These objects relate to each other across space in a crossfire of interchange.

If Nicolas Bourriaud hadn't adopted the term, 'relational aesthetics' might have best been used to describe the way artists negotiate space and informally use it as a grounding for their work. Like minimal art, the abject volume of the gallery is used as a material that is implicit in the understanding of works. While the decoding of these functions remains veiled, silently slipping under the radar of any reactionary movement, this type of work will prevail, providing an opportunity to invest in the terms theory and history have discredited with awkward analysis and semantic entanglement. Foregrounding them with current cultural contexts may shed light on old terms.

Steven Cairns is co-editor of MAP