

The Movement of Images (Philippe-Alain Michaud)
Centre Pompidou, Paris
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(translated from French by Sylvie Fortin)



CATHERINE OPIE
NEW YORK

Lambert, Pittsburgh Paint, and St. Claire Paint. To sharpen the point, Kennedy strategically inserted smaller rectangles of striped colors that simultaneously quote hard-edge modernist abstraction and represent the ribbon patterns of new, commemorative medals for War on Terrorism Service, Iraq Campaign, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and so on. Together these paintings and the meta-text *SHIT HAPPENS* make it clear that Kennedy is pulling no punches. The military can wallpaper over cracked reality, invent medals of honor to give to the wounded, call victims "heroes" or casualties of war "collateral damage," but not all is unfolding as planned in Rummy's war.

It is significant that CANADA gallery's programmers juxtaposed the works of these two artists in *SHIT HAPPENS / In Search of the Miraculous, Continued...* (April 29—June 4, 2006). While Malinowska's fanciful engagement with Bas Jan Ader may seem somewhat at odds with Kennedy's unequivocal directness, both artists do quote sources that reflect current events. Ader's search for the miraculous led him to embark on a voyage across the ocean in a very small boat, confident in his past nautical abilities. But it didn't work out this time. Rumsfeld & co. optimistically initiated a shock and awe Iraqi invasion that would expand American control on the Middle East. Hampered by intelligence failures and a military force too small for the job, the war on terror has foundered in the sea swells of resistant street fighting, looming civil war, and mounting body counts on all sides. Missions are not always accomplished. Shit happens, indeed.

—Peter Dykhuys and Jayne Wark

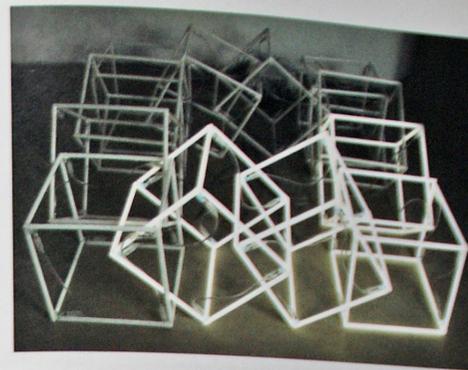
In the 2002 thriller film *28 Days Later*, the main character Jim wakes up in a London hospital to find the building and the city totally deserted. He roams the perfectly silent streets in disbelief, gradually realizing that a plague has either killed or forced the evacuation of the entire population. The highpoint of the whole movie may well be a sequence of expansive shots of downtown London, in which the grand urban structures become monuments to a dead civilization.

In *American Cities* (Gladstone Gallery, September 9—October 14, 2006), Catherine Opie conjures a similar, though much more subtle, apocalyptic vision. Her black and white photographs of five cities share a uniform, panoramic format, though the prints' size does vary. Opie identifies the essential characteristics of each urban environment: the endless highway-side strip malls of L.A., the rivers and underground streets of Chicago, the concrete maze of Lower Manhattan, the deserted buildings and parking lots of St. Louis, and the network of skyways that hover above the streets of Minneapolis. These densely detailed shots are almost entirely devoid of people, and when a tiny figure does appear, its presence is ghostly. In one image, a man dressed in black stands at a bus stop with his back turned to us. For all the desolation of his surroundings, he might as well be waiting for Godot. Oddly, the emptiness of these places isn't initially so disquieting; as it turns out, we are quite used to panoramic, beautiful, black-and-white city scenes out of which the human presence has been subtracted. French photographer Eugène Atget documented early-twentieth-century Paris's vacant streets. Yet, whereas Atget's foggy scenes wistfully evoked the long history of the ancient city, Opie's seem to forecast an ominous future. What would the streets of Rome have looked like just as the empire began to decline? In the Wall Street photos, one catches glimpses of the base of the twin towers, suggesting that the rest of the scene

could be just as temporary. In case one fails to detect the foreboding undertones of *American Cities*, Opie includes a photograph of a ruined remnant of the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis—a miniature version of the eroded remains of a Roman aqueduct.

The images' exaggerated horizontality supports their psychological vacancy. Lined up side by side, they begin to appear like random segmentations of an endless, continuous, undifferentiated landscape. This visual continuity is most concrete in the skyway images: our eye walks through the passageways from image to image. The format of the strip mall pictures mimics the visual perception produced by a car in motion: the kaleidoscopic colors of Chinese restaurants, delis, and graffiti are homogenized into shades of gray, and the city becomes an infinite panorama of meaningless details forgotten the moment they are apprehended. Transferred to the heart of big cities, the wide format creates a sense of openness even as the buildings loom overhead. In Chicago, the black river implies a lateral motion that counteracts and even threatens the towering might of the architecture. In the smaller towns, the expansiveness of the shots reveals all the unused pockets of space—empty parking lots, unused storefronts, and so on. It seems that Minneapolis and St. Louis suffer from insufficient density. The buildings seem to be drifting apart, the tense energies of their modernist forms dissolving and diffusing outward, like ice cubes melting on the floor. There is simply too much space in America. The horizon always seems to lurk behind buildings, threatening to reclaim the scene.

—Adam Thompson



LE MOUVEMENT DES IMAGES
PARIS

Some exhibitions become immediate art historical references, in so far as they identify a trend, name an aspiration, track an ascendant discourse, or detect an emerging concern or type of practice. *Le mouvement des images* [The Movement of Images] (Centre Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne; April 9, 2005—January 29, 2007), the new installation of the Centre Pompidou's envied, immense collection, is a case in point. Its sophisticated configuration of the exhibition space and non-chronological layout deftly enact the exhibition's premise—the examination of the relationship between the cinema and visual arts. If prior exhibitions have also delved into this question, *Le mouvement des images* decidedly distinguishes itself by broadening the debate through some four hundred works.

The show significantly reconfigures the chronology of the protracted relation. Philippe-Alain Michaud, the exhibition's curator, asserts that the cinema initially conformed to an existing space—the modern theater—such an extent that it became irrevocably assimilated to its main stage, single-point perspective, and full frontal engagement with the spectators. This apparatus blurred the history of cinema for many years. In the aftermath of WWII, however, the impact of experimental cinema progressively spread: it initiated new possibilities for filmic presentation. The cinema then freed itself from the theater—as site and type of projection—more definitively, notably migrating to exhibition spaces, aided by the advent of digital technologies.

This incursion of film, video, and moving images in general into museums produced a feedback, the effect of which was a renewed understanding of visual arts. Considered static, visual art practices then required a new critical vocabulary.

Michaud's historical narrative is quite convincing; his theoretical premise ambitious. Thankfully, the installa-

tion itself does not fail to deliver. Occupying the entire fourth floor of the Parisian institution, *Le mouvement des images* is divided into four sections, distributed along a central path. Each section tackles a fundamental aspect that the cinema shares with other visual media. These are *movement*, *projection*, *editing*, and *narrative*—four axes that apply equally to sculpture, painting, and architecture. Much of the sophisticated pleasure produced by the exhibition results from the viewer's discovery of unsuspected parallels between works. Finally, the caliber of the four hundred selected works yields powerful correspondences; this is the exhibition's first strength. The second is the intellectual sophistication that governs each juxtaposition.

One of the exhibition's most interesting combinations is the presentation of Henri Matisse's preparatory cartoons for the stained glass windows of the chapel in Vence in the same room as the projection of Stan Brakhage's film *Chartres Series*, which was hand-colored by the American experimental filmmaker. The parallel drawn out here is all about light—natural for Matisse; electrical for Brakhage—animating chromatic motifs and contributing to their dematerialization.

Equally successful, another section combines three works around their exploration of *line*—the mark determinedly traced, without interruption, from start to finish. A painting by Jackson Pollock, featured here because of its sinuous and milky drawing, is juxtaposed to the documentation of Dennis Oppenheim's ephemeral *Annual Rings*, 1968, a series of concentric circles drawn in the snow on the Canada-United States border. Nearby, the viewer can follow the slow, white smoke drawing of five airplanes against a blue sky in Marijke Van Warmerdam's looped film *Skytypers*, 1997.

Thirteen silent projections grace the exhibition's central avenue, intelligently avoiding audio conflicts while proposing a kind of spatial montage. A few memo-

orable films grace these darkened walls: Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique*, 1924; Man Ray's *Retour à la raison*, 1923; and *Piece Mondrian/End War*, 1966, by Paul Sharits, for example. These short films are screened at regular intervals and the visitor can easily adapt his visit to the screening schedule. In this type of ambulation, the viewer edits his own trajectory. As such, he recomposes the exhibition, performing an individual act of editing through his movement in space. This open scenography enables a very fluid circulation. This contrasts sharply with the domination of the viewer inherent in many curators' deferral to black-box presentation of moving-image work, which has become the norm in numerous recent manifestations, such as Documenta XI.

Conceptually and spatially, this exhibition is therefore superbly coherent as it utters in an original and well-founded, interpretation of the history of the relationship between visual arts and the cinema. Underlying this kind of history writing is Philippe-Alain Michaud's regard for Aby Warburg's theoretical project, which he has previously explored. *Le mouvement des images* enacts the lesson and memory of *Mnemosyne*—the awe-inspiring project for a textless art history founded, precisely, on etiological relationships and anachronisms, which the German intellectual tackled at the end of his life. This exhibition thus pays homage to the imagination of this illustrious predecessor.

—Yvonne Van Parys

Translated from the French by Sylvie Fortin

INSIDE FRONT COVER: Catherine Opie, *Untitled #8* [Chicago], 2004, iris print, framed: 26 1/2 x 51 1/2 inches [© Catherine Opie; courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Regen Projects, Los Angeles] / ABOVE: Catherine Opie, *Untitled #11* [Wall Street], 2001, iris print, framed: 26 1/2 x 51 1/2 inches, signed on verso [© Catherine Opie; courtesy of Gladstone Gallery, New York and Regen Projects, Los Angeles]

ABOVE: Jeppe Hein, *Moving Neon Cube*, 2004, glass, electric cable, programmer, transformer, 65 x 185 x 185 cm [© Jeppe Hein, collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; AM 2005-195; Museum RMN]

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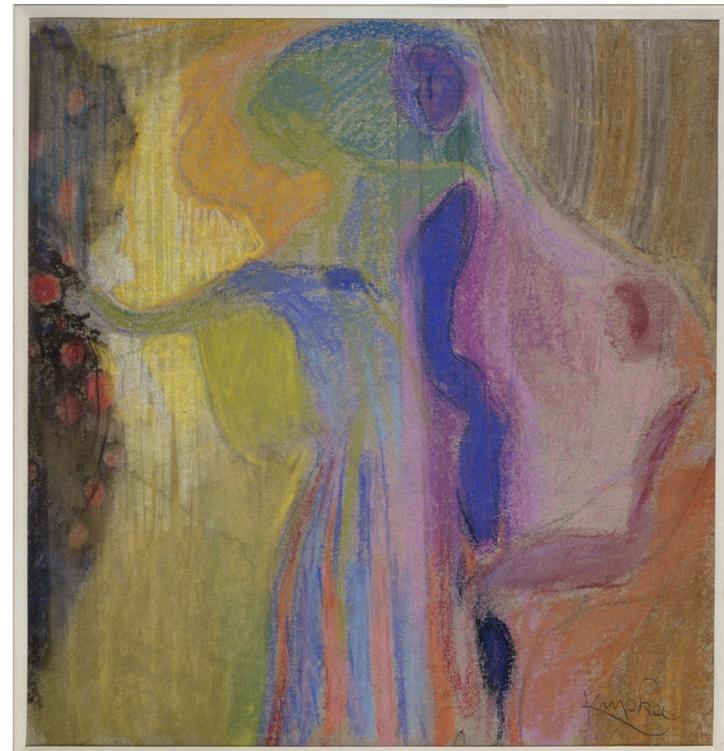
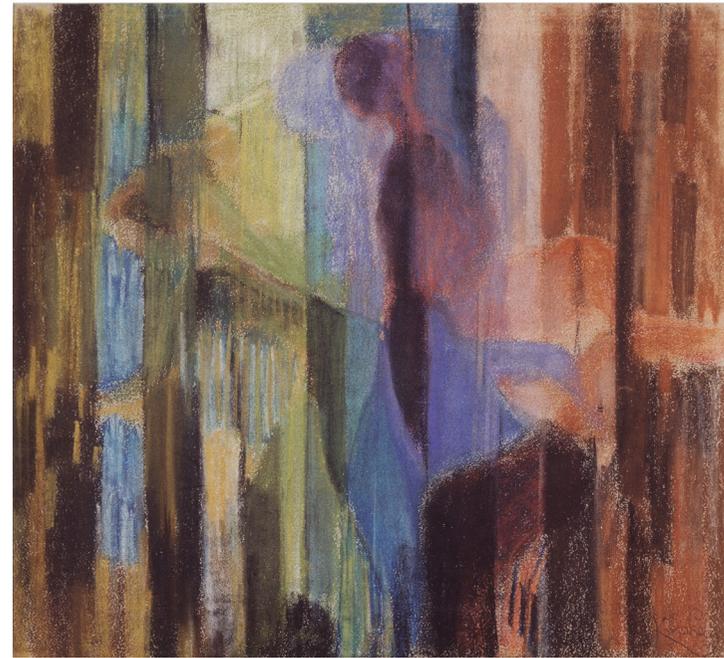
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