

CURATING THE COLLECTION: HEIDI RABBEN

Uncertain Pilgrimage

Mary Augustine Gallery

April 30, 2013 to May 25, 2013

Curatorial Walkthrough: Thursday, May 9th, 3:45 PM

Uncertain Pilgrimage

Works by: Larry Bell, Trisha Donnelly, Gareth Moore, and George Pfau

The term pilgrimage implies a long journey, often driven by spiritual or moral objectives, culminating at a symbolic location or as an encounter with an iconic object. Qualifying a pilgrimage as uncertain however, introduces a dynamic sense of the unstable and the unknown. *Uncertain Pilgrimage* brings together four works from the Kadist Art Foundation's 101 collection, that together propose a philosophical and phenomenological encounter. Each work in the exhibition favors instability over stability, indeterminacy over rationalization, and inquisitiveness over resolution. Embedded in their refusal to certify, is a subtle gesture toward phenomenological experience.

Gareth Moore's *Map (from Uncertain Pilgrimage)* (2006-2009), from which this exhibition borrows its title, consists of a blank uncharted grid with its creases still intact. By inverting the darkness of the conceptual void into a stark white expanse, Moore's map charts an anti-directional navigational path, asserting what Edmund Husserl refers to as determinate indeterminacy, "an emptiness that is not nothingness, but an emptiness to be filled out."¹ Rather than plotting out an orientation or trail for the viewer to follow, Moore's work frees them of expectations and predefined relationships, thereby opening up a space for something new to emerge. For some, this new freedom can be as debilitating as it is liberating, and it is therefore this tension between knowing and unknowing, that informs the organizing logic of *Uncertain Pilgrimage*.

While Moore's work functions as a metaphorical point of departure, the exhibition is rooted in the concerns of the California Light and Space movement of the 1960s and 70s, represented by Larry

Bell's "vapor drawing" *VFGY9 (1979)*. According to Bell, this series of work happened spontaneously and intuitively, "In [his] mind, [he] was investigating improbable visuals using improbable means."² Bell's investigation of the improbable tinges his drawing with an element of mysticism, further reinforced by our phenomenological perception of it. The layers of aluminum vapor coating the paper create a dynamic experience with the work. Based on the viewer's position and the position of light in relation to the drawing, its reflective sheen animates the surface, conveying a sense of flux, with something yet "to be filled out" by our encounter with it.

The haunting, supernatural possibilities in George Pfau's video *Zombie (Swallows the World, Swallowed by the World)* (2010) avoid a singular classification, instead presenting an experience of confusion and indeterminacy. Pfau often uses zombies to explore the human and non-human body in states of transition, uncertainty, and contradiction. In both title and experience, this work presents a series of contradictions—it is both threatening and intriguing, beautiful and repellent, unsettling and humorous, and demands a level of engagement beyond passive spectatorship.

Trisha Donnelly's *Untitled* (2007) captures a wave rising in an unspecified oceanscape. Taken at face value, the photograph appears to present an image of an unremarkable wave, but upon closer examination, actually records a rare phenomenon: the manifestation of an unbroken wave far offshore, occurring only immediately before or after a storm. The photograph documents the swell while still developing, precisely after forming into a crest and right before breaking. Suspending this moment of precipitous tension emphasizes a causal notion of the present. Donnelly's understated documentation of this event allows viewers to engage with its possibilities more actively in order to make their own determinations about its significance.

Uncertain Pilgrimage was curated by Heidi Rabben.

*Please note that the Mary Augustine Gallery is located in CCA's main building on the San Francisco campus at 1111 Eighth Street, and not at the CCA Wattis Institute's new location on Kansas Street.

1. Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, (Dordrecht ; Boston : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). ↩

2. Larry Bell, *In Reflection*, <http://www.larrybell.com/text/essays/larrybell.html>, (accessed April 23, 2013) ↩

(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)