

Marika Thunder

*Body of Work*

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Reena Spaulings presents *Body of Work*, a new series of machine paintings by Marika Thunder. Working from black and white photographs of gym exercise equipment and junked cars, the artist arrives at her images by reducing the photographic information until bold, totemic forms emerge within atmospheric gray spaces on the canvas. Thunder makes us feel abstraction as real and ongoing, as an everyday operation in the lives of all contemporary selves. At the gym, in the car and on the phone, the human will to abstraction is already mapped out in the devices we're most intimately connected to, the machines we use to move, change and project ourselves. Like an elliptical trainer, the painting itself meanwhile interfaces with the same desires and anxieties that drive humans at Equinox. In the gym and in the studio, we're pushing for the threshold where the self tips into nothingness, disappearance, even perfection. Notice the gray voids and twilight zones the artist opens up within her cardio and weightlifting equipment. Thunder's machine paintings (all titled after people's names) could almost be seen as self-portraits, or maybe portraits of a potential self that never finally arrives... the nameless, missing, other self we all dream in common.

The car is the archetypal symbol of modern freedom and a very special machine that allows an ongoing negotiation with death at the heart of normal everyday life. Where is this speed taking us? Thunder's images of junked, crashed automobiles reveal the human death drive in a dreamy freeze frame. The urbanist and theorist Paul Virilio said that every technological invention is also the invention of a new kind of accident. And in Thunder's junkyard still lives we see the naked truth of the automobile: an always-already deteriorating, toxin-spewing, planet-destroying, human suicide machine. Car wrecks speak to us in a body language we recognize as human. No less than her abstracted gym machines, Thunder's landscapes of crumpled chrome and steel, shattered plastic and glass, are abstract self-portraits of the human alien, our most intimate other. (In the gallery office, meanwhile, graphite drawings of Lindsay Lohan's totaled vehicle, sourced from tabloid paparazzi images, are wordless metaphors of career burn-out).

Kathy Acker has written about bodybuilding as a working-out around failure and death, muscles continuously pushed beyond their own power to move, to the edge of breakdown: a journey into chaos. Exercise machines, like paintings, require a free human self to perform their operation. These are machines to which we freely submit our freedom. In this sense, the painting is an aesthetic Cybex. Thunder's images suggest torture devices but they are at the same time playful and erotic... machines that run on desire. Francis Picabia would recognize this diagrammatic body language, whereby painting interfaces with the abstraction of contemporary selfhood. This is abstraction you can touch and that feels you back, reaching for a body that's always just out of reach, maybe just a ghost.