



'The Actuality of the Idea' (2009), installation view. Left: Carl Andre, *Graphite Cube Sum of Eight* (2006); right: Leonor Antunes, *MMM* (2008)

Commercial galleries' group shows often have the unpalatable taste of stockroom leftovers thrown together at random, less exhibitions than showroom displays, replete with sample works by all the represented artists. This state of affairs makes 'The Actuality of the Idea' at Modern Art all the more enjoyable. Gathering artists as different in renown and generation as the septuagenarian Carl Andre and the young Sara Barker, the thoughtfully curated exhibition is an engaging reflection on lines and their ability to define and create space. Curated by Stuart Shave, it's also a healthy reminder that gallerists don't necessarily need to call on a guest curator's expertise (or prestige) to put on a decent show.

In the first room, Nasreen Mohamedi's delicate drawings (all *Untitled*, c.1980s) seem to fight from within the regimented structure of their graph-paper support. They function like graphite Zen gardens, playing out the harmony of the unsymmetrical. Altogether buoyant and contained, Mohamedi's oblique lines reconcile constructivism's formal dynamism with conceptual art's understated aesthetic. Agnes Martin, that other grid-making great, is represented with three double horizons crossing an A4 sheet of paper (*Untitled*, 1995). The artist famously said that her abstract works were an attempt to capture 'not what is seen, but what is known forever in the mind.' This somewhat elusive ideal

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may apply to the work of both Martin and Mohamedi, yet their juxtaposition deftly demonstrates how different in mood and energy their often compared practices were. Martin and Mohamedi are two poles apart – the infinite grid versus its perpetual disruption.



Left: Sara Barker, *Unfolding Arms Behind My Back* (2009);
Nina Canell, *Separate Members* (2007)

Other works pull these flat, traced lines into the three-dimensional, fluidly connecting drawing with sculpting. Nina Canell's twisted piping and neon floor-piece, *Separate Members* (2007), marks out bright, serpentine line, while the threaded brass sections of Leonor Antunes' hanging rope (*MMM*, 2008) operate like pencil strokes that mark out the silhouette of an irregular ladder. If there is one artist whose work has most powerfully explored the idea of sculpture as 'drawing in space', it's Fred Sandback, and one of his signature thread pieces, dividing the air with invisible panels, is clearly missing here. Instead (and probably for practical or commercial reasons), the gallery shows a three-coloured right triangle drawing, most likely a study for an installation. *Untitled* (1988) is not very evocative for someone who's never experienced any of the artist's works first hand, but thankfully the piece retains some of the architectonic strength of Sandback's seminal pieces and manages in three lines to evoke their potent space-generating qualities.

In the second room, a white wooden structure is topped by a flimsy assemblage of cardboard, a ghostly extension or misshapen echo of the first composition. Entitled *Unfolding Arms Behind My Back* (2009), Barker's precarious construction brings to the exhibition's rather geometric ensemble a touching sense of fragility and potential failure. The title alludes to some sort of self-representation. The sculpture becomes mirror; it reflects the artist's doubts and offers an engaging contrast with Andre's sturdy *Graphite Cube Sum of Eight* (2006). This rich multiplicity of voices is at the nexus of the show's success. 'The Actuality of the Idea' is richly diverse and coherent, allowing elaborated resonances to emerge between works too easily associated or alienated: a rare and satisfying experience.

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