

Trisha Donnelly

AIR DE PARIS, Paris

January 17–March 14, 2015

Following the artist's wish to have no reproductions of her work, this review will include no images.

No text? At Air de Paris, the press release is nowhere to be seen. This recognizable signature of Trisha Donnelly's exhibitions is one of various measures to limit the documentation of her work: show and work titles are absent in the gallery space, and the dissemination of images outside it is very limited. This operation challenges a certain routine use of textuality as portal to interpretation. By forcing the viewer to move away from this process, the artist creates the conditions for the autonomy of the exhibition as experience. Stripped of text, the works are barren, and writing about them causes an embarrassing feeling of nudity. Nonetheless, these works call for a certain referentiality, but we have to look into the unbound, slimy matter of our memory in order to activate it.

On the night of the opening, viewers strolled in the dim, blueish light of Trisha Donnelly's videos, the droning chatter of the crowd intertwining with reiterative pings coming from one of them, located at the back of the gallery. Amid the shadows, a drawing on paper (all works untitled; all works 2014) was difficult to discern—a stirrup, or perhaps a stirrup bone. Somebody suggested to come back during the day.

Another vision. Light passed through a glass door and the drawing's lines of graphite became visible. The sound was clear in the gallery; all the colors were different. The significance of the light was tangible. The luminescence of the projected images revealed a structure within the gallery's architectural planes, just as light, in photographic processing, reveals an image. The images shuffled between a set of visible and invisible layers, reminiscent of one another like bodies are reminiscent of phantom limbs.

In the first video, a stream of clouds fades into a backwash of ripples in a trapezoid frame, like an inclined plane mirroring the sky. The same motif is reiterated on the rear wall of the gallery in a wide projected frame with rounded corners, calling to mind a rear-view mirror perspective. The animation of cloud and foam is pasted on top of a pixelated image of white, serpentine shapes, interspersing a long, black-and-white sequence showing an automated "dip-and-dunk" machine in progress, mechanically processing strips of film. The movement of spume, repeating itself in a vertical scroll, unveils the images underneath, echoing the work of the machine's chemical baths. Like a parallel axis of mirrors bookending the exhibition, the two videos refract blind images of a nonexistent sky, generating a complex field of reverberation of the gaze in the gallery space.

In between these two works, three looped animations feature abstract figures in movement: silvery lumps spreading, stretches of pearly lines twitching. The images remain flat but contain circular movements, rolling an undefined subject in and out. The motion within a still frame generates the appearance of a living process and gives the image an organic quality.

One of these videos features the evolution and transformation of this material substance over a misty violet mountainscape. The gray frame supersedes it and then shrinks to the size of a thumbnail, moving around in a quirky journey over the landscape. Appearing sporadically, it blinks, alters, and proceeds in tune with the pings of its soundtrack, like hints to a riddle. The composition recalls the rear-view of the cloud videos, but in an inverted way, as if it were an abstract organic form over an image of a landscape. It generates the opposite perception, as the gaze doesn't rebound; the images are centrifugal, focusing our intention on a repeating question that is impossible to answer.

Another vision, this time a projected still image at the center of the exhibition, which stands out like an altar in a cathedral. It invests the full height of the space with abstract shapes resembling parts of a camera. Traces like the pattern of marbling paper appear in the background and the iridescence of the pictured objects generates a beautiful gradation of colours. As in most of Donnelly's works, the shapes are elegant and delightful, but convey an eeriness in the difficulty of identifying the objects. All the images appear as provisional, like the gaseous state of water in the clouds, the foam, and the mist present throughout the exhibition. Liquidity connects the photographic and organic processes within the field of image production. In nature, foam and clouds are created when water is in contact with other matters, "impurities" so to speak: Donnelly's images stand at a threshold between an ethereal trajectory towards the sublime and the sliminess of their dirt and liquids. Her methodology is not necessarily to provide the viewer with an awareness of what is being watched; rather, to cause an awareness of the subjects' instability in the experience of seeing.