

EXHIBITION REVIEWS



View of Hiroshi Sugimoto's exhibition "The Day After," 2010; at Pace.

NEW YORK HIROSHI SUGIMOTO PACE

In winter 2009, Gagosian Gallery elevated Hiroshi Sugimoto's "Seascape" series (1987-96) to iconic status with a dramatic installation evoking a sacred space on the order of the Rothko Chapel. This fall, newly representing Sugimoto, another gallery of means, Pace, offered him the opportunity to push this theatrical tendency in another direction, as the artist transformed Pace's 22nd Street space into a solemn Hall of Science—the kind in which grand dioramas, demonstrations and other exhibits offer the public lessons in matters as lofty as creation itself.

A small antechamber set the tone of instructive awe, displaying an ancient meteor fragment and an exquisite fossil (nature's photography, in a way), both from the artist's collection, alongside several images of dinosaurs in landscapes from his ongoing "Diorama" series (begun 1976). Beyond, in a central, naturally lit gallery, were seven "Seascapes," representing yet another victory lap for these acclaimed pictures. But the star was the recent (2009-10) "Lightning Field" series (the relationship to Walter De Maria is in more than title alone), displayed in the other two rooms. These are spectacular cameraless photographs resulting from the direct exposure of sensitized paper to electricity produced by a Van der Graaf generator and other equipment constructed for this sole purpose.

A pair of giant, 47-foot-long diptychs showing electric bolts within a charged atmosphere occupied two entire walls of one

room. In *Lightning Fields Composed 011*, a repeated "strike" resembles a bleached white tree arcing through a dark field of barely perceptible feathery tendrils of light. These lyrical expanses almost summoned an accompanying soundtrack; I recalled the prologue to Disney's *Fantasia* (1940), set to Bach's "Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor," with Oskar Fischinger's stylized, abstract animations.

The crackling sound one periodically heard was produced by a theatrically lit contraption (*Faraday Cage/Bachelor Machine*, 2010) near the front desk. Composed of a Tesla coil electric generator, birdcage and found objects, it felt vaguely menacing, though also not unlike a horror movie prop. Here Sugimoto evokes science in the Romantic era, as thrillingly described in Richard Holmes's book *The Age of Wonder* (2008): medical and astronomical experiments (not to mention the discovery of electricity), possessing both beauty and terror. Also on view were nine 58¾-by-47-inch photos, among them *Lightning Fields 168*, which is emblematic in its convulsive imagery. These photographs restore a certain elemental mystery to the photographic process—its juggling of light, time and chemistry—that has been erased by digital practices. One is also reminded of darker doctrines such as Vitalism, whose 19th-century practitioners sought to reanimate dead animals through contact with a voltaic battery (drawing the attention of Mary Shelley). In Hiroshi Sugimoto's laboratory, science is returned to the service of art. The photographic evidence of this dramatic encounter is nothing less than sublime.

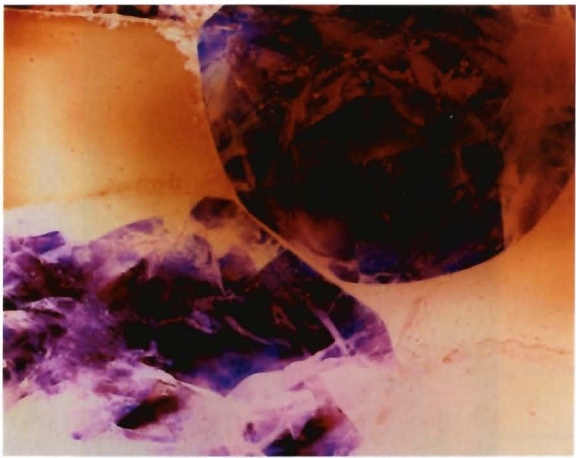
—Tim Maul

CAREY YOUNG PAULA COOPER

For over a decade now, the British artist Carey Young has been an exponent of a version of institutional critique that has focused on the contemporary art world's increasing resemblance to the corporate sphere. Her works have called attention to, for example, the privatization of British museums and the artist-as-entrepreneur. Young typically proceeds by combining current artistic practices with the trappings of modern commerce. Her text pieces, for example, adopt the legalistic prose of business contracts. Likewise, in performances and videos, she restages iconic moments of the artistic avant-garde, such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles's *Hartford Wash* (1973), in office settings while wearing a gray pantsuit.

In her recent exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery, "Contracting Universe," Young shifted her focus to current efforts by governments and transnational bodies to develop a new legal protocol for the administration and monetization of outer space. Since 1967, international agreements have designated that territory as humanity's common heritage, but the rise of commercial space travel and privately owned satellites have prompted attempts to renegotiate those Cold War-era arrangements.

The show was dominated by the "Redshift" series, six 33⅓-by-42-inch photographs (all works 2010). Young made each of these abstract compositions by shining light through translucent fragments of meteorites. This process yielded intricate, crystalline patterns of vibrant purples, reds and yellows.



Carey Young: C-type print from the *Redshift* series . . . , 2010, C-print mounted on aluminum, 33 1/8 by 42 inches; at Paula Cooper.

Hannah Wilke: Untitled, 1965, pastel and graphite on paper, 12 3/8 by 14 3/8 inches; at Ronald Feldman.



Spotlighted in a darkened gallery, the images' otherworldly, almost nebular glow recalled their celestial origins and highlighted the long-standing association between abstraction and the spiritual. At the same time, for all their radiance, these photographs merely register the physical properties of the rocks, leaving the images poised between the transcendent and the material.

Many of the works in the exhibition explore this tension. A small inkjet print, *Origin of the Seven Stars*, for example, alternates, line by line, texts from a Wyandot Nation myth about the origins of the star cluster Pleiades and from a 2004 U.S. policy statement about the exploration and governance of space. Through this opposition, Young dramatizes the transformation of the heavens into zones ripe for colonization.

Other works approach the cosmos through the disinterested language of physics. *Missing Mass*, a transparent Plexiglas box, 18 inches to a side, recalls Hans Haacke's *Condensation Cube* (1963-65) and Larry Bell's minimalist sculptures. A text stenciled on its pedestal explains that the box holds 5,461 particles of the theoretical substance known as dark matter, immediately adding, "Dark matter is transparent and undetectable to the human eye." The particles may circulate freely, the text goes on to say, their number may change, and all this information is provisional, "based on current scientific understanding." This wry turn to what is beyond human perception looks back to Robert Barry's late-1960s exhibitions of radio waves and photographs

of inert gases, and suggests that there are limits to our ability to enclose and exploit outer space. At the same time, by treating this hypothetical substance as a readymade, Young provocatively links privatization to appropriation.

—Tom Williams

HANNAH WILKE RONALD FELDMAN

Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) is best known for her performative work: the "Starification Object Series," begun in 1974, in which she photographed herself with vaginal-shaped pieces of chewed gum stuck to various parts of her body; *Through the Large Glass*, a video of the striptease she did behind Duchamp's iconic piece at the Philadelphia Museum in 1976; and the "Intra-Venus" photographs (1992-93), self-portraits documenting her struggle with the lymphoma that killed her at age 53. While her greatest notoriety arose from the use of her own (often naked) body as material, Wilke was also an avid draftsman, as seen in a recent show that included works on paper dating mainly to the late '60s.

Made in a range of styles, Wilke's early drawings offer a glimpse of the artist she was to become—playful, witty, sexy. Pieces from the early 1960s executed in charcoal and black ink display a fierce, raw vitality, their abstract imagery often suggesting breasts or phalluses. Wilke then added pastels to her repertoire and began experimenting with a more graphic, bold, colorful style with elements recalling Miró's airy blobs or

Adolph Gottlieb's hovering orbs. In the early '70s she adopted a softer touch and palette. In one drawing, a scalloped circle inscribed with the words "This was once my mother's plate" is placed next to a few delicately rendered flowers that extend from the crumbling end of a pale yellow rectangle. One feels that Wilke is beginning to explore, and tentatively celebrate, her femininity, allowing a vulnerable, personal side to show through. She continued in this vein with mixed-medium works that feature collaged elements with distinctly sentimental overtones—a flower (*Rose in Water*, ca. 1970) or details from Victorian-era illustrations, such as a hound peering from his wooden shelter, three little boys drinking tea, and an elegant dandy. What saves these collages from mawkishness is the quiet minimalism present in the almost invisible pastel stripes that frequently serve as a ground.

It would be misleading to propose that Wilke's work followed a linear trajectory. She continued to use biomorphic, eroticized forms as well as figurative imagery, as seen in a few pieces from the '70s. But some works took a more conceptual turn. A scribbled text piece, *Crucifixion Complex* (1978), alludes to Wilke's Jewish heritage through wordplay, turning PREJUDICE into PRAY JEW DIES; and for *Criminal Fingerprint Record* (1977), she asked a local police precinct to take her fingerprints, then incorporated them into the piece. It's a crucial shift, revealing an artist confident enough to push social limits as well as her own esthetic.

—Claire Barliant