



MARK DI SUVERO
TIME OUT FOR NICOLE D'ORESME 2005
STILL, 8 X 10 X 10 M
PHOTO: JEFFREY MURPHY
COURTESY PAULA COOPER GALLERY, NEW YORK

the biennial (slightly less upstate).

Time Out is not a tower, but it is towering, and it replays for its audience Di Suvero's fascination with that old knock and tug between brute physicality and linear composition. One's initial experience of the work can remain as fresh as ever, but only because the analytics of awe and size can be counted upon to return us, however briefly, to childhood, when big was just what things were. The nod to Nicole d'Oresme, a fourteenth-century scholar of some repute – whose writings discuss a coordinate geometry ahead of Descartes, and the impossibility of a stationary earth prior to Copernicus – is simply that, a nod, and, like the other works by Di Suvero that invoke such names as Kepler and Euler, is meant to remind us that there may be a deeper logic pulling the strings.

Writing recently on the first 'Peace Tower' (then *The Artists' Tower of Protest*) erected in LA in 1966 to protest the Vietnam War, Di Suvero reminded a more contemporary audience that, at that time, there was indeed a politics to, if not 'of, abstraction. 'I believe,' Di Suvero explains, 'that the ability to think abstractly necessarily led one to refuse the reactionary attitudes that were so prevalent then.' But in 1966, abstraction was simply the pretext for a kind of iconic confrontation that, once the artists got what they asked for, was

at once spectacular, polarizing and far from peaceful – in other words, it was anything but abstract.

This year's *Peace Tower* re-enacts its predecessor's strategy of providing a platform to display more than 200 two-foot-square panels submitted by different artists in protest at the Iraq War, but its inclusion as part of the Biennial – hardly a site for confrontation – robs it of both the urgency and agency that accompanied its older sibling. The new tower's ephemerality is what undermines it; which is to say that it could do with a dose of the raw permanence one cannot help but feel when confronting *Time Out*. This is not to suggest that the protests of *Peace Tower* are unnecessary, it is only to note that expressions of outrage can no longer afford to be so fleeting.

JONATHAN D. NEEL

NEW YORK

AMY SILLMAN

SHIKEMA JI NKINS
8 APRIL – 6 MAY

Amy Sillman's paintings aren't faithful to figuration or abstraction – instead she deftly combines the two to offer a cautionary tale about physical pleasure and desire. Canvases that are often blank in large swathes also contain flurries of active brushstrokes in an extraordinarily rich palette. Sillman's personal, highly active marks don't seek resolution. Rather, they are an honest examination

AMY SILLMAN
THE PLUMBING, 2006
OIL ON CANVAS, 174 X 203 CM
COURTESY SARKIS + THORNDIKE, NEW YORK

Brancusi came to be known. Yet, after further contemplation, one senses a deep connection between this work and the artist's later signature style. No matter if his end was comic or hieratic: Brancusi was on a search for essential forms.

And isn't such pursuit of necessary structures the most crucial aspect of Modernism itself? Certainly the thrill of this exhibition comes from seeing how various the results could be. Even if these artists shared a belief in making work based on the fundamental natures of their materials themselves, there's a world of difference between, say, Man Ray's swivelled *Lampshade* (1921) and Francis Picabia's *Midi* (1923–6), a construction depicting a Riviera landscape that the artist framed in snakeskin. Likewise, no one would ever mistake the euphoric comedy of Kurt Schwitters's collage, *Carnival* (1947), for the cool phantasmagoria of tubes and funnels in Fernand Léger's *Study for 'La Ville'* (1919).

Many of the best pieces in the show are by far less famous artists. In the same room as *Little French Girl*, for example, hangs Morton Livingston Schamberg's *Machine* (1916). Although Schamberg based this painting on the parts of a sewing machine, the green, yellow and black forms exist apart from any representational function. This industrial-age abstraction resembles paintings by fellow Americans like Demuth, Sheeler and Davis. But Schamberg's *Machine* stands on its own merits; it gives off a feeling of studious attentiveness that's all the painter's own. Other compelling works by lesser known artists include Käte Traumann Steinitz's *Heads* (1925) and László Perí's painting on wood *Room (Space Construction)* (1920–1).

Perhaps the least interesting pieces are those by Duchamp himself. Even if the coloured discs of his *Rotorieliefs* (1935) and the jumbled reproductions of his *Box in a Valise* (1942–3) deliver their

whimsical, anti-art jolt, hasn't that sensation worn a little thin by now? Duchamp remains the indisputable grandfather of today's conceptual artists. Again and again in the current artworld, we're asked to consider seemingly random objects as art, as well as to question the conventions of ostensible masterpieces. What was once radical now feels like tired editorializing.

So there's a strange irony to this exhibition. Here is Marcel Duchamp, the anti-artist, offering us the most generous and surprising selection from the work of his contemporaries. The master of ironic reductionism turns out to be (along with Katherine Dreier and Man Ray) the provider of this cornucopia. One hopes that *Société Anonyme: Modernism for America* will lead viewers, especially viewers who are artists, to reconsider that modernist past. Yes, there are merely derivative pieces in the show, pieces that have been ossified by their own period styles. But the variety of work that came out of the sincere trust in the media themselves, and out of the belief in a search for essential forms, produced work far more various and compelling than any Duchampian didacticism.

PETER CAMPION

NEW YORK

MARK DI SUVERO

PAULA COOPER GALLERY
8 MAY – 24 JUNE

It is tempting to take Di Suvero's most recent contribution to the earth's population of monumental sculptures as an opportunity to talk, once again, about steel's potential to become script in the hands of this industrial calligrapher. But, on the occasion of viewing *Time Out for Nicole d'Oresme* (2005), one cannot help but juxtapose this hulking construction, which appears poised to explode out of the Paula Cooper Gallery's ever-graceful main exhibition space (and land, one imagines, smack in the middle of the Storm King property upstate), to Di Suvero and Rirkrit Tiravanija's far more ephemeral yet politically active *Peace Tower* (2006), recently installed at the Whitney for



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TITLE: MARK DI SUVERO: PAULA COOPER GALLERY
SOURCE: Modern Painters JI/Ag 2006
PAGE(S): 108
WN: 0618201632039

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