

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: RAHA RAISSNIA

Dates: September 7 – October 19, 2008

Reception: Sunday, September 7, 6:30 – 9 PM

Opening on Sunday, September 7th, Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present Raha Raissnia's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The show will feature recent paintings and drawings by the artist alongside a slide and film projection with sound work by Charles Curtis.

In a seminal sequence from Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, a horse's steady trot is halted to a standstill and seized upon as a frame within the strip of film destined for the editor's table. To fully understand how Raha Raissnia reanimates detritus, we must start at the cutting room floor and play these stages in reverse.

Using transparent tape, Raissnia collages found 16 and 35 mm filmstrips with hand-processed, hand-painted and manipulated materials she then presses between glass slides, like specimens for inspection. The variegated components comprising any single slide may include segments of a still life photograph with paint and ink drawings reworked and scratched into acetate sheets. Pushing further the theme of 'still life', Raissnia incorporates selected sections from human x-rays into her mix of pictures. After the resulting palimpsest has undergone full treatment, she sets the final slide array into a sequence intensified by projection and injected with sound.

Raissnia develops her filmmaking process by breaking apart the cinematic movement of 'film' into three components: Two slides are projected side-by-side and partly overlap in the middle, while an 18 frame per second, 16mm film is superimposed over the left image. This composition, in effect, produces a slow-moving montage during which scenes are at once temporary and aleatory. The arrangement underscores cinema's inherent paradoxical structure of manipulating stillness to conjure up the illusion of movement.

The movie camera lens lolls about, repeatedly failing to apprehend and fully represent an ambiguous, external light source. The disembodied eye of a segmented film struggles to look back onto itself. Beneath this drunken movement, one projector screens images of a fetus in utero, exposed within the architecture of the female body, against perhaps, an image of a human figure, miniscule against a looming building. The resulting procession of dark and saturated colors is occasionally punctured by the barest inflections of light. Charles Curtis' haunting, mathematical sound accompaniment reinforces the high-pitch of this shuffle of quixotic images.

While clearly influenced by New York's Materialist-Structuralist avant-garde, Raha Raissnia's cinematic work departs from the trope of revealing the stilled frame by instead recuperating the 'dead' still as her originary material point. The artist's avoidance of projecting a full stop thereby sidesteps the complete destruction of cinematic movement. As is suggested by her choice of images, her work hovers between movement and stillness, life and death.

If Raissnia's cinema extends time, her drawings delimit time. In certain renderings we can cull subcutaneous sinews and tendons. Most compositions, however, depict a crushing build-up of marks so dense that their excess verges upon illegibility. It is as though we are witnessing the result of a scene that has been superimposed and slowly replayed upon itself so thoroughly that the image, stuck in its frame, has suffered a slow burial under the topographical sediment of graphite and ink.

Furthering this theme of temporality, it is perhaps useful to turn to Raissnia's newest paintings in which she has inverted her usual order, Ivory Black paint atop white gesso. Her newest configurations, Titanium White paint atop black gesso, like previous compositions, remain architectonic. However, if previous iterations could have been interpreted as aerial views of infrastructure, movement and transit, we are now confronted with crystalline

forms that seem to rise up and break past a horizon to converge, cross and continue through the dark void of limitless space. The resulting network of vectors resembles what one could imagine to have been a sketch from a lost letter in the Crystal Chain. We sense an ambitious, if not ambiguous proposal for a yet-to-be-realized future.

To better consider Raissnia's material inversion, one might extend this historicized fantasy to include the influential American contemporary of early European Expressionist architects, Frank Lloyd Wright. Since 1959, Wright's *Ennis House* (completed in 1926) has served as a cinematic backdrop for multiple Hollywood films and commercials. Its depictions are often futuristic despite the fact that its primary material components, interlocking cast concrete blocks, were fashioned after the style of Puuc architecture from the Mayan city, Uxmal.

If Frank Lloyd Wright's references to 'the ancient' are propelled into the future through the 'now-present' medium of cinematic time, it seems that the same sort of séance could be contrived in Raissnia's process of graphic inversion. By deploying the same methodical techniques of painting – layering and erasure (via scratching) – Raissnia bridges the gap between her Ivory Black on white, sepia-toned ruins and her Titanium White crystalline spires that are still freezing into form. The transits pictured in each remain not fully decipherable and, therefore, mysteriously incomplete.

Between Raissnia's separate but thematically related practices, we are invited to consider the terms under which we triangulate representations of our own present – the version of a 'past' to which we defer and the future it foregrounds. Our eyes, like the camera, seek sources of illumination that may guide us. Raissnia's work, embedded in history (or perhaps, rather, something akin to an ambiguous 'ancient' dimension), looks forward, and pulls us through the darkness of this search.

Raha Raissnia received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992 and her MFA from Pratt Institute in 2002. In between receiving her degrees, her interest in avant-garde filmmaking led her to take on an internship at Anthology Film Archives (1995-1999) where she also occasionally exhibited. Solo shows of her work were held at New York's Thomas Erben Gallery, Galerie Xippas, Paris, and the Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Art, Isfahan, Iran.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

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Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street; J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street