



Anthony McCall
Breath (The Vertical Works)

Hangar Bicocca, Milan
20 March – 21 June

Breath (The Vertical Works),
2009 (installation view).
Photo: Giulio Buono, Studio
Blu Torino. © the artist.
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Six vertical 'solid light' film installations by Anthony McCall – known for his *Fire Cycles* and influence on the early 1970s London avant-garde film scene – make up the New York-based artist's exhibition at Hangar Bicocca. The show consists of work exploring height and verticality that McCall has completed in the past six years, along with one work, *Meeting You Halfway* (2009), made specifically for the show.

Walking among these six works is something akin to wandering in a dark and misty forest, where sunlight filters through the dense foliage, creating intense streams of light-and-shadow patterns on the ground below. Yet McCall's three-dimensional enclosures aren't based on observed natural forms as such, but reflect studied mathematical formulae and geometric forms like ellipses and waves. The viewer moving about in the space may note how the waves create the illusion of ephemeral architectural structures that have the look of soft black velvet, an effect created by the light beam from the projector coming into contact with mist generated by a haze machine. The works, however, are by no means coldly mathematical, as they also explore the idea of breathing, or as McCall states, 'the expansion and contraction of volume'.

The first 'solid light' film, the seminal *Line Describing a Cone* (1973), afforded the artist the possibility of reflecting on the three-dimensional aspects of a light beam before it comes into contact with the two-dimensional screen. He has called some of his work from the 1970s 'straightforward', and his titles 'simple and descriptive', while mentioning that the newer work is concerned more with the body and mortality. Where *Line Describing a Cone* gives a clearly structured account of a circle being depicted

by a line, a newer work, such as *Coupling* (2009), presents the viewer with a more abstract, even ambiguous narrative. Here one watches the floor and the movement of two separate ellipses, one inside the other, that expand over a 16-minute time frame until the smaller form suddenly becomes the larger form – an 'ending' that is as captivating as it is easy to miss, as the changing of position happens rapidly.

A strong feeling thus arises that watching the whole process a second or third time is required in order to decipher the relationship of the two ovals. In fact, the sensation of memory failure as to which shape replaced the other becomes a legitimate concern, also because the 'sculptural' element might 'distract' one from seeing where the other shape went. So as the viewer engages with the cinematic element on the floor, it's easy to be equally engaged with the sculptural, three-dimensional aspects of the installation that surrounds one's body. Finally, McCall's interest and aim in investigating and convoluting the space-in-between sculpture and cinema would seem to indicate that rich dialogue between bodies materialises in the interstices of fleeting moments; both in the artist's work and in the haphazard nature of daily life. *Andrew Smaldone*