

# ARTFORUM

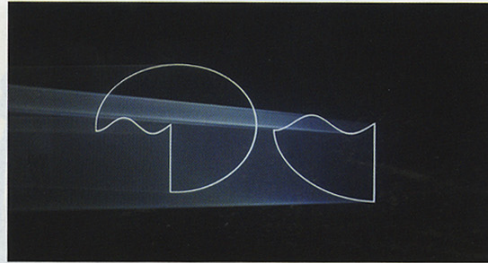
## Anthony McCall

SEAN KELLY GALLERY

Fold an art-world time line so that 1973 touches 2010. Task-based performance in its antimetaphorical directness—as undertaken by an artist in his twenties—will rub against technological spectacle in an elegiac mood, as engineered by an artist now over sixty. Structuralist cinema and post-Minimal sculpture will meet digital video and relational installation; ambient dust and cigarette smoke in a loft where cognoscenti gathered for experimental screenings will turn to vapor puffs emitted by a haze machine in a gallery, where QuickTime projections loop and passersby drop in. Yet key concerns remain. What Anthony McCall calls “solid light,” and his sense that cinematic apparatus—screen, projector, beam, image—can generate haptic experience, inspire him now as they did before he put his career on hold. (He quit making art circa 1980 and resumed around a decade ago.) Showing two new projections, along with drawings for one of them and for two planned site-specific outdoor installations, McCall updated his preoccupations while pondering terms first set forth in *Line Describing a Cone*, 1973. Like that now-iconic film, the new works create a kinesthetic theater whose players are light, darkness, and the audience’s perceptual capacities.

*Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*, 2009, filled the main gallery. In this installation, two cones of light shine laterally across a darkened room, describing ellipses on the opposite wall; subtle traffic-and-water sounds, punctuated by what sounds like a brushed cymbal, are audible. Depending on when one enters in the thirty-two-minute cycle, it is more or less clear that the beams move in opposition, such that the twinned shapes on the wall—an ellipse with a wavy-edged bite out of it, and a wavy-edged bite by itself—would at any moment, if superimposed, fill out a third, ideational ellipse. Altering fast enough to generate a

Anthony McCall,  
*Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence)*, 2009,  
computer, video projectors,  
audio equipment, haze machines.  
Installation view.



restrained mathematical drama, one form grows toward completion as the other wanes and disappears. The sound track pauses for two minutes, then all reboots. *Meeting You Halfway II*, 2009, runs a variation on the theme; without sound, a double-edged beam describes a wide curve that shrinks and a tight curve that widens. Closing a fifteen-minute cycle, they join with a silent “click” in a full ellipse, then diverge again.

Mesmerizing if inhuman in their computerized perfection, the projections are in effect ever-changing props or scenarios for the visitor’s use; at the show’s core is the viewer’s passage from outside to inside the light cones. It is like penetrating a Platonically precise cloud. Elegant oil swirls glow on the curved walls of smoke. Metaphors of transcendence like “going toward the light” are inescapable—obviously a far cry from the rigorous materiality of *Line Describing a Cone* (compare the titles). Other pleasures are nonsymbolic, albeit illusory: the impression of solidity and dissolution in piercing the scrim; the claustrophobia of walking toward the cone’s apex as if a tunnel were narrowing; the euphoria as one’s head pops out of the hazed beam like an airplane above cloud cover; a synesthetic choking as the edge of the cone hits one’s throat. In *Leaving*, the percussive “brushing” gradually separates itself from the sound track; it is not a cymbal at all, but the hissing of the haze machine. Whether the work is augmented or diminished by this peeling apart of basic function and quasi-narrative overlay—i.e., the traffic-and-water recording turning the beams into headlights or lighthouses—depends on individual perceivers.

The soundscape of this piece is a collaboration with composer David Grubbs, and it is the first time since 1972 that McCall has used sound. He is also returning to outdoor installation. One group of drawings presented *Projected Column*, a twirling pillar or “coherent convection” (as McCall has described it) of haze, which will be installed on the river Mersey in Liverpool, UK, in 2012. A second drawing consisting of three panels showed *Crossing the Hudson*, a proposal to incrementally illuminate the Poughkeepsie Bridge in New York with white LEDs over 365 days (the drawings depict Day 295). If McCall’s early work balanced what-you-see-is-what-you-see materiality against the funky chanciness of low-tech means, and his newer pieces set digital precision against mortal reverie, then perhaps these open-air proposals will mix it all up.

—Frances Richard