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Surface Surfeit: Ingrid Calame Traces the World

By R. C. Baker *Wednesday, Jan 15 2014*

Since 1996, Ingrid Calame has been tracing things that generally go unnoticed — paint blobs on studio floors, sidewalk splatters, rusted industrial signs — and translating them into paintings and wall drawings. In recent interviews, she has said, "When I started this, the idea was that the whole surface of the world is a potential drawing," while she has also noted that "my paintings and drawings are not maps at all, but the project itself has to do with a cartographic desire to know the world."

This brings to mind philosopher Alfred Korzybski's premise, "A map is not the territory it represents," and Jorge Luis Borges's related vision, "In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters."

These concepts chime with Calame's enveloping wall drawing of skid marks, which she and a team of assistants traced at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. (Calame employs an ancient technique: pricking holes along her traced lines and then tapping them with pouches filled with powdered pigment in order to transfer the tracings to the wall, similar to the way Renaissance artists prepared frescoes.) From the center of the gallery, Calame's four-wall composition has the impact of an all-over action painting, while details viewed up close reveal the painstaking application process. Here are lines repeated in both red and purple, the guide paper having shifted between the laying down of different hues, lending a colorful vibration to one contour.

When making her 1:1 scale tracings, Calame uses touch as much as sight to follow the bumpy, uneven markings of her chosen surface, giving the final murals a visceral physicality very different from a topographic map. In a video on the gallery's website, Calame notes that the marks at the speedway are "kind of a celebration of life and death. It's more like the gladiator ring where people pay to watch people drive really fast and crash. . . . It's a dramatization of mortality." In the gallery, long trails of

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marks — palimpsests of velocity — slash upward and end abruptly at the ceiling, perhaps ghostly relics of sudden impacts.

As in Warhol's paintings of car crashes, Calame's imagery works not simply on a documentary level but transmigrates formal rigor into emotional radiance. Even for a viewer unaware that these shapes and designs derived from burned rubber, the jagged geometries and bits of signage painted onto the Speedway's grooved asphalt would imply both human organization and the inexorable breakdown of systems over time. Like James Rosenquist's mural *F-111* (1965), which wrapped completely around a gallery and depicted images ranging from a smiling child to a mushroom cloud, Calame's vivid arena contains both exhilaration and entropy.



Adam Reich

Ingrid Calame, *Tracks* (2013)

Details

Ingrid Calame: 'Tracks'

James Cohan Gallery

533 West 26th Street

212-714-9500, jamescohan.com Through February 8