

THE ARTIST'S VOICE SINCE 1981

BOMBSITE



Raha Raissnia

by Jeanne Liotta

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Untitled, 2013, image transfer, Sumi ink, compressed charcoal, and collage on paper, 14×17 inches. Images courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

They say that stolen fruit is the sweetest. It's always a pleasure to steal terms from another discipline—it automagically bestows an enlarged perspective on the work, suggesting it might strain against garden variety containers.

Raha Raissnia's show of drawings and paintings *Series in Fugue* at Miguel Abreu this past fall led me to consider the form of the fugue. The fugue, literally "to chase, to run away, to take flight or flee," designates repeating musical motifs that will chase after each other in turn and variation, in call and response, echoing and reforming, multi-threading, layering, and running circles around each other.

There's a Google group devoted to the art of the fugue where recently musicians were deep in disagreement over the possible existence of a visual fugue—since Walt Disney, case in point, had failed so miserably with that silly animation of Bach's *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* in the opening scene of *Fantasia* (1940). Oskar Fischinger showed more than a little dissatisfaction with that filmed experiment in visual music after Disney changed his design. His infamous parting of the ways with Disney was nothing if not a sworn vow to non-objective reality, where abstract art aspires to the *condition* of music, not its illustration.

There is nothing silly in Raissnia's dark and complex 2D works—oil and gesso, wood, charcoal, and ink are in dynamic conversation with the photographic and

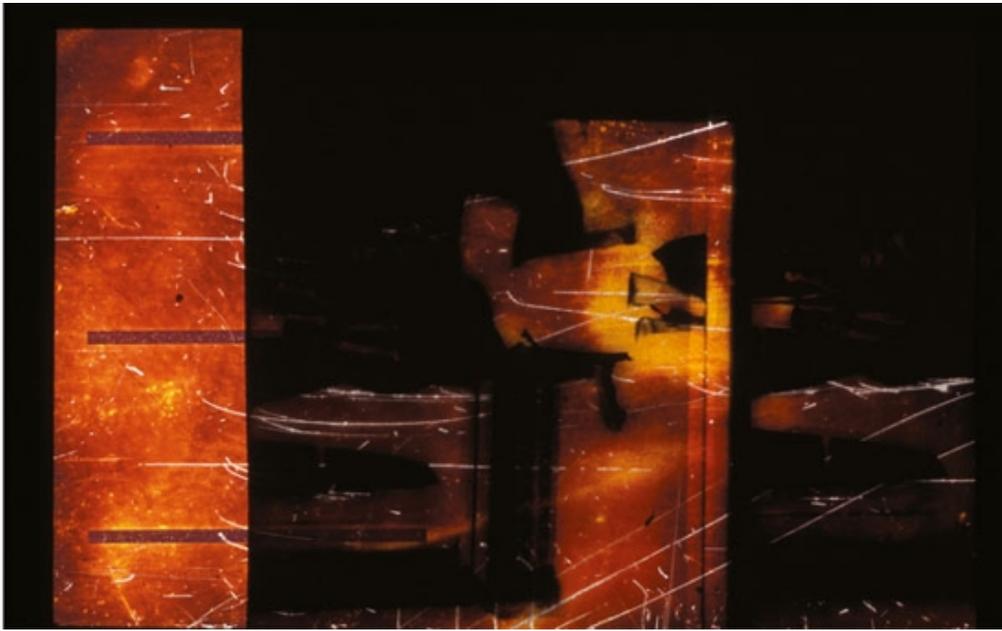
architectural, taken from her own film material via image transfers. All devoid of color, all moody tones and shadows, murky then sharp, all shifting depths, edges in motion, dissolution, dispersion, and gathering storms. A perfect foot peeks out from under a smoldering robe. A huddled form lies crumpled on a mattress framed by scaffolds and stairways to the infernal depths. If this were music it would be industrial.



Raha Raissnia, *Untitled*, 2013, image transfer, Sumi ink, compressed charcoal, and collage on paper, 14 x 17". Images courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.

For all the static works in this show, it is worth emphasizing that Raissnia's various projects over the years have been intensely stirred in a homemade cauldron of film, performance, musical collaborations, and slide projections, often loudly and simultaneously. One sweltering night last summer, for instance, Raissnia performed live in Abreu's empty loft space with various 16mm films and slides projected onto one of her larger paintings, accompanied by Dalius Naujo's Search and Enjoy choir. It was an intense, reckless, and unforgettable evening. A shifting fugue took place amongst all the mediums present to produce that work—in time, in space, in voice, alive and absolutely unpredictable.

Series in Fugue clearly related to this densely layered process, though it sometimes felt as though Raissnia was trying to arrest the very thing she set loose that night in the loft when she made a painting and bombarded it with light and sound. What was that thing but some kind of wild ephemeral synaesthesia? I am sure it is asking for the impossible to want to locate such energy inside a 2D work. Maybe that's what those Google group musicians felt when they insisted that a visual fugue was an impossibility.



Two hand-painted collages, 35 mm slides overlay.

Jeanne Liotta makes films and other cultural ephemera. More on her can be found on her : [website](#).

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