

Ingrid Calame: NYSE

Weaving the streets beneath our feet into the powers beyond our grasp

| BY DAVID MOOS

"Today we can depict an enormous, so-called stateless, monetary mass that circulates through foreign exchange and across borders, eluding control by the States, forming a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power untouched by governmental decisions."

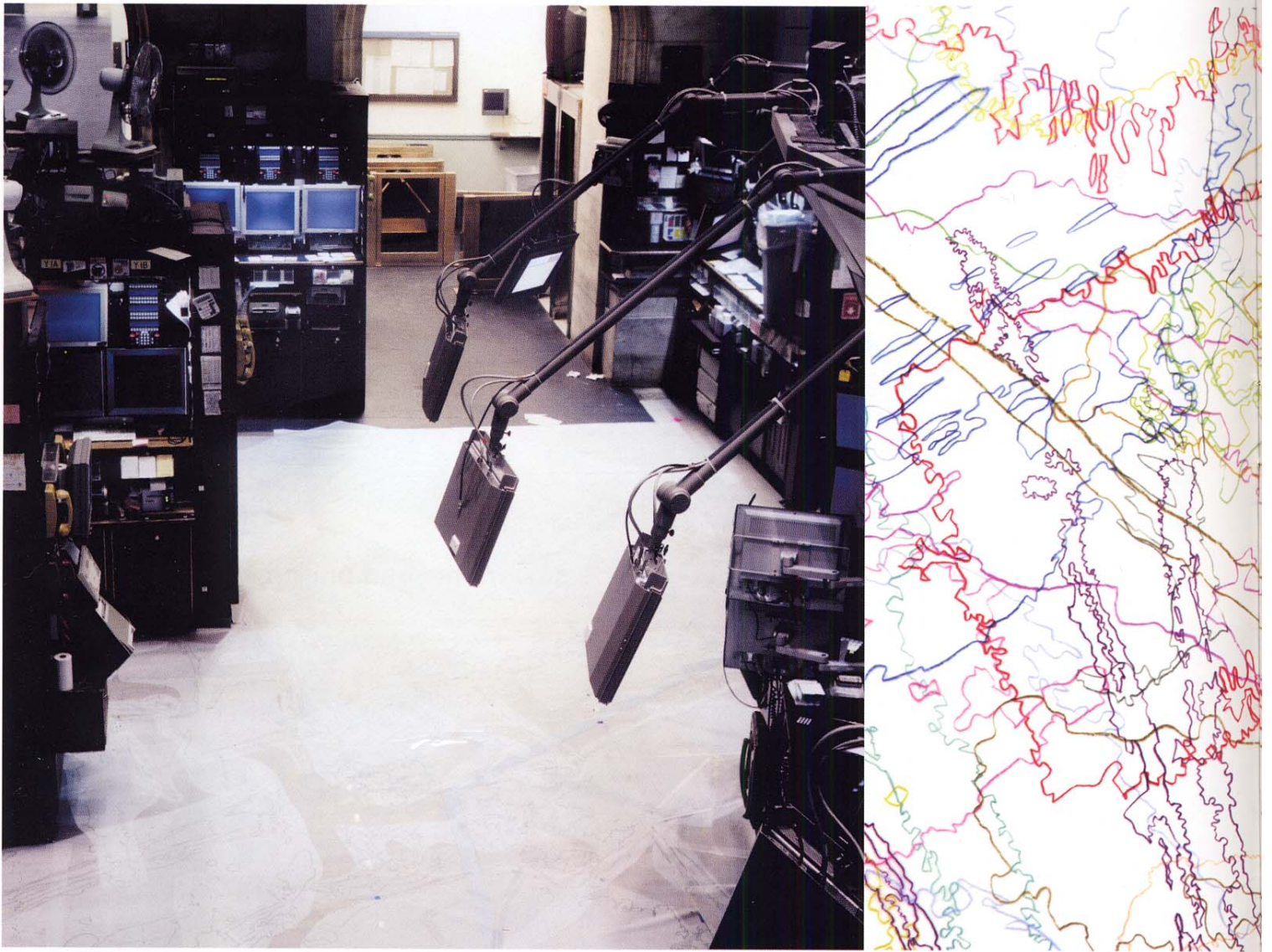
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari,
A Thousand Plateaus (1980)

Ingrid Calame rose to prominence in the late '90s by exhibiting large enamel paintings on trace Mylar with titles like *Spalunk...* (1997) and *b-b-b, rr-gR-UF!, b-b-b* (1999), works that struck viewers as immense, clarified variations on Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. Calame's magnified single-color splashes had the bravura and ferocity of Action painting yet manifested this energy upon the fragile support of Mylar, a material associated with drawing. These works moved from floor to wall, occupying and connecting space. By addressing the twin topics of painting/drawing and wall/floor, Calame genially deconstructed Pollock.

Such thoughts invite trepidation. Pollock's drip is the most powerful, iconic sign in modern painting.¹ The drip and Pollock's command of it were innovations so totalizing that from their inception to now, painting has struggled to negotiate their impact. One grasps at successors, parsing the legacy: Twombly's scrawl; Klein's performances; Warhol's oxidation paintings; Marden's skeins.² Avoidance or parody have been the dominant responses, for, as Kirk Varnedoe observes, "Pollock himself seemed to have staked all possible claims on his own terrain."³



Opposite page: Ingrid Calame, *hoo-koo-koo-koo*, 2003, enamel paint on aluminum, 72 by 72 inches (courtesy James Cohan Gallery). Above: Ingrid Calame making the drawing for *Secular Response 2* in the main room of the New York Stock Exchange, May 2001 (photo by Shelby Roberts courtesy the artist).



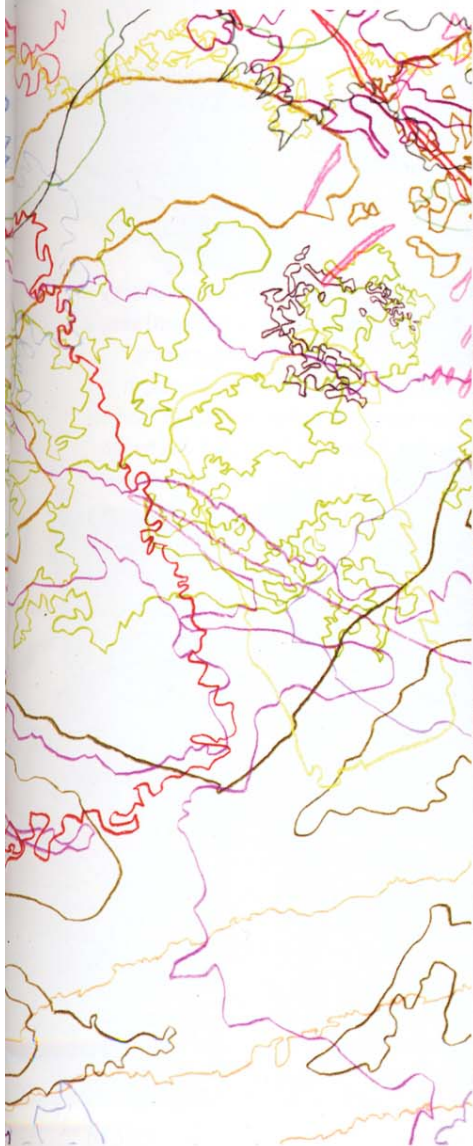
Left and far right: The drawing for *Secular Response 2* in the main room of the New York Stock Exchange in progress, May 2001 (photo by Shelby Roberts courtesy the artist).
Center: Ingrid Calame, *b-b-b, rr-gR-UF!, b-b-b*, 1999, enamel paint on trace Mylar, 29 by 25 feet (courtesy Whitney Museum of American Art).

Calame's large Mylar drawings unfold across three dimensions. Coming down from the wall, the pictorial space, they project across the floor, unrolled into physical space. One must walk around the drawing, carefully avoiding the Mylar. Pacing the work's perimeter calls to mind the telltale images of Pollock at work, wondrously captured in Hans Namuth's photographs of the painter dramatically leaning over his painting, sometimes stepping onto the canvas to deliver the drip. Peering at Calame's Mylar, one projects oneself, through those images, into the work's "arena" (to use Harold Rosenberg's word).

The resulting hyperbolic sensation suits the exaggerated scope of Calame's project. In April 2001 she gained access over two weekends to the New York Stock Exchange's main trading floor and undertook a 50,000-square-foot drawing, an elaborate tracing that meticulously produced stain-like shapes similar to her preceding enamel paintings on Mylar. Not only did this work map the entire trading floor six months prior to September 11, but she developed this project and undertook preliminary work in a studio on the ninety-first floor of the World Trade Center's North Tower. Calame's work seems fated to address, intentionally or not, large paradigms.

Calame's creation of painted shapes is painstaking, the antithesis of the singular gesture. Her shapes are stains that she has lifted from the streets of Los Angeles, New York and Las Vegas. "I trace the lacy stains left by the evaporation of nameless liquids, their contours determined by the viscosity of the vanished fluid and the texture of the surface onto which it pools," Calame has characterized her process. "Singling out the marks from the cement palimpsest of pedestrian life, I choose each for its aesthetic appeal, the expressive quality of the organic or mechanical gesture that it made."⁴ Works such as *b-b-b, rr-gR-UF!, b-b-b*, with its title that onomatopoeically renders sounds heard while tracing, graphically display Calame's compendium of stains. Some of the stains reified in enamel are puddle-like, large pools of liquid; others bear the force of impact, defined by direction and speed; still others are simply small seepages, drops, drips or drizzle. The stains derive from human, animal, mechanical or natural sources.⁵ Calame maps the street's vocabulary, spoken in fleeting liquid residue.

Her studio houses an archive of her silhouetted stains that she arranges into constellations; configurations subsequently retraced for Mylar works, pencil drawings or paintings without altering the stain's



scale or shape. Crucially, this veracity connects her work to experience in a literal way. The stains accurately reflect her itinerary and bring mapping into contact with drawing, merging cartography with painting.

This highly personal methodology has a distinct precedent in American art. In the Panorama, a now-defunct nineteenth-century practice, artists sought to convey the grandeur and immensity of the newly discovered continent. If the earliest panoramas, invented in late-eighteenth-century Europe, were circular paintings installed in circular rooms, the genre soon evolved to answer distinctly American needs. By the 1840s artists such as John Banvard and John Rowson were painting on astoundingly large canvases wound onto huge rolls. Now rather than have the viewer rotate in the center of a circular room, the canvas unspooled before the audience. Banvard pioneered this new technique for his 1846 opus, *Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas, exhibiting a View of Country 1200 Miles in Length, extending from the Mouth of Missouri River to the City of New Orleans, being by far the Largest Picture ever executed by Man*. Regardless of this claim's accuracy, artists like Banvard "made lengthy, laborious, and expensive trips sketching river scenery and then spent weeks and months transferring those sketches to canvas."⁶

Panoramas of the Mississippi offered viewers a proto-cinematic experience that was part travelogue, part documentary, serving as spectacle and vicarious journey. The genre was ideal for surveying, mapping and culturally occupying the landscape.⁷ Panoramas raise compelling questions about landscape's relation to painting. Not only does their gigantic size obliterate the easel picture's constraints, but they realize that painting only can represent landscape properly through abstraction and thus they introduce the element of time in an effort to reconcile seemingly infinite space. The relationship between Calame's Stock Exchange drawing, as it currently exists, and its subject matter is analogous to the panorama's relationship to landscape. In an impassioned letter written to a facilitator who was essential in arranging access to the Stock Exchange floor, Calame describes her intended artwork:

Secular Response 2 is a proposed 15,000-square-foot drawing. The floor of the Main Room of the New York Stock Exchange will be filled with drawings from streets of three American cities—New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas—and retraced. The final drawing will capture the actual-size floor plan of the Main Room, and all of its posts and booths, as a silhouette superimposed with the active marks of the street.⁸



Ingrid Calame, *pb!pb!pb!pb!*, 2002, enamel on aluminum, 24 by 24 inches (courtesy James Cohan Gallery).

When Yves Klein traveled from Paris to Japan in 1952, he was struck by the fact that a human shadow could remain visible after death. "Hiroshima, the shadows of Hiroshima," Klein wrote, reflecting upon his experience of the silhouette of a human being that remained seared onto the ground after the atomic flash: "In the desert of the atomic catastrophe, they were a witness...both for the hope of survival and for permanence—albeit immaterial—of the flesh."¹⁵ Klein used fire as a medium to convert this experience into something tangible, charring corporeal imprints onto canvases. Calame, having worked on the Stock Exchange floor, using some stains gathered from the pavement near the World Trade Center, has imprinted her line with capitalism's epicenter. Her work provides an apt visual metaphor for the randomness and anonymity of the free market, which seems similar to the street, for as Calame has remarked, "it is a sort of no man's land and everyman's land."¹⁶ **AP**

NOTES. 1. "It covers everything," Peter Schjeldahl declared: "no other art can be wedged in beside it." Schjeldahl, "The Rise of Abstraction II," *Abstract Painting, Once Removed* (Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1998): 36. 2. The repercussions of the drip exceed the domain of painting, often being understood as affecting Robert Smithson's asphalt rundowns and glue pours, Eva Hesse's suspended

rope pieces and Richard Serra's actions with molten lead. 3. Kirk Varnedoe, "Comet: Jackson Pollock's Life and Work," *Jackson Pollock* (Museum of Modern Art, 1998): 68. 4. Ingrid Calame, statement in *Selections Winter 98* (The Drawing Center, 1998). 5. "Calame identifies transmission fluid, motor oil, dog urine, blood, spilled juices, fence paint, and bubble gum as sources for the shapes that have since evaporated but still left their mark." Dana Friis-Hansen, "Ingrid Calame," *Abstract Painting, Once Removed*: 50. 6. John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958): 17. For an extensive analysis of Banvard, see pp. 18–46; *Scientific American* IV ([December 16, 1848]: 100) described and documented his novel system. 7. It cannot be coincidental that the panorama assumed its ambitious American incarnation in the decade when the Doctrine of Manifest Destiny was most forcefully promulgated. The trope of enlargement fuels the imagination as Whitmanic metaphors animate the geography of mid-nineteenth century. 8. Ingrid Calame, private correspondence, January 24, 2001. 9. Ingrid Calame, *Secular Response I*, limited edition self-published catalogue, 2001, unpaginated. 10. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 453. 11. The late Mark Lombardi produced large-scale flowchart drawings that traced the often-circuitous yet intersecting flows of legal and illicit capital, revealing the implications of clandestine plots. 12. On the back of the one dollar bill to the left of "In God We Trust" are the Latin words "Annuit Coeptis," meaning "God has favored our undertaking." 13. At present Calame uses her Stock Exchange drawing as source material for her Working Drawings and paintings. The commission for which the work was made has not been executed. Plans are in process for another incarnation of this work. 14. Clark endeavors to elucidate how abstraction ultimately, reluctantly, relates to representation: "... abstract painting must set itself the task of canceling nature, ending painting's relation to the world of things. It will make a new order to experience....But painting discovers that none of this is achievable with the means it has. Nature simply will not go away: it reasserts its rights over the new handwriting, and writes its own familiar script..." "Jackson Pollock's Abstraction," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945–1964* (MIT, 1990): 221. 15. Yves Klein, in Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Cantz Verlag, 1994): 179. 16. Interview with the author, Los Angeles, July 15, 2002.

Ingrid Calame's show at James Cohan Gallery closes November 1. "Painting 4," at Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum until December 7, also includes work by her.

DAVID MOOS is Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Birmingham Museum of Art. He holds a doctorate in art history from Columbia University and is a Contributing Editor at ART PAPERS.

Although she underestimated the size of the finished drawing, her methodology remained consistent. Arriving at the New York Stock Exchange on two Friday afternoons in April 2001 with a team of assistants, Calame laid out her specimen stains and then worked almost continuously through each weekend, retracing the stains onto 50,000 square feet of Mylar that precisely mimics the floor's footprint. The photographs documenting her effort seem staged, perhaps the stuff of a science fiction film. The backdrop of the New York Stock Exchange, universally recognized through its many media incarnations, is evacuated of traders, its screens blank, and Mylar—the material of art—now occupies the inner sanctum of capitalism's most sacred site. Captioning these images, which dramatically recontextualize this place, is challenging. Such a transformation of the Stock Exchange's function, even for two weekends, is astounding. Other artists, Christo for example, have made access to sites and the coordinated organization of massive resources integral to their art. Calame has refrained from this approach, focusing rather on her intimate experience. Drawing, understood as tracing, anchors her endeavor. Walking through her cities with assertive intent, in a way loosely connected to the ambulatory practices of Vito Acconci, Richard Long and Sophie Calle, Calame selects her stains. Inverting the role of graffiti writers who lay down tags, Calame lifts the imprint of the city's used surface, reclaiming anonymous stains from the ultimate public territory.

"How do we understand a whole from its parts?" Calame asks laconically in her notes for *Secular Response I*, a project from 2000 that used the floor of Calame's childhood church, Ardsley United Methodist in the small town of Ardsley, New York, as the template upon which she organized stains. "The quantity of fragments of information from which we derive our understanding of a whole unit (the universe, the world, the human body) has increased and the understanding itself further abstracted."⁹ The motivation is simple. Amidst overwhelming complexity, where information may defeat humanism, Calame takes pencil in hand to construe the structures of our world.

How to represent global capitalism? Andreas Gursky's *Chicago, Mercantile Exchange* (1997), an over-sized, digitally produced photograph that captures for one breathless instant the frenetic paroxysm of the traders—gesturing, signaling, competing, communicating, calculating—the instantaneous flow of capital, offers a comparison. Gursky's spectacle is literal and reveals how the system uses vital human switches in a vast computerized network. Another Gursky image, *Stockholder Meeting, Diptych (Hauptversammlung)* (2001), presents an imaginary counterpart: a collaged acropolis of corporate deities—the logo-branded gods of multinational industry—atop Olympus. Such digitized fantasies capture the unrepresentability of the system in which we inevitably, predictably participate.

As the pituitary gland of global capitalism, the New York Stock Exchange's secretions determine and regulate the health of the transnational business body. By mapping this body's contours with the imprint of streets from three quintessentially American cities, Calame has produced a twenty-first-century panorama. The shorelines of rivers, outlines of forests, profiles of settlements, Indian encampments—this essential narrative scenery that punctuated the old landscape has been converted into myriad linear networks, the pedestrian, seemingly inconsequential stains that perpetually permeate the visible surface of cities. "Capitalism forms when the flow of unqualified wealth encounters the flow of unqualified labor and conjugates with it," Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari write in *A Thousand Plateaus*, their philosophical diagnosis of the historical and political forces structuring modern society.¹⁰ It is tempting to read Calame's contours as mapping

not territories but flows—literally, perhaps, liquid assets. Capitalism, as understood by Deleuze and Guattari, has since its inception been the ultimate deterritorializing force, crossing borders and blurring national distinctions. Writing before Communism's implosion and the formation of the European Union, they anticipated an accurate definition of global capitalism: "...a multinational ecumenical organization, constituting a de facto supranational power...."¹¹

"NYSE: The world puts its stock in us." This self-congratulatory phrase adorns an entrance to the main trading floor, a billboard aimed at itself. Calame's title, *Secular Response II*, challenges this mantra, decoding the "ecumenical" aura with a secular, artistic response. It seems superfluous to note that the nation inscribes its trust in God on its money.¹² Elaborating upon *Secular Response I*, her Stock Exchange drawing radically asserts her subjectivity. From the casual process of stain selection through eventual retracing, Calame is dauntingly intent on inscribing her line.¹³ This line proceeds with an intimacy of handwriting. In what she calls "Working Drawings" Calame employs colored pencils, selecting a different color for each stain. On square sheets of Mylar she follows the itinerary of her shapes, many of which extend beyond the edge, elaborating them across a varied, indulgent spectrum. Each sheet is a viewfinder, a tile within a much larger matrix of stain shapes. Drawing is her way to assert an order, extract an essence. In this regard, with its linear expressive intensity, Calame's work relates to projects of other artists similarly concerned with the life of lines: Ghada Amer's meandering embroidered thread works, where lines constantly suggest figurative possibilities, or Shahzia Sikander's intensely invested surfaces that incorporate aspects of language. Although these artists construe abstraction as incorporating legible figuration, Calame's work remains *abstract*. Her project, while deploying figuration, dwells in the realm of pure visual metaphor. Calame's use of tracing to produce a rigorously abstract-looking image, supplies narrative potency. The stains release their residual street histories and, through transcription, assume new identities. By converting prosaic stain into abstract line, her work chases modernism's old utopian dream, where painting escapes reference to become, as the art historian T.J. Clark notes, "a script none of us have read before."¹⁴ Of course, as postmodernism tirelessly teaches, we've seen and read every script, every code. Painting is recursive: it refers to the past, while holding out the prospect of a surprising future.

Calame displaces the old painting categories of landscape, nature and the body—everything that Pollock collapsed into his drip—with a slow action of drawing. While her myriad lines purport to represent stains, they actually, through transcription, signify other narratives. Her florid, carefully articulated lines that meander, vector, intersect and overlap, accrue meanings as they move from gallery to museum to church to Stock Exchange, tracing the pathways of our movements, thoughts, systems, beliefs—even, for lack of any better ascription, our democracy. Too picaresque? Perhaps because of its proximity to Ground Zero, the New York Stock Exchange drawing helps us contemplate, even embrace, such over-determined territory.

Recently Calame exhibited versions of her drawing at Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art and in a group exhibition at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University. In a New York gallery exhibition *Secular Response 2* will receive its third incarnation. These sites allow Calame to reiterate another part of the vast template and to articulate information from the stock exchange floor in paint. That this information is realized through the encompassing tracery of reified stains supplies her work with its peculiar potency, defining painting through residue rather than assertion.