

INTRODUCTION

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Ingrid Calame's intricate, highly-coloured paintings and drawings have a specific, if abstracted relationship to the world. They all begin with Calame tracing marks, stains and cracks on the ground in various urban locations. Back in the studio, she combines, layers and retraces the tracings before transforming them into drawings in coloured pencil or pure pigment and paintings in enamel or, more recently, oil paint. The works that result from this singular process are beautiful and intelligent abstractions. Displayed in a gallery, they retain their connection with the world outside at several removes, exerting an oddly insistent presence.

The earliest works in this publication come from *SHPHLOO!*, a body of work which Calame spun around a group of stains on her studio floor. Each stain was named and classified within a particular taxonomy, then combined in works such as *Lup Bup Zhir POW!* (1994/1997; p.23), *Weuw Woop* (1994/98; p.24) and *Trump.p...p* (1997; p.25). The works are titled to reflect the stains from which they are assembled, the titles functioning as a kind of working drawing, holding the stains in a logic particular to the work in question.

In 1997, Calame moved outside the studio, and started to work with marks on the street in downtown Los Angeles. Taking the work outside inevitably altered her working process. The stains on her studio floor had been made by her, although not deliberately in order to provide interesting subjects for tracing (they were the by-products of earlier work). Outside, several layers of control and clarity were removed. Calame chose the location – in the beginning the streets outside her studio – and the specific marks to trace, but on the pavement a wealth of detail opened up, as well as a more rigorously indexical relationship between work and world. The detail brought choices: what to trace, how to trace it, where to stop. The indexicality brought responsibility: how was Calame to take account of the history of these marks she was transferring into her art?

A work like *OM splink* (1997; p.26) provides one answer. A painting in enamel on aluminium, it stakes out its territory in the real world at least three times. Formally, it depends on a re-combination of tracings made on a pavement in L.A. Its colours come from somewhere else, observed in the world but not necessarily when and where the tracings were made (the colours in *Vu-eyp? Vu-eyp? Vueyp?*

Vu-eyp? (2002; p.57) are those of Calame's pet parrot, though the tracings, clearly, are not). Its title is a phonetic transcription of sounds overheard on the street, but again not necessarily while making the tracing. These three elements at once anchor the painting in the time and place of its making and free it from it – its primary relationship is with the collection of layered tracings assembled by Calame into what she calls a 'constellation' and from which she would have made a working drawing for the painting, and its primary identity is as an essentially abstract painting. Calame began to make working drawings from constellations of tracings to replace the taxonomic titling of *SHPHLOO!*, acknowledging the indexicality of the work's relationship to the marks in the world which give it its origin while asserting her agency in transcribing them.

Calame's early paintings are two feet and then four feet square, reminiscent of a sample square thrown over a patch of ground by a biologist in order to count and classify what lives or grows within it. She did make work on a larger scale: *Spalunk* (1997; p.29), *sspsps...* *UM biddle BOP* (1997; pp.30–31) and *b-b-b, rr gR-UF!b-b-b* (1999; pp.38–39) are paintings on vast sheets of Mylar that increase successively in scale, painting by painting, the size of each determined by the size of the gallery wall for which it was first made. As the paintings got bigger, the problematic question of where to stop tracing or constellating began to frustrate Calame. While she was reconciled to the fact that she could only ever capture some of the stains and marks by which she was confronted every day, she felt there needed to be a more rigorous reason to bring a constellation to a spatial conclusion, to define an edge, declare a part a whole and make something which could be exhibited as a finished work. Her solution was *Secular Response*, a project in three parts which involved making constellations of marks traced outside in one place, inside in another, in order to make works destined to be shown in a third. *Secular Response 1* constellated tracings made in L.A. into Calame's hometown church in suburban New York. Shown as large wall drawings in the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and elsewhere, the final works were structured by the church's floor plan, bringing a new logic to the metonymic transaction (part for whole) they enacted with urban L.A. *Secular Response 2*

brought tracings made on Wall Street and in L.A. and Las Vegas into the New York Stock Exchange. On the wall in (among other places) the Kunstverein Hannover, the circles of the trading floor provided a new rhythm to the tracings. (As an aside, the power of the indexical relationship Calame's work has with the world is such that, while she was granted permission to work in the NYSE, they were concerned at the idea of bringing tracings made in Las Vegas into the building: the connection between gambling and trading must not be made, even at this abstract level). *Secular Response 3* layered tracings made by the L.A. River into the Clark Telescope Dome of the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. Shown at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the round structure of the observatory again brought a new spatial logic to the potentially inchoate tracings. The buildings in which Calame made the constellations for the three parts of *Secular Response* exemplify religion, finance and science – systems by which we order and make sense of the world. By appropriating these systems to her own, Calame hijacked our conventional understanding of how people and ideas may be organized through space, diverting the flow of information for her own ends.

Secular Response settled for Calame the problem of where to stop, providing a conceptual logic as well as a pictorial rhythm for her paintings. It also convinced her of the value of maintaining in a finished work a link to the location of the tracings from which the work was made. *Secular Response 3* was titled with the location of both its tracings and its constellations. Subsequent works, though they were constellated in the studio, retain this geographical link between work and world, substituting information about the place of the tracing for the earlier aural link to the outside. Following *Secular Response*, Calame made tracings at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and at three locations in Buffalo: the ArcelorMittal Steel Shipping Building, Perry Street Projects wading pool, and the Albright Knox Art Gallery parking lot. The works resulting from these tracing expeditions – the sweeping circles of *2005 Indy 500 Victory Donut: Traces of Dan Wheldon* (2007; pp.70–71); the dilapidated numbers in *ArcelorMittal Steel Shipping Building One, Right Nos. 274, 275, 277* (2010; p.114); the delicate filigree of *Perry Street Projects Wading Pool, Buffalo, New York, 1* (2010; pp.121, 122–123) – speak simultaneously of the work and the world, as we as viewers learn to read them.

Calame combines and re-combines tracings, continually developing her lexicon of marks. The most recent body of work in this publication, a suite of six drawings made in 2011 for the exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery that this book is published to accompany, brings together marks from the L.A. River, the ArcelorMittal Steel Shipping Building and the Perry Street Projects wading pool. The

drawings move in and out of abstraction, the subtle, circular, repetitive detail of the wading pool marks in work such as *#349 Drawing (Tracing from the Perry Street Projects Wading Pool, Buffalo, NY)* (2011; pp.2–3, 19) contrasting with the pull to legibility of the traced numbers from the ArcelorMittal shipping bays and the graffiti tags Calame found on the concrete banks of the L.A. River and combined in works such as *#328 Drawing (Tracings from the L.A. River and ArcelorMittal Steel)* (2011; pp.10–11).

The insistent figuration of the tracings from the ArcelorMittal building and the L.A. River relates of course to the types of marks for which they are an index. In these works Calame is dealing with marks that have been deliberately made; by the steel factory to designate loading bays, and by the taggers to voice their desires and dissent. Not illustrated in this publication is the new wall drawing that will accompany these new drawings. In a vast sweep of pure pigment, 'pounced' onto the wall through tiny holes pricked in a transfer drawing, tracings from the L.A. River are brought together to make *L.A. River at Clearwater Street, 2006–8*. The drawing, like other recent wall drawings in James Cohan Gallery in New York and the Monterey Museum of Art in California, is reminiscent perhaps of the three much earlier large Mylar works. Like *sspsps...UM biddle BOP, L.A. River at Clearwater Street 2006–8* stops when the wall for which it is intended stops – the imperatives of the architectural detailing of the wall at The Fruitmarket Gallery are a factor in Calame's decision-making process when preparing the transfer drawing. Only one factor, however: *L.A. River at Clearwater Street, 2006–8* has a much clearer internal logic than *sspsps...UM biddle BOP*, a logic that comes both from the innate figuration of the source marks and the surety with which Calame handles them. Though figurative, the taggers' marks are subject to Calame's process quite as much as any more random spillages and stains, though now her decisions are made out on the street as much as back in the studio. *L.A. River at Clearwater Street, 2006–8* is a single layer, unconstellated tracing, its composition determined over time out in the world rather than back in the studio. The process of abstraction – of turning marks in the street into lines on a drawing – has developed to quite a degree right there at the point of tracing.

In its oscillation between the figuration of the source tracings and the abstraction of Calame's treatment of them, *L.A. River at Clearwater Street 2006–8* enacts the central paradox of Calame's art. In making paintings from tracings, in deciding precisely what to trace, how to trace it and where to stop, Calame is both preserving and destroying the marks she finds in the world, taking account of their history and engulfing it with her own.