

Diapason

January 2011

Swiss mountain transport systems

Ernst Karel and Helen Mirra

68.5 minutes

*Swiss mountain transport systems* is an audio composition created specifically for Diapason's eight-channel system, constructed of location recordings and percussion. The location recordings were made during the summer and fall of 2008 while we were in residence in Basel, Switzerland. Over the course of frequent walks in the mountains in different parts of Switzerland, Karel recorded the various transport systems which are specific to mountainous terrain -- gondolas, funiculars, and chairlifts -- of different types, of different vintages, and accessing different elevations. Recorded with high-quality microphones and preamps from within these mostly enclosed mobile environments, the sounds include mechanical drones, intermittent percussiveness, and transient acoustic glimpses of a vast surrounding landscape inhabited by humans and other animals. The project builds on a performance that we gave in Kyoto, Japan, in January 2009, in the context of Mirra's exhibition, *Case study: Swiss bird houses*, at Taka Ishii Gallery. For that live performance, Mirra played drums with Karel doing a live mix of unprocessed recordings of the mountain transport systems. Mirra subsequently recorded the percussion parts in the studio using multiple microphones in multiple configurations. The minimal percussion activates and modifies the contours of the listening space, as it contrasts with, complements, interrupts, and augments the sounds of transport.

Wengernalp	cogwheel railway
Männlichen - Grindelwald	4-seat gondola
Fräkmuntegg - Pilatus Kulm	4-seat gondola
Simplon Pass	helicopter
Maschgenkamm - Obertetzen	4-seat gondola
Obertetzen - Untertetzen	8-seat gondola
Scuol - Motta Naluns	4-seat gondola
Motta Naluns - Scuol	" "
Dallenwil - Wiesenberg	4-seat aerial tramway [Pendelbahn]

Saturdays, January 8, 15, 22, and 29, from 2 p.m. - 8 p.m.

<http://ek.klingt.org>  
<http://hmirra.net>

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882 Third Avenue, 10th Floor, Sunset Park, Brooklyn NY

29.04.2009 - 20.06.2009  
Meyer Riegger Galerie, Berlin

*33 Bergwanderwege*  
Helen Mirra

project note

I've been in Switzerland for the past year. I spent a lot of time in the mountains, hiking and collecting rocks. I set out while occupied with the idea of pan-psychism: that consciousness, of a sort, exists at the level of the atom. This is not unrelated to perceiving the transference of one's own experiences and feelings onto one's surroundings, onto the world of things.

The one thing on the wall in my room in Basel was a postcard reproduction of the poster for the Robert Bresson film *Lancelot du Lac*. It's a simple clunky cartoonish drawing of a knight falling off a horse (both are overturned) and vomiting blood. It isn't so much grotesque as it is matter of fact.

Difficult to say how I chose particular rocks, though it was easy to tell why most of them weren't tempting - too small, too round, too sharp, too impressive, too whatever. Their maximum size was determined by what I could carry in my backpack. I wasn't sure what I would do with them, but the task generated momentum to go for the hikes - that there was some extra labor involved, non-essential to the wanders. When I took a rock, I marked the location on the trail map, and I put a camera on the ground in the same spot and took a photograph, ostensibly of what the rock saw from that place.

I placed the rocks on folded Swiss military blankets as staging grounds. I noticed that the size of the folded blanket was the same size as an unfolded trail map.

Helen Mirra  
Berlin, April 2009

## Taka Ishii Gallery, Kyoto

### **Helen Mirra**

*Case study: Swiss bird houses*

January 10 - February 14, 2009

Opening reception: Saturday, January 10, 18:00-20:00

Live performance: Saturday, January 10, 17:00- \*entrance free

Taka Ishii Gallery Kyoto, is pleased to announce our second exhibition, the debut solo exhibition in Japan of American artist Helen Mirra. Mirra, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is presently an artist in residence at the Stiftung Laurenz-Haus, Basel, Switzerland. Mirra has exhibited extensively - a selection of solo exhibitions includes DAAD Galerie, Berlin, Dallas Museum of Art, Berkeley Art Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York and the Renaissance Society, Chicago; a selection of group exhibitions includes the National Museum, Oslo, MARTa Herford, Germany, White Columns, New York, Kunstverein Hamburg, the 50th Venice Biennale, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam.

Helen Mirra's exhibition consists of a series of 18 color photographs. There are nine images, and each image has been printed twice, once in reverse. The informal photographs are of trees in the woods with a birdhouse among them. The exhibition is in both spaces of the gallery, with each photograph out of sight from its mirror image.

Mirra made the photographs at Waldau, a psychiatric clinic outside of Bern, Switzerland, once home to writer Robert Walser. Walser's mikrogrammen - extremely small hand-written texts - served as the foundation for a series of Mirra's recent paintings on scrap plywood.

This photographic series is distinct within Mirra's practice. Where Mirra's works typically involve a reductive abstraction - Mirra consistently employs muted colors of a tone referencing natural phenomenon in a series of wall and floor works presented in a serial manner, often incorporating scrap material or found text presented in an indexical form - the present work begins with photographic representation and ultimately prompts a movement towards abstraction. The physical distance between each exhibited photograph and its double - Mirra specifying, generally, that it should not be possible to view both images at the same time from the same standing point - introduces a conceptual gap as an essential element of the project. The content of each image, when understood within Mirra's and, more generally, a contemporary context, leads towards the consideration of further abstract issues of a photographic and wider interest.

Galerie Nordenhake Stockholm  
February 17 - March 23, 2008

Helen Mirra  
*Quarry*

Galerie Nordenhake is pleased to present American artist Helen Mirra's first solo exhibition at the gallery as well as her first show in Sweden. Mirra recently completed a residency at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway in September 2007. She will be exhibiting works made during her five-month sojourn in Norway. Tracing the rugged Scandinavian landscape, Mirra employs prevalent, though often unnoticed, materials to investigate the essential and mutable physicality of things and beings.

The exhibition includes works made with alpine plants that Mirra collected while above the Arctic Circle, which are pressed and labeled as is common for both scientific and amateur herbariums, though the plants here are subtle combinations of more than one species. Mirra's attention to the correct identification of the plants, despite the idiosyncratic nature of the project, suggests a sympathy with the 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet Emily Dickinson's own herbarium that she assembled as an adolescent. A method of drawing as much as evidence of a sincere attention to a collection of humble plant specimens, Mirra's herbarium is indicative of her experience of the visual and the textual as simultaneous.

Mirra's preoccupation with the materiality of how things live in the world can be seen in her floor sculptures, made with rocks she collected while exploring the Norwegian landscape, and pieces of folded, well-worn wool and cotton clothes from her wardrobe. The rocks are also painted, unnoticeable to the eye but importantly to the project, as Mirra is not stressing the natural as untouched and the cultural as its opposite, but instead is engaging the always-active relationship between them. Some of the rocks consist mainly of serpentinite, a green mineral, ubiquitous in the earth's core. Many of the rocks have lichen growing on them, unimpressively but determinedly. The hues of browns and greens, act as an ordering principle in each arrangement, the colors of the rocks and lichens similar to that of the fabrics, implying sympathy between the materials and therefore their inhabitants. The clothing is a stage for the rock, and the rock is holding down the clothing. The glacial, geologic time of the rocks coexists and contrasts with the brevity of the clothed person's life, while the lichen's life span is gauged relatively between the two - growing approximately one millimeter a year, and able to live for several centuries, if provided with a minimum of fresh air. The sculptures are small, not unlike bonsai trees, formally austere and scale shifting.

Helen Mirra was born in 1970 in Rochester, New York. Mirra completed her MFA at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 1996, and has received awards from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, and Artadia: the Fund for Art and Dialogue, and she was a guest of the DAAD Künstlerprogramm in Berlin in 2005-2006. Her solo exhibitions have taken place at the Berkeley Art Museum, Meyer Riegger Galerie, Karlsruhe, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Renaissance Society, Chicago, Galerie Nelson, Paris, Donald Young Gallery, Chicago, Peter Freeman, New York, DAAD Galerie, Berlin, and the Dallas Art Museum, among others. Recent projects include the large-scale public project *Instance the Determination*, which indexes works by John Dewey and Jane Addams, at the University of Chicago through 2009, and the book *Cloud, the, 3*, published by JRP Ringier/Christoph Keller Editions. She will be an artist-in-residence at IASPIS in Stockholm in 2009. Mirra is Associate Professor at Harvard University, and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

09.03.2007 - 14.04.2007

## Helen Mirra

### Waldau

Meyer Riegger is pleased to present Waldau, Helen Mirra's third solo exhibition with the gallery. Waldau is the name of the psychiatric clinic outside Bern, Switzerland, where the writer Robert Walser lived for a time. Mirra has recently been researching Walser, and specifically the Bleistiftgebiet (from the pencil area), and three paintings in the exhibition take their titles from his late novel "der Räuber".

Last year Mirra was a guest of the DAAD artist-in-residence program in Berlin, and was working in a studio on the edge of the Grunewald, the large forest in the westernmost part of the city. The sculptures in the exhibition were made in this context, with fragments of shipping pallets, and pine cones picked up from the forest floor.

These materials appear at ease with each other, while they also evidence their difference – the pallet wood is in a past tense - it shows marks of its previous use value, in commerce and the shipping of goods, and the pine cones, covered in seed scales, are a potential before. Rough, square cuts from the industrial chop saw contrast with the fine, but out-of-square, cuts that Mirra has made with a Japanese hand saw. Mirra's studio practice involves no power tools, and the tone of the works reflects the methods of their making. The small sculptures are quiet, and modestly contemplative, but their benign, impoverished appearance may indeed be misleading: they challenge the idea of what critical work can look like. The sculptures share a grammar, while each makes sense differently. Mirra's work is often referred to as poetic, and indeed Mirra engages quite directly in relation to poetry, but as shown here, her interest is less in the lyrical than in the metrical.

With a keen focus, Mirra's work engages structural and conceptual logics, resulting in a makeshift and uneasy beauty.

Helen Mirra's recent solo shows include Galerie Nelson, Paris (2006), daadgalerie, Berlin(2006), the Dallas Museum of Art (2004), and the UC Berkeley Art Museum (2003). This year she also completed a large-scale public project on the University of Chicago campus. She lives in Cambridge, MA.

Meyer Riegger Galerie  
Klauprechtstr. 22, D - 76137 Karlsruhe  
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Helen Mirra

*Wolkendecke*  
(cloud cover)

military surplus hospital blankets

2006

Another abstract representation of one of the basic elements of the 'natural' world.

Thinking about the conjunction of our abstract ideas about, and our concrete participation in, the world. Situated between the poetic and the problematic, the lyrical and the critical. The sculpture incorporates the possibility that people will walk on it, though does not necessitate this, and signifies our relation to the environment without being either metaphoric or directly symbolic.

For further information please contact:  
meyer riegger  
at Art 37 Basel  
Hall 2.1 Booth D6  
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The Franke Institute for the Humanities  
1100 E. 57th Street  
The University of Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois 60637  
773 702-8274

PRESS RELEASE

project: Helen Mirra: *Instance the determination*

dates: April 27, 2006 through June 2009

related event:

Conference session, "The Disciplines and the Arts", 4-6pm  
with Bill Brown, W.J.T. Mitchell, and Helen Mirra  
Reception, 6-7pm  
Saturday, April 29, 2006  
Swift Hall, 1025 East 58th Street

As part of a three-year Mellon Project that concludes with the conference, "The Fate of Disciplines," The Franke Institute for the Humanities is pleased to announce a public artwork by Helen Mirra.

Mirra's project, *Instance the determination*, takes the form of thirty brief segments of text, each painted directly on the wall in locations dispersed throughout the academic buildings on the main quadrangle of the University of Chicago campus. These texts are derived from indexes that Mirra has created from two books by authors closely connected to the histories of the University of Chicago and the city of Chicago: John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* (1925) and Jane Addams' *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907). Dewey and Addams were colleagues and close friends. Addams founded the Hull House on Chicago's Near West Side in 1889, and Dewey taught at the University of Chicago from 1894 until 1904. By turning the index form into a kind of poetry, as well as taking it off the page, Mirra produces a remarkable interaction between the practices of art and the practices of scholarship. Recontextualized and architecturally integrated, the mined texts behave not as signifiers back to the source texts, but instead point out into the world at large. They are located in stairwells and hallways in order to be encountered within ordinary movement through the University, and are thereby references for everyday experience. The entries, in their textual isolation and particular sites, come across variously as enigmatic, germane, anomalous, and poignant.

Index entries are located in the following buildings: Classics, Gates-Blake, Cobb, Swift, Jones Laboratory, Kent, Anatomy, Ryerson, Eckhart, Walker, Kelly-Beecher-Green, Foster, Social Sciences, Stuart, East and West Harper, Wieboldt and Haskell. On a wall at the Franke Institute for the Humanities, located in the Regenstein Library building, can be found the painted citations for the source books. Campus buildings are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Helen Mirra's work has been widely exhibited internationally, including group exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Basel, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam, and the 50th Venice Biennale, and solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Renaissance Society, Chicago, and the DAAD Galerie, Berlin. Mirra was Senior Lecturer in Visual Arts and Cinema & Media Studies at the University of Chicago from 2001-2005, and is Assistant Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard. This project is supported by a UChicagoArts grant from the Arts Planning Council and the Franke Institute for the Humanities of the University of Chicago. The Mellon Project on "New Perspectives on the Disciplines: Comparative Studies in Higher Education" is sponsored by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and coordinated by the Franke Institute for the Humanities, directed by James Chandler.

Galerie Nelson  
59 rue Quincampoix  
75004 Paris

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## Helen Mirra Käuzchensteig

25 février – 7 avril 2006

La Galerie Nelson est heureuse de présenter la première exposition personnelle en France de l'artiste américaine Helen Mirra. A la croisée de plusieurs influences artistiques incluant l'Arte Povera et Fluxus, cette jeune artiste crée des œuvres à partir de matériaux simples comme le feutre, les vêtements usés, des morceaux de bois récupérés, des palettes de transport. Ces éléments généralement cousus, teintés ou assemblés, sont disposés au sol sous forme d'installations ou accrochés au mur. Ecrits, dessins, musiques expérimentales, films et installations sonores font également partie de son travail. Ses travaux ont été montrés lors d'expositions personnelles aux Etats-Unis : en 2001, à la Renaissance Society ; en 2002, au Whitney Museum of Art et en 2004–2005, au Dallas Museum of Art. Elle a également participé à de nombreuses expositions de groupe en Europe depuis les années 90 : au Kunstverein de Hamburg en 2002 puis à la Kunsthalle de Bâle l'année suivante. En 2003, elle a également participé à la 50ème Biennale de Venise.

Les pièces que nous présentons à la galerie ont été réalisées alors qu'Helen Mirra est en résidence à Berlin depuis presque un an, d'où l'utilisation d'un ensemble de palettes récupérées à proximité d'une voie de chemin de fer en Allemagne. Disposées au sol perpendiculairement au mur, superposées ou seules, ces palettes sont peintes par l'artiste dans des tons gris-vert, proches de leur couleur d'origine. Toutes les couleurs utilisées par l'artiste sont des teintes naturelles volontairement limitées : bleu, vert, brun, beige et gris. La géométrie des ensembles composés, leur situation dans l'espace, et les irrégularités du bois forment un ensemble homogène. Ses travaux proposent différents niveaux de lecture : les palettes sont plus spécifiquement associées au transport et donc au voyage également. Mirra crée un nouveau paysage à partir de ces objets en revenant à leur essence propre : le bois. Elle les peint, les vernit, tout en conservant les éventuelles traces de leur premier usage comme les traces d'huile, révélant discrètement leur passé et leur histoire. Elle cherche ainsi à faire ressortir la beauté intrinsèque de ces éléments. Elle travaille souvent à partir du mélange de références : historique, géographique, philosophique. Les palettes trouvées en Allemagne étaient proches de la voie de chemin de fer qui conduisait les Berlinoises de Grünewald vers des camps. Référence discrète à l'Histoire mais également à l'environnement d'où elles proviennent : la forêt.

Helen Mirra est une artiste minimaliste et conceptuelle dont les œuvres complexes, subtiles et poétiques, traduisent une réflexion nouvelle à chaque fois. L'économie de moyens mis en œuvre dans son travail contraste avec la richesse de l'interprétation. Le recours à des médiums de récupération « naturels » (loin des matériaux industriels), à des techniques du passé comme l'usage de la machine à écrire, à des textes philosophiques du siècle dernier, tout cela donnant naissance à une forme de nostalgie – sans aucune référence romantique – qui habite l'œuvre.

## **HELEN MIRRA**

### **Laws of clash, 247**

May 26 through July 2005

Donald Young Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Helen Mirra.

For her second solo exhibition at the gallery, Mirra presents a new body of work entitled laws of clash, 247. The title comes from an index Mirra made for a collection of essays by the philosopher William James, which was used to create works for this project. Contrary to the standard columnar index format, Mirra presents her index entries as typed text on hand painted 16 mm cotton bands of various lengths. Installed in a single organic line around the gallery, each band contains the index entries for a specific letter of the alphabet, but are not presented in alphabetical order, rather according to size, largest to smallest. The subtle variations in the color of the bands, a limited pallet of browns, denotes their hand painted nature which, together with the slight shifting of the height of the works, is evocative of the earth and nature in sympathy with the ideas referred to in the texts from which the index was made.

Neither poetry nor prose, the index form has the appearance of objectivity, while relying on Mirra's decisions as to what is included and how entries are notated. Certain index entries seem quite customary and objective such as "nature, 20, 41-44, 56" or "rationalism, 12, 30" whereas the bands also include atypical and wordy entries such as "express a tolerably definitive philosophic attitude in a very untechnical way, vii" or perhaps more personal as with "Rochester, NY, 301" the city of the artist's birth. It is not Mirra's intention that this work be seen as a supplement or a proposal for an actual functional index to the text, but is instead a way for her to create a body of work based on source material which is of interest to her. Mirra first began working in the 16 mm band format in relation to film and chose to employ this method of presentation for this work as a way to evoke the temporality of film. Motion is an integral element to the experience of this work as the physical act of circling the gallery brings the text to light. As the viewer moves through the gallery reading the index entries, an abstraction of the book is unveiled as mediated through the artist's experience of the original text.

Helen Mirra's work has been widely exhibited internationally, including group exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Basel, Kunstverein Hamburg and the 50 th Venice Biennale together with one-person exhibitions at The Renaissance Society, Chicago, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and the Dallas Art Museum. Beginning this summer Mirra will be an Artist-in-residence at the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), Berlin and upon her return to the US in 2006 she will commence her position as assistant professor at Harvard University.

notes for exhibition *Laws of Clash*, Donald Young Gallery

Each of these works is made with an excerpt from an index I wrote for a book of essays by the philosopher William James. (*The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, Longmans, Green & Co., 1897) This project is related to a previous endeavor, when I wrote an index for W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*. That project had the novelty of being an index for a novel. This present work is, in a way, more straightforward—since it is not uncommon for a nonfiction book to have an index—and therefore is perhaps stranger as artwork. In neither case am I proposing my index as a supplement to the book; instead, it is a way for me to work close to source material which interests me. Neither poetry nor prose, the index form has the appearance of objectivity, while relying on my decisions of what is included and how entries are notated.

The visual aspect of the thin line of each work is a reduction, though to me, neither incomplete nor essential. The works are painted in a limited palette of browns, to make them as earthly as possible, in sympathy with the ideas referred to in the texts. When I first began working with this 16 millimeter wide cotton material in 1996, its iconic relation to motion picture film extended to an analogy between the experience of each medium. I have continued to work with the banding as a way to enact a spatialization of temporality, since the banding refers to film, and temporality is inherent in that medium.

As visual and textual notation, the works are in hand with James' concept that "the simple classification of things is, on the one hand, the best possible theoretic possibility, but is, on the other, a most miserable and inadequate substitute for the fulness of truth" ('The Sentiment of Rationality,' 1879).

Helen Mirra

May 2005

21.05.2004 - 11.07.2004

## Helen Mirra

### Miscellaneous papers

We are pleased to announce the second solo exhibition of the American artist Helen Mirra. In Europe her works have recently been seen at Kunsthalle Basel, Kunstverein Hamburg and at the 50th Venice Biennial.

Helen Mirra's work consists of writing, drawing, film, sound installation as well as sewn and woven objects. In a sense her artistic interest is comparable with the interest of a geologist. Her work reveals different levels of cultural, political and historical landscapes, integrated into her personal manner of expression. An essential aspect of her work, besides adapting strategies of minimal and conceptual art is her experimental use of language. This exhibition in our gallery, "Miscellaneous papers", consists of a group of new text works.

Influenced by and excerpting from philosophical, scientific, historical and experimental literature she creates new texts, typed on 16mm wide strip of cotton with a manual typewriter. The material's width refers to 16mm film stock. As the basis for this project Mirra worked with the novel "Ringe des Saturn" by W.G. Sebald in its English translation. The novel traverses a journey through myriad socio-cultural occurrences, with a distinct tendency towards crises. Mirra made a working index for the book, not as a suggested appendix but as a tool to place the new texts in close affiliation with the novel. In contrast to the apparent objectivity of the index form is Mirra's selection of particular subjects, which are shown neither in prose nor poetry. The dirty white of the works reminds one of the pages of a frequently read book. Also, the aloofness of the white line on the white wall raises the tension of the historical density and emotional weight of the text that the new text refers to. The irregularity of the type-written text gives every word a substantial materiality. Since the viewer must walk while reading to follow the horizontal line of text, the course of language becomes a physical condition. In this sense the text bandings of "Miscellaneous papers" create an abstract landscape which is both static and fluctuating.

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PETER FREEMAN, INC.  
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## Helen Mirra Hewn third

dates: extended: 4 March - 17 April 2004

Hewn third (the title both of this exhibition and of an individual work) is Helen Mirra's first exhibition in New York since her solo installation at the Whitney Museum in 2002. The current show consists of paintings recently exhibited at the Berkeley Art Museum as 65 Instants. All sixty-five paintings in this series are made from reclaimed shipping pallet planks, sawn to the length of Mirra's forearm plus the width of her hand. For the museum installation, these were shown in a continuous band. In this New York show, groupings from the former project have taken on their final form: some planks are individual works; in other cases, groups of five make up a single piece. Since each plank in the Berkeley show was individually named, groups of multiple planks form texts, and groupings of planks generate new linked titles. The repetition of similar rectangles at eye height around the room leads one to read shifts of surface and color from painting to painting as visual text as well.

Related language works form part of "Hewn third." Words typed on 16mm wide cotton cloth dyed with watercolor, these works share the brevity of the planks, but present their texts as content rather than title. Mirra has used different combinations of these lines of text in past projects, as a constant editing and revisiting of text is a crucial part of her studio practice. Indeed, decision-making, informed by philosophical and literary practices, generates her work, which derives from ideas of language and of landscape, from her perception of the interrelatedness and overlap of ideas, rather than from systems of abstraction.

Add to these two kinds of work a third: a narrow, wavering band of knitted wool, roughly the size and shape of the wooden planks. Once again, a reading is demanded: the nubbly twisted strands seem purposefully marked and indented like cuneiform script.

From these quiet, restrained works emanates an extra-ordinary power, which may come from Mirra's unusual marriage of shining intelligence and a devoted compassion for the natural world. The works are beautiful, they are almost humble in their chosen simplicity of means—but they are intensely felt and very smart.

Helen Mirra's recent solo shows include Berkeley Art Museum (2004), Stephen Friedman Gallery, London (2003), The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2002) and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (2002). She was also included in the Italian Pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Chicago.

## Helen Mirra

21 March – 19 April 2003

Preview Thursday 20 March 2003 6–8pm

Stephen Friedman Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in London by Chicago-based artist **Helen Mirra**.

Helen Mirra's varied practice includes work in sculpture, film, video, language, and sound. The artist's works often refer to the earth, sea and sky through the consistent use of a green, blue and brown palette. Throughout her practice, an interest in the relationship between the natural world and the people who inhabit it motivate works that are elegant and poignant. A further interest in both cinema history and film structure manifests most explicitly in an ongoing group of works made of lengths of 16mm cloth, which Mirra thinks of as "silent silent films".

In the front gallery, a large, minimalist textile form shares the space with a line of text which marks a horizon on the gallery walls. The floor sculpture *Sky-wreck* is constructed of large triangles cut from a coarse indigo cloth. A fragment of a flattened polyhedral form, *Sky-wreck* materializes an idea of the sky as firmament, literally mapping a section. A dystopic Paul Celan poem and the utopian experiments of Buckminster Fuller are reference points in this sculpture. The text follows the actions of the violent Babylonian tomboy "The Mountain Girl" from *Intolerance* (D.W. Griffith, 1916); the viewer walking along the length of the work stands in for the movement of film running through a projector.

In the back gallery, Mirra will present *Arrow*, a sound and video work in which images of the Mountain Girl, played by Constance Talmadge, appear briefly out of complete darkness. The work is made with the structure and timing of a thunderstorm: the flashes of image have the irregular lengths of lightning, and guitar and bass parallel rain and thunder. The work can be seen as a meditation on violence both as natural phenomena as well as in its human manifestations.

Helen Mirra's has exhibited in the U.S. and Europe. Recent solo shows have been held at The Renaissance Society, Chicago and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Group shows in 2003 include *Paper Sculpture* at the Sculpture Center, New York, USA; *Land, Land!*, at Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland and in 2002, *Art Projects*, curated by James Rondeau, Art Basel, Miami, USA; *Here and Now*, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago; *Sudden Glory*, CCAC Institute, San Francisco, USA; and in 2001, *Tirana Biennial*, Albania.

Forthcoming exhibition: **Yoshitomo Nara**, 2 May – 31 May 2003

Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday 10am–6pm and Saturday 11am–5pm

For further details please contact Kirsten MacDonald Bennett on +44 20 7494 1434

Helen Mirra  
*Nicola*

2 November - 20 December 2002

Galleria Francesca Kaufmann is presenting the first solo show of Helen Mirra in Italy. Based in Chicago, she was born in Rochester, New York in 1970.

In her method of working, Helen Mirra privileges similitudes between historical characters and events, geographical features, and self-referenced details and subjects which interest her from both a social and personal point of view. After attentively researching her subject matter, she constructs visual and auditory analogies, and relies on the geographical and the historical in order not to slip into too easy a self-involvement which would result in sentimentalism. This very poetic method recalls concrete poetry. From a visual point of view, her interest in nature and her tendency to construct site-specific works suggest the influences of Arte Povera and Fluxus.

For the show at galleria francesca kaufmann she has explored the personal letters of the Italian-American anarchist Nicola Sacco to trace a discourse upon social awareness and rebellion, ruling class systems, and a sense of displacement in contrast with the intimacy of one's life. They were written while in prison in Boston, Massachusetts, awaiting trial and re-trial for the robbery-murder he and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were accused of and ultimately executed for. As Helen Mirra approached the letters of Nicola Sacco she discovered that their non-fluency in English showed an involuntary poetic potentiality resulting from the lack of grammatical rules which formally matched his social rebellion towards the ruling classes. Excerpts from the letters are translated from their awkward English into an even more awkward Italian by Mirra (who does not speak Italian) with the aid of bilingual dictionaries, shifting what was orthographically incorrect into the grammatically peculiar. Through this process of fragmentation and amateur translation, instead of clarifying the letters, they are transmuted. Shifting deliberately from the specifics of the story of Sacco and Vanzetti, Mirra demonstrates the difficulty of expression and simultaneously makes evident possibilities for poetic expression. The texts are typed onto long, narrow cotton bands which run over the walls of the gallery, purposely placed to make the viewer walk and read to understand the subject. This creates a connection between the work and the viewer and a physical effort which should resolve in a parallel mental effort of understanding.

The small space of the gallery allows Helen Mirra to increase the intimacy of the texts and also the contrast between private life and public social life.

A commissioned installation entitled Declining Interval Lands is currently at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The inspiration behind this project is the history of the plague which affected the American elm trees over the past two centuries as related to colonization and environmental destruction.

For further information or the request of photographic material do not hesitate to contact the gallery.

Galleria Francesca Kaufmann  
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Art Statements, Art Basel 2001

Helen Mirra

*Miller's Views*

There are four stories in a grain mill. The sail arm is a wood armature, and depending on the weather, the canvas sails are unfurled partially or completely, to catch enough wind to turn the sail arms. As you go higher in the mill, the mill sail arm is closer to the window. The works are the size of the windows. The linen thread is the possible outlines of the sails at the three common positions. The sky, the mill arm (and the interior of the mill) are dark; the sail lines are where the light is- not in the sky (nature) or in the mill arm (labor) but in between, and unreliable. Each Mill View is of a repeating moment, as the sail arms rotate whenever the miller is at work, and the sky repeats on another, slower cycle. Mill measurements taken from Green's Mill, Nottingham. The sound piece is also of two cycles; the steady rhythm of the guitar (like the motion of the sail arms) was recorded with hand-held microphones which were slowly circling by the guitar, one always approaching while the other was receding (sky).

*Miller's Views*

75x100cm, indigo cotton cloth, acrylic on canvas, linen thread, wood frames

*Miller*

compact disc, stereo, 20 minutes

guitar and hand-rotated microphones

left wall:

miller's view of sail arm (lower left corner, from sack floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (lower right corner, from sack floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (lower edge, from sack floor window)

center wall:

miller's view of sail arm (right edge, from stone floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (left edge, from stone floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (left edge, from bin floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (right edge, from bin floor window)

right wall:

miller's view of sail arm (from sieve floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (top right corner, from sieve floor window)  
miller's view of sail arm (left edge, from sieve floor window)

Helen Mirra: beforsten

23. September - 4. November 2000

The gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Chicago-based artist Helen Mirra. This will be the artist's first solo show in Germany. She is a recipient of the 1999 Louis Comfort Tiffany award, and her work has been included in recent shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Her first solo museum exhibition will be in May 2001 at the Renaissance Society, Chicago.

For this show, Mirra has made a body of work specific to Meyer-Riegger Galerie's location on the edge of the Black Forest. The gallery walls have been painted moss green, and all of the wall works included are also green. The works are installed very close together, like trees in a forest. There is a group of eleven rubbings/drawings, each of a different pine needle cluster. Four other works include texts amateurishly translated into German from the original English, which first appeared on Mirra's 1999 music recording, *Along, Below*. Using a manual typewriter, these texts are transferred onto cotton banding, which is then sewn onto larger pieces of fabric. The content of the texts is obscured by the imperfectness of the German translation in a way that parallels both the subject of being in the forest and the way all the work in the show hides itself on the green walls. There are five embroidered grids, and one which is simply perforated, which are like handwork which was done in Friedrich Froebel's original Kindergarten system. Two abstract maps take the introduction of the railroad into the wilderness as their subject. The floor sculpture *All my clothes 1988-1998* is just that, Mirra's complete wardrobe for a ten year period. In its adherence to the limited palette of green, brown and blue it indicates an attempt to be incorporated into, or camouflaged in, the natural landscape.

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Helen Mirra  
Railroad Ties and Latitude Lines

June 1 through July 1, 2000

The gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by Chicago-based artist Helen Mirra. This will be the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. Her work has been included in recent shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and Jacob Fabricius, Copenhagen, Denmark, and she is a recipient of the 1999 Louis Comfort Tiffany Award. Upcoming exhibitions include Meyer Reigger Galerie, Karlsruhe, Germany, and ZKM, Karlsruhe.

The rough hewn minimalism of the works in this exhibition explore the pairing of travel and labor within the tropes of rail and ship transportation. In the entrance ramp the sound installation *Field Geometry* realizes the twenty visual/physical abstract materials Friedrich Froebel created in the mid-1800's for use in his newly developed Kindergarten. In the first room, a small hand-built model ship transforms the floor into a vast sea, and five canvas wall works textually reconstruct scenes from Buster Keaton's silent film *The Navigator*. In the second room, the artist has mapped out every seventh line of latitude, from the North to South Pole. These twenty six imaginary lines are realized at a scale of one inch to one degree longitude, in dyed 16 millimeter banding, corresponding in color to the surfaces of the earth (e.g., green on arable land, blue in sea). Also, using a floor loom, she has woven five large wool floor works which are projections of railroad ties laid on rock ground, not yet overlaid with rail. In these diverse forms, the artist tackles spatial expanses with structural rigor and an unusual intimacy.