

## Village Voice September 1, 2010

### Fall Guide

Robert Shuster

Ingrid Calame Finds Beauty in the Grime James Cohan Gallery hosts the artist's Swing Shift

An empty asphalt parking lot rates pretty high on the ugly scale, so it would seem rather improbable that a painter had chosen just such a spot—in the city of Buffalo, no less—for its beauty.

Mind you, Ingrid Calame, kneeling on the tar, wasn't exactly admiring the location. She was too busy peering down, as she often does, at the rough, dirty surface, where she was methodically tracing the outlines of grooves, cracks, spills, and stains. The "marks," painstakingly recorded on sheets of Mylar by Calame and her assistants, would become a set of diagrams for another series of the artist's signature paintings—abstract, glowing with a pop chromaticism, and derived from the accidental palimpsests that lie under our feet (on view in her show "Swing Shift" at the James Cohan Gallery starting September 10).

"The things I trace are generally completely abject," Calame admits. "No one would stop and look at them twice." But removed from their context, those unnoticed details—which have included tire imprints on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and graffiti covering the L.A. River's concrete banks—form intriguing networks of irregular shapes, striations, and sinuous paths. For each painting, Calame overlays several (sometimes dozens) of tracings from different locations, then transfers the complex composite onto a white aluminum panel. "It looks like a coloring-book drawing," she says, explaining how, as she paints, certain preferred sections emerge into the foreground. Because she treats the lines as boundaries, isolating her vivid colors within the enclosed areas, a completed panel often resembles an intricate, specially coded map. It's as if her close-up examinations of surfaces have revealed a microcosm of coasts, seas, and archipelagoes.

The new work, from tracings made during a residency at Buffalo's Albright-Knox Art Gallery, speaks more than ever to Calame's reverence for her sources. From the cracked bottom of an abandoned public-housing pool, "bizarre, beautiful marks" resembling cellular structures will stretch 20 feet across the gallery's wall—memorialized there as a simple chalk outline (transferred by old-fashioned pounce drawing). The paintings, marking a shift toward more recognizable forms, feature sets of blocky numerals, which came from tracings she made of stencils painted (many times over) on a steel plant's shipping dock. Prominent and brightly colored, the figures—symbolizing the working class—are enshrined like pop icons. "They really moved me," says the artist, her voice a little dreamy. "They were very human. There were a lot of layers of history in the numbers."

For Calame, 45, that sense of time—of things passing away—is a central theme. It was about 20 years ago, right after learning that her grandmother was dying, that

she first went outdoors to trace. "The things that happen on the ground embody loss somehow," she says, describing how connecting with L.A.'s streets helped her cope with death. She lets the idea spin outward. "If the world ended, how long would this concrete last? Would nature come back through it? I think about those things a lot."

But for the immediate future, Calame has her eye on a surface that supports plenty of life, a playground near her Los Angeles studio. The choice seems particularly appropriate for an artist whose interests—and daily habits—bring to mind a child's ground-level obsessions with what adults never see. "I look at my feet when I walk," she confesses, "and I notice things. It's funny: My daughter does, too. She picks up all sorts of trash and stuff." She laughs at her three-year-old's curiosity, then seemingly makes a connection to the art. "I love those treasures of nothingness."

Ingrid Calame: 'Swing Shift,' September 10 to October 9, James Cohan Gallery, 533 West 26th Street, jamescohan.com

#### Fall Art Picks

Tony Oursler October 7–December 4

In his 1970 theory of robotics, Japanese researcher Masahiro Mori states that when a machine comes too close to resembling a human, we find it repulsive. Renowned installation artist and cultural critic Tony Oursler, who often gives sculpted forms a creepy human presence, is applying Mori's ideas to the Web. Combining video, laser projections, and LED-illuminated drawings, Oursler's latest effort suggests that, as he says, "the Internet itself is an epistemological mirror of human consciousness." Indeed, Googling yourself is just another symptom of existential dread. Lehmann Maupin, 201 Chrystie Street, lehmannmaupin.com