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Cover & Back Cover:
Installation view, TENT, Rotterdam.
Photo: Roel Meelkop

Inside, Page 1 (top):
Installation view,
York Quay Centre, Toronto.
Photo: Michael Zryd

Inside, Page 1 (bottom):
Detail from installation view,
TENT, Rotterdam,
Photo: Roel Meelkop

Inside, Page 2:
Installation view,
York Quay Centre, Toronto,
Photo: Courtesy of the artists.

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Light Spill

Light Spill

Sandra Gibson
and Luis Recoder

Curated by
Elena Gorfinkel

Art History Gallery
University of
Wisconsin – Milwaukee

January 27th –
February 10th, 2011



ARTISTS STATEMENT

In our installation work, we use projected light to articulate space and time. Film projectors and celluloid are the material base of our constructions in light and shadow, the elemental properties of cinema. These things are deeply imbued with a history of viewership in the dark of the theater. To remove it from darkness is to flood this history and cast a certain illumination upon it. A certain exposure. Light spills in the shifting of film from its native darkness in enclosed chambers (camera obscura) to the uncanny openness and defamiliarized illumination of installation. We are exploring the shift, elaborating the displacement, recasting the light mechanics of a peculiar estrangement of the medium. The art of cinema, yes. But more timely: the becoming cinema of art. That is the coming attraction for us.

—Sandra Gibson & Luis Recoder

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder have exhibited their solo and collaborative performances and installations at the Whitney Museum of American Art (NY), P.S.1 MoMA (NY), The Kitchen (NY), Diapason Gallery (NY), Redcat (LA), Devin Borden Hiram Butler Gallery (Houston), Ballroom Marfa (Marfa), Robischon Gallery (Denver), ICA (London), Barbican Art Gallery (London), Peter Kilchmann Gallery (Zurich), Viennale (Vienna), KW (Berlin), Hartware Medien Kunst Verein (Dortmund), TENT. (Rotterdam), Palais des Beaux-Arts (Brussels), La Casa Encendida (Madrid), Museu do Chiado (Portugal), RIXC (Latvia), Image Forum (Tokyo). Their work is in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art (NY), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid), Museum of Contemporary Cinema Foundation (Paris), as well as numerous private collections. Gibson and Recoder are based in New York City.

AT THE END OF CINEMA, THIS THING CALLED FILM

A 16mm film projector with no take-up reel, which unspools discarded, de-accessioned celluloid onto the ground, in a pile that grows steadily over the course of the exhibition — *Light Spill* (2005) evokes an abandoned cinema, a projectionist who has fled her station, and an analog technology that has been left to fend for itself, *mutatis mutandis*. Sandra Gibson and Luis Recoder stage the scene of film as orphaned object through the temporal labor of moving image installation.

Collaborators since 2000, Gibson and Recoder unite the rich traditions of the experimental film, particularly its structuralist and materialist strands, and the multi-modal sensibility of expanded cinema that emerged in the 1960s, in which the moving image was woven into the labile space of performance, sound, and audience interaction. Their larger body of work explores this interstice between avant-garde film practice and the incorporation of moving images and time based media into the museum and art gallery.

Light Spill's contemporaneity, its currency, is one that insists on the surplus value of the medium's mechanical and materialist base, made all the more poignant in the wake of cinema's evanescence. For the past fifteen years, if not longer, the "death of cinema" has been announced, debated and contended with in the film industry, film culture, and film criticism and theory. Pragmatically as well as rhetorically, this declension is dependent on changes in the economics of theatrical exhibition and distribution, on the onerous fate of film preservation, and perhaps, most visibly, in the eclipse of an analog medium with the arrival of digital formats. Film's indexicality, we are told, gives way to the moving image's new status as information and data. Counterfactually, Gibson and Recoder

posit cinema's much-mourned decay as coincident with the resolute, stubborn recalcitrance of the film object's materiality. Their work reminds us that film, even as it draws ever closer to the vagaries of the art gallery and its attendant market, bears both a museological gravity and a radically contemporary weight, in "the becoming cinema of art."

"The perfect vision
has no duration
and is not durable.
This axiom is at the
heart of the notion
of film history."

—Paolo Cherchi Usai

Distinguishing between cinema (as institutional practice, ideological frame, immaterial idea) and film (the material object which gives cinema its life, provides its substrate), Gibson and Recoder confront the moving image's

historicity through a reassembly of its physical components. With the surgical clarity of vivisection, film's organs — screen, projector, celluloid — are broken down into ever more discreet mechanisms and processes. A series of displacements and relays unfold. A take up reel is replaced by the floor, converting the film strip into a contingently wending, looping, tangled sculptural form. The institutional location and necessary darkness of the cinema theater is exchanged for the light of the gallery space, a light that overlaps with an image tendered through an unfocused

"Film can do without
cinema once and
for all."

—Sandra Gibson
and Luis Recoder

lens, through which the projection of dispossessed films, image fragments, produces a painterly, unfixed, aleatory frame. In place of theater seats, we have a bare space,

in which the viewer is free to wander in the round, to pause on whichever detail most compels them amidst the mechanical dramaturgy of the act of projection. The film screen, historically the object of an indubitably immersive spectatorial attention, is both diminished and expanded, substituted with the gallery wall. Thus, the representational contents of the projected image, and, as a consequence, a history of encounter with and a way of relating to that image, is subordinated to the refurbished processes and technical strategies that summon it forth. The de-realized screen pulls us backwards, anachronistically,

against teleology, towards another swelling tide. Gibson and Recoder's modified apparatus and installation-performance unveils the "back end" of projection, made suddenly organic, corporeal — another material substrate exposed. The film strip itself is stripped, slipping, spilling from its previously seamless embrace of the technology which housed it, provided its conventions of exhibition and reception, and once gave it a coherent shape, a distinct place. The spectacle's motility is reallocated, slithering in reverse towards film's disposal and disposability. Film: now a pile of snaking, swirling, luminescent entrails, so much waste matter spit out from the corpus of cinema's invisible archive. Nevertheless, a vibrant refuse that refuses to remain dead.

Light, an essential element of motion picture production *and* projection, is multiplied and refracted, illuminating



film as the vital remains of a vanishing cinematic ideal. Light cannot contain film, but *spills out*, through film and beyond it. If film spilling entails loss — the nightmare of film preservationists' Sisyphean struggle against the ravages of time on an unfathomable body of unknown films — light spilling invokes an expanded arena of diffusion and admixture, an elasticity regarding what this *thing* called film, after cinema's end, might become. Light, in this sense, can give film new contours, another shape, an alternate flesh. Beyond cinema: an other space opens up, of seeing, feeling, approaching film as ineffable object — organic and inorganic, obsolete and obdurate.

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