

NEW YORK

Chantal Akerman

The Kitchen // April 12–May 11

FANS OF AKERMAN'S EARLY work depicting the ordinary lives of trapped women—*Saute ma ville*, 1968, or *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, 1975—will find a lot to like in this solo exhibition, titled “Maniac Shadows.” It includes a video installation, a suite of 100 photographs hung like tiles on a wall, and a video of Akerman reading *My Mother Laughs*, an autobiographical text in which she intertwines the narration of the story of her mother, a Holocaust survivor sick with cancer, with that of her own. The exhibition captures the intensely lonely inner life of an artist who has spent the last few decades looking out at the world but never really stepping into it.

The three-channel video is projected on five screens—three on the wall that greets the viewer,

corner; the sound of her reading occasionally seeps into the front room. “Will I last for four weeks?” she asks about having to stay with her sick mother. “I only last if I hide from life. What life? I don’t have a life. I don’t know how to make one.” As if to remind the viewers that they are watching her life—or lack thereof—rather than cinema, Akerman occasionally makes an appearance in the projection, shadowed against a translucent white curtain or holding up her BlackBerry to film herself staring into a mirror. To highlight her isolation, she ends the loop of projections with scenes from a street party in New York City. The camera watches the neighbors as they eat and talk, but there is never any indication that Akerman joins in.

When she started making



and two repeated vignettes on opposing sides. Filmed using both Akerman’s BlackBerry and HD cameras, the channels frequently switch from scene to scene without any apparent narrative thread between them. Many of the shots capture views through windows in Akerman’s apartments in Paris and New York: dank, claustrophobic airshafts, an empty pool in a shared courtyard. Occasionally, the camera pans to show an interior—a living room that looks like it hasn’t been redecorated since the 1950s. A narrow hallway is piled with garbage that a cleaning woman is organizing into bags. Looking at these, one feels the sort of anxiety that comes from being trapped for purely internal reasons.

In a back gallery, Akerman’s husky voice intones her autobiography in another projection, bewilderingly hedged into a

films, Akerman’s insistence on transforming the quotidian into something epic was revolutionary. But in the age of social media, her work reads differently. The suite of 100 photographs on the back wall of the gallery are intimate glimpses into Akerman’s private life and the things she looks at when she’s out in the world (a girl on the subway, the shadow of her embracing someone on the beach). But to most eyes, they will look like nothing more than a well-curated Instagram feed. Perhaps we owe Akerman homage for empowering the prosaic. Or perhaps, with the isolation engendered by online media, we exist in a state similar to hers. Thanks to social media, most of us observe the world rather than step into it. Fifty years ago, making art out of the ordinary was revolutionary—today it’s merely commonplace. —Brienne Walsh



NEW YORK

“Meshes of the Afternoon”

Sean Kelly // March 29–May 4

THIS GROUP PAINTING show is ostensibly about the subconscious and how it relates to the 1943 Surrealism-inspired film of the same name, but the important link between these artworks and the film is their exploration of the physical and physiological effects of light.

Kaye Donachie expresses the power of moonlight’s sway over the senses in *Speak with Nothing to Say*, 2013, an image of a woman’s face, with her eyes closed, as light pours in behind her. Haloed by a piercing white light, the subject’s shaded coloring is exaggerated by smoky purples and browns, creating an emotive and otherworldly state further heightened by mysterious small, blurry white brushstrokes that dot the painting’s surface. Do these dabs represent tiny reflections or are they painted manifestations of an emotional state? Likely both.

Chinese artist Lu Song also enlists painterly processes in order to capture light in *Gusts*, 2012, a faint landscape washed and scrubbed to the point of abstraction. *Gusts* conveys the harshness of the elements (wind and sun) and their effect on the senses, while simultaneously resembling a faded photograph, an object decimated by the weather.

Sam Falls’s lurid, large-scale photograms seem a bit out of place in this show, thanks to their sheer materiality and paintless process, yet they are nevertheless an interesting conflux of light and memory in the form of tire-shaped insignias. *Untitled (Red 1, Highland Park, CA)*, 2011, an enormous swath of polyester that wraps multiple interior columns in the gallery, was bleached from red to pink by the relentless California sunshine. Car tires not only held down the unwieldy sheet during this process; they also created the images on it by leaving behind a pattern of red rings.

The cunning interplay of light and surface in Falls’s piece leads one to believe that this show could have benefited from a wider range of media, yet the works on display all manage to hit their mark in presenting unsettling sensory moments crafted with paint. Whether the heightened anxiety in these images results from how we’re hardwired or the way the environment affects our senses and possessions is up for debate.

—Ryan E. Steadman

ABOVE: Cecily Brown *Lost Weekend*, 2009–13. Oil on linen, 89 x 97 in.

LEFT: Chantal Akerman Still from a video of Akerman’s performative reading of her forthcoming autobiography, *My Mother Laughs*. 24 min.

FROM LEFT: JASON MANDELLA; ROBERT MCKEEVER; CECILY BROWN; GAGOSIAN GALLERY; AND SEAN KELLY