



SHANGHAI

Nina Canell

LEO XU PROJECTS

“Reflexology,” the title of Nina Canell’s first solo exhibition in China, seemed an apt topic for a culture that has long purported the medicinal benefits of foot massage. Entering the sparse ground-floor gallery space, which was carpeted in a dingy, low-shag, wall-to-wall industrial char- treuse, one immediately noticed the imprint of the sole of a single shoe or slipper seamlessly inlaid into the carpet’s surface. At first it appeared to be a house painter’s accident, a haphazard mistake, but closer inspection revealed a tattered and well-traveled history. As the title piece to the exhibition, the work, *Reflexologies*, 2016, also suggested a scruffy foot map of pressure points. But where was the other foot? This lone imprint appeared like a clue to a mysterious event or an inconspicuous biography.

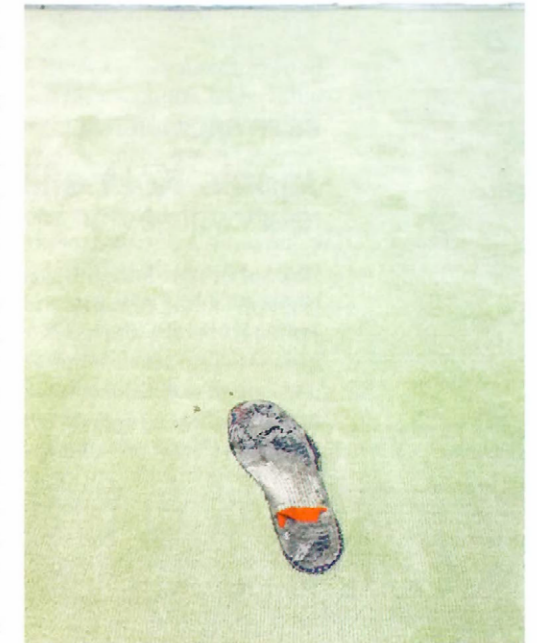
Metaphors of dislocation or absence, displacement, and disconnec- tion run consistently through Canell’s work. Often, she transforms recycled objects and discarded materials—the detritus of everyday life, and of the world of communication technology in particular—into understated sculptural relics and improvised installations. Here, in the carpeted ground-floor space, there was also *Softest Corner*, 2016, con-

sisting of two copper tubes or pieces of conduit of unequal lengths running along the edge of the wall and floor. These tubes were spliced together by a short, connecting piece of white neon bent casually, intended to not conform perfectly to the corner’s ninety-degree angle. In an adjacent alcove, one heard *Interiors (Wavy)*, 2016, an audio work made from an old sleeping-aid machine tucked in the corner, its inner workings and components exposed while playing a delayed, scratchy recording of crashing ocean waves. Throughout the exhibition, one sensed a dialogue with precursors such as Arte Povera or Fluxus. This felt most evident in the acrylic-encased cuttings and cross sections of high-voltage subterranean and subsea telecommunication and electricity cables, from the series “Brief Syllables,” 2014–, installed in a somewhat more formal manner on the second floor of the exhibition.

Included in her 2014 exhibitions at the Camden Arts Centre, London, and at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, “Brief Syllables” began as a close study of the intricate interiors of high-technology cabling, exam- ining how cables are made, color-coded, bundled, and sheafed, based on their specific purposes or functions. In the new works from the series shown here, modest-size cable cuttings, suspended within solid acrylic cubes usually no bigger than six inches square, were displayed like high-tech specimens on narrow concrete columns. The use of cast con- crete and her bare-bones presentation were part of Canell’s extended conversation with the city itself. More than just aestheticizing advanced industrial wiring, Canell here suggested a potential breakdown or fail- ure of communication, a loss of energy, in a world that has become totally dependent on an uninterrupted circulation and flow of power and information.

Nearly all the works in “Reflexology”—and the materials used— were made or sourced in Shanghai. This brought a local specificity to Canell’s project. But the issues it raised are ever more universal today as we share a “collectively extended nervous system,” as the press release calls it. Whether we choose to remain on or off the grid, plugged in or disconnected, we still might manage acts of solitude within a vast technological plexus, especially those networks that continue to advance or erode our experience between public and private terrain.

—Arthur Solway



Nina Canell,
Reflexologies, 2016,
mixed media,
dimensions variable.