

The body of the material

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Carla Chaim enters directly into a dialogue with the heritage of constructivist and geometric art in Brazil, and is a model to many artists of her generation all over the world. In her work there appears to be an echo of the folded surfaces of Amilcar de Castro and bodily notions such as those fashioned by Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Mira Schendel. Instead of simply carrying on with this salient of historical avant gardes, Carla Chaim reinvents poetic possibilities based both on photographed actions as well as traditional materials, paper and graphite.

As in a non-figurative origami, with two or three folds, a square forms triangles and generates rectangles. Drawing upon simple geometric elements, Carla Chaim's compositions make the back of the sheet into the front, and vice-versa. Because of its transparency, when the paper is folded, the black form painted on the front goes to the back, yet allowing itself to be seen through the paper in more of a grayish tone. The artist breaks with the opposition between front and back, the white of the paper and black paint, as well as that between a presumed interiority of the material and its outer appearance. In her work there are no oppositions between back and front.

The gesture of folding that diminishes the surface for outer contact is the same one that brings about the joining of planes painted black. At this juncture, the furrow created by the fold is less a line separating one side from another than the possibility of their union. With the paper unfolded, there remains a memory of what was once

sheer continuity. Distinct separate forms separated by the tiniest fissures confine themselves on the borders of the square. The line that remains is born from turning one part of a piece of paper over the remainder. The result is not a lacerated plane, but the final composition alludes to a mismatch of forms in relation to a prior painted unity that has since come undone.

Carla Chaim's paper creations are not satisfied with the plane. As they are folded they take over 3-dimensional space, assuming a corporeal dimension. The series *Queda* ('Falling') – in which part of a roll of paper runs down the wall to the floor – requires another posture from the body of a visitor. The design unfolds from the vertical plane, which presupposes the erect position of the body, and expands into the horizontal, compelling us to lower our head to see it. These works revisit the abandonment of the traditional space of representation, in which painting was analogous to a window, and mingle with the dirt and banality of the world we live in, the place where we set our feet.

The discussion of the notion of corporeality becomes more explicit in the photographs, in which the surface of the artist's body, on a real scale, emerges partially covered by the same Japanese paper as the other works. But in it the straight lines clearly do not adapt to the artist's body in motion, and gradually give rise to crumpling. The impossibility of finding a complete synchronicity, a perfect fit between the artist's body and the folds of paper, results in images in which the movements of her arms and legs are constrained by geometry. But in approaching dance, it is as though the artist had raised to the utmost degree the expressive power that an unfurled rectangular sheet can possibly attain. The conflict between the human body and the body of paper is resolved in the assertion of their shared organic origin.

These photographs, in contrast to the descending movement of the series *Queda* ['Falling'], point upwards as they approximate pyramidal structures. In another pair of images in which the artist is leaping, her movements are interrupted not by geometric forms, but by the photographic act which freezes them and reveals to us the weight of her body. The volume and direction of her body on the vertical and horizontal planes are analogous to the black rectangles absorbing light, both floating in the air.

In other photographs, the relationship between the body and geometry is also problematic. Now the body is bending to find a position allowing for a balancing of tiny cubes acting as a support; now the cube itself takes bodily form and becomes a solid encased in a folded paper that partially adapts to its volume. The graphite is both a drawing instrument as well as the raw material for sculpture. The solid chunk of graphite comprises a uniform body both inside and out.

Even so, in this artist's work, the body is more than a mere support. It is the fundamental catalyst for amplifying the expressive potentials of the material. The paper in her work takes its bodily form as of the moment when it is folded and there is no more opposition between front and back, inside and out. The body is the place where subjectivity and objectivity come together. More than a photographed image, it is the field of feeling and thought, it is what makes possible the artist's direct experience of the world. It is her body that executes these movements of performance, instigating a clash with its surroundings as it provokes other bodies. Carla Chaim addresses both the body of the material as well as the material of the bodies