



Ceal Floyer/MATRIX 192 37' 4"

September 16 – November 11, 2001

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

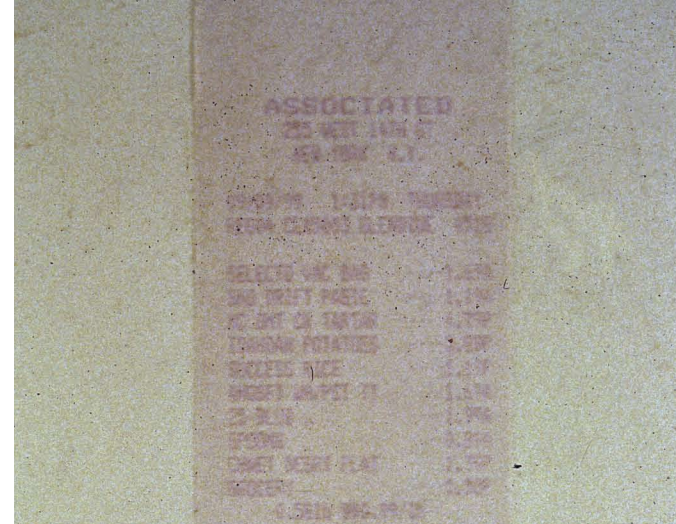
Ceal Floyer/MATRIX 192

“I consider the things I make to be self-reflexive; they are not necessarily about anything outside of the work itself and the context of its production, and I mean this both in terms of its being made and its being shown. The activity of making the work and the consequent result of it being shown become inseparable.”—Ceal Floyer¹

British artist Ceal Floyer makes good old-fashioned Conceptual art² with a late '90s/early '00s attitude. Educated at the trendsetting Goldsmiths College, London, Floyer quickly established herself among the new generation of British artists emerging in the second half of the 1990s. Using a classic Conceptual strategy—i.e., a limited, predetermined set of ideas or conditions in which to execute a work—she reconsiders the nature of visual perception through an engagement with everyday objects and situations. Floyer and other young British artists such as Angela Bulloch, Rachel Whiteread, and Douglas Gordon sort information procedurally, recycle trivial ideas, and situate meaning directly within the cognitive process of the viewer.³

Floyer's work embraces both Minimalism and Conceptualism and comments on each. A double or even triple take may be necessary before her apparently simple installations can be deciphered.⁴ Complexities of meaning not immediately apparent on first viewing are revealed along with the subtle humor and self-conscious irony with which the artist approaches her subject. Floyer's works often play with the viewer's perceptions of space and light, idea and physical presence, but like those of the Minimalists, do so without illusion. She makes no attempt to hide the underpinnings of her work, which nevertheless are often so subtle that the viewer is at first unable to recognize them. In *Light* (1994), she hangs a light bulb, obviously disconnected from any possible source of electrical current, and makes it appear lit by shining light on it from four projectors that are mounted from the ceiling in plain view. In *Door* (1995), the crack of light visible under a door turns out to come not from the room beyond, but from a slide projector set in the middle of the floor. In this way, Floyer sets up expectations only to confound them.

In a quote that encapsulates the premise of Conceptual art, artist Joseph Kosuth pronounced in 1969: “The ‘value’ of particular artists after Duchamp is weighed according to how much they questioned the nature of art.”⁵ Kosuth himself is interested only in making works of art that inherently question their very existence. The genesis of this exploration can be traced to Marcel Duchamp who, by putting a urinal on display and titling it *Fountain*, pushed the notion of how art is defined as art. For Kosuth, and for others who work within the now canonized framework of Conceptual art, art exists in the ideas of the artist rather than in the object itself.



Monochrome Till Receipt (White), 1998; ink on paper. Photo courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Many of the early Conceptual artists studied the writings of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein. Looking at the function of language as a means to engage philosophical discourse, Wittgenstein posited both that “The meaning of a word is its meaning,” and that “The meaning of a word is its use.”⁶ Floyer also contends with meaning. A 1997 work entitled *Glass* is a clear vinyl seven-inch record. The track is the sonic vibration resulting from the artist running her wine-wet finger around the rim of a wineglass. Here the meaning of the title is its use. In *Bucket* (1999), an actual bucket sits in the middle of a room, seeming to collect drops of water dripping from the ceiling. The bucket, however, contains only a CD player that produces the sounds of water dropping. Here, to quote Wittgenstein, “The meaning of a word is its meaning.”

1960s Minimalism reduced art to its bare elements. Two camps existed within the movement. The one led by Donald Judd focused on pure form and privileged intellect as the determining force in both perception and art. The other, propagated by Robert Morris, Dan Flavin, and Carl Andre, presented raw materials and found objects as art and emphasized the viewer's bodily awareness in the appreciation of and interaction with works of art.⁷ Morris and Judd did agree, however, on the power of space, light, and material when they functioned literally rather than as mere illusion. Both artists promoted an interaction between the viewer and the whole, literal work in a real, shared space. French existentialist theorist Roland Barthes addresses the interactions that define a work of art in *From Work to Text*. In a concept that parallels those of Morris, Barthes believes that a work of art exists not as a self-contained object, but rather only through viewer interaction with the work.⁸

Like that of her art historical predecessors, Floyer's work relies not only on the viewers' cognitive process but also on their perceptual participation. In works such as *Monochrome Till Receipt (White)* (1998), for example, meaning arises only with recognition. Here, a receipt documenting the artist's trip to a local supermarket is pasted directly on the gallery wall. Only gradually does the viewer comprehend the list of purchases to be only things that are white: milk, toilet paper, cottage cheese, etc. Floyer's spare, ironic, and evocative installations reflect quietly but insistently upon their own ability to manifest themselves as art. At the same time, by focusing on the day-to-day quality and poetic associations of a bucket, wineglass, or doorframe, among other utilitarian items, she challenges the fetishization often



Bucket, 1999; CD and portable CD player with audio speaker, plastic bucket. Photo courtesy Lisson Gallery.

assigned to objects transformed into “art.”

Floyer's works are spare, paired down to the extreme, almost immaterial. Many are inherently reliant on the context in which they are shown, not just for meaning, but for existence as well. In the *General Release* catalog for the 1995 Venice Biennale, she chose not to reproduce past works, but rather left the pages blank and altered them solely by adding “th” to the page numbers. Thus the 46th and 47th pages were Floyer's. For a book project with Imprint 93, her contribution was one page. It was blank and had the top corner folded over. Her exhibition at The Showroom gallery in London consisted of a mechanical counter, an infrared beam that traversed the center of the space counting the number of visitors to the show.⁹ And in *Projection* (1997), Floyer projects an image of a nail, the structure that supports traditional visual art, onto a white wall. Cool and clever, if Floyer's works and ideas do not capture the viewer's critical imagination, then there is no other space in which they can succeed.¹⁰

37' 4", Floyer's site-specific MATRIX exhibition, continues an ongoing exploration of the relationship between language and perception. A wall drawing comprised of a single piece of black elastic, it is Minimalist in appearance, but is actually the antithesis: maximalist. The material is extended to its extreme, thereby negating its elasticity and reducing it to a black line. The choice of material, however, is extremely important—the use of black elastic is deliberately absurd. Floyer chooses to use a material whose dimensions are constantly in flux to quantify distance and delineate the defining feature of the MATRIX Gallery, its long uninterrupted wall. And allowing the viewer to imagine the performative aspect of the wall-to-wall (corner-to-corner) stretch reveals the artist's sense of humor. The poetics of the work lies in the discrepancy between the title and the actual length of the wall of the MATRIX Gallery (84' 5 ¹¹/₁₆"). As viewers we are left to ponder how titles (identifying factors assigned to works of art by their creators) influence what and how we see.

Floyer's investigation of the relationship between thinking and seeing in *37' 4"* recalls Conceptual artist Mel Bochner's Measurement series from the 1960s. In the Measurement series, Bochner used black tape and Letraset letters to create line drawings. Horizontal and vertical lines were accompanied by measurements of the lengths of the walls themselves. As such, his drawings were very literal, large-scale



diagrams of the exhibition spaces in which they were shown.

Floyer pushes and destabilizes our imagination in playful ways. Modern art, in particular Conceptual art, carries a stigma of indecipherability. Floyer's work, which one could argue is deceptively simple, fractures this phenomenon by being truly simple. As British critic David Barrett wrote, "Viewers who obstinately read artworks literally, which unsurprisingly exasperates most artists, would please Ceal Floyer —what is aimed for is a finely balanced paradox of the obvious literalness of the work, coupled with the pressing urge to read further into meanings which present themselves so shamelessly."¹¹ Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of Floyer's work is its levity. One is reminded of the genius of Richard Tuttle who said that, after all, "it is just art." That is more than enough.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

¹ "Freddy Contreras and Ceal Floyer in conversation with Kim Sweet," in *Freddy Contreras and Ceal Floyer* (exhibition catalog), April 26-June 4, 1995 (London: The Showroom, 1995), n/p.

² Howard Halle, "Ceal Floyer," *Time Out New York*, September 30-October 7, 1999, no. 210, p. 67.

³ Brian Muller, "Ceal Floyer: Seeing the Light," *contemporary visual arts*, 1997, no. 16, p. 52.

⁴ Nico Israel, "Ceal Floyer: Casey Kaplan," *Artforum*, February 2000, p. 119.

⁵ See www.artandculture.com, 20th-Century Art, Joseph Kosuth.

⁶ See artnetweb/views.

⁷ See www.artandculture.com, 20th-Century Art, Movements, Minimalist Art.

⁸ C. Murray, "Minimalism," www.solucian.com, artheory.

⁹ David Barrett, "Playing Dumb: David Barrett on Ceal Floyer," *Art Monthly*, February 1996, no. 193, pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Glass, 1998 (production still); recording on clear vinyl seven-inch record. Photo courtesy of the artist and Rodney Hill editions, New York.

Ceal Floyer was born in 1968 in Karachi, Pakistan. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1994 from Goldsmiths College in London. Living and working in London until recently, Floyer now lives and works in Berlin.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2001

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, U.K.

Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee, WI

"Massive Reduction," Peer, Shoreditch Town Hall, London, U.K.

2000

Pinksummer, Genoa, Italy

1999

Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, NY

1998

Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany

1997

Galleria Gianluca Collica, Catania, Sicily, Italy

City Racing, London, U.K.

Herzliya Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, Israel

Lisson Gallery, London, U.K.

Galleria Primo Piano, Rome, Italy

1996

Galleria Primo Piano, Rome, Italy

Tramway Project Room, Glasgow, Scotland

Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York, NY

2000

"Media-City Seoul 2000," Seoul, Korea

"Edit," Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany

Door, 1995 (installation view); 35mm metal mask slide projection; dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Lisson Gallery.

"Quotidiana," Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy

"Drive," Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

"Making Time: Considering Time as a Material in Contemporary Video & Film," Palm Beach Institute of Contemporary Art, Palm Beach, FL

"La répétition, la tête dans les nuages," Villa Arson, Nice, France

1999

"On Your Own Time," P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, NY

"Mirror's Edge," Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden; Arken, Copenhagen, Denmark; Tramway, Glasgow,

Scotland; Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada; Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy

"Trace: The International Exhibition of the Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art," Liverpool, U.K.

"Inside Out," Overgaden, Copenhagen, Denmark

"Real/Life: New British Art," Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan (Tour)

1998

"every day," Biennale of Sydney 1998, Sydney, Australia

"In the Meantime," Galeria Estrany de la Moto, Barcelona, Spain

"Seamless," De Appel Foundation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

"Genius Loci," Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland

"Thinking Aloud," curated by Richard Wentworth, South Bank Centre, London, U.K.; Kettles Yard,

Cambridge, U.K.; Cornerhouse, Manchester, U.K.; Camden Arts Center, London, U.K.

1997

"Pictura Britannica," Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia; Art Gallery of South Australia,

Adelaide, Australia; City Gallery, Wellington, Australia

"Projects," Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

"Material Culture: The Object in British Art in the 80's and 90's," Hayward Gallery, London, U.K.

"Urban Legends: London," Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Baden-Baden, Germany

1995

"General Release: Young British Artists at Scuola di San Pasquale," Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

"4th International Istanbul Biennial," Istanbul, Turkey

Selected Catalogues and Publications

Ceal Floyer, Kunsthalle Bern, Bern, Switzerland, 1999.

Ceal Floyer, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, 1998.

Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture, Phaidon Press, London, U.K., 1998.

every day, Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia, 1998.

Real/Life: New British Art, The Asahi Shimbun Press, Japan, 1998.

Ceal Floyer (untitled artist's book), Imprint 93, London, U.K. 1996.

General Release: Young British Artists at Scuola di San Pasquale, British Council, England, 1995.

Projection, 1997 (detail); 35mm slide projection; dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Selected Bibliography

Archer, Michael. "Reconsidering Conceptual Art," *Art Monthly*, February 1996, no. 193, pp. 12-16.

Barrett, David. "Playing Dumb: David Barrett on Ceal Floyer," *Art Monthly*, February 1996, no. 193,

pp. 22-23.

Floyer, Ceal. "Three Pages 2000," *Afterall*, 2001, no. 3, pp. 5-7.

Halle, Howard. "Ceal Floyer," *Time Out New York*, no. 210, September 30-October 7, 1999, p. 67.

Israel, Nico. "Review: Ceal Floyer at Casey Kaplan," *Artforum*, February 2000, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 119-120.

Lewisohn, Cedar. "Ceal Floyer," *FlashArt*, March/April 2001, vol. 34, no. 217, pp. 116-117.

Lorés, Maite. "Ceal Floyer: Contact Print 1-24," *contemporary visual arts*, 1998, no. 21, pp. 67-68.

Muller, Brian. "Ceal Floyer," *FlashArt*, May/June 1997, vol. 34, no. 217, pp. 116-117.

Muller, Brian. "Ceal Floyer: Seeing the Light," *contemporary visual arts*, 1997, no. 16, pp. 49-53.

Musgrave, David. "Ceal Floyer," *Art Monthly*, March 2001, no. 244, pp. 45-46.

Schmitz, Edgar. "Warten," *contemporary visual arts*, 2000, no. 28, pp. 70-71.

Work in MATRIX

Ceal Floyer

37" 4", 2001

Elastic

Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery, London

Please Note:

On Wednesday, September 19 at 12 noon, Ceal Floyer and noted art historian and UC Berkeley professor Ann Wagner will engage in a mobile conversation on the theme of Conceptual art with a feminist edge.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator's walkthrough of this exhibition and Jessica Bronson/MATRIX 194 *heaps, layers, and curls* on Thursday, October 25, at 12:15 p.m.

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COVER: 37" 4", 2001; elastic. Photo courtesy of the artist.

ABOVE: *Light*, 1994 (installation view); 4 35mm metal mask slides, 4 projectors, matt white sprayed light bulb on disconnected flex; dimensions variable. Photo courtesy Lisson Gallery.