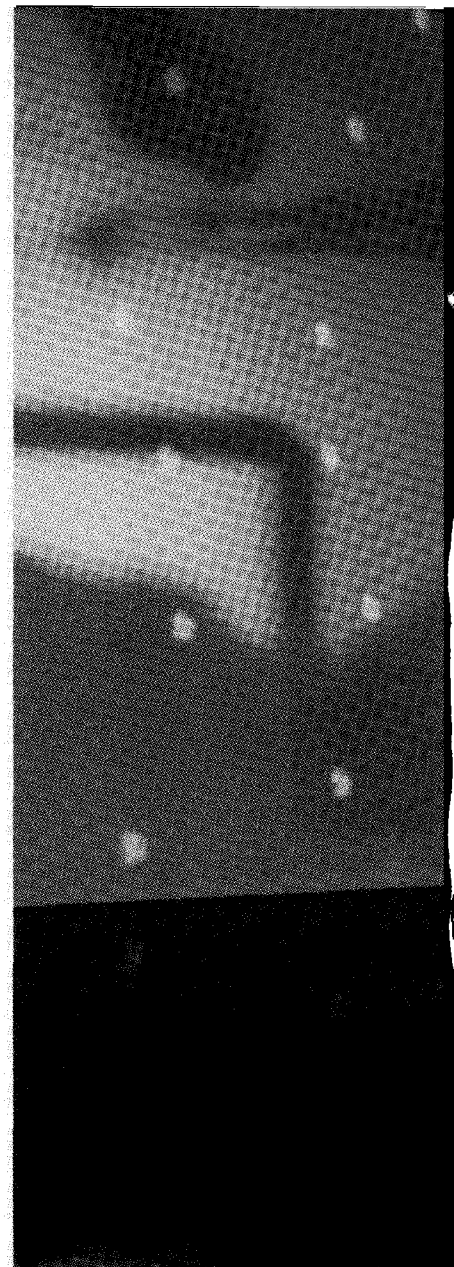


Marden's attention to calligraphy and Asian culture. These develop into the *Cold Mountain* paintings and *The Muses* (late 1980s to early 1990s) and end with the high-chroma *Red Rocks* group (begun in 2000) and *The Propitious Garden of Plane Image* works (2000–06). These paintings, which are thin and seem embedded in the canvas thanks to Marden's process of painting, sanding, washing out, repainting and adjusting, embody time and demand time from the viewer. A viewer sees Marden's labour, his seeking of the way, and follows the evidence that marks his trail, which is the making of the painting. He lays out paths for the active eye to follow and one can enter these all-over images, in which compositional equilibrium hums with movement, anywhere.

With the *Cold Mountain* paintings and *The Muses*, Marden has invented a new approach to the problem of all-over painting: a vertical, layered, curvilinear network synonymous with the painting plane on which he fuses figure and ground and atmosphere, where the atmosphere arises from the optical oscillation between the figure and the ground. It is one of many achievements in this exhibition, which would seem to have influenced younger painters. And it is most complex in the newest works, the long horizontal series of paintings entitled *The Propitious Garden of Plane Image*. In each, six panels of primary and secondary colours are traversed and connected by six layers of linear figures that correspond to the colours of the panels and seem to dance their way across the surface in rhythmic movements of angles and curves. Following the interwoven ribbons of colour, a viewer moves in and out of these paintings, and within and along them.

Marden's paintings are a slow read for their beauty, their rigour, their complexities and their intelligence (the New York retrospective added another reason—they were very hard to see in the huge galleries and bright, hard lighting of Yoshio Taniguchi's new MOMA, which create a space inhospitable to some kinds of paintings). He refers to himself as an old-fashioned painter and a romantic, and acknowledges his roots in Abstract Expressionism, as did Agnes Martin, an artist with whom he has much in common. Like Martin's, his work draws inspiration from an interface with nature and seeks to transcend its concrete reality. To put it in Daoist terms, for Marden, painting is the way.

His retrospective, which demonstrates the inadequacy of categories like "minimalist" and "romantic," seems also to show, by contrast, where much new abstraction is positioned: as an art history-conscious comment on abstract painting, now a branch of Pop art, filled with quotations used as ironic tropes. Marden's commitment is to a painting qua painting; it is his way of responding to art, experience and people he is close to, a way of being in the world and seeking something like enlightenment in a painter's terms. Call it old-fashioned if you like—it still has a way of looking exhilarating and new. by Nancy Tousley



Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller

MUSEU D'ART CONTEMPORANI DE BARCELONA, BARCELONA

The centrepiece of "The Killing Machine and other Stories," as Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's show at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) was ominously titled, was a new installation made especially for the exhibition.

Inspired by Kafka's gruesome tale *In the Penal Colony*, the artists have recreated a grisly execution chamber complete with a couple of modern-day twists. Echoing the horrifying particularities of Kafka's apparatus, which used needles to inscribe the law that a person has violated onto his body, Cardiff and Miller's eerily modified dental chair moves balletically to a choreographed score. Kafka's machine worked with the perverse but familiar logic that only through bodily torture can truth be revealed to its victims. Similarly, in Cardiff and Miller's latest contraption, two automated arms equipped with probing



Installation view of Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *The Killing Machine* 2007 Mixed media and audio PHOTO SEBER UGARTE

lights and menacing needles sniff out their prey with terrifying motions.

Cardiff has described her desire to construct a machine lying in wait for its victim. The room where the piece is housed is dark upon entry; it is the spectator who activates the sinister device by pushing a button and sparking it into life. As in so many of Cardiff and Miller's works on display here, including *Opera for a Small Room* and *The Paradise Institute*, the frame separating the work from the viewer is pushed to the point of collapse. But while there is often a kernel of darkness in these earlier works, *The Killing Machine* sees the duo making a decidedly more political turn. The spectator's participation in the work is no longer a form of play, but rather suggests complicity in the current media spectacle of terror. While the television sets built into the structure emit only static, it is not difficult to imagine contemporary scenes of torture from Abu Ghraib or Guantánamo. The spinning disco ball and pink fun-fur chair covering only serve to heighten the audience's uncomfortable oscillation between horror and fascination at the scene before them.

While *The Killing Machine* represents a brave departure from the pop

references and seductive qualities of the artists' earlier pieces, it nonetheless forges links with the other works in this retrospective. The sonic anger expressed in the guitar crescendo of *Opera for a Small Room* is put to work again in the latest installation. The vacant dental chair conveys a sense of the spectral, missing body that haunts so many of Cardiff and Miller's pieces—*Road Trip* and *The Dark Pool* are two examples included here. If the disembodied voices and fragmented narratives of the duo's previous works generated unsolvable mysteries, now the absent figure of *The Killing Machine* constitutes a call for political response. by Judith Wilkinson