

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## The Cool Conceptualism of Artworks at Absolute Zero

by [Patrick Neal](#) on December 7, 2015



'Approaching -273.15° C' at Academic Gallery, installation view (photo courtesy of Academic Gallery)

Academic Gallery in Long Island City has been around for a little over a year. Founded by artists [Melissa Walker](#) and [Wonchun Che](#), it has had an ambitious program, mounting nine shows since its inception. The current exhibition, [Approaching -273.15° C](#), curated by artist [Michael Sarff](#), is a particularly elegant group show revolving around the theme of absolute zero, "the temperature at which all motion in matter stops."



Raphaele Shirley, "6.6 and 4" (2015), gold leaf, neon, paint, and wood laminate, 72 in diameter (photo courtesy of Academic Gallery)

Freezing temperature, as it affects a subject's kinetic energy (active mobility toward inert suspension), serves as a potent metaphor for the show. All the artworks on display embody a transformative process, demonstrating moments of flux before a peaceful stasis. The pieces take external pressures and environments into consideration and are sensitive to the chemistry of unorthodox materials. Walking through the exhibition, I also felt a process of "inversion" laid bare: there are distinct instances of transposition, things being stretched inside-out or considered as polar opposite, in black or white.



'Approaching -273.15° C,' installation view (photo courtesy of Academic Gallery)

**Raphaelle Shirley's** wall piece, "6.6 and 4," is comprised of concentric wooden rings that protrude from the wall in a concave sphere. The gold wood, backlit with a white neon strip, is offset by a silver orb painted on the wall. Viewed frontally, there is an optical phenomenon akin to an eclipse, a dark celestial body dramatically lit in a solar glow. On the floor, resting on a grey pedestal, Shirley has placed concentric bands of stainless steel, one on top the other in a convex formation, bisected through the middle. Here we are brought back to earth; the silver steel is bright against cast shadows, and the rings exist as an intimate sci-fi dome or primitive sanctum.



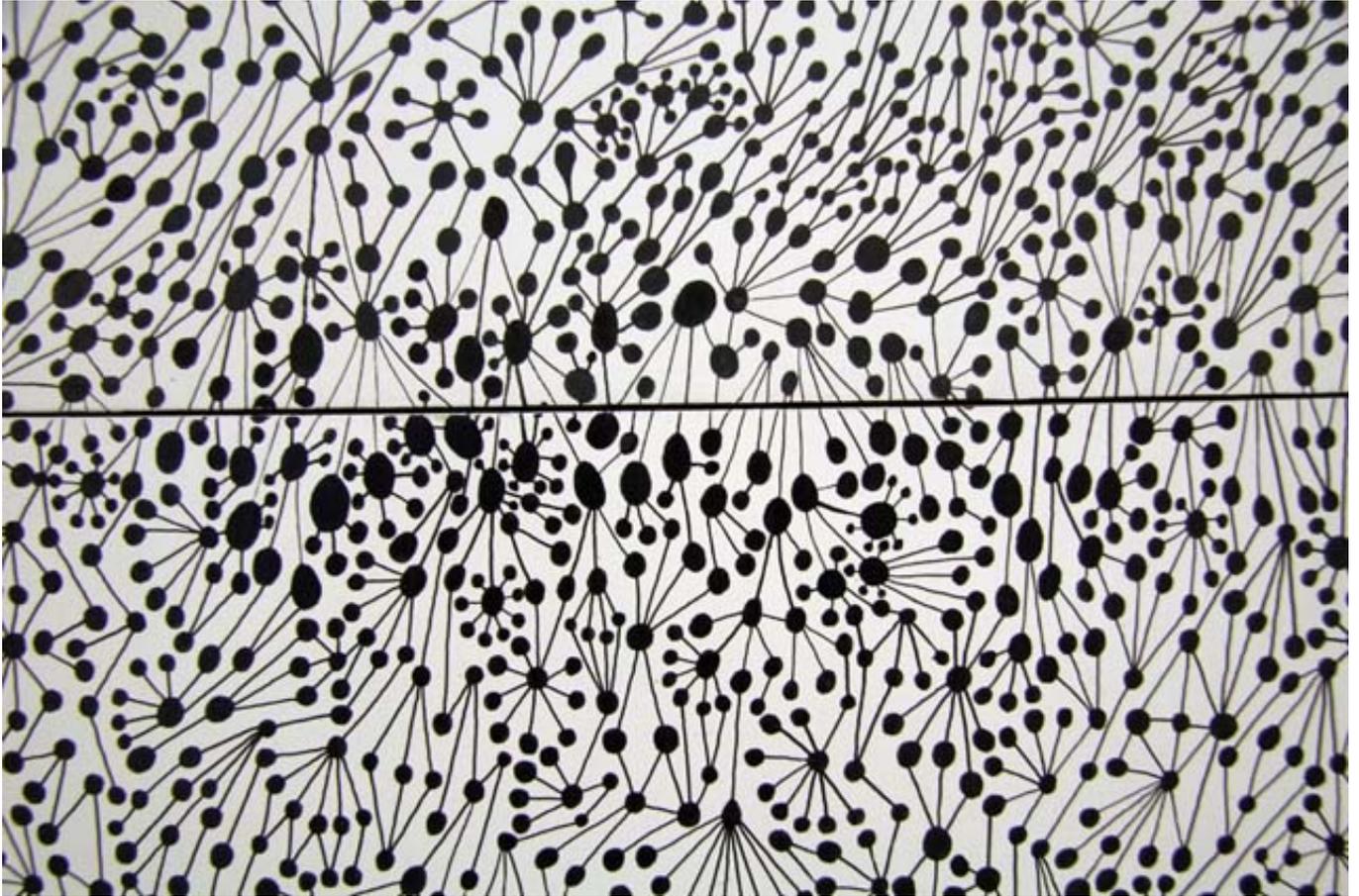
Keith Anderson, "In this Box" (2012), found cardboard box, powder pigment, acrylic paint, primer, staples, and asphalt-saturated cotton fabric, 17 x 18.5 x 19 in (photo courtesy of Academic Gallery)

With a nod toward the filament and cubed geometries signature to [Eva Hesse](#)'s work, artists [Marcy Chevali](#) and [Keith Anderson](#) use whatever domestic or industrial materials happen to cross their path. Anderson has covered the gallery's large rectangular window with black tape and nearby, on the floor, coated a square cardboard box with black paint over cotton and asphalt. The glue, on the exposed and flaccid backside of the tape, has the same visceral abrasion as the gritty black pigment. Viewed at night, these works appear as a frosty cosmic void or infinity. During the day, sunshine serves as light at the end of a tunnel, creeping through cracks on the window and revealing the depths and planes of the box.



Marcy Chevali, "Circumference" (detail, 2014), series of photographs mounted on acrylic, 20 x 30 in each (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

Marcy Chevali stretches fine yarns, in varying degrees of delicacy, hanging from the ceiling and anchored to the floor. Here a background wall is painted silver, which highlights the yarn's subtle shades of pearl, bone, and shell. The skeins have a woven whorl pattern that continues downward, subtly shifting to knitted glass that glistens like ice crystals. One imagines the precarious installation of the fragile materials as an integral part of the project. Across the gallery are a series of photos, titled "Circumference," in which Chevali has captured herself on her knees, arms outstretched, etching rings into sand near the seashore. Between the two works are allusions to waves, water, neurons, and the nervous system that emphasize Chevali's own body and vulnerability to outside forces.



James Cullinane, "Portal" (detail, 2015), ink on gessoed panel, 62 x 28 in (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

**James Cullinane** works with ink on three gessoed panels all scaled around body-size. He also creates webs or net configurations that resemble the dots and dashes of Tinkertoys or Queen Anne's Lace. The works have a gawky harmony, like surface-saturated doodles on a high school kid's notebook, or like **Mark Tobey's** "white writing." Cullinane takes time to color in a globby dot before striding forth with a line, and the dots crowd up along the edges of the support. In these works, he appears to be absorbed in an obsessive traveling, one that incidentally gives way to an image or an egoless surrender to aimlessness that reciprocates with an indeterminate structure.



Daniela Kostova, “It’s Delovely” (detail, 2015), photographic print on canvas, 24 x 17 in each (photo by the author for Hyperallergic) (click to enlarge)

**Daniela Kostova’s** large photo, “It’s Delovely,” is wallpapered to one wall of the gallery and jazzes up the show with bursts of lush red and brown. A second smaller photo adhered to canvas rests on the ground. In scenes staged with props — a vintage Danelectro radio, a piano with sheet music, a Barbie doll, a banana peel, a baby bottle — both photos depict Kostova’s unruly daughter spending time with her babysitter. Amid the stylish clutter, the babysitter studies the book *Babysitter: An American History*, offering a witty key to the work’s layered depictions of domesticity and femininity, as well as public vs. private self. The photos, by dramatically becoming part of the physical architecture of the gallery, further dislocates the familiar household scenes, pairing fashion and theatrics in a manner that seems like **Sam Taylor-Johnson** meeting **Norman Rockwell**.



Marcy Chevali, "Cirrus" (detail, 2015), yarn and glass, dimensions variable (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

The works in *Approaching -273.15° C* are self-consciously aware of how the artist exists in the world, and they emphasize the left-alone integrity of the object. Many of the pieces are monochromatic and minimal with a marvelous physicality; materials are unfussed-over, simply placed and allowed their utilitarian functions. But even as a work may have a cool exterior, just beneath the surface one senses its romantic longings and philosophical musings on finding one's place in the world both physically and psychically. These pieces evoke roaming, collecting, and crossing borders in an attempt to get out of one's own head or body, or looking beyond the stars or to nature for answers to existential dilemmas in a world of dry statistics and cold, hard facts.

**Approaching -273.15° C** continues at Academic Gallery (47-39 35th Street, Long Island City) through December 12.

**Academic Gallery Long Island City Mark Tobey Michael Sarff**