

Artnet: 'Speeding Bullet', by Donald Kuspit, 2010



SPEEDING BULLET

by Donald Kuspit

The photograph on the catalogue cover says it all: Beatrice Caracciolo is on the move, devolving into a blur, leaving traces of her movement in her drawings, their lines like raw nerves, agitated yet nonetheless steady on their meteoric trajectory, tumbling over themselves yet never quite falling out of the space of the paper -- «Life Lines,» in fact, as she calls a 1999 series, and she holds onto them for dear life, rising and falling with their eccentric rhythm, holding their own even as they release waves of energy into the void that is the white space of the paper. It remains open-ended and unperturbed, however much it swarms with lines, sometimes forming a broad horizon, suggesting that Caracciolo has no horror vacui but a peculiar affection for the infinity the emptiness signals. Existentialists speak of «dreadful freedom,» and Erich Fromm famously argued that we are all eager to «escape from freedom,» so terrifying is the feeling of aliveness that informs it, but Caracciolo's drawings, with their aggressive yet oddly fragile lines, often intersecting yet maintaining their separateness and individuality, suggests that there is no escape from freedom and dread -- not even in the ocean whose movement is often her point of departure, as though her lines were mnemonic traces of its self-involved flow. Her drawings remind us that we still live in an «Age of Anxiety,» but that we can endure it by making art that distills its anxiety, thus finding freedom in anxiety.



Comparing her photograph of Water Mark 15 with her drawing Water Mark 13, ostensibly based on the photograph (both 2007), one sees that her drawing performs a kind of anatomy lesson on the photograph, revealing the inner guts of the sea even as it suggests its outer form. Caracciolo struggles to find the inner form of the outer -- to find form in the seemingly formless -- but her Water Mark drawings suggest that the inner not only pre-exists the outer but pre-empts it: inner free-



dom is all, whatever «natural» form it seems to take. Caracciolo's eye is faster than a speeding bullet because it is the eye of the hyper-alert mind, seeing the movement of its own seeing in what it sees. One might say that Caracciolo contains her own mania, limiting it by framing and focusing it -- in good modernist fashion, the self-framing sea reflects the confining rectangle of the paper -- but her mania bespeaks a restless freedom that feeds on itself to offset its dread.

Aggression is clearly of interest to Caracciolo, as is made clear by her abstract riffs from 2002 on Tiepolo's *La Disputa des Polichinelles* and Cartier-Bresson's 1949 photograph of a densely packed crowd, on the verge of rioting, made in Shanghai, China, during the last days of the Kuomintang. One can read her drawings as discharges or outbursts of aggression in defiance of society, indicating that she is in conflict with it (for it represents an escape from artistic freedom). She identifies with the battling Polichinelles, densely packed in combat, and the Chinese crowd, struggling to escape a defeated government: she doesn't want to be dominated and governed. In a sense, she flees from social intimacy into remote nature and aloneness -- the landscape as well as seascape her drawings also dwell on, delve into, and dissect into abstract traces: away from civilization as though to recover her natural self in solitary romantic fashion, brings with it a dreadful awareness of her freedom, and with it a certain insecurity and nervousness: but that sharpens her perception, giving it an uncanny certainty equal to the uncanny, irksome fluidity and dynamics of the sea and landscape. She's a troubled free spirit, but a perceptive one. Thus her lines, for all their aggressive «natural» energy, are not random and brutal, but seem purposive and nuanced, as though she was trying to control the waves of boisterous energy she is riding, or at least sense its current sufficiently to maintain her balance. Indeed, there is a peculiar rationality to Caracciolo's lines, for all their seeming irrationality, suggesting that she is divided against herself.



I think it is responsible for the gray -- melancholy --



cast of her collages, and the relentless grayness of the tour de force of the exhibition, the «waterfall» of found scraps of metal installed on a tunnel-like staircase of the Villa Medici, which is where it was held. The exhibition -- in effect a retrospective -- is entitled «Tumulti» and this relentless abstract «waterfall» is the most tumultuous work in it. And also the most calm, even peculiarly serene, for the waterfall is contained on one side by a wall and on the other side neatly straight -- reasonable, after all, despite the irrational fragments of dead material that «compose» it. Indeed, Caracciolo has a strong -- I venture to say classical -- sense of composition, suggesting that her three-dimensional collage of misshapen material has a certain pre-determined shape. One can walk along the waterfall, admiring its intricate chaos -- Caracciolo seems aware of chaos theory, as the odd redundancy of her fragments suggests (like her lines, each seems to be a reflexive response to the other) -- without worrying about stepping in its Heracleitean flow twice. We ride Caracciolo's rapids without getting wet -- for the regressive and contemplative thrill of it. Her eloquently abstract waterfall is a seamless whole, for all its brokenness and tumultuous flow, and as such convulsively beautiful, to recall Breton's idea of modern beauty.



Beatrice Caracciolo, «Tumulti,» Jan. 23-Mar. 14, 2010, at the Académie de France à Rome - Villa Medici