

Jennifer Cawley, "Rachel bas-Cohain." In *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, ed. Ina Deicke. Leipzig: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2007.

1. Biography

1.1 Vitaline

bas-Cohain, Rachel, Rachel bas-Cohen, Rhoda Cohen; artist, teacher; 1937-1982; lived and worked in Brooklyn, NY

1.2 Maintext

Art Education:

1955-58 Art Students League, New York, printmaking with Arnold Singer 1957-58

1955-59, 1962-64, New School for Social Research, New York, painting with Gregorio Prestopino, photography with Josef Breitenbach, printmaking with John Ross

1961-64, Brooklyn Museum School, Brooklyn, NY, painting and drawing with Mark Samenfeld

1964-66, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY

Rachel bas-Cohain was a conceptual artist, whose mature work consisted of sculptural assemblage, installation, printmaking, earthworks, and watercolors. Trained primarily in painting and printmaking, in the late 1960s, bas-Cohain began experimenting with a wide variety of materials and processes, producing works that blurred and transgressed boundaries between traditional categories of artistic media and between art and life. Dada-esque in their playful irony, these works celebrate the quotidian, chance, and change and mark the beginning of her artistic maturation. Between 1968 and 1970, bas-Cohain was recognized with and supported by a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In the company of women scholars and artists in Cambridge, bas-Cohain's nascent feminism deepened. In 1972, she joined 19 other women artists in founding A.I.R. Gallery, the first women's cooperative gallery of its kind in the United States. A feminist, obliquely political work produced the following year, *Frozen Grid* is a kinetic sculpture consisting a geometric network of copper tubing, which houses a refrigeration unit and is poised atop a tenuous copper rod that extends from an encased motor. When plugged into an electrical source, *Frozen Grid* draws from the atmosphere moisture, which crystallizes on the copper network, transforming its cold, hard form into one of soft, white fuzziness. *Frozen Grid* derives from bas-Cohain's circa 1973 series entitled, "How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Grid," whose title nearly quotes that of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 darkly comedic film, *Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. The works in this series likewise issue a wry critique of cold war politics; they also challenge contemporary artistic deployment of the grid itself and the rationalizing, modernist, masculinist structures and institutions of which it might be read as emblematic. In subsequent works, bas-Cohain employed materials as varied as tea, cigarette paper, latex, fiberglass, earth, sand, cosmetics, organza, and text. Although formally disparate, these works together question and critique common assumptions and perceptions and offering alternative ways of knowing and seeing. Produced in the last year of bas-Cohain's life, *Any Artwork Strives* (1982) consists of four translucent white silk organza panels arranged one in front of the other and suspended between the floor and ceiling. Each panel bears a portion of text whose meaning is "unwritten" by the text and the work itself—an ironic articulation of the failure of language, intention, and perception; the contingency of meaning; and the "death of the artist/author" that results in the "birth" of the viewer/reader.

2 Documentation

2.1 Work (selection)

CAMBRIDGE/MA, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. DULUTH/GA, Jacqueline Casey Hudgens Center for the Arts. INDIANAPOLIS, Indianapolis Museum of Art. NEW YORK, The Jewish Museum. NEW YORK, New York Artists' Equity. SAVANNAH/GA, Savannah College of Art and Design. WASHINGTON, D.C. Hirshhorn Mus. and Sculpt. Garden. WASHINGTON, D.C. Smithsonian American Art Museum. WELLESLEY/MA, Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College.

2.2 Writings by the artist

archives of Rachel bas-Cohain held at Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA and New York Artists' Equity, New York; additional papers in archives of A.I.R. Gallery, New York

2.3 Selected exhibitions

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E: Individual exhibitions

1969 Cambridge, MA, Radcliffe Institute: Liquids and Light Polarizing Materials / 1970 Cambridge, MA, Radcliffe Institute: Air, Fluids, Light, Glass (Exhibited as Sculpture) / 1973 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Water Works / 1974 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Stasis / 1976 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Reviews and Other Works / 1977 Hopkins Gallery, Ohio State University: Reviews / 1978 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Recent Work for the Out-of-Doors / 1980 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Eye Cycles / 1982 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Rachel bas-Cohain: Silk Organza Boxes and Flat Sculpture / 1985 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Rachel bas-Cohain 1937-1982: Selected Works / 1988 New York, Diane Brown Gallery: Rachel bas-Cohain: Sculpture / 1991 New York, A.I.R. Gallery: Rachel bas-Cohain: Silk Organza Sculptures / 2006 Wellesley, MA, Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Rachel bas-Cohain (1937-1982): "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated" (curated by J. Cawley)

2.4 Bibliography

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2. further literature

J. Cawley. "Rachel bas-Cohain, 1937-1982: 'In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated.'" Wellesley College, 2006; N. Wikoff Leetch. "A Study of Contemporary Installations by Women Artists in Galleries and Museums." Bowling Green State University, 1986.

3. Archives of A.I.R. Gallery, New York; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA; New York Artists' Equity, New York; Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA; New York Public Library, New York; Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA; WGBH, Boston, MA

4. The Harvard Crimson Online Archives, 2007

(printed materials)

Some More Beginnings, New York, 1968; *D.Ashton*, Arts Magazine 43:1968(3)46-50; *S.Love*, The Harvard Crimson 13/05/1969; Critics, Reviewers Ignore Women's Art Show, The Harvard Crimson, 19/11/1970; *E.J.Driscoll*, The Boston Globe, 21/11/1970, 10; Genesis 2, 2:1970(4)3; *D.White*, The Boston Globe, 06/02/1971, 1,6; Earth, Air, Fire Water: Elements of Art, Boston, 1971; *E.J.Driscoll*, The Boston Globe, 07/02/1971, 57; *D.Loercher*, The Christian Science Monitor, 11/02/1971, 9; *B.Schwartz*, Craft Horizons 32:1972(6)59-61; *L.Alloway* The Nation, 09/10/1972, 316; *A.Kingsley*, Art International 17: 1973(5)58, 60-61; Art International 17:1973(5)58, 60-61; *G. Henry*, ARTnews 72:1973(4)78; *J.Perrault*, The Village Voice, 15/03/1973, 22; *M.Tucker*, Ms. 02/1973, 33-35; *P.Stitelman*, Arts Magazine 47:1973(6)74; *R.P.Smith*, Artforum 11:1973(9)86; *L.Alloway*, The Nation, 12/01/1974, 60-61; *A.Moore*, Artforum 13:1975(5)71; The Year of the Woman, Bronx, NY, 1975; Arts Magazine 51:1976(6)35; *A.Kingsley*, The Village Voice, 01/04/1978, 70; *E.Lubell*, Arts Magazine 52: 1978(10)46; Five Artists Changing: A.I.R. Gallery, Lancaster, PE, 1978; Overview 1972-1977: An Exhibition in Two Parts, New York, 1978; *G. Glueck*, The New York Times, 21/09/1979, C22; *L.Weintraub*, Arts Exchange 1979, 25-26; ARTnews 79:1980(8)cover; *J.L.Cardozo*, Artforum 18:1980(9)80; *L.Alloway* Art Journal 39:1980(4)295-297; *E.Lubell*, AiA 70:1982(6)147; *K.Orloff*, Women Artists News 8:1982(1)10-13; *K.Sofer*, ARTnews 81:1982(9)202; Rachel bas-Cohain, 1937-1982: Selected Works, New York, 1984; *A.S.Wooster*, AiA 73:1985(10)156; *J.Silverthorne*, Artforum International 23:1985(9)111-112; Collected Visions: Women Artists of the Bunting Institute, 1961-1986, Cambridge, MA, 1986; *D.B.Balken*, AiA 79:1991(12)111; *S.Brodsky*, The New Villager, 09/12/1992, 10; *P.Braff*, The New York Times, 24/03/1996, L118.