

NINA CANELL

Nina Canell has reconfigured her poetic interventions from exhibition space to exhibition space, preserving their transitory nature all the while. In her work, Canell privileges the use of natural materials — water, stone, wood, and even air—with which she stages delicate and improbable encounters. Transforming even the most nebulous of these materials (air, water, electricity) and their conductive properties into architectural material, the artist operates in the realm of alchemy, with an intuitive logic guiding her exploration of what could be called a phenomenological poetics. Electricity is an important component in her vocabulary. Inspired by the visionary figure Nikola Tesla (1856–1943), who invented different methods of energy transfer, Canell exploits, through her work, electricity’s symbolic power and proliferates representations of electrical current in its fluid, flowing capacity. At the limits of materiality, the conduction of electricity, gas, heat, and air give shape to Canell’s work

For *Intense Proximity*, Canell has installed a group of sculptures that are at once independent and complementary. One is a site-specific installation made for the Palais de Tokyo, where the artist has augmented the level of oxygen in the air by a slight percentage. Without directly influencing the organism, this action creates an ambiance that is favorable for observation and contemplative thought—since the augmentation, however slight, of the proportion of oxygen in the air is thought to produce a stimulating effect on the human mind’s faculties of perception. The nature of thought itself and its relation to the act of breathing—inhaling, exhaling, spitting—constitutes the conceptual foundation of another of Canell’s contributions: *Unanswered Elemental Thoughts* (2010), a sculpture in which a piece of chewed and hardened gum is suspended in the air. A third sculpture, *Impulse Sight* (2011), composed of 4320 watermelon seeds, calls attention to the mouth as the intimate organ for transmitting non-verbal thoughts. Each of these works demonstrates the power of Canell’s work to alter our habitual perception of distance and proximity—up to the point that they become confused, or even inverted

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