

Nina Canell *Near Here**Camden Arts Centre, London 17 January – 30 March*

How deeply should we analyse a sculpture? Materiality, after all, extends to the subatomic level, where particles act tirelessly and weirdly, and invisible forces can sometimes be as decisive as visible ones. Such forces, Nina Canell's work asserts, can even compose for us. *Near Here (1 Microsecond)* (2014, made with her frequent collaborator Robin Watkins) is a thick sheet of plastic coated with photocopying toner and, for one microsecond, zapped with a million volts. Now sitting in a Perspex vitrine on a rectangle of carpet, it suggests lightning cutting whitely through murky blackness; the massive electrocuting power that created this aleatory composition on the plastic's surface, now just a memory, feels inextricable from it. In this sense, the Swedish artist shares territory with boffinlike practitioners such as Raphael Hefti; but, as per her previous shows, this selection of works from 2012 to 2014 finds Canell primarily interested in extending sculpture's vocabulary to unseen things made flashingly visible, or out of sight yet framed as present.

So the off-white chunks sitting in a glass on a square of carpet in *Interiors (Condensed)* (2013) turn out to be coagulated air, a favourite material of Canell's, and in a series of thick

offcuts from electricity cables – several suspended in vitrines full of water – the artist speaks of natural forces stymied, a galvanic flow suspended. These works, their cross-sectioned ends revealing jostling clusters of wires, each wrapped in colourful insulation (the whole thing encased in thick rubber, like a giant liquorice allsort) operate strangely. They're all about absent forces, cancelled events. We know what electricity does in water: it conducts, potentially fatally. But we're simply reminded that it *would* happen, were circumstances different. *Blue (Diffused)* (2014), meanwhile, features a 'shredded sock' whose tiny azure fragments hang, as if magnetised by static electricity, in a slim vertical vitrine. Without specific crib notes (which aren't freely available), you know only that *something* is happening here.

Canell's 'seemingly unorthodox use of objects and materials', according to the institution's website, 'attempts to transfer, exchange and share forms of intuitive knowledge'. This is an interpretative stumbling block of sorts in works that appear to require some sort of explicatory supplement. What's apprehensible without one is a sense of being perched on the

lip of understanding – or left with one's subjectivity – which might be analogous to intuiting that existence is ghosted by all kinds of vigorous invisibilities that we don't really understand, shifting all the time. Read Canell's work thus and it converts into something like science's inverse: a relativist poetics, suggesting both anxiety and excitability at everything being in flux, at the air and what's built into our architecture (eg, electricity cables) quietly effervescing, and – as per the title – at the constant, easily ignored proximity of all of this.

Even so, to ride the critical upbeat in this way is also to dance around the fact that this display doesn't engage as previous Canell shows have. You might will it to be both literal and metaphor (for the creative spirit, for the freedoms of interpretation), but there are more of the cable works than seem necessary, odd curatorial decisions such as stranding one work outside the entrance, a faint air of exclusion. Canell remains an intriguing, individualistic figure, and one doesn't want her to sit still as a sculptor; but for an exhibition plugged into power sources and in clandestine perpetual motion, this one feels mysteriously static. *Martin Herbert*



Near Here, 2014 (installation view). Photo: Marcus J. Leith. Courtesy Camden Arts Centre, London