

## STOCKHOLM

## Nina Canell

MODERNA MUSEET

The very first thing one encountered upon entering “Mid-Sentence,” Nina Canell’s recent solo exhibition, was a nail. It was embedded in the gallery wall, but instead of having been hammered *in*, the nail’s sharp point faced *out*, toward the viewer. A few more nails loosely hung from its tip, creating a fragile chain. They were held together by a magnetic force—invisible, but powerful—that permeated their little “bodies” with a flow of energy.

Nina Canell, *Brief Syllables (detail)*, 2014, telecommunication and electricity cables, steel, wood, dimensions variable. From the series “Brief Syllables,” 2014–.



The works of the Swedish-born, Berlin-based artist allow the viewer to perceive normally imperceptible dimensions of reality—not only flows of energy but gravity, sound waves, or air itself. Her delicate compositions of familiar and often mundane objects and materials capture minute examples of these phenomena and render them perceptible to the viewer’s eyes, ears, or body. Through this material poetry, Canell unveils an ontology of becoming and suggests that the material

world is formed by the constant tension between flux and coagulation. Her sculptures can be seen as an extension of this tension between flow and hardening—they represent sculpture as process, sculpture as emergence or as the result of emergence. *Perpetuum Mobile* (25 kg), 2009, featuring a water bucket, water, an ultrasound generator, and concrete, subtly reveals the imperceptible interactions between the materials: Owing to humidity, the loose particles of cement that fill a cut-open paper bag placed next to the bucket slowly coagulate into a monolithic sculpture.

As the exhibition title suggests, Canell’s sculptures are often considered in literary or linguistic terms. The show’s curator, Fredrik Liew, speaks of her sculptures as words that become elements in a vocabulary, while in a catalogue essay for another recent solo show, “Free-Space Path

Loss” at Lunds Konsthall, Chris Sharp refers to Canell’s works as metaphors. Such accurate definitions are provoked by the inaccuracy of language itself, which constantly attempts to express the inexpressible, whether referring to the complexity of thought or of the material world, but does so always only partially, and yet with surplus of meaning. Good metaphors at least partially lift the veil of the inexpressible, and Canell’s works are most lively material metaphors.

Linguistic terms are directly employed by Canell herself: To make *Brief Syllables*, 2014 (part of the ongoing series of the same name), she unearthed an array of electrical and communication cables, dismembering and pinning them to white pedestals like rare butterflies. They appear as open mouths with half-pronounced words hanging like dead sound in the air; their original function—communication—is interrupted, almost violently cut. Almost surgical incisions in the cables reveal their internal “organs” for the viewer’s inspection: dead slices of the flow of information.

The dynamic matter-energy relationship is expressed through even such a dull object as chewing gum: *Remembrance (Colourless)*, 2013—a piece of gum next to its concrete replica—is a tiny sculpture of the process of thinking, a frozen moment in the rapid circulation of ideas. We see the marks of a body’s actions, of small gestures that form sculptures. Alina Szapocznikow’s series of photographs of chewing gum comes to mind, but in Canell’s work, it is not only the human body that gives form to sculpture but the material itself—its vibrant interactions with the body, and with chance. Just as poetry allows words to touch the inexpressible, Canell’s art allows materials to do so through the dance of matter and energy—elegantly and sparingly.

—Neringa Černiauskaitė