Anthony McCall

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Albright-Knox Art Gallery, August 16–November 3, 2019
Solid-Light Films

1

*Throes II, 2011*

*Throes II* is a single complex sculptural object in which McCall uses what he calls a “floating” wipe to hold in balance two basic forms: an ellipse, which imperceptibly contracts before rapidly expanding, and a rotating wave form, which follows a circular path. A conventional wipe is a filmmaking technique for gradually moving from one shot to another; however, in a floating wipe, neither image is ever replaced by the other. Instead, each remains partially obscured and partially visible.

2

*Between You and I, 2006*

*Between You and I* represents McCall’s interest in extending his solid-light works vertically. These conical forms soar overhead, and the apertures in the membranes of the tent-like enclosures hint at both doorways and inhabitable spaces. Where the horizontal projections seem to retain a clear relationship to cinema, the vertical projections suggest additional kinships to sculpture and perhaps architecture. *Between You and I* is based on two side-by-side standing figures, each built from an ellipse and a traveling wave. McCall animates these forms using a wipe, a filmmaking device that enables one shot to gradually replace another. In one standing figure, the ellipse is gradually replaced by the traveling wave; in the other, the traveling wave is gradually replaced by the ellipse.

3

*You and I, Horizontal, 2005*

With *You and I, Horizontal*, McCall was seeking a sculptural equivalent of parallel action: an idea drawn from film where two or more stories are told by repeatedly cutting back and forth between them. In doing so, he rediscovered the outmoded cinematic transition known as the wipe, where one shot slides in front of, and obscures, the earlier shot. Such a transition would traditionally last little more than a second or two. In contrast, McCall radically extended this transition to seven minutes in *You and I, Horizontal*, creating in the process a slow, measured exchange between the three separate sculptural forms: an ellipse, a floating line, and a traveling wave.
4

_Doubling Back_, 2003

_Doubling Back_ was the first of the series of solid-light films McCall created following a twenty-year hiatus. In the work, two identical traveling wave drawings—at the time, a new form for McCall—advance imperceptibly through one another. One moves horizontally, the other vertically, to create slowly changing chambers and pockets. A distinguishing feature of this film is the way in which it uses the architecture of the gallery as a framing device; the projection is directed along one of the side walls rather than through the center of the room. As a result, the forms furl and unfurl against this side wall and floor, creating additional spatial volumes to discover.

5

_Split Second (Mirror), 2018_

A large mirror interrupts the beam in this work halfway along its length so that the cone reverses direction and projects its “footprint” back onto the same wall that conceals the projector. The large mirror also reflects back the entire redirected, split cone, presenting a mirror image of it. The two volumetric cones face different directions and rotate seamlessly both in real space and as an uncanny, reflected object.

Performance Films and Slide Work

6

_Landscape for Fire_, 1972 (digitized 2019)

This film, McCall’s first, documents _Landscape for Fire II_, one of seven related performances the artist created between 1972 and 1974. In it, figures dressed in white set small fires in a specific order in a landscape (a decommissioned WWII-era airfield in North Weald, England), producing a kind of elemental choreography. Although McCall carefully scored _Landscape for Fire II_ and each related performance in advance, there were no rehearsals for the participants; the film records the only enactment of _Landscape for Fire II_. With just one chance to capture the performance, McCall decided that there should be no distinction made between the individuals performing the work and the film crew recording it, and both appear in the film.
Jeff Preiss and Anthony McCall  
*Anthony McCall: Five Minute Drawing, 1974/2008*

McCall first performed *Five Minute Drawing* at Art Meeting Place, London, in 1974 as part of a “cabaret” dedicated to five-minute performances; this video documents the artist’s subsequent re-performance of the work at Orchard Space in New York on April 27, 2008. The performance begins with the artist pinning six sheets of paper to a wall. He then tightly stretches a long, charcoal-covered string, using it as a compass arm to draw a charcoal arc, before snapping the string to imprint a straight line across all six sheets of paper. This mark-making instantly adds dynamism to a two-dimensional surface—a simple technique that echoes the drawing practice anchoring all of McCall’s light projections.

Helena Wittmann and Tim Liebe  
*Anthony McCall: Crossing the Elbe, 2015*

This work documents McCall’s *CROSSING THE ELBE*, a public commission in which he projected the beams of long-range searchlights from three different locations in Hamburg, Germany: one from an island in the Elbe and one from either side of the river. Starting ninety minutes after sunset, *CROSSING THE ELBE* was visible across most parts of the city’s sky for twenty-one minutes every evening for one year. Over the course of the project, the direction of the three beams of light was gradually shifted so that each section of the city eventually became part of this symbolic connection. Much like *Landscape for Fire*, this film captures the way McCall’s site-specific interventions transform the landscape.

*Miniature in Black and White*, 1972

One of three works McCall made in 1972 for the Kodak carousel projector, *Miniature in Black and White* can be seen as a precursor to his solid-light works; here, the spectator invited to look toward the projector itself. This work could also be considered his first installation: when exhibited in 1972 at Gallery House in London, it occupied an entire room and ran continuously, as most of his solid-light films have done since. For McCall, the swarm of retinal after-images and the propulsive projector sound are crucial to the experience of the work.

7 Works on Paper and Notebooks
The artist’s first solo museum exhibition in North America, Anthony McCall: Dark Rooms, Solid Light fills the entirety of the Albright-Knox’s 1905 Building galleries in a survey of his creative production from the 1970s to today. At the heart of the exhibition are five of McCall’s (American, born England, 1946) immersive solid-light installations: simple animated drawings of circles and lines the artist projects through a thin mist to produce massive sculptures—conical enclosures and flat planes that expand, contract, and develop over time.

McCall evolved these works over decades beginning in 1973, the year he definitively emigrated from London to New York after a few years spent traveling between the two cities. In New York, he steeped himself in the city’s parallel worlds of Minimalist sculpture and avant-garde film. McCall’s first solid-light work was the now-legendary 1973 film Line Describing a Cone. In the film, a single point of light emitted by a 16mm projector expands over the course of thirty minutes to “draw” a three-dimensional, translucent cone. Originally, McCall relied on the cigarette smoke and dust that typically filled the loft settings where the film was
first shown to articulate his projector beam as an emerging membrane of light. The work’s radicality lay in a simple inversion. Since the dawn of cinema in the late nineteenth century, viewers have gazed at a screen to be entertained or challenged by the enlarged images presented there. In one decisive moment, McCall reoriented the spectator’s body and turned it toward the projector; the beam itself became the “image” of his work, and there was no longer an option to just gaze passively at the screen.

Between 1973 and 1975, McCall created several similar works, in which 16mm film was projected in haze-filled rooms, while also experimenting with the way smoke, candles, and firelight both mark time and leave a physical trace of its passing in numerous other projects. These include his earliest film, *Landscape for Fire*, 1972, as well as additional documentation related to the performance captured in the film. In the footage, we see figures dressed in white set small fires at specific times and locations...
that trace out a grid in the landscape, producing a kind of elemental choreography. Between 1972 and 1974, McCall created seven such unique performances, using preparatory drawings to score these carefully staged events, which were each presented only once.

Like performance, drawing—whether in pencil on paper or with light through haze—and photography have been central to McCall’s practice from the very beginning. As part of a significant installation of the artist’s works on paper from 1970 to the present, the exhibition includes *Found Solid Light Installation*, October 29, 1973: a map
identifying the locations of the dozens of lighthouses that pepper the coast of England, Wales, and the Channel Islands. By co-opting existing “projector beams” for his then-new program of solid-light installations, McCall connected his art with landscape. The exhibition also includes notebooks that show the origins and evolution of McCall’s ideas. Many of his drawings, such as *Breath III*, 2010/2011, help illustrate the way the artist conceives of the projected line as an ever-changing “footprint,” or base, for the sculptural shapes he creates in space. Those small moments of interaction between light and the environment that can be so easily overlooked are also often the subject of McCall’s photographs, such as *Room with Altered Window*, 1973/2018, or *Smoke Screen I*, 2017. *Miniature in Black and White*, 1972, a carousel of slides McCall hand made using paper, adhesive tape, plastic, and unexposed 35mm slide film, is actually a precursor to the artist’s solid-light works, which he began the following year; when projected, the whole beam of the slide projector’s light becomes part of the work’s image. McCall consistently uses these works on paper and drawings in space to help us apprehend the ways in which he “draws out” a duration of time, giving lasting form to ephemeral slivers of experience.
McCall occupies a central place in the discourse of sculpture, drawing, film, and performance in the 1970s. *Five Minute Drawing*, 1974; *Pencil Duration*, 1973/1974; and other task-based drawings and performances resonate with Sol LeWitt's (American, 1928–2007) conceptual drawings of the same period as well as the profound influence of John Cage's (American, 1912–1992) scored performances on an entire generation of artists. And his translucent haze sculptures seem to melt the monumental steel planes of a Minimalist like Richard Serra (American, born 1938) while lending greater substance to the taut yarn line drawings in space of Fred Sandback (American, 1943–2003). Yet toward the end of the 1970s, McCall moved away from making art. During what became a twenty-year hiatus, he ran a studio that designed and edited art publications. McCall only returned to making art when his truly pioneering works from the 1970s began to be “rediscovered” by curators and included in numerous exhibitions in the early 2000s.

Although this new interest was sparked by McCall’s creations from the 1970s, the artist immediately began transforming his practice for the contemporary moment by using computer scripts and digital projections instead of film. Likewise, as interior spaces had become less smoke-filled in the intervening decades, McCall began...
relying on haze machines to complete his solid-light works. While he used variations on the circle or straight lines for his installations from the 1970s, since 2003 McCall has turned to digitally animated curves and waves. The movement of these forms is profoundly organic and sometimes even suggestive of the body or dance.

Although the mechanisms behind McCall’s solid-light works are fairly easy to outline—animated light beams and haze—it is far more complicated to describe their phenomenological, spatial, and even emotional effects. Here, sculpture is pared down to only the most immaterial materials—light and mist—yet McCall’s continuously unfolding, curving, and bending projections of light piercing through darkness are far from austere. Their immediate effect may be disorienting, even destabilizing, as the apparent solidity of these forms
flies in the face of our intellectual understanding than light cannot be solid. Gaining confidence in the darkness, we may reach out to try to touch one of these shapes, a magical feeling that magnifies our senses and heightens our awareness of the relationship between space, light, and time.

Indeed, the unfolding of McCall’s work over time is a key part of its appeal. The dilations and expansions of time that define our daily lives—running for a flight or waiting for a loved one to call—are so commonplace they become largely unremarkable. It seems to be only in moments of acute boredom or stress that we become aware of how fluid our relationship with time can be. McCall’s solid-light works offer an alternative temporal experience, holding us in an altered state in which time is slowed or paused while our awareness of our surroundings, our relationship to others, and our own bodies in space is heightened.

The installations also shift our relationship with architecture in ways that can feel uncanny. For returning visitors to the Albright-Knox, McCall’s luminous interventions will significantly alter the experience of familiar galleries in the museum’s historic 1905 Building. In *Between You and I*, 2006, two vertically oriented side-by-side forms tower thirty feet from the floor to ceiling of the museum’s Sculpture Court. Elsewhere, the forms are projected horizontally: terminating on a two-sided screen, unfurling in relation to an adjacent wall and floor, or, in the case of *Split Second (Mirror)*, 2018, doubling courtesy a mirrored wall. These membranous works energize the architectural volumes, encouraging viewers to identify, reimagine, and negotiate the space as if for the first time. As the haze slowly drifts through the expansive darkness, creating fugitive chambers and cells for us to explore, otherwise fixed gallery walls now appear to breathe gently.

From McCall’s emphatically non-narrative solid-light works springs an unavoidable desire to share with others, to tell your story of discovery, to confirm your observations, to determine if you really did see what you saw. But however compelling a friend or stranger’s shared photographs may be, it is for those who personally circle and weave through the light, who approach and turn away from the projector’s beam, who adjust to the steadily transforming environment that the work becomes alive,
an experience that lingers and crystalizes over time. These works are unforgettable performances activated by those who experience them firsthand. Our eyes calibrate to the darkness, our breathing slows, and our hands reach toward the light.
Checklist

Unless otherwise noted, all works are courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly, New York.

Landscape for Fire, 1972 (digitized 2019)
16mm color film with optical sound transferred to DVD, edition of 15 with 3 APs
Running time: 7 minutes

Jeff Preiss and Anthony McCall
Anthony McCall: Five Minute Drawing, 1974/2008
HD video
Running time: 6 minutes, 45 seconds

Helena Wittmann and Tim Liebe
Anthony McCall: Crossing the Elbe, 2015
HD video
Running time: 9 minutes

Miniature in Black and White, 1972
Eighty-one 35mm slides, miniature glass screen, and Kodak carousel projector,
edition of 5 with 2 APs
11 x 24¾ x 61¾ inches (28 x 62 x 156 cm), continuous installation

Doubling Back, 2003
Media player, QuickTime movie file, digital projector, and haze machine, edition of 5 with 1 AP
30-minute cycle, in two parts

You and I, Horizontal, 2005
Media player, QuickTime movie file, digital projector, and haze machine, edition of 5 with 1 AP
50-minute cycle, in six parts

Between You and I, 2006
Media player, QuickTime movie file, two digital projectors, and two haze machines, edition of 3 with 1 AP
33-minute cycle, in two parts

Throes II, 2011
Media player, QuickTime movie file, video projector, and haze machine, edition of 5 with 1 AP
15-minute cycle, in two parts

Split Second (Mirror), 2018
Media player, QuickTime movie file, video projector, haze machine, and mirror, edition of 3 with 1 AP
16-minute cycle
Recording Artist, 1970/2018
Archival dye sublimation print, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
10 x 15 inches (25.4 x 38.1 cm)

Landscape for Fire II, 1972/2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33½ x 50 inches (85.1 x 127 cm)

Smoke without Fire, 1972/2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33¾ x 50¼ inches (85.4 x 127.6 cm)

Fire Cycles I, 1973
Performance score, blue and red ink, pencil, and vintage silver gelatin photograph on graph paper
17½ x 22 ¼ inches (44.5 x 56.5 cm)

Found Solid Light Installation, October 29, 1973
Offset lithography on paper, edition 1/2
14 ¼ x 10 ½ inches (36.2 x 27.6 cm)

Landscape for Fire, 1973
Chromogenic prints with burn marks mounted on paper
23 ¼ x 14½ inches (59.1 x 36.8 cm)
Private Collection

Pencil Duration (on verso: no. 1 long strokes x3 in from each corner (light pressure)), 1973
Graphite on paper
30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm)

Room with Altered Window, 1973/2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33¾ x 50½ inches (85.7 x 128.3 cm)
Collection of Peter Lowy and Sandra Barros

Room with Altered Window (7 am, 12 noon, 7 pm), 1973
Installation drawing, ink on paper
14½ x 23 inches (36.8 x 58.4 cm)
Courtesy Aaron and Barbara Levine

Ink and pencil on paper
14½ x 23 inches (36.8 x 58.4 cm)

Long Film for Four Projectors, 1974
Installation study, photocopy and pencil on paper
8 x 10½ inches (20.3 x 26.7 cm)

Nine Gasoline Fires: Score for Eternal Condition, 1974
Ink and pencil on paper
17½ x 22¼ inches (44.5 x 56.5 cm)

Four Projected Movements, 1975
Set of four installation drawings, wax pencil on paper
18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 61 cm) each
Doubling Back, 2003
Traveling wave animation study, pencil and colored pencil on paper
11 x 8 ½ inches (27.9 x 21.6 cm)

Doubling Back, 2003
Set of six installation drawings, pencil on paper
24 x 14 inches (61 x 35.6 cm) each
Courtesy Aaron and Barbara Levine

Five Minutes of Pure Sculpture, 2005
Graphite on paper
18 x 14 inches (45.7 x 35.6 cm)

Between You and I, 2006
Set of eighteen sequential footprint pairs at two-minute intervals, xerographic carbon prints on paper
14 x 11 inches (35.6 x 27.9 cm) each

Leaving (with Two-Minute Silence), 2006/2008
Set of twenty-four sequential studies, graphite on paper
13 x 16 inches (33 x 40.5 cm) each, framed

Crossing, 2007
Eight graphite drawings and one chromogenic print
8 ½ x 11 inches (21.6 x 27.9 cm) each

Coupling, 2009
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum rotunda installation study, graphite on paper
37 ⅞ x 27 inches (96.2 x 68.6 cm)

Column (Bending to the Wind), 2009
Graphite on paper
55 ⅜ x 38 inches (141.6 x 96.5 cm)

Breath III, 2010/2011
Set of seven sequential footprint drawings, charcoal on paper
14 x 11 inches (35.6 x 27.9 cm)

Crossing the Hudson, 2011
Cyclical structure study, pencil on paper
8 ½ x 11 inches (21.6 x 27.9 cm)

Crossing the Hudson (April 12, the 295th night), 2011
Pencil on paper in three parts
43 ½ x 109 ¼ inches (110.5 x 277.5 cm) overall

Throes, 2012
Charcoal and oil pastel on paper
30 x 22 3/16 inches (76.3 x 56.3 cm)

Crossing, 2016
Study for slanting, solid-light, four-projector installation, pigment print on paper mounted on aluminum, edition of 3
39 ⅜ x 47 5/16 inches (100.5 x 121.8 cm)

Doubling Back, 2017
Set of nine sequential footprint drawings, archival UV-cured pigment on Dibond
9 ⅞ x 12 ⅜ inches (24 x 32.1 cm) each
Smoke Screen III, 2017
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 3/3 with 1 AP
61⅜ x 45⅜ inches (155.9 x 114.5 cm)

Smoke Screen IV, 2017
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 3/3 with 1 AP
61⅜ x 45⅜ inches (155.9 x 114.5 cm)

Smoke Screen VII, 2017
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition AP from an edition of 3 with 1 AP
61⅜ x 45⅜ inches (155.9 x 114.5 cm)

Spinning Column 1, 2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33⅜ x 23⅜ inches (85.1 x 60 cm)

Spinning Column 2, 2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33⅜ x 23⅜ inches (85.1 x 60 cm)

Spinning Column 3, 2018
Silver gelatin print mounted on museum board and aluminum, edition 1/3 with 1 AP
33⅜ x 23⅜ inches (85.1 x 60 cm)

Split Second (Mirror), 2018
Graphite and photocopy on paper
17⅛ x 24¾ inches (44.5 x 62.9 cm)

Notebook, April 12–25, 1973
Fire Cycles I
Notebook
12⅛ x 10 x ¾ inches (31.8 x 25.4 x 1.6 cm)

Notebook, July 10–August 21, 1973
Line Describing a Cone
Notebook
12⅛ x 10 x ¾ inches (31.8 x 25.4 x 1.6 cm)

Notebook, October 14–November 27, 1973
Conical Solid
Notebook
12⅛ x 10 x ¾ inches (31.8 x 25.4 x 1.6 cm)

Notebook, January 31–May 1, 1975
Long Film for Four Projectors
Notebook
12⅛ x 10 x ¾ inches (31.8 x 25.4 x 1.6 cm)

Notebook, May 1–June 26, 1975
Long Film for Ambient Light
Notebook
12⅛ x 10 x ¾ inches (31.8 x 25.4 x 1.6 cm)
Small Notebook No. 6, 2004
Five Minutes
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 11, 2005
Double Exchange
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 14, 2005
Vertical/Horizontal Differences
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 15, 2005
Guggenheim
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 17, 2006
Hanging Fire
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 18, 2006
Double Horizontal Projection
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 20, 2006
Doubling Doubling Back
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 22, 2006–7
Arrest and Flow
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 23, 2007
Leaving
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 27, 2007
Leaving
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 31, 2008
Leaving
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 32, 2008
Leaving, With Two Minute Silence
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)
Small Notebook No. 34, 2009
Meeting you Halfway
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 36, 2009–10
Crossing the Hudson
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook “Bridge”
Crossing the Hudson
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 38, 2010
Skirt
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 40, 2010–11
Coupling
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 41, 2011
Circulation Figures
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 42, 2011
About Face
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 43, 2011
Throes
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 47, 2012–13
Face to Face
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)

Small Notebook No. 50, 2013–14
Traveling Wave
Notebook
6 x 4¼ x ½ inches (15.2 x 10.8 x 1.3 cm)


FIVE MINUTES OF PURE CINEMA
FIVE MINUTES OF PURE SCULPTURE
This exhibition has been made possible through the generosity of M&T Bank.

Additional support has been provided by Frey Electric Construction Company and Sean Kelly Gallery.

Equipment and technical support provided in part by Advantage TI.

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s exhibition program is generously supported by The Seymour H. Knox Foundation, Inc.

The artist and curators would like to thank Sean Kelly Gallery, Sprüth Magers, and the generous lenders to the exhibition: Barbara and Aaron Levine, Peter Lowy and Sandra Barros, and a private collection.