



DIANA COOPER
CLEVELAND

The ten-year retrospective *Beyond the Line* tracks the development of Diana Cooper's outsider-ish art since the late 1990s [Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland (MOCA); September 28—December 30, 2007]. From the mostly two-dimensional *The Black One*, 1997, a platform of impenetrably fidgety ink and marker doodles, through *Missed Once*, 2000-2002, essentially a moveable wall tethered to the gallery by a network of pipe cleaners, Cooper has gradually spread into the third dimension.

Most of MOCA's exhibition space is devoted to several intensely disquiet gallery-environments. These recent room-size hybrid drawing-sculptures, grown from seeds sown by artists like Richard Tuttle as much as Agnes Martin, are post-minimalist jungles of computer-age office scraps. Cooper uses such refuse to push a vision of modern systems up to—and then, well past—a visual breaking point, to invoke the collapse of a coherent sense of self in the face of overwhelming complexity. The installation *Orange Alert: UK*, 2004-2005, seems almost to prophesy, mixing visual hyperbole with a contemporary political trope. The focal point of this work is a starburst of filmstrip-like orange lines, radiating from a cruciform orange box. Referencing the US Department of Homeland Security's threat level code, Cooper's virtual scream breaks above a mountainous terrain of jagged triangular orange-striped foam core. At intervals, several of these triangles jut out from the walls like hysterical blips on a graph of cultural dysfunction. Doomsday hasn't been this laden with ambivalent sensuality since Slim Pickens learned to love the bomb in *Dr. Strangelove*. Roy Lichtenstein's cartoon bubble explosions also come to mind. Such stylistic invocations of an early 1960s aesthetic help to make much of Cooper's work seem bated-breath-contemporary in our own anxiously nostalgic era.

In *Beyond the Line*, an indomitable, kudzu-like fecundity has taken possession of otherwise affectless, handicraft-oriented linear shapes, colors, and ticky-tacky textures. Cooper worked for more than a month with MOCA staff and local art school interns to assemble

the eight large-scale works on display. She employed pipe cleaners, pom-poms, felt, acetate, neoprene, Velcro, and various kinds of tape—every material and element seemingly calculated to strike the eye as quotidian, informal, and waste-oriented, that is, single-use, makeshift stuff, normally recycled, shredded or thrown in the trash. Nevertheless Cooper lends it all an air of conceptual permanence, hooking things together with a convincing illogic. Velcro and acetate run up to the ceiling, careen around corners, or puddle at the bottom of a pillar, as in the monochromatic, Armageddon-like *Swarm*, 2003-2007, where homemade geometry rendered in corrugated plastic is under attack by phalanxes of black felt and Velcro V-shapes.

Even when Cooper's work explores biological/medical metaphors, it tends to feel prefab in its improvisations rather than organic or biomorphic—more stick than Popsicle. Take, for example, *Emerger*, 2005-2006. Replete with valentine-red tessellations and medical chart-like passages, it is a fantasy of vascular and organ function, depicting flow and stoppage, pressure and a pervasive sense of anxiety. At several points, neatly carpentered square holes open up the work, offering passages to more activity on the other side.

The exhibition culminates on the round floor-space of the Seltzer Rotunda, where the autobiographical *All Our Wandering*, 2007, lies as if in state. This newly invented retrospective instrument, a sort of time machine, takes its place among Cooper's other quasi-inventions and dreamlike, functional non sequiturs. Commissioned by MOCA, the telescope or bellows-like construction is made from a series of diminishing open wood boxes, whose interiors contain an intricate digitally photographed retrospective of Cooper's drawings rendered in a tracery of red printer's ink. Here, the infinity of former doodles becomes the ground for the artist to scrawl a fresh generation of hand-drawn marks. The structural solidity of the wooden boxes and their febrile, reproducible interiors suggest that Cooper's prolific ephemera are beginning to build their own cultural reef.

—Douglas Max Utter

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ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Diana Cooper, *Orange Alert: UK*, 2004-2005, installation: acetate, acrylic, felt, neoprene, paper, foam core, corrugated plastic, and map pins, approx. 24 x 27.83 x 20.6 feet (courtesy of the artist; installation view at MOCA Cleveland, 2007; © Tim Safranek Photographics); Diana Cooper, installation view at MOCA Cleveland, 2007 (courtesy of the artist © Tim Safranek Photographics)