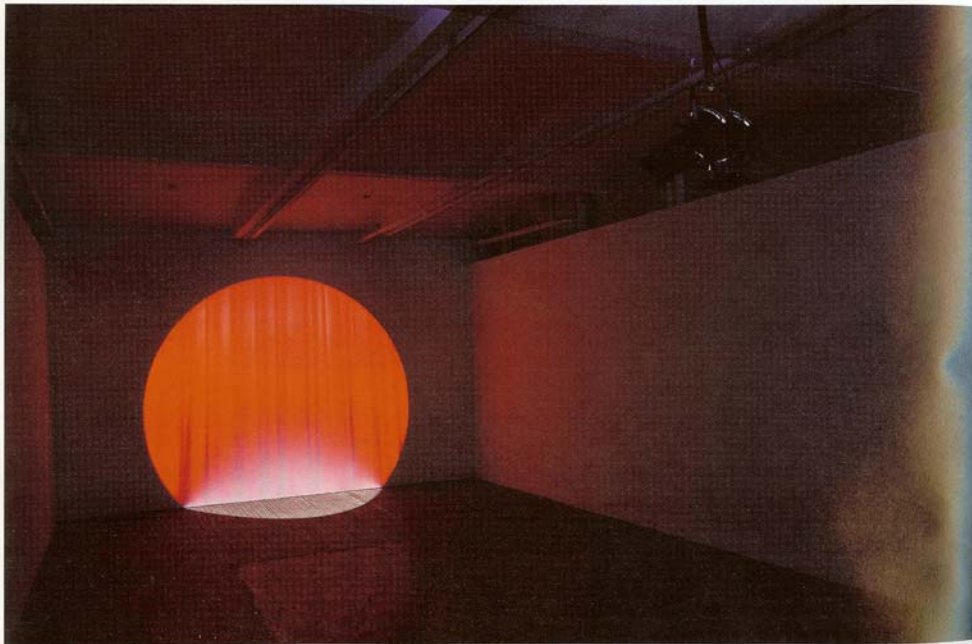


# REVIEWS



CEAL FLOYER, *DOUBLE ACT*, 2006 • LIGHT PROJECTION, PHOTOGRAPHIC GOBO, GOBO HOLDER AND THEATER LIGHT, DIMENSIONS: VARIABLE • COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LISSON GALLERY, LONDON

## North America

### NEW YORK

#### CEAL FLOYER

SWISS INSTITUTE

Pop songs and advertising jingles employ repetition to maddening degrees, both through their internal structure (the chorus or "hook") and relentless airplay. A catchy tune can permeate a listener's consciousness to exasperating effect, until eventually a threshold of inattention emerges, the tune's ubiquity blocking out discerning, critical perception. Alfred Bester's classic sci-fi novel *The Demolished Man* (1951) showed the power of insidious tunes turned to absurd and perverse ends: his evil protagonist evades capture by continuously running the world's most irritating ditty through his head to "jam" mind-reading investigators with its numbing reverberation.

British artist Ceal Floyer found a hook whose catch is likewise banal, insistent, and a touch psychotic. She truncated the chorus of a torpid Tammy Wynette ballad to the incessantly repeated phrase "So I'll just keep on... 'til I get it right," and the abbreviated song endlessly impelled its own continued loop (it "just keeps on"), pervading the Swiss Institute's space with metronomic regularity. The piece consisted of a mere 10 words, yet Floyer enlisted the feelings in which pop songs traffic—longing, perseverance, hope, and compulsion—evoking an endless circuit of unrequited expectation.

Sound art has often employed looping techniques to disturbing effect. Alvin Lucier, a pioneer of the medium, created the paranoia-inducing 15-minute piece *I Am Sitting in a Room* in 1969. In it the artist's incantation of the eponymous

phrase, increasingly distorted via feedback loop with each replay, not only erodes the listener's perception of space but also disintegrates the meaning of even the most self-evident statement. Floyer's *Til I Get It Right* (2005) similarly questions the apparent obviousness of auditory material. An event that unfolds in a predictable sequence—here, the unremitting repetition of Wynette's phrase—becomes subtle and highly charged. The psychological ambiguity of Floyer's choice written by she of "Stand By Your Man" fame, resounds with uncertain implications: Floyer's version lends a self-accusatory inflection to Wynette's doleful declaration: she still hasn't gotten it right, and ineffectual repetition makes it clear that she never will. Perhaps her fortitude is admirable, idealistic, even noble—Tammy as the can-do optimist refusing to take no for an answer. That Floyer removed the sentimental core of the song (originally Wynette will "keep on falling in love" 'til she gets it right), universalizes her determination, poised as she is between the knife-edge of failure and perseverance.

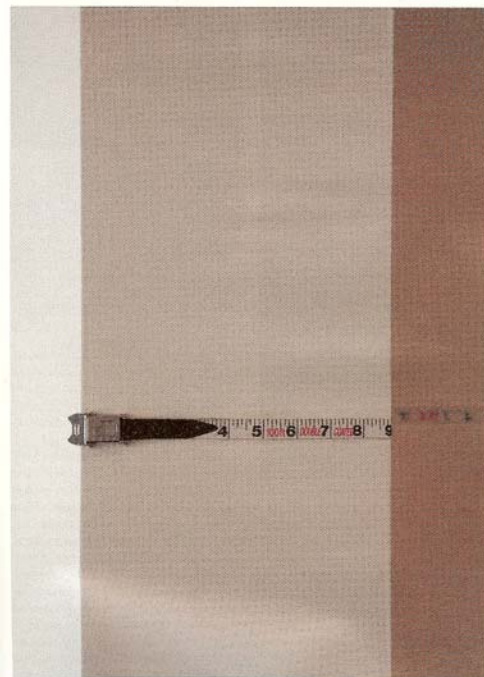
Floyer's track bled into the surrounding spaces, so when approaching the nearby *Double Act* (2006), Wynette's lament affected one's reading of it. A curtain appeared on the gallery's far wall, beamed there by a single theatrical light equipped with a red-velvet-patterned colored gel. Projected at the lower corner of the long room, a small lip of white light remained on the floor, emulating what would have been a curtain's true end were it positioned on the vertical wall and illuminated by a glarin spotlight. The projection functioned both phenomenologically and psychologically, evoking the fearful and exhilarating intensity of the stage, and, with Tammy's voice leaking in from the outer room, one almost expected her to part the Grand Ole Opry-like curtain to finish, at last, her plaintive ballad.

A final piece in the exhibition, *Nine Yards* (2006), was an almost-too-easy neo-Conceptualist exercise. A single tape measure extended from one corner of a small room, zigzagging along the wall through the white cube. The measure

ended—surprise!—after nine yards (324 inches), with the remainder neatly wound and set on a diminutive ledge. Because the tape had to go over every architectural nuance, even the columns, nine yards was a lot shorter than the 27-foot length one would have expected. This exploration of the rudimentary conditions of perception (is nine yards always the same nine yards?) combined with the simple pun ("the whole nine yards") left the viewer with a textbook study of the elemental components of representation, spatial and otherwise. Works like Walter De Maria's 1979 *The Broken Kilometer* and Edward Krasinski's signature blue line, which he attached to various surfaces always at a height of 130 centimeters, have mined the misrecognition of distance, and Floyer's work treads close to these precedents without distinguishing its stake in such a rehearsal.

Floyer conveys extraordinary complexity with intentionally modest materials: found audio, a colored gel, and a length of tailor's tape filled the Swiss Institute's loft and often made intense demands on spectators' understandings of seemingly self-evident spatial relations. She argues that a close attention to perceptual stimuli can marshal dense psychological effects. In destabilizing and slowing down our often hurried and inattentive relationship to both art and our surroundings, she leaves viewers haunted by the possibilities revealed through a subtler perception of the everyday.

—EVA DIAZ



CEAL FLOYER, *NINE YARDS*, 2006 • TAPE MEASURE, 9-1/2" 22.1" • COURTESY 303 GALLERY NEW YORK; ESTHER SCHIPPER GALLERY, BERLIN; LISSON GALLERY, LONDON