



Ceal Floyer: *Til I Get It Right*, 2005, audio CD, 4 speakers; at the Swiss Institute.

Ceal Floyer at the Swiss Institute

Despite their scant material presence, three recent works by Ceal Floyer ably commanded ample spaces. A Berlin-based British artist, Floyer is known for minimalist conceptualism. I first encountered her work in P.S.1's 2001-02 exhibition "Loop," where she showed *Light Switch* (1992-2001). In it, a prominently placed slide projector threw an image of the titular object onto a wall by a door, thus creating a switch made from light—a typical combination of wordplay and pleasingly ham-handed trompe l'oeil.

"I'll just keep on . . . til I get it right," sang a woman's achingly beautiful voice in *Til I Get It Right* (2005), the sole work in the Swiss Institute's first room. The phrase repeated itself mournfully, as if the singer's desire for perfection was, sadly, marred by a technical glitch. Press materials indicated that the sound is a seamlessly altered sample from a country music song by Tammy Wynette, of "Stand By Your Man" fame. The original lyrics run "I'll just keep on fallin' in love til I get it right"—a common enough sentiment. With the romance edited out, the refrain expresses an even more generalized, Sisyphean struggle into which any viewer might project him- or herself—or, the artist struggling equally futilely to create the ideal artwork. While eternal repetition could easily summon existential horror, here the melody and silky voice combine to hypnotic effect, even on extended listening (as attested to by a gallery staffer who compared the piece's effect to a long take from a Marguerite Duras film).

In the slightly darkened adjacent space, a theatrical light cast a horizontally split image, projecting a red curtain on the wall and a spotlight area of illumination on the adjoining floor. Comically, ambient light made the surrounding white wall visible, preventing the illusion of an actual curtain. But there remained the puzzle that the light seemed to both illuminate and comprise the artwork, in keeping with its title, *Double Act* (2006). To view it was to fruitlessly await an ever-imminent

appearance; the sound from *Til I Get It Right* wafting in from next door suggested that when the curtain went up, one would finally witness the work the singer/artist was trying so hard to perfect.

Created for the Swiss Institute and installed in its soon-to-be-dismantled library space was *Nine Yards* (2006), in which a simple cloth tape measure affixed to the wall at chest height marked out 27 feet of space. The title evokes the phrase "the whole nine yards," an expression of uncertain provenance that means "the whole, everything." In at least two ways, the piece was delightfully perverse: the tape did not span the entire space, so that the 27-foot work was at once partial (ending mid-wall) and whole (a full 9 yards); secondly, its minimal physical presence contrasted sublimely with the abundance implied by the expression. Paradigmatically for Floyer, *Nine Yards* uses negligible materials to reflect on big topics like art, language and perception.

—Brian Boucher