

LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY

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ELIZABETH McALPINE

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With "Flatland," the British artist Elizabeth McAlpine took film to its core elements: stock, light and projector. The show borrowed its title from the novella by Edwin A. Abbott that chronicles the story of "a square" discovering the three-dimensional world. In McAlpine's exhibition, though, the narration was minimal. There was no distracting imagery in the works shown; viewers were confronted instead by the sheer materiality of the medium. In *Tilt (in 6 Parts)*, 2009, six Super 8 projectors are stacked on top of each other and linked by a single loop of film. A column of six pale rectangles—the projection of white film frames—flickers onto the wall. Intermittently, a single red frame appears, descending from one position to the next. This jolly little color field brings to mind the dancing abstract shapes of an Oskar Fischinger animation; it's a quick pulsation of warmth disrupting the mechanical procession of whiteness. The red square also functions like a refrain, giving the piece an almost musical quality.

Perhaps the most touching aspect of "Flatland" was McAlpine's investigation of filmic temporality—not in the sense of a story's development or a film reel's unspooling, but of the film stock's life span, which is short. In *Tilt (in 6 Parts)*, thin streaks have appeared on the white frames; some look colored, the scratches

acting as miniature prisms. Hurrying through the projector toward its own end, the film comes to embody the frenetic course of existence. From non-image, the film becomes a memento mori.

In *Pan (in 2 Parts)*, 2009, a pair of large projectors are displayed side by side. Again, the machines are connected by a single loop of film, this time showing a broken horizontal line: a shot of a thread pinned to the wall of the artist's studio. Staging the poetics of a simple piece of string, *Pan (in 2 Parts)* has the quiet strength of a Fred Sandback sculpture. If *Tilt (in 6 Parts)* can be seen as a still life, *Pan (in 2 Parts)* is a landscape, the line a minimal but definite horizon, distant yet tangible. During my visit to the gallery, one of the projections, I was told, was unusually shaky, but this accident of technology enhanced rather than hampered the piece's impact. "Flatland" was a moving homage to the beauty of film's idiosyncrasies.

—Coline Milliard

Elizabeth McAlpine:
Tilt (in 6 Parts),
2009, six Super 8
projectors and
mixed mediums,
7½ feet tall;
at Laura Bartlett.

