

Karen Azoulay

Curated by Glenn Ligon

March 15 – April 21, 2007
(Opening Thursday, March 15, 6-8pm)

“The belief that runs through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*— that all things are connected because all things can be transformed— is at the heart of Karen Azoulay's project. In sculptural tableaux, performance pieces, and digital images, she creates worlds in which the line between body and object; material fact and representation; and the perceptible and the imperceptible is blurred.”

—Glenn Ligon

Karen Azoulay, *In The Water* (1), (2006-07)
Pigment print on watercolor paper, 71/2" x 6 1/2"
Edition of 5



The fleeting and fluid aspects found in nature continue to captivate Canadian artist Karen Azoulay. *Wading Under A Crackling Sky*, her first solo exhibition in the United States at CUE, features new sculptures, photographs, and a site-specific installation incorporating imagery of fireworks, nightscapes, and seascapes represented in staged scenarios reminiscent of the tradition of tableaux vivant. Azoulay captures these transitory atmospheric events through a performance-based aesthetic that enables the viewer to appreciate the stillness and poignancy at play. In her recent fantasy landscapes and environments, the artist employs set pieces and simple props constructed from basic materials and motifs culled from sources ranging from Renaissance figurative allegories, flat turn-of-the-century theatre props, and abstracted organic forms with eye-dazzling effect. By using meaningful motifs, which may appear static but contain a fluid ancestry, Azoulay explores the interrelationship between nature and the decorative.

Inspired by the dramatic stage sets often featured in Las Vegas reviews, Azoulay's site-specific installation depicts a night sky formed from large panels, painted in dark colors with small areas embedded with stained glass, and features abstracted imagery of fireworks. Representing an expansive sea, yards of fabric replete with details of waves tumble forth directly in front of the panels. These compositional elements fill up the visual field like a 19th century panorama and offer multiple narratives. Adding to the mis-en scene, accompanying photographs of performers reacting to fireworks and cosmic explosions, or immersed in the turbulent blue-green water depicted in the installation, address the overall theme of being pulled up from the familiar and pushed into the unknown.

Azoulay's visual alchemy involves deconstructing the structure and harnessing the tensile energy of select, ordinary materials in order to transform them into icons and symbols of natural phenomena. In *Catching the Star*, 2007, one of the photographs on view, the artist employs the cloth of a battered umbrella to create the illusion of a shooting star. Through the process of transformation, what once was a stationary means of protection from inclement weather is now free to roam through the skies without limitation. Wooden parasols, which form the basis for a grouping of five mixed-media sculptures, ranging in height from 6' to 8', become spectacles of color and light, and are placed together against a dark background to form a grand vision of fireworks exploding in the night.



Karen Azoulay, Detail from *Fireworks* (2007)
Steel, wooden parasols, paper mâché, mixed media
Dimensions variable

(Cont.)

The dynamism, scale, and handmade quality of the works on view vibrantly signal the artist's desire to evoke the profound allure that a nature imagined holds over human emotions. Representing a study in contrasts, they harbor a degree of somberness within their dark tonality, yet also sustain impressions of enchantment and lightness. Ultimately, Azoulay's sublime impressions engage the viewer to cast his or her own mood on to the surrounding scenes.

This exhibition is supported in part by Peter Norton Family Foundation and Agnes Gund & Daniel Shapiro. Karen Azoulay's exhibition received additional support from The Latner Family. Special thanks to Materials for the Arts, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

Catalogue available.

ARTIST'S BIO:

Karen Azoulay was born in Toronto, Canada in 1977. She received her BFA from York University in 2000. Solo exhibitions include *The Evening Canopy and the Sunset Hour* at Mercer Union in Toronto (2006), as well as, a forthcoming exhibition at Four Gallery in Dublin (2007). Her installations and performances include commissions for institutions such as The Art Gallery of Ontario, *Canadian Art Magazine* and The Power Plant. Her work has been included in the follow group shows: *Landscapism*, Islip Art Museum, East Islip, NY; *Menselijke Analyse*, Stichting, Eindhoven, Netherlands; *Delicate Kinship*, Hanna Gallery, Tokyo; *You & Me & Art & Idea*, Art & Idea, Mexico City; and *The Cave and the Island*, which showed at both Galerie Kunstbuero, Vienna and White Columns, New York, among others. She is currently based in New York City.

ABOUT CUE:

CUE Art Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) non-profit arts organization, is dedicated to providing a comprehensive creative forum for contemporary art by supporting under-recognized artists via a multi-faceted mission spanning the realms of gallery exhibitions, public programming, professional development programs and arts-in-education.

The Foundation was established in June of 2002 with the aim of providing educational programs for young artists and aspiring art professionals in New York and from around the country. These programs draw on the unique community of artists, critics, and educators brought together by the Foundation's season of exhibitions, public lectures, workshops, and its studio residency program: all are designed to be of lasting practical benefit to aspiring and under-recognized artists. The entire CUE identity is characterized by artistic quality, independent judgment and the discovery of genuine talent, and provides long-term benefits both for creative individuals associated with CUE and the larger art marketplace. Located in New York's Chelsea gallery district, CUE's 4,500 square feet of gallery, studio and office space serves as the nexus for educational programs and exhibitions conducted by CUE.

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For additional information, please contact Kara Smith, Programs Assistant, CUE Art Foundation, 212-206-3583, or email kara.smith@cueartfoundation.org. Gallery hours: Tues.-Sat., 10am-6pm.