

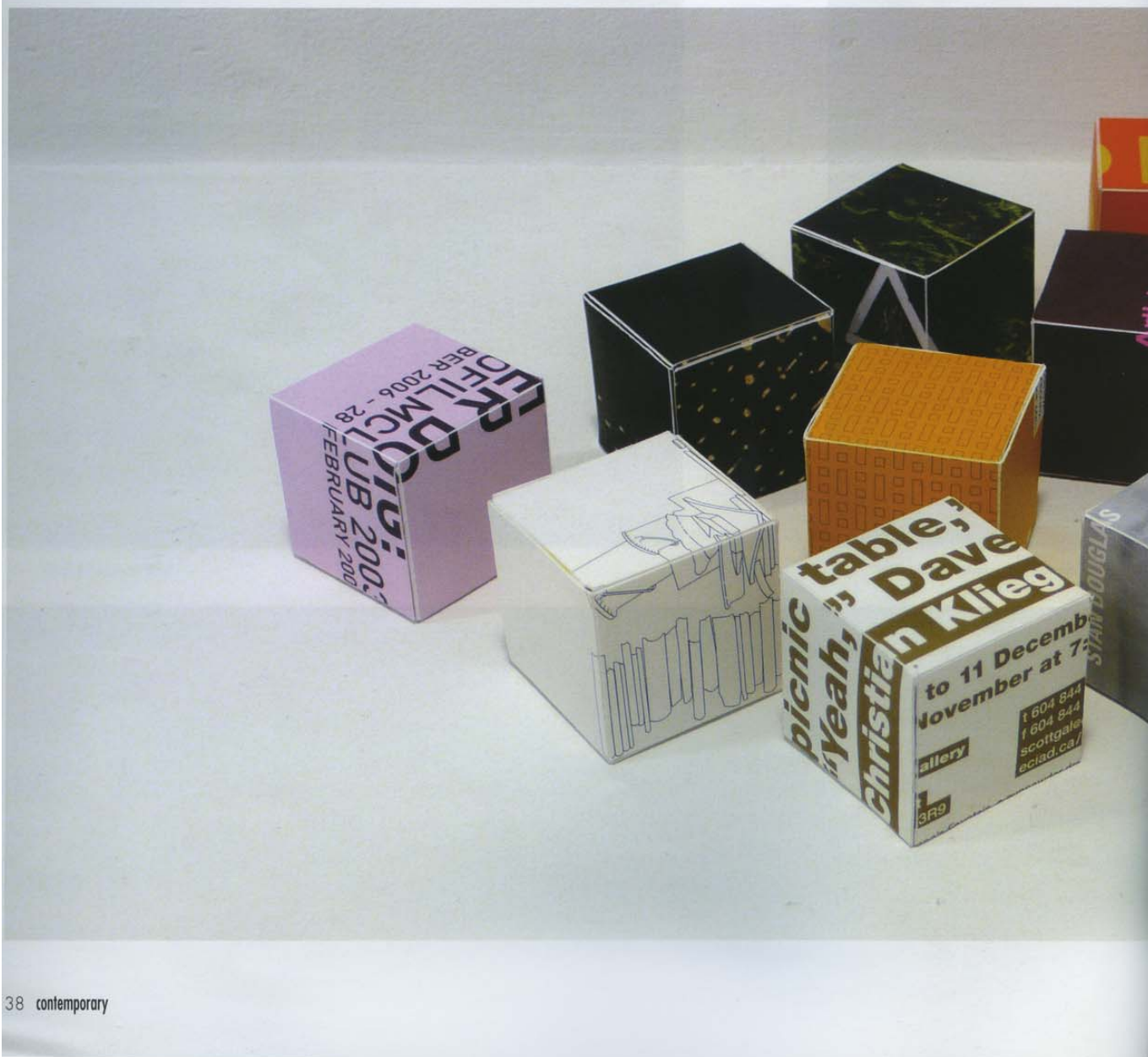
ARABELLA CAMPBELL

JENS HOFFMANN

LOOKING at the work of Vancouver-based artist Arabella Campbell it comes as no surprise to discover that she has been working as the director of one of Canada's leading contemporary art galleries. Many of her works find their starting point with aspects that are familiar to us from the world of commercial art galleries and museums. Campbell subtly alters these elements to create self-reflexive, critical yet delicate, and often personal works of art.

On first glance the series of paintings titled 'Wall' (2005), appears to be a triptych of white monochromes that play with colour, light, and paint effects. On closer inspection however, we realise that each painting is based on the particular shade of white used in the exhibition space of three galleries. *Wall* (Catriona Jeffries Gallery) (2005) is painted in the same white as the

white in the gallery of Catriona Jeffries in Vancouver, *Wall* (Vancouver Art Gallery) (2005) is painted in the white of the Vancouver Art Gallery, and *Wall* (Contemporary Art Gallery) (2005) is painted in the white of the CAG in Vancouver. These works are in themselves extremely delicate and beautiful and it makes them even more intriguing when one discovers their conceptual nature. The paintings refer to galleries at which Campbell's work was exhibited at some point in the past. They are painted from the memory that the artist has of the shade of white of their walls and she attempts to recreate the colour in the environment of her studio, under an entirely different lighting. This series is ongoing, and every time Campbell's work is shown in a white cube gallery a new painting based on the white of the walls will be added to the series.



Another group of works that takes its starting point from gallery related material is an ongoing project the artist started in 2002 titled 'Cube Installation'. These works are small, colourful and minimal-looking paper cubes that are made of gallery invitation cards, which the artist has received over the years. Campbell has a huge invitation archive that she adds to constantly and from which she randomly selects cards to turn them into small, yet elaborate sculptures.

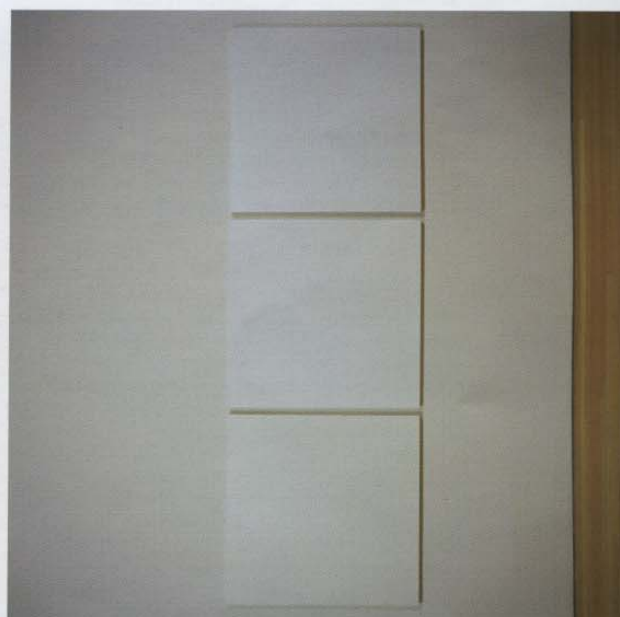
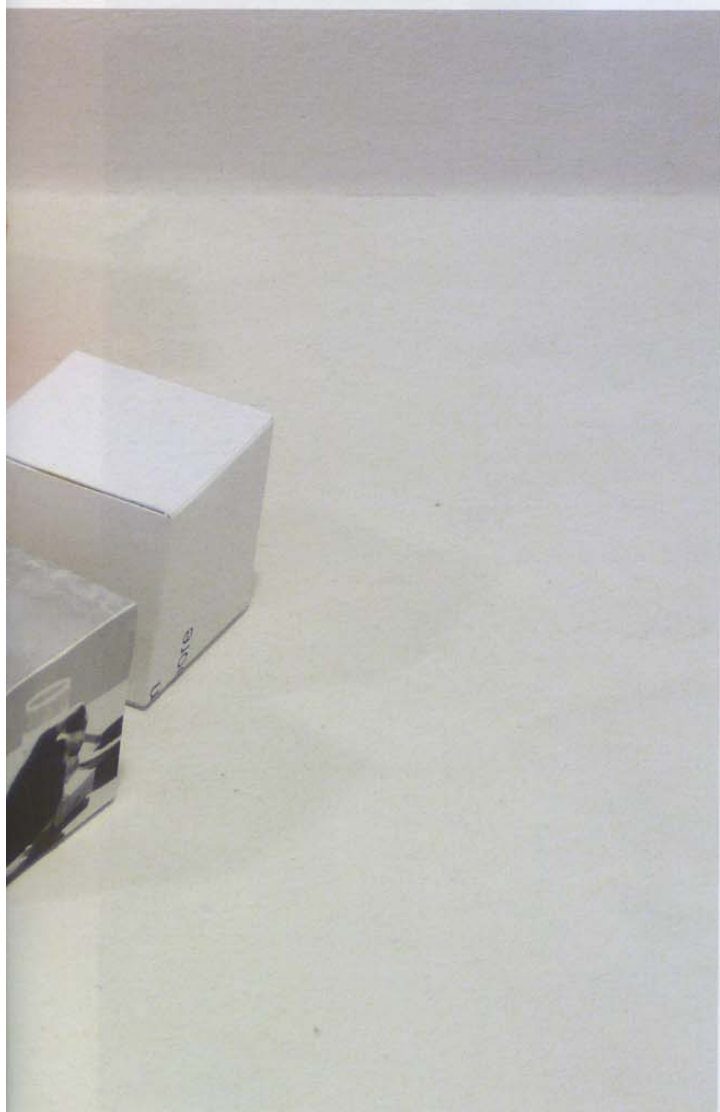
During a stay in New York in 2004 the artist created *Summer Residency Program Open Studios* (2004). She turned her studio into a large installation which included acrylic paintings on paper, tape on paper, tape on walls, works on the walls, cut-up invites, and other pieces. In addition to these, Campbell presented a ring-bound book titled *Thirty-seven exhibitions I have seen, in chronological order, New York, July 4 – August 10, 2004* (2004), which was a logbook containing entries of the date, time and location of all the exhibitions that she saw during her stay in New York. Since then the artist has produced other books similar to these, amassing press releases for certain periods of time or during trips abroad.

Over the last few years Campbell has created a large body of work that includes collages, sculptures and collections of all variety of materials surrounding gallery exhibitions – press releases, invites, envelopes, correspondence. One of her future works will include envelopes on which her name appears, from the huge collection of correspondence she amassed while working at Catriona Jeffries Gallery. Other planned works that are related to the

environment of the gallery include a sound piece about a gallery after hours, as well as a video work filmed from the point of view of the works in an exhibition.

Campbell, who uses a very minimal and elegant aesthetic, has also begun to move away from artworks that are immediately related to the gallery context and started to make site-specific works for art institutions. A recent exhibition, 'Paint' (2006-7), consisted of an installation of five paintings in the rotunda of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Two of the paintings, *Painter's Tape Light* (2004) and *Painter's Tape Blue* (2004) are monochromes the colour of two different painter's tapes, traditionally used to mask the edges of a canvas. One larger painting, *Canvas Painting* (2006), is a canvas-coloured monochrome. These three paintings have over 60 layers of paint each, creating a glossy smooth surface. The other two paintings were from Campbell's 'Physical Facts Series', and are based on their construction as objects: painted on the front is the frame that gives the canvas shape. In the rotunda the artist presented the work *4th Floor, 2nd Floor, 3rd Floor, 1st Floor* (2006), for which she selected the exhibition wall colours from each floor, as they were for the month of October 2006, and arranged these four colours in tonal gradation. One alcove on each floor of the rotunda was painted with one of these colours.

One of the artist's most complex works was exhibited at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver earlier this year. As part of a larger group exhibition revolving around the



Above: *Wall* (Catriona Jeffries Gallery), *Wall* (Vancouver Art Gallery), *Wall* (Contemporary Art Gallery), 2005. Photo: Scott Massey. Collection: Laing and Kathleen Brown, North Vancouver. Opposite: *Cube Installation*, 2002-ongoing. Both images courtesy: the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver

idea of monochrome, titled 'The Monochromatic Field', Campbell developed a work that was entirely based on the architecture of the gallery, its structure and its materials. The work consists of three large monochrome paintings with proportions and colours based on the bricks that one can see on the outside façade of the gallery. The canvases themselves are painted a canvas colour, a colour that also mirrors the colour of the clay that the bricks are made of. The paintings are built to fit exactly between the large steel girders that appear throughout the gallery. Outside the gallery on the lawn, using the same dimensions as the canvases on the interior wall, three rectangular shapes were made by removing the grass to reveal the brown earth beneath to suggest that the wall that holds the canvases has fallen over.

ARABELLA CAMPBELL WILL HAVE A SOLO EXHIBITION AT CATRIONA JEFFRIES GALLERY, VANCOUVER FROM 8 JUNE – 7 JULY

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