

# BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

## EVE ACKROYD & KARA ROONEY: Group *Motivation*

By **Kaitlyn A. Kramer**

The painting hangs in waiting. A woman's seated body, snug within the frame, is cropped to reveal only a neck, torso, and arms that support her upper body in repose. Her chin and breasts turn toward a space outside the canvas, to some person or event that has earned her attention. Her broad shoulders have a calming sense, which softens her perfect posture and invites ease. Her presence, patient and mysterious, is one to which someone might confess her secrets. She would sit with them and listen, arms folded, feigning composure while she waits. But I believe she has her secrets, too.



Eve Ackroyd in Group Motivation, Cinder Rucker Gallery.  
Courtesy of Cinder Rucker Gallery.

In her paintings at Cindy Rucker Gallery, Eve Ackroyd paints figures with both excess and omission, and the bold lines that form her bodies can lure a viewer into the sentient worlds she creates. Each world, emotive and soft in its muted palette, is populated by a solitary woman whose languid body is caught in a state that is at once relatable and deeply personal. In a painting titled *Descending* (2017), two arms cascade down the length of the canvas where they hang, heavy and too long, from the shoulders of a woman. She stands folding her body over her legs in a restorative stretch, as if to plummet her arms deep into the earth or through it entirely.

I know this stretch well and escape into it whenever I desire a reconnection with my body, when I've been moving so quickly I nearly forgot I have one at all.

Breathing in a steady rhythm, I saturate this folded space with a vitality that acts as the body's intuitive double, replacing it for those few slow moments. The energy produced in this kind of threshold becomes a biological *lingua franca* that manifests through movement, touch, or even absence. It can be shared with others, an invisible transmission between disparate bodies. This creation of invisibility, according to the philosopher Luce Irigaray, distinguishes us as human beings. She writes that humans create a form of invisibility that is entangled with presence and perception, with her relations to others, and particularly to their differences. In facing Ackroyd's limp figure, a viewer might consider what it is to discover the interiority of another, and to enter a world previously unseen.

Ackroyd's paintings are exhibited among monochrome sculptures of thick plaster and reflective resin by Kara Rooney, which can be seen as voids suggesting absent bodies—the presence of invisibility. Two such sculptures belong to the series “Alter,” whose title mildly describes the activity of the objects and their forms. Rooney, a writer as well as an artist, has noted the dual use of the word “alter” as both adjective and verb, and she imbues such linguistic codes and tricks into her sculptures. In the other sense, the surface of each object appears malleable, the impressions in the plaster shaped by the repeated force of a body's touch.



Kara Rooney in Group Motivation, Cindy Rucker Gallery. Courtesy of Cindy Rucker Gallery.

*Alter No. 9* (2016) consists of folds of plaster, wood, and paper that crouch over the floor, backed by a thick tail made of resin and strands of thread, which emerge to spill over the glossy black protrusion like hair. Rooney used this sculpture in a performative collaboration wherein a dancer slipped subtly into the plaster cave, filling its

negative space. Though it rests on the gallery floor as a reverent void, it remains tied to the dancer's body, as a structure that once adorned her crooked figure. If invisibility is fashioned in the spaces between and against bodies, to recognize it is to discover a more contemplative way of looking. Rooney's sculptures inhabit these spaces of in-between, confronting a viewer's perception of herself with both the presence and absence of another.

*Alter No. 9* (2017) is displayed below Ackroyd's painting of the woman who waits. Its title, *Folded Arms* (2017), draws notice to the composition of the figure's arms, as otherworldly or simply incorrect. Below her body, bathed in pale pinks and blues, her right arm is positioned atop another right arm, doubling the first. Her arms don't fold as mine do—crossed and tucked together in a way that allows my hands to rest on arms to which they aren't connected. Instead, this peculiar second arm is transparent and seems to float, as if in flirtation, between the figure's torso and opposite arm. One hand hovers just near enough to feel the other's heat; fingers graze as they mimic gestures; touching and being touched. The suggested intimacy of the figure's hands suggests the artist's own private intimacy, shared with her uncanny other.

This reflexive intimacy is carried throughout the gallery, where Ackroyd's depictions of ethereal doubling mingle with the corporeal absence evoked in Rooney's sculptures. Experiencing these works together, I returned to Krzysztof Kieslowski's film *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), which is centered on the lives of two identical women, Weronika and Veronique, who, while strangers to one another, independently remark about the emotional connection they feel to an inexplicable other. They never meet, but Veronique does catch a glimpse of her double in a crowded plaza, and becomes overwhelmed by an empathetic bond. Of this sensation she explains, "All my life I felt like I was here and somewhere else at the same time." The figures and forms in Ackroyd and Rooney's works share this sentiment, and a sense of longing permeates

between them. Their energies settle in this space together as they wait for a viewer to come between them, interrupting their invisible bond.

#### Notes

1. "Mining the Invisible," *ArtFile Magazine*. [www.artfilemagazine.com/Kara-Rooney](http://www.artfilemagazine.com/Kara-Rooney)