

pebbles on a beach. In other words, the geometric order that controls the structure when viewed from a distance, seems to take flight on closer inspection.

The grids that structure *Sheep (Yellow)* and *Sheep (Orange)* have a stronger sense of the horizontal, with bold striations linking the modules laterally. In *Sheep (Yellow)* the gaps between the modules contribute the other half of the grid: the vertical lines. Proximity to these works, similarly undoes the stability of the grid: lines wobble and are perforated by gaps and holes. Nearness also allows the comfort of the woolly material to come to the fore. The warming insulating material, normally associated with the cosiness of slippers and ugh boots, surpasses the domestic scale of a human limb to enclose a wall or a room.

This playful redeployment of sheepskin further lightens the possible meanings and connotations of the modernist grid. The grid is not only a high art principle of organisation, here its domestic underbelly is celebrated: pattern and decoration are given to the most unlikely and recalcitrant substance, which is itself revealed as capable of subtle sensuality. In these works, then, the bivalent structure of the grid can be better characterised as a constant shuttling between the world and the frame. The grid does not exclude the world, nor serve as a prototype, rather it mingles with the most prosaic domestic substance and is thereby utterly transformed by it. Such a transformation allows the openness of associative cloud-dreaming to be accommodated in the still silence of the grid.

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Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT P, 1985) 9.
Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute, 1988) 185.
Krauss, "Grids," 18.

SHEEP DVD: the process by Ross Rudesch Harley
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Front Image: Sheep (yellow) installation detail 2002



Maria Fernanda Cardoso : SHEEP

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Grid and Cloud: Maria Fernanda Cardoso's Sheep

"...the grid announces, amongst other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse."

Rosalind Krauss

"The clouds help us to dream of transformation." Gaston Bachelard

Two more contrasting images are hard to imagine than the amorphousness of clouds and the structural rigour of the grid, yet how else to describe the sheepskin works of Maria Fernanda Cardoso? Cardoso's *Sheep* are a startling union of these two: grid and cloud, rigid structure and soft formlessness, hard-edged geometry and mutable organic shapes, fixity and ramifying associations.

Clouds, as the quote from Bachelard indicates, are triggers for the imagination, garnering all manner of semblances and connotations as we look at their suggestive and changeable forms. The grid, on the other hand, is one of modern art's chief inventions; a form intended to exclude the world and its representation. Viewed in this way, the painted grid signifies the canvas as self-contained, as auto-referential, seeking its own special idiom of horizontal and vertical pictorial elements. Yet, the grid also stands for the very opposite of this involution when it figures as an icon of utopia, in which case the aim is to extend the grid outwards beyond the frame as a model of harmonious, balanced perfection. These two ways of thinking about the grid are described by Krauss as comprising its "bivalent" structure, encompassing both centripetal and the centrifugal forces.

It is the former meaning of the grid as a centripetal, inward-turning retreat from the world that is associated with silence, the reduction of associations, and the quest for an internal logic that escapes or evades the other 'grid' of language. When this structure of silence is overlaid onto organic form it can generate a window-effect, the grid is something we look through, but when the grid becomes incorporated into the very form and substance of soft organic matter, as occurs with Cardoso's *Sheep*, something very different happens. A marvelous stillness is somehow lent to animal matter, as though the intricacy and complexity of nature is temporarily arrested for our quiet contemplation.

These qualities of quietude, stillness and transience are consistent features of Cardoso's work.

In the case of *Sheep*, these qualities are accentuated by the looseness of the formal hold on organic matter, despite the strict regulation of the grid. In the three works from the *Sheep* series shown in this exhibition—*Sheep (Yellow)* 2002, *Sheep (Orange)* 2002, *Sheep (Red)* 2002—the organic shapes and textures of the animal skins are clearly present alongside the geometry of the grid. The geometry may shape and hold the many separate sheepskins together but organic form escapes that grip at the edges. The perimeter of the work retains the irregular contours of the original hides. Depending upon the space of installation these edges may be visible on one or more sides of the loosely rectangular works. The smaller works in the series, such as *Sheep (Dark Red)* and *Sheep (Yellow)*, can be more easily displayed as free floating forms with all edges visible, the earthy ochre tones contrasting with the white gallery wall.

All works in this series are comprised of a basic module made up of two joined sheepskins. In the case of *Sheep (Yellow)* there are seven modules usually placed side by side, although they can be arranged in other ways. The other two works in this exhibition are made up of fourteen modules. These larger works, *Sheep (Red)* and *Sheep (Orange)*, are on occasions partially regularised at the lower edges or sides: squared off by the juncture of wall and floor or the meeting of two walls. Usually the top edge is not tamed in this way. When the most irregular profile is at the top of the work, the eye is drawn upwards towards it. The architectural scale and feel of the work is counterweighted by this emphatically organic horizon line. These irregular profiles transform (in true cloud style) from suggesting the contours of continents to banks of clouds, to crenulated rock formations or even mountain ranges.

Up until now, I have concentrated on the way in which the grid is unraveling or fraying at the edges, but in actual fact this is a feature of the incised grid itself. The sheepskins have been only partly tamed by the second shearing or clipping that Cardoso has performed upon them. The incised lines that make up the grids have unleashed as much irregularity as they may have created. The fibres clump, contract, fan out and otherwise resist the marshalling of straight lines and repeated patterns. A richly textured bass-relief is the result. Each grid is different, with its own proportions, textures, and rhythm of repetition. *Sheep (Red)* looks like a lattice formation from a distance, but closer up the individual raised wool clumps are as variable as