



Sarah James: Micol Assaël. *Inner Disorder*. In: *ArtReview*., London, September 2009, p.134.

Micol Assaël *Inner Disorder*

Johann König, Berlin
27 June – 29 August

For a relatively young artist, Micol Assaël has a very big reputation. Having taken part in a host of recent biennials, this year alone Assaël has had solo shows in Paris, Warsaw, Kassel, Vienna and now Berlin. And her work is big – on the epic and ambitious, labour-intensive scale of Gordon Matta-Clark or Robert Smithson. It is normally based upon constructing immense and intense environments with technical equipment, such as old generators and exposed electric circuits. These environments are often stiflingly hot, oppressive or unnerving, and Assaël's work thrives on the relationships between places and one's prehensile physical and psychological responses to them. Her ideas are also proportionately big, and evolve from a dedicated interest in the worlds of physics, biophysics, nuclear energy and engineering.

However, the show at Johann König – her second solo exhibition at the gallery – presents another side of Assaël, and a much more modest and delicate body of work. Seven beautiful glass vitrines set on shiny aluminium legs display 250 small-format drawings, all taken from the series *Inner Disorder* (1999–2001). Most of these works feature the same curious motif, a circular pencil form with various white-inked biomorphic-looking shapes. Laid out systematically in perfect rows, they gesture towards an elaborate but unknown methodology and investigation. Apparently Assaël began these drawings during a stay in Iceland, where she was moved by the empty landscape and keen to explore the relationship between air and light. They find their aesthetic opposite in a series of black drawings, made when the artist was visiting the coal mines of Siberia. Like an abstract diary, their creation became part of her daily rituals, the act that she would embark upon, half-conscious, as soon as she awoke. This fugue state is reflected in the imperceptibility of the white ink on white paper, which because of the safety glass and the gallery's lighting are almost completely invisible from one side of the cabinets – causing one to strain one's eyes to trace their precarious outlines – only to reveal themselves luminously, almost like holograms, as you move around them. Next door this repeated motif appears as a large black wall-painting, overlaid onto a complex diagrammatic representation of the electric machinery apparently housed in Moscow's Red October Chocolate Factory.

In a previous project, at the Kunsthalle Basel, Assaël explored the work of the Russian scientist Alexander Chizhevsky, whose research focused on the connections between solar activity and pivotal historical events. This link between scientific and historical experience, and the relationship between the alchemic and the organic, seems to fascinate the artist, and her cellular/electric subjects are perhaps suggestive of the writings of the Italian physician and physicist Luigi Galvani, who discovered bioelectricity, demonstrating that electricity was the medium by which nerve cells passed signals to the muscles. As if mapping the bioelectric field of automatic artistic creation, like Assaël's more monumental installations, *Inner Disorder* engages its viewer in an intense interactive experiential process, in this instance more meditative than bodily, but no less cogent for it. *Sarah James*



Inner Disorder, 1999–2009,
display cases, ink and
graphite on paper, 27 parts
(each drawing, 1999–2001,
7 x 14cm), 110 x 200 x 140 cm.
Photo: Alexis Zavaloff
Courtesy Johann König, Berlin