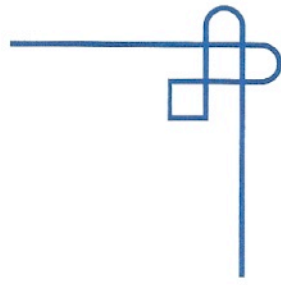
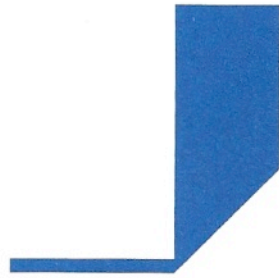
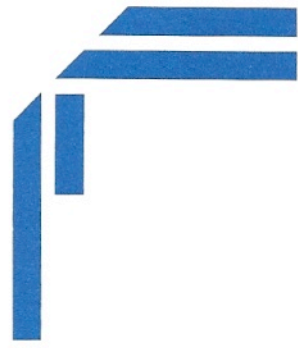


QUEENS  
INTERNATIONAL 2012:  
THREE POINTS  
MAKE A TRIANGLE



## 22 CARMELLE SAFDIE



July 2, 2011, 2011. soft-pastel on void filler mounted onto MDF. 60 x 47 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Please give us a sense of your background.

In 2008, I had a residency at the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. There, I had access to a great library and a “vault” filled with hundreds—maybe thousands—of original artworks by the Albers, their colleagues, friends and former students. When I went back to school at Bard College, I started making works on paper and experimenting with some basic

printmaking techniques. I also started thinking about ways to bring my music and art together.

How does the graphic relate to your practice at large?

I think that the “graphic” is a place where material and subject can go beyond their physical capacity and meet and visually communicate with the viewer, where the whole can be more than the sum of its parts. In one of the works in QI



2012, which are rubbings of gravestones, I highlight found graphics with color to create confusion between subject and material. I'm apprehensive when it comes to identifying the "subject matter" of an artwork. How does referencing something outside of, say, a painting, make the painting "about" something? How can material become subject without falling into predictable tactics of material specificity? Can form be subject? It's been hard for me to pinpoint exactly what it is about the grave rubbings that I'm genuinely interested in. It's not just the graphic nature of the stones themselves, my experience in the abandoned cemetery or an anthropological interest in the people buried there. I realized that my experience in the graveyard—"finding" these tombstones and choosing which ones to rub—is very similar to my experience shopping for clothes, which I do exclusively at second hand stores. I wanted to take a closer look at what my criteria for selecting used clothing is, so I've developed a second piece for this show where I showcase some of my many used sweaters.

What should we know about your work that might not be visible in it?

I hope that everything you need to know is visible in the work. I started making rubbings of tombstones because I was interested in re-presenting the gravestone as a place of decorative opportunity. I think that this work has the same self-reflexive and questioning attitude that much of my previous work does.

What attracted you to the darker matter of grave markers for the rubbings?

In reading about math and pioneering mathematicians while working on a group of posters called *A History of the Problem*, I read about a tombstone that was inscribed with an equation that, when solved, revealed the age of the deceased mathematician. I was imagining how this tomb would have looked, how it would have been designed. I had heard of a run-down cemetery not too

far from my studio—just on the other end of the Q39 bus—and decided to go there to experiment with the technique of rubbing. I decided to take whole gravestones—ones whose overall graphic layout and design attracted me as a complete unit—and present them as dryly as possible. In the end, all the things about my source material that I thought might work against me really enriched the final product. They are totally not gravestones, yet they totally are at the same time, isolating the building blocks of making a picture, and making that construction the focal point of the work.

Which instrument do you play? Also, how does music influence your artistic practice?

I sing and play xylophone and other percussion. I dabble in piano and keyboards in the privacy of my own home. I first started performing as a backup singer in 2005. We had wild times; it was a great way to socialize and release energy.

Then that band ended, I realized I missed making music and started a new group with some friends. This time, I was much more involved with the songwriting. At the time, I was adamant that it had nothing to do with my studio practice. I thought it would be a good idea to have creative outlets where I could indulge in pure fun, so that when I went to my studio, I could be more considered and thoughtful. But at a certain point, this way of working started to feel puritanical. I decided to take my painting to the music instead. I wrote some songs about visual art, and found a visual way of presenting and distributing them as sheet music. Here, again, the graphic came to the forefront. Using a visual layout, with sheet music or a record cover, is a way to bring multiple practices together, leveled by the flatness of the design.

Carmelle Safdie (b. 1982, Cambridge, MA) is a graduate of Bard College and Cooper Union. Exhibitors include Recess Activities, La Mama La Galleria and Sara Meltzer, New York; MASS MoCA (in collaboration with Cabinet, Brooklyn), North Adams, MA, among others. Other activities include an ongoing project with Sophy Naess, *First Rate Second Hand*, published by Printed Matter, and performing in the band Beachniks. She lives in Astoria and works in Long Island City.