

# frieze

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## Karthik Pandian

VILMA GOLD, LONDON, UK



*Jubilee*, 2012, two-channel 16mm film projection

Rosalind Krauss closes her 1979 essay on the grid with a reference to a forthcoming performance, a collaboration between Lucinda Childs, Phillip Glass and Sol LeWitt, which illustrates the grid's continuing prevalence in the arts. The performance was *Dance*, which premiered that year at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In it, the dancers, including Childs, moved in perfect synchronicity with their own black and white images. Leaping and spinning through white gridlines marked on the stage floor, these had been filmed by LeWitt, and were projected onto a scrim that covered the stage. By superimposing live and recorded action, *Dance* flattened the spectacle, closing it in an auto-referential fold that speaks to Krauss's comments about the grid as anti-narrative and anti-developmental. A static and infinitely repeatable form, the grid can be overlaid, mapped onto, used to chart shifting terrain.

Overlay, or the showing-through of the contours of the past in the culture of the present, was central to 'Jubilee', the first UK solo show of Los Angeles-based artist Karthik Pandian. Taking its name from the two-channel 16mm film projection in

the gallery's darkened main space (itself developed out of an earlier work shown in this summer's 'Made in L.A.', the inaugural LA Biennial at the Hammer Museum), the show also included a series of four drip-painted wire grids (*Frustrated Total Internal Reflection*, all works 2012). Hovering just away from the crisp white walls in a second room, the white powder-coated steel was not immediately visible, with the black splashes seeming to hang suspended in a faint, ashy dust cloud.

In the darkened space of the first room, two whirling projectors simultaneously threw images onto both sides of a single, floating screen. Looping continuously to a soundtrack of free jazz, the films showed two takes of a single performance – a loose and seemingly improvised Happening-style event in an empty theatre. Pandian himself, loudspeaker in hand, directs from centre stage a heady, smooth-moving jive of cultural references, taking in the Nouvelle Vague and the Judson Dance Theater (of which Childs was part) via jazz and drip-painting, Jackson Pollock-style. If the performance already has the feeling of a rehearsal, this is doubled in the second take in which the actors, watching themselves on iPads whose shiny-new screens jar with the otherwise nostalgic aesthetic, make fumbling attempts to re-enact their own actions. Projected simultaneously onto opposite sides of a diaphanous, floating screen, the figures doubled, converged and emerged, soft-edged and shadowy, tracing each other; each take was imprinted inescapably with the outline of the other, distant yet inseparable. Standing perpendicular to the screen, to the precise, flat line where the two sets of images overlapped, eyes straining in an impossible effort to see both things simultaneously and distinctly, one briefly experienced the present as a blind spot, formless and indecipherable without the map of what has come before.

This archeological methodology is not new to Pandian. 'Unearth', his 2011 show at the Whitney Museum in New York (a body of work that was also included in the 2012 Paris Triennale) was the product of two years' research into the ancient Native American city of Cahokia, and featured monolithic columns filled with layers of earth, with fossil strips of film embedded in them, compressing ancient and not-so-distant pasts in silent monument to the circularity of culture. Looking backwards is very of the minute, it seems, and with its doubled emphasis on Pollock and performance, 'Jubilee' tapped into a particularly prevalent interest in painting and the performative (as attested to by the current exhibitions 'Painting the Void' and 'A Bigger Splash', at LA MOCA and Tate Modern, respectively). A self-consciously stylish homage to the age of Birth of the Cool, the show left me with a conflicted and entirely faux-nostalgia for a time when artists at least had the conviction that they were doing something new, but wondering whether the ersatz nature of nostalgia, a latter-day myth of the avant-garde, wasn't precisely the point

**Amy Sherlock**