

ArtReview

Kelly Nipper
Weather Center

Galleria Francesca Kaufmann, Milan
April – May

Kelly Nipper's opening took place on the evening after the volcano on the Eyjafjallajökull glacier in Iceland erupted, releasing clouds of ash that brought Europe to a standstill and turned atmospheric into the talk of the day (and also cut net CO₂ emissions by around 2 million tonnes in a week, a result of the flight ban). The title of the American artist's exhibition, *Weather Center* (2009), couldn't have been more apropos, unless it was translated into Italian, where *tempo* stands both for 'weather' and 'time', and defines the speed and mood (*adagio* – slow; *agitato* – hurried; *allegretto* – fast, etc) of a musical composition. *Tempo*, in all its multiple acceptations, is indeed at the core of Nipper's oeuvre, as much as it was for the 'activities' of Allan Kaprow, for whom she worked as an assistant in Encinitas, CA, for a decade. Where Kaprow named one of his happenings *Meteorology* (1972), Nipper has spent five years working on the different stages of an ongoing dance/performance/video project called *Floyd on the Floor* (2005–), after the eponymous hurricane; a visual parable on the attempt to control the realm of physics as much as that of physicality, to dominate the unruly bodily deeds that a trained dancer (or yoga practitioner, for instance, like Nipper, who never studied dance) can spend an entire life trying to domesticate, polish and refine, inch by inch. The same exactitude that musicians find in metronomes, Nipper found in Labanotation: a standardised system for recording and scoring motion in space created by Rudolf von Laban. In a manner that brings to mind Tacita Dean's *Merce Cunningham performs STILLNESS (in three movements) to John Cage's composition 4'33" with Trevor Carlson, New York City, 28 April 2007* (2007), her dancers enact a cyclical quest for the perfect, stylised position as a way of measuring time.

Though the exhibition (Nipper's third solo at Kaufmann since 2002) marks the European debut of the video she presented at the Whitney Biennial, it isn't to be seen right away. The small room at the entrance hosts instead a selection of ten unframed lo-fi video stills of varying sizes (from 30 x 36 to 76 x 127 centimetres, all titled *Weather Center*), which feels like a statement: Nipper, who emerged in the late 1990s with photoworks, says she is still fascinated by the possibility of isolating single unities of immobility in a flux of movements – from Muybridge to Laban, and back again. Furthermore, a 'camera'-shaped set (the outline of a box with a lens/hole aside) is a recurring presence in her recent performance studies, like *Shifting Shapes* (2009), staged at the last Art Basel Miami and, in an updated version, in Zurich (just two days before Milan), as part of the group show *While Bodies Get Mirrored*, at Migros Museum. The video, also entitled *Weather Center* (2009), is loop-projected in the second space, across the *cortile*, with its loud soundtrack of counting reverberating under the vaulted ceiling. For five minutes, the dancer Taisha Paggett, wearing a mask and a costume designed by Leah Piehl, slowly and powerfully executes a personal variation on the *Witch Dance* (1914) by Mary Wigman, a student of Laban at Monte Verità in Ascona. But while Wigman (see it on YouTube) accentuated gesturing with a ritual mimicry recalling Noh and danced to the sound of cymbals, Paggett revolves, rises and swirls in total silence, accompanied only by the numbers of her inner *tempo*, breaking down the distinction between 'doing' and 'performing', and possibly between art and life. *Barbara Casavecchia*

