

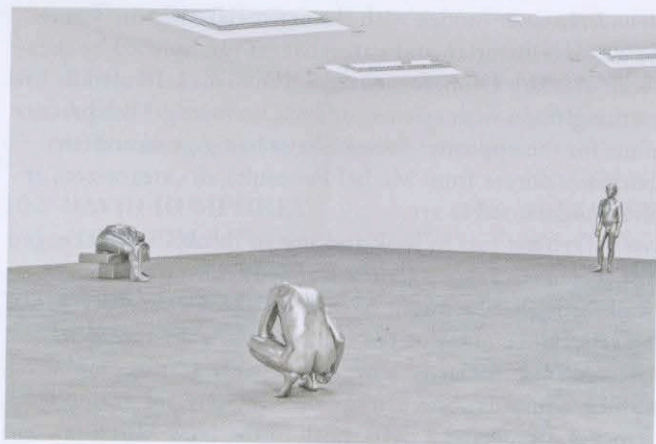
galleries, which she quickly added to one of her works (a velvet canvas) on the second floor, drawing a connection between this work and her 1993 one-minute video featuring a moth, titled *À la Motte*. Trockel delights in such micro-interventions, often tinkering with the exhibition checklist until the last moment, and her subversion of viewers' expectations generates more questions than answers. In a room devoted to Trockel's recent work in ceramic, for example, visitors may have found themselves wondering about the inclusion of *Replace Me* (2011), a sculpture that appears to be two long midcentury leather couches, clad in plastic sheeting and a wool blanket. Despite appearances, the artist had painstakingly cast the couches in ceramic—I don't know how she did it, but the replica is uncannily precise, so much so that even attentive spectators could miss the gesture entirely.

Look closely, then, but to what end? What makes Trockel such a challenging artist (in the best sense of the term) is her steadfast refusal to ascribe a *purpose* to looking—this goes even for her most “traditional” works: on floor three, visitors encountered an assortment of Trockel's recent wool “canvases,” including several knit monochromes nearly 10 feet square, plus a bevy of smaller pieces, such as the sunny *Belle Époque* (2011) and the cool-toned *Comfort Zone* (2012). While echoing canvases by Agnes Martin and Barnett Newman, these works have none of the pop and shimmer of oil paint; to my eyes, they look a bit like enormous wearables, and forthrightly so. Aping the conventions of art, her work might just as well be something else (a sweater, a couch), or the product of someone else's hand. If there is a secret to her work's remarkable longevity, and a lesson for artists today, it is this: when all faith in art's historical mission has been exhausted, the anarchist's evasions and sideways maneuvers offer a rare kind of strength. There is power in powerlessness, Trockel suggests, and refuge in a horizontal world.

[The exhibition premiered at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, May 23–Sept. 24, 2012, and travels to the Serpentine Gallery, London, Feb. 13–Apr. 7.]

—Daniel Marcus

View of Charles Ray's exhibition, showing (left to right) *Sleeping Woman*, *Shoe Tie* and *Young Man*, all 2012, stainless steel; at Matthew Marks.



CHARLES RAY

Matthew Marks

Over the past 30-plus years, Charles Ray has produced successive bodies of sculpture that superficially appear quite different from one another. There have been works performed for the camera that employed the artist's own body as a sculptural element. There have been conceptual variations on minimalist forms: a line that is a continuous stream of ink flowing from a hole in the ceiling to a hole in the floor; a cube that is a black-painted steel box open at the top and filled to the brim with black ink; and a circle that is a mechanized white disc set flush into a white wall and spinning so fast as to appear stationary. There have been outsize and miniaturized mannequins, often modeled after Ray himself, as well as immaculate reconstructions of hatching eggs, rotting trees and wrecked cars, and figurative works that recall Classical sculptures.

As disparate as Ray's sculptures may appear, they are united by common characteristics and concerns. Chief among the latter is the formal notion of sculptural space—in particular, the space between the object and the viewer where perceptual and cognitive shifts might occur.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Ray's most recent show at Matthew Marks. Carefully disposed within the large gallery were three unpainted, stainless-steel figures (all 2012): a standing male nude modeled after a sculptor acquaintance; a homeless woman from the neighborhood around Ray's Los Angeles studio, curled up asleep on a bench; and the artist himself, naked and crouched as if tying an invisible shoe. All reference idealized forms familiar from Greco-Roman sculpture, while at the same time being both personally and culturally specific.

Ten percent over life size, each piece was modeled in clay, put through a 3D scanner, and then machine carved from a solid block of metal. Details have been deliberately softened, and surfaces have been buffed to a dull sheen. As one walks around the works, their reflective, slightly smoothed-out forms morph in the manner of Anthony Caro's abstract sculptures, of which Ray has long been an outspoken fan.

In *Sleeping Woman* a long lozenge of reflected light lengthens along the curve of the figure's back, splays out to follow the folds in her jacket, and then continues on to the curve of her brow. *Young Man*, conversely, is all flowing vertical shadows, pooling in the middle at front and back. The most remarkable effects are generated by *Shoe Tie*, which can be read as a shifting collection of abstract light and dark shapes.

The sculptures' reflectiveness serves another purpose, which is to complicate the boundary between work and surrounding space. Blurred images of architectural details and gallery visitors become part of the piece, while certain elements, such as the sleeping woman's Nikes, seem to be atomizing as one watches, as if the heavy sculpture (weighing in at three tons) were dissolving into the very air of the room.

Here, as in the past, an engagement with the viewer's physical presence trumps any psychological, cultural or personal narrative implied by the work's imagery, making these variously curled, crouched and standing figures equivalent to, respectively, Ray's



original circle, cube and line. This is not to say that Ray's images are any less carefully considered than his works' effects. As with all of his sculpture, much of the power and strangeness of these newest pieces resides in their simultaneous exactitude and inscrutability.

—Anne Doran

OLAFUR ELIASSON

Tanya Bonakdar

With its stark beauty, raw geologic power and captivating natural phenomena, Iceland has long been both subject and muse for Olafur Eliasson, whose parents are Icelandic, although he was born and raised in Copenhagen. Featuring 172 color photographs of the Icelandic landscape, three fountain sculptures dizzyingly illuminated by strobe lights and an ample floor piece made of obsidian, Eliasson's exhibition opened on a Thursday. Four days later, nature intervened in a big way, when Superstorm Sandy struck. Floodwaters surged into the gallery, uprooted the front desk and ruined the computers; fortunately, Eliasson's works were spared. After heroic efforts, the gallery reopened 13 days later. While New York was staggered by the power of nature, in Iceland erupting volcanoes, earthquakes, fierce winds and avalanches are commonplace.

On the first floor were three gridded installations of photographs (all 2012). The largest is "The volcano series," 63 C-prints (each around 16 by 24 inches) that present a visual lexicon of types of volcanoes. As you stand before this looming work, your gaze restlessly darting to and fro, a complex interplay develops between parts and whole. You note the differentiating details: red lava swirling down one volcano's slopes; blue and green water surrounding an island volcano; a small volcano so black, craggy and weird that it could be on an alien planet; volcanoes delicately mottled with snow or green moss. Eliasson varied range and camera angles, so that some of the mountains seem quite close while others are distant, and the static installation seems to be in flux. Abundant colors and almost abstract shapes are also downright painterly: a landscape composed by the artist as well as by nature.

"The hot spring series" comprises 48 somewhat smaller (around 12-by-17-inch) photographs of vents, holes, craters and pools. Some are astonishingly colorful: a reddish-orange pool seems to come straight from science fiction, or to have been

invented in Photoshop. Several modest hot springs marked by mineral colors look deceptively immense, as big as the volcanoes; others close to the camera seem miles away. Eliasson excels at manipulating perception and cognition; you're not sure exactly what you're seeing. "The hut series" concerns remote public shelters in vivid hues—an A-frame's bright blue roof, a red and gold shack—that contrast with the muted landscape. These austere yet colorful huts are charming, and they can save people threatened by dangerously unpredictable weather. They also look both stubborn and precarious, overwhelmed by the landscape but somehow making do. Eliasson's photographs deal in information and facts, but they are also enthralling, conjuring encounters with a nature that is both wondrous and scary. Such sublimity is especially apparent in five bigger photographs from "The large Iceland series," featuring chromatic mountains, moss-covered lava fields and a cascading waterfall.

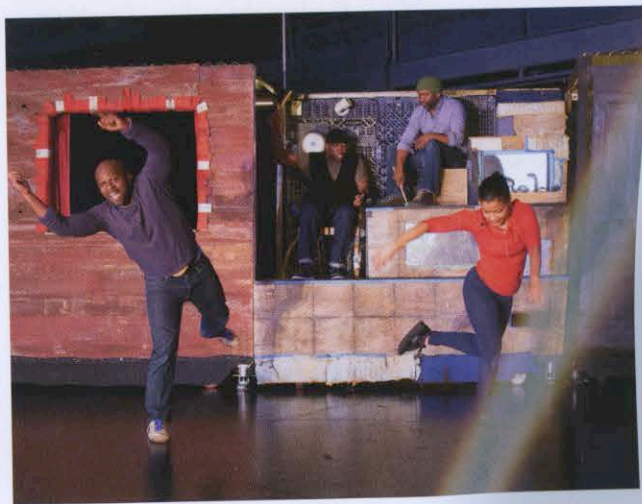
Upstairs were the strobe-lit fountain sculptures (all 2009), along with the showstopper, *Your disappearing garden* (2011), a thick, jagged carpet of jet-black Icelandic obsidian. At once sleek and rugged, alluring and foreboding, Eliasson's indoor version of an awe-inspiring lava field is a marvel of complex visual stimuli. Obsidian, a natural glass that forms when hot lava is submerged in water, is highly reflective. Gazing at this mirrored black sculpture born from whopping geologic forces, you respond to the constantly shifting spectacle playing over its uneven surfaces: flecks of color from the overhead lights, your reflected image, other viewers. This work transports you deep into Iceland even as your attention is riveted by its many optical effects.

—Gregory Volk

"RED, BLACK & GREEN: A BLUES"

Brooklyn Academy of Music

Since 2009, artist Marc Bamuthi Joseph has coproduced *Life Is Living*, a series of interdisciplinary festivals promoting environmental justice in underserved communities. They have taken place



View of "red, black & GREEN: a blues," 2012, showing (left to right) Mark Bamuthi Joseph, Tommy Shepherd, Theaster Gates and Traci Tolmaire; at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.