

**Steve Shapiro's review of *Decelerate*, a group exhibition at  
Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri, 2005 – 06  
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It took approximately a hundred years for Western society to learn what the rest of the world has known forever: even speed has its limits. The gearing up of the Industrial Age affected not only business but also personal life, as adults and children, too, were turned into cogs in the machine for longer hours a day. The techno-revolution of the light bulb, the Tesla electric motor, the Diesel engine and the telephone escalated city life (as the city superseded the slower-paced village) in ways that snipped years off the older, established routines of life. But once we were happy with our microwaves and MTV-style editing, our overnight FedEx deliveries and high-speed dial-ups, many people began to feel fast was not always best: a grassroots revolution in defiance of fast-food culture took off – in such ways as the slow-food movement and the vogue for yoga – a conscious effort to take time with one's life.

When Marinetti published the first Futurist manifesto, in 1909, he declared an affirmation for "a new beauty: the beauty of speed." The Futurist emblems – racing cars and machines – were all about the energy of a new tomorrow, perhaps best represented by Giacomo Balla's *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, in which a weiner dog's busy movements are caught individually, as in one of Muybridge's sequential photographs of a horse. The group show, *Decelerate*, at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, is continuing proof of this back-to-basics revolution as ten artists from around the world show in drawings, paintings, installation, and video, works that are anything but immediate. Though some pieces, such as Anne Lindberg's spectacular *old brain* – a 26-foot long 650-pound sculpture composed of hundreds of intertwined rayon thread – cannot but catch the eye, all of the artworks prove to be more than about first looks.

The deceleration theme is evoked through a multiplicity of mediums that reminds us how art can be used for evil or for good. Colby Caldwell's video-works use the technology of today for yesterday's effects; rather than the ear- and eye-splitting video madness of so many artists, Caldwell's choice of unadorned regular people (older, rural) are by themselves a statement about slowing down and thinking differently about the plain, unmediated world around us. The plainness becomes more meaningful as the viewer participates in the vision of Caldwell's process (a word used by several of the artist in the exhibition). His making prints from his videos, enlarging and mounting them on wood, then using beeswax that gives the pieces a weathered sheen is a slow hands-on process; we are a long ways from the assembly-line of Mark Kostabi, whose assistants painted his work and all he did was sign his name. A 25-minute audio piece which consists of recordings from around Caldwell's farmhouse might be the single best example of the exhibition's theme: nothing to see or touch or wonder why – only life, experienced again.

Several of the artists employ familiar techniques for reasons of their own which suddenly take on fresh appearances. The Moroccan-born Israeli artist Jacob El Hanani draws from the Talmudic tradition of micrography, that is, doubling up on the size of the handwriting to squeeze in all the text, through Hanani's pen-and-ink drawings, meticulous cross-hatching and circles, are abstract illusions. They recall Bridget Riley's psychedelic wavy lines but, even more, the late Agnes Martin's chicken scratchings to the point of formalism. As Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, there is no there there in Hanani's drawings – nothing if you are looking for something. Slowly, the drawings resolve their own directions. This is maximal minimalism.

Michelle Segre, another Israeli (now living in New York), employs a similar madcap approach: her swirling, detailed fantasias, redolent of the doodling in students notebooks, speak not of the greater world or even the real world; they are elaborate worlds within, not unlike the jungle paintings of Rousseau or outsider art. Indeed, the process may be the work given that her oversaturated scenes prove less fulfilling than thinking about the time tracing lines. The opposite is true of the Japanese sculptor Yoshihiro Suda whose delicately carved wooden roses and weeds are a beauty to behold, so there as to make all thoughts about time spent (what about mistakes and starting over!) frivolous – it would be like complaining before Guernica.

Kansas Citian Anne Lindberg's two pieces are the show's scene-stealers: more to the point, they point up the decelerating sensibility in a memorable way. More than the other works at the Kemper, Lindberg's not only express her ideas but also expand on them. The effect of both *old brain* (wonderful title) and *democracy* – upon a wooden table, hand-twisted steel-wire world are laid out as a three-dimensional transcription of a speech by the writer Terry Tempest Williams on the loss of meaningful dialogue - is to make the viewer see through the obvious. The time involved in the piece's construction is plain to see, as is the everyday material of wood, wire, and thread. The material, like the positioning of the works (*old brain* is laid out on the floor, like a hay bale), seems simple enough; what Lindberg does, though, like Eva Hesse, is to push products of the natural world or utilitarian objects into another frame of reference. Terry Tempest Williams' words, each one suddenly given a new twist (literally), summon a deeper sense of the naturalist's intent; it is like a photograph coming to life or blood issuing from Guernica. Lindberg is calling attention to what is there in another way.

Speed has its virtues; when Goodard introduced the jump-cut into the movies, the medium was no longer so left-brain heavy, where everything had to be shown. At the same time, art that serves as a speed bump can free up the sense of play for the artist and the interplay between the artist and the viewer. Art began slowly: why not consider there is still a point to savoring work – as with your life – instead of rushing on to the next thing?

- By Steve Shapiro, a writer living in Kansas City, Missouri.