

Caprice of Support: *Chasing Tail*, Matt Sheridan

The intrinsic double lives of paintings as objects in the world and also as images of- whatever, engenders the central tension to the category. Whether they seek to pare down and play with this dichotomy, testing the limits of the genre as such, or to ignore the conceptual problem and concentrate instead on the crafting of some two-dimensional form in some variety of media, all paintings re-present this ubiquitous and strange duality. Los Angeles artist Matt Sheridan calls his video projection installation, *Chasing Tail*, a painting-in-motion, and so, of course, directs us to consider it as a painting with all of the inherent dualistic tension; but in doing so he also highlights the absence of the work's presence as an object.

Chasing Tail is, in part, a digital representation of a painting. There is no paint, but there was. The video depicts repeated motion, the making of a curved, painted mark and the shifting geometric shapes of paper folded and unfolded and folded again. It is an image of paint and an image of a common support for paint. If we employ Sheridan's analogy to painting, then the photons that make up the projected image comprise the surface, and the material onto which they are projected is the support. Critically, for Sheridan and for this work, the support is not certain; it is conditional, interchangeable and unfixed.

In its history and format, *Chasing Tail* contains a quality of transience, and nods to homelessness. Sheridan began the piece in New Delhi and completed it in Los Angeles in 2011, and has since exhibited it in eleven distinct, widely varied international locations. On a flat white interior wall above a bed in Finland, the representational aspect of the work is quite clear: the image is identifiable and recognizable, but as the textures and structures of the support become more assertive in the different locations of installation, so the integrity of that representational image is compromised. Of all its inhabitations, a London church transforms *Chasing Tail* most. The lines and contrasting shades of brick and mortar and a blank form of negative space overwhelm the lines and shapes

made with light from the projector. The void swallows whatever part is projected onto it and asserts a stronger black shape, which cannot be altered by the image. What remains is the motion, mechanical, tight and repetitious, confined and familiar, yet disembodied.

Toward what end, all the movement, the shifting of shapes and forms and formats, dematerializing and rematerializing, turning the material of the paint to ephemera then back again? It speaks to some type of aversion, but aversion of what is not clear. Certainly though, the work embodies avoidance of some kind of commitment. It runs from itself without running anywhere, like an animal chasing its tail, never making a kill; and so there is no end, and, as in the title, there is not consummation.

The realization of the work stands opposed to the shiftiness in its content. While so many of Sheridan's choices suggest an impulse to hide something from something, the decisions to project the piece on the sides of public buildings and towers in crowded cities indicates some strong wish to be seen, or at least a wanting for the infinite cycle of hiding to be, itself, exposed.

In the marks that make up the image of *Chasing Tail* there is one more conflict, one more hidden and hinted-at tension. Projected on a flat plane, the composition of *Chasing Tail* reveals itself pristinely balanced; the motion choreographed and delicately directed. Despite themselves, all the alterations and reformations and interruptions discretely belie a desire to create something beautiful. So many intentions to corrupt the image may also be intentions to mask the intention to make beauty, as if that impulse is a secret indiscretion or inappropriate and guilty objective, one which must be thwarted in order to be allowed to be manifest, but one which may not be entirely resisted.