

# WESTERN ★ PROJECT

## Selected Press on Nancy Riegelman

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**Nancy Riegelman** at Western Project  
by Kim Beil

Nancy Riegelman's *Breath* marks time as dictated by the rhythms of the artist's body. Every fine pencil line drawn on the eighteen canvases on view at Western Project was executed during the space of one breath. While the drawings represent Riegelman's individual experience of time, the titles translate her personal bio-rhythms into a generalized concept: the period of days during which the artist executed the drawings. Like On Kawara's rigorous commitment to the national conventions of marking time in his date paintings for the *Today* series, Riegelman acknowledges her situation as a particular human being in the larger context of a world that will continue with or without her breath.

In *06/28 through 07/19* Riegelman's steady pencil lines proceed unerringly across the surface of a white canvas and converge in a pattern like the topographical map of a preternaturally flat landscape. A second set of lines emerges from the top right corner of the drawing, creating a disorienting weight, a slight directional shift that works to disrupt the easy observation of this faint grid.

Though the subtle gradations of the fine graphite lines can be difficult to bring into focus, the effect remains one of calm contemplation, as opposed to what has been described as the aggression of Bridget Riley's op paintings which at first glance some of these drawings resemble. Rather than enacting a continual assault on the senses, Riegelman's drawings gradually resolve before the viewer, revealing luminous prismatic patterns, like sunlight passing through layers of thick glass, as in *02/12 through 03/07* and *02/01 through 02/16*. Other images are as detailed as fingerprints, like *09/24 through 10/30* which refuse to let the uneven surface of the canvas disrupt the mesh of perfectly drawn lines.

The physicality of Riegelman's practice is particularly evident in *04/26 through 05/13*, in which a diagonal of white space tears through the canvas from the top corner to the bottom. The horizontal lines that surround this jagged empty space suggest hyperventilation, proceeding from the diminutive, short breath, to a long, relaxed line that forms the base of a triangle. This intensely embodied experience is impossible to recreate from a viewer's perspective. A viewer can visually trace the line across the canvas, but Riegelman's original experience of drawing the line, feeling the slight resistance of the toothy canvas, the muscular control propelling the pencil evenly and efficiently forward is only a ghostly presence for the viewer. For the viewer, the experience of the single line cannot be a vicarious reenactment of the creative state. As a whole, though, these drawings are powerful reminders of the necessity of every single breath, even the ones that go unnoticed. What kind of a picture does a lifetime of breathing paint? Doesn't the last breath look much different from the first? Like the practice of pranayama, or breathing in yoga, Riegelman's awareness of breath is the force that connects her body to her work. As her drawing demonstrates, the equation is not simple or mindless, rather highly considered and interrelated. One cannot easily determine whether it is the breath that drives the line, or the line that draws out the breath.

Riegelman's project draws attention to the forgotten functions of the body, underscoring their independence from the thinking self. Again invoking Kawara, these records of Riegelman's breath illustrate the fact that she is "still alive." Her precise horizontal lines are a little skeptical, like Kawara's inclusion of the adverb "still," as if acknowledging the fragility of life which one minute may be represented by a full and confident pencil line, the next by an insistent flat-line drawn by an electrocardiogram.