



DANIELA RIVERA
BOSTON

Driving from the harbor to South Boston to visit Daniela Rivera's exhibition *Growth*, I go across a cement landscape of construction sites, factories, and parking lots [LaMontagne Gallery; April 20—May 28, 2011]. No trees, shade or lawn. As I enter the exhibition space, I initially feel like I am getting into a hidden garden. The room's floor is covered in grass. So is one of its walls. Grass, or rather, squared canvases representing grass fill the room. A path allows me to walk through the green all around me. My feet touch the ground—an industrial, unfinished floor. On the walls, little rectangular paintings from the *Accidental Sky* series, 2011, evoke miniature windows to the outside world. They present spots, coffee spills, and cracked surfaces as traces of the accidental nature of the artist's interaction with the pieces. In a corner, the three-channel video *Labored Landscape*, 2011, shows Rivera's body giving shape to a huge snowball—a metaphor of the fatigue inherent in intellectual work.

The individual works *Growth*, *Accidental Sky*, and *Labored Landscape* come together in the same space, showing different aspects of the relationship between reality and its representation. In *Labored Landscape*, Rivera relies on the documentary tradition as she records her action with very little elaboration. In *Growth* and *Accidental Sky*, sky and grass are illusorily represented.

In *Growth*, however, the canvases, whose sides are marked by dripped color, reveal themselves as paintings. Rivera uses them as objects, accumulating or displaying them on the floor. Her use of modularity and seriality recalls minimalist structures and Arte Povera works, such as Piero Gilardi's *Nature Rugs*, 1966, or Pino Pascali's *Approximately 32 square meters of sea*, 1967. In the Arte Povera tradition, *Growth* alludes to the uncertain relationship between environmental forces and human-made production through the repetition of geometrical shapes, which frame images of nature. "I went into the gallery as a landscaper and the piece acted sometimes as a mirror to our manicured lawns and the image they attempt to sell. It was somehow linked to the labored landscapes of industries and related to the land

and its exploitation," Rivera writes in her statement. The artist repeats and exaggerates a common attitude toward the natural world, which casts it as a product to be consumed for our visual pleasure.

Footprints sneak on the "grass" in *Growth's* painted lawn—an homage to Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967, which Rivera considers exemplary because of its disregard of medium-specificity: a photograph documents Long's performance of walking through a field, and leaving on the grass the sign of his passage in the fashion of a straight line, which is the primary element of drawing. *Growth* is clearly crossing the boundaries of artistic media, too, presenting the canvas as a sculptural object, incorporating illusionistic painting that camouflages itself as photography, and requiring the viewer's participation to complete the picture with a sort of performative walk across the installation. However, Long's piece conceptualizes nature very differently. In *A Line Made by Walking*, the artist's body temporarily affects a wild landscape, which will grow over the human's trace and erase the sign of its momentary presence. By contrast, Rivera's lawn is depicted, invented, and enclosed within the gallery. Long's romantic and sublime understanding of nature contrasts with Rivera's "manicured lawn." The footprints painted in *Growth* will never go away. A spontaneous proliferation will not triumph over the human mark.

—Silvia Bottinelli