The concept of Drawing is akin to a visionary process; it has an origin, a point of inception, and from here one’s ideas travel and are, in most cases, open ended — there are no rules; drawing can be as minimal as a breath and as complex as the wave structures and recordings of the ocean. A drawing is a kinesthetic; a movement between points, a connection, a recognition and gesture of any idea, mark, trace, line, symbol, shape, medium, space or surface — everyone has their own language of mark”.  

Drawing

I often wonder about drawing breath. The point where it funnels into the mouth or nose — the great space around us full of invisible fluids, molecules, atoms, neuorites, and on and on. If I draw breath I intentionally move air from one space to another, my lungs — I could say — have made a breath drawing. If I exhale onto the choker door and shake my head I have drawn with breath, or if I blow onto duct and film its movement from static to kinetic then it would be a dust and air drawing. Anything that moves between points can be a drawing, and its medium can be anything. Much has been written on drawing in the past twenty years and clarifying what we mean — there is the series of Vitamin publications. The Primacy of Drawing, and a recent publication, The Drawing Ward, published by Studio International for two international universities — a conflation of art and academic text and image. Notably the emphasis is on writing as a drawing, a departure from more traditional ideas of the role of writing in art practice. Now we have drawing as a trans-disciplinary practice across all forms, where most outputs in relation to the mark are observed as drawing. As a curatorial premise for the 2012 Contemporary Australian Drawing #2 exhibition in London, 80 artists were asked to respond to two texts, two ideas by French philosophers Michel Butor and Serge Troumoune that “writing is drawing” and “The space of writing, what is that?” All artists responded generously, seriously considering the propositions. A wonderful example of writing as drawing are the communications in postcard form that Sol Lewitt sent to his friends, a continual use of the format as a text and image drawing — a present continuum of the working drawing from him wherever he was. British artist Anne Lütjel lives on a boat on the Thames and her recent projects makes drawings from the sway of the tides, allowing the redundancy of the material generated by the waves’ movements to be the instrument of mark-making — a drawing machine!

What is a good drawing?

One of the most interesting small publications on drawing, in my opinion, is the book The Good Drawing, coming out of the University of Arts London in their recent publication series. It is the question of what is a good drawing? Stephen Farthing, a collaborator and the Rostov Hoffm’s Professor of Drawing at the UCLA, speaks of the sundial as an example of good drawing — it has been around for about four thousand years and has been developed conceptually by multiple authors’, a shadow drawing machine’. My contribution endeavored to elucidate the difference between a ‘good’ drawing and a ‘great’ drawing; the artist is witness to the selection of … idea, beauty, phenomenon, light, time, connection, pathos etc. the drawing is a ‘signifier’, a residue of the artist’s perceptions at that time, and the viewer, in a trans-historical way, is witness to the artist’s intentions and visual knowledge succinctly, allowing others to experience their insights. It is the poetry of the mark-making, the intuitive response to the visible, invisible and conceptual, which alludes the ordinary into the extraordinary. A great drawing, or a ‘great work of art’, transforms you; it shifts your being, your thinking, emotions, and perceptions. You are transfixed by the interaction — you move away, you draw, changing that you are altered, your perceptions changed and your thinking expanded — it is liberating or it can be most confronting — either way you have entered a meta-space. Technical processes, obsessive outwardly of vision, inspired moments, deep perceptual insights, clarity of vision (to name a few), translated into marks or movements, produce in the viewer a neurological shift, a ‘psychocoreography’ mirroring what the artist has experienced. The drawing is the conduit whereby the viewer is able to become a participant and sharer in the translation, response and outcome of the one who has drawn, be it on a cave wall, an altar, a sketchbook from the Renaissance period, a wall from the 12th century or 21st century, or a pattern of equations — this for me is good drawing; a ‘great’ drawing changes you. What makes a great drawing exhibition?

So many drawing shows, especially group exhibitions, tend to roll out anything on paper in lead — the urge to have a ‘traditional’ section for drawing is often at the root. While this is mentoritious, it can be virtual fail, as a result perhaps of a subtle generalisation of traditional means often found in contemporary education, arts education and by the very pace at which we now live. Traditional drawing, historical and representational, developed through thousands of hours of the artist’s immersion, studying techniques and finding new ways of working with a lineage of traditional means. I think if one is going to focus on a more formal drawing of then one is required to climb out of quick for contemporary medecity as it can suficate direct perceptual skill. Dr. Lise: Drawing through the Twentieth Century at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, which included William Forsythe, the contemporary American choreographer and artistic director of Germany, was a fantastic group exhibition, perhaps even a ‘great’ drawing exhibition.1

Movement & text in drawing

Movement and kinesthetics have been represented in major drawing exhibitions recently, works which re-form ideas explored in the series and more specifically works by William Forsythe. He speaks of a vocabulary of room writing where the body is used as an instrument to write the room, drawing geometries with the body in space and responding to these forms within the dancer’s environments. His Universal writings use the body as a ‘systematic’ group of givens to form ‘letters’ spatially in cursive script and block letters that are ‘split open and explode into the room’. Here the language and boundaries of both writing and drawing blur to incorporate movement as a form of ‘writing as drawing’. We are in effect in ‘a space of writing’ or ‘a space of drawing’. He says: ‘What we do differently from traditional ballet is to focus on the beginning of a movement rather than on the end’. The drawing is firstly a ‘thought’ / ‘response’, the registering of a possibility which excites the kinetic motioning of the nervous system and articulates movement embodied in the body. It could be drawing, writing, dance…we choose the mode of expression — the internal mechanisms organise themselves around our decisions for expression: What we possibly see in the mark / movement/language is in fact the residue or outwarding of the internal choreography, or the ‘psychocoreography’ as I have termed it, we all mostly take for granted. In something such as ‘drawing’, both micro and macro movement are engaged.1

A global drawing dialogue

Drawing International appointed commission Janet McKenzie to author Contemporary Australian Drawing 1, an extension of her previous 1986 survey on Australian drawing. Its development was a reaction to the paucity of publications on drawing in Australia, and indeed a general lack of knowledge of Australian artists’ works internationally. It was unmasked that the publication would have an international distribution and block letters.

Dr. Irene Barberis, as Director of the International Research Centre, Metasena B, commissioned the book Contemporary Australian Drawing 1, authored by Dr. Janet McKenzie with essays by Dr Christopher Heathcote and Irene Barberis, published by Macmillan Art Publishing (2012).

Dr. Irene Barberis, New Drawing 2012. (c) Irene Barberis, carbon dust, pastel and ink, 21 x 29.5 cm.

Anne Lütjel, Arctic Poolside, (7) detail 7, 2012, ink on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm.
Now, Drawing... continued from page 7

I'm walking along cabbage street: too early morning and you there is still a public telephone box on the corner of elm. For ten years I lived nearby in faraday street on the top floor of an old warehouse for many of those years I had no telephone and I used to walk around to this public box to make whatever calls I needed to make. I expect that the box is going to miss one day but every time I pass it I used to sit there. I have thought that throughout melbourne's metropolitan area and beyond that too. It can think of seeing and batarial strange ways and the dandemony range sip potions all along the peninsula to frankston. I'm told there's a network of public telephones boxes that over the last forty years. I've made calls from some on which my life and those of others around my dispersed. Others simply to organize practical affairs like where to pick up a child after school or where a particular cricket ground or squash court was located some were phoning calls. Some in which I heard good things told me, suddenly occasionally on ones in which I was the bearer of bad news. I've at times thought that I'd like to get a map and pinpoint them all. All of them every single one of them and then join them up in a drawing with lines variously coloured to represent the reasons they were made. I used red for anger and blue for love yellow for pragmatic reasons black for melancholy grey for funny and so on. And then see what figure emerged from that network of multi-coloured lines to try and understand whether the crossings made any sense whether all these urgent reasons for suddenly stopping the car for jingling the change impatiently sometimes for desperately asking strange if they had a particular coin missing from my hand. I had somehow came across a picture that from a perspective the years afford (strangely or genuinely isn't it) that particular gift of hindsight that time freely bestowed on us when it's least needed might provide a kind of diachronical dream of some of the roles for living that life. I gave los borgos inquires as to what might constitute a divine mind when he wonders whether the stops that we take from birth to death traces a figure in time a figure inconceivable to us but real. As a kind of dream of some of the roles for living that life. I gave los borgos inquires as to what might constitute a divine mind when he wonders whether the stops that we take from birth to death traces a figure in time a figure inconceivable to us but real. As a kind of dream of some of the roles for living that life. 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Domenico de Clario, interdisciplinart artist, musician, writer and educator.

drawing something about contemporaneous icon time down canning street by domenico de clario, interdisciplinary artist, musician, writer and educator

show where handerhinch catalogue and packaging took preference over glass and frame. He shares thoughts on his drawing and place in ‘drawing and something about contemporaneous time in drawing street’.

Godwin Bradbeer, mult I Obi Prize for Drawing winner and finalist at last ten times, artist and university colleague, was asked to share his perceptions of the image and its drawn counterpart over a time/life span, and has written an insightful piece titled ‘Art and the Flygeline Image’.

Australian artist Jayne Dyer, based in China, writes on China, Sri Lanka and India, selecting an artist to represent each country. Brazilian artist and philosopher Dr Mafalda Neuman Gaia Louis explores drawing in major Brazilian artist Filipe de Carvalho’s work.

Professor Stephen Farthing RA, highly-regarded British artist, has written on The Centre for Drawing based at the University of the Arts London, which he was instrumental in developing. Living in both New York and London, his works are widely exhibited and his numerous books on art also highly sought after.

The drawing segment concludes with a transcription from a recent interview I made with the Director of The Drawing Center in New York, Brett Littman. Brett was formerly the Deputy Director of PS1 Contemporary Art Center and has been the Executive Director of The Drawing Center since 2007. He is also an active art, craft, architecture and design critic, a member of AICA/USA (International Art Critic Association) and has written numerous catalogue essays and articles for a wide variety of international publications and museums.

References

Art and the Fugitive Image

by Godwin Bradbeer, Melbourne-based artist and occasional writer of poetry and essays

Sometime in 1972 I stood at the side of a car, bookshop flicking through a contemporary art journal and I chanced upon an image that arrested me in the moment, more profoundly than I might have thought at that time. The image was being used to advertise a forthcoming art auction and it was a frontal-gazing face by an artist unfamiliar to me.

I considered buying the journal in order to take possession of this haunting image but my economics were modest so I made no purchase and left with the intent of researching the artist and locating the picture wherever else I might find it. I reproductions I suggested the picture of that pallid somewhat erotic face was a portrait, but it seemed to me to be esoteric beyond the expectations of the usual convention of the portrait. I found out a little about the artist. He could reasonably and conveniently be placed within the broader circumstance of the fine de siècle circle generally referred to as symbolists.

In the more than forty years since that encounter I have only once held a book on the artist in my hands and this was a rare and irregular publication; and it did not include that remembered image.

We will not see that once again.

The mild anxiety that remained in the void of that image subsided in time as my own work, particularly my photographs of that early decade, acquired aspects of not only that chiaroscuro and the smoky face but a sense that the subject was profoundly elsewhere; caught in asp, caught under glass, caught in emulsion, caught on the retina, caught in the moment, caught in the mind somewhere else, it was secure from time.

In the early 1980s I shifted away from photography to an imagery pursued principally through drawing. The reason for this was, and remains, critically important for me and for my art. Its conception and its execution the subject must be accessible to a total interrogation of its raison d’être. This can involve a profound anxiety and an analytical brutality that requires distance, even anonymity. The freedom to do this was for me disallowed by empathy, intimacy and the identity of the subject. The responsibility for the emergent image demanded absolute authorship and not the paparazzo kleptomania of the photographer/artist, whether that was feasible or contraband. In my experience modernism was not distinguished by its freedoms as it may have been at the start of the twenty-first century but by its restrictions and its exclusivity. Modernism was an elite, and security was tight. (On the other hand post modernism is open house and security is slack) The obscure object of my desiring was not only fugitive, it was blackballed by modernist orthodoxy.

Nevertheless I was, and remain, actually very conditioned by the intellectual architecture of my era and my artistic circumstances. Something of minimalism and certain considerations of the existentialists got through to me. I was terraced of a voyage of romance into my work and in a flight from sentimentality I avoided the human usage for almost fifteen years; my compromise was the profile with its non engagement of emotional exchange. Toward the turn of the century — my own fin de siècle — my subject was upon me like a seduction.

In 1998 I made a large drawing of a frontal-gazing face, somewhat suspended within a void, the image sufficiently large that the experience for the viewer would seem immense. I took the word ‘image’ as the title for this work. The ‘image’ refers to an idealised image of self or other, formed in early life and retained into adulthood. It might also be the most definite and distinctive phase of the physical life of person or creature.

This drawing and the subsequent forty plus versions became a composite of many interactions and many influences, not least the millions of faces encountered in my life. But I was aware of a slight orientation to my figurative practice and the immediacy of the drawn line.

In studio exile circa the turn that century I struggled with a fourth or a fifth version of the elusive gazing face and recognised that a line of images had been dormant in my mind for thirty years and owed not only their existence but their clarity to distant and obscure memory. A drawing of high or low culture or worthy or unworthy intent. Personality, perspicacity, gender, ethnicity might be collateral victim to such an artistic quest. The narrator even the sterility of the immaculate and multiple image — of photography and digital imagery is oppositional for me to the unique and flawed nature of each individual, artist or model. As a man and as an artist I am anything but immaculate and additional to this, despite the high value I place upon self-knowledge, I remain still essentially foolish to myself.

Longing, yearning is at the heart of art making. Frustration is a significant part of the powerhouse of artistic urgency. As a figurative artist in an era of abstraction and conceptual art my figurative subject was like contraband. In my experience modernism was not distinguished by its freedoms as it may have been at the start of the twenty-first century but by its restrictions and its exclusivity. Modernism was an elite, and security was tight. (On the other hand post modernism is open house and security is slack) The obscure object of my desiring was not only fugitive, it was blackballed by modernist orthodoxy.

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When printmakers draw into plates or project their interaction with the plate at stage proof stage — and with manifold processes enenders sophisticated imagery that does not always maintain the immediacy of the drawn line. Lithography captures the graining drawn on to stone or metal plate, as does the intaglio technique of drypoint. Arthur Boyd, who made thousands of drawings in the 1960s, when painting materials were scarce due to the war, in the 1960s turned to etching and lithography and drew very little on paper, channeling that same impulse for mark-making into printmaking. He had expert assistance for editing, but drypoints were among his most important works in terms of invention and imagination. Drypoint, he explained, was a drawing in which he ‘tried harder’. By that he was referring to a series of occasion that he experienced faced with a fresh copper plate — each mark, he explained, assumed greater significance. The unique woodblock printing methods of Crescida Campbell produce not an edition of prints but a single image. In this she is not a printmaker but an artist who employ printmaking techniques. Drawing occupies a pivotal role in her image making where her exemplary skills are used to capture a range of subjects; it is for Campbell the skeleton or bones of a picture and although colour can completely alter a composition’s balance, the drawing and design have to be right or usually the painting, or in my case the woodblock, does not work. It is the structure or scaffolding for a picture. I have always drawn in a linear way, never tonally and always from life. I feel the essence of a subject to be learned and look for the detail, one sees which you don’t get from a photograph. I often put it too much detail and get rid of objects to simplify the composition.1

We Refuse to Become Victims (2004) is the product of a collaborative drawing and printmaking project between three countries which sought to address the urgent issues of global politics. Instigated in Canberra at the print collective Culture Kitchen, the project came about in response to the acute political instability in East Timor in 2006. We Refuse to Become Victims is an innovative example of collaboration. The immediacy of mark-making through print techniques and seven lines, between three geographically separated places, enabled a more successful dialogue to be established between individuals who might not normally find a cultural or political voice. Mark-making in societies in transition thus is a fertile empowerment.

Remarkable energy and dedication characterise the art practice of Gosia Wodarczak in which she is used to index her performative art, the events and processes of experience. Since she settled in Australia from Poland in 1996, she has made an innovative contribution to drawing in Australia and to contemporary art practice. Trained as a printmaker, Gosia has devised a number of ambitious performance-based projects. Visually, works such as Safety Zone, Stowaways, were part of and an outcome of Performers’ Night in her native Poland in 2008. A spectacular work, it shares with many of her projects a formidable energy and is executed on a large scale (160 x 510 cm). Although they are not primarily formal art objects in themselves, Gosia values the process over the finished product, a central characteristic of printmaking.2

Notes

References
3. Ibid.


Gosia Wodarczak, Elixir: Zone Geometric, 2000, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm, collection the artist.

Gosia Wodarczak, Elixir: Zone Geometric, 2000, oil on canvas, 170 x 170 cm, collection the artist.
From Thought to Action:
Drawing as the Catalyst for Contemporary Printmaking in the UK

by Dr Janet McKenzie

The London exhibition KupferstichKabinett: Between Thought and Action (1), made reference to the German tradition of ‘KupferstichKabinett’, used to describe print and drawing collections within a museum—and referring to the closeness of the two forms explicitly. Historically, the word ‘kabinett’ originally came from the small space within a castle where personal collections were kept before the advent of public museums. In the 20th century prints assumed a more public role; the graphic impulse employing affordable processes such as linocut and etching, and the dedication to ‘KupferstichKabinett’//

Thinking in form: Drawing is the first step in the printmaking process. It is the first visible thing of the form of the thought, the changing point from the invisible to the visible thing. It’s really a special kind of thought, brought down onto a surface, be it flat or be it round; be it a solid support like a blackboard or be it a flexible thing like paper or leather or parchment, or whatever kind of surface.2

Georg Baselitz’s chainsaw woodcuts and large lineographs modern the traditional scale of the medium. Thomas Kilpper’s woodcuts are made by chiselling a parquet floor, inking up using house paint and laying fabric onto the floor before hanging the works like banners.3 Being an artist, essentially a painter, cuts into surfaces with the sureness of a master other than with the rigidity of disciplines in his collateral, painted installation works. As a student of Sigmar Polke, his work is multilayered in meaning, method and ambitious in conceptual terms. These artists can all be seen to have inherited the first expressionist artists’ passion for socially engaged art in which drawing achieved a new level of urgency. Like contemporary art practice, their work was based on experimentation and collective. Subsequently the work of Joseph Beuys, for whom drawing was pivotal, and for whom the distinctions between traditional print techniques and mark making became less and less important, continues to exert a strong influence on artists working in the present.4

Prior to the advent of photomechanical or photographic processes, drawing was the essence of printmaking. Artists drew (and many still do) directly onto stone, metal plate or block. There was an added high level of drawing skill displayed by specially trained artisans to woodcuts by the wood block cut by the DürerSchool of 15th-century German to the chromatists in 19th-century France who translated the work of the Impressionists through extended series of hand-drawn lithographic stones. Without the history of print, artists have appropriated or adapted printmaking processes to suit their personal vision. Woodblocks may now be drawn with a chainsaw and intaglio print with an angle-grinder. Arthur Watson, current President of the Royal Scottish Academy, who set up a print shop, now the Peacock Print Workshop in Aberdeen in 1974, observes.

Paul Coldwell, A Mapping in Blue, 2013, screenprint, edition of 20, image size 75 x 77.6 cm, Printed at Drydock Printmakers.

There are artists like Giacometti where there is virtually no difference between his prints and his drawings, merely a slightly different surface to work on and either lithographic crayons or an etching needle to place on the place of the pencil. For him however, drawing represents the first attempts at making a visual equivalent to a thought or proposition. Much of this activity is essentially private, in sketchbooks and scraps of paper and is part of me trying to find an idea, then extend it. These drawings are generally informal and speculative; printmaking for me is more considered and planned. If drawing can be seen as preparation and warming up for a game, printmaking can be seen as the game itself and once started I would try to take it as a hopefully successful conclusion. That said, my inclination is to edit out any sense of there being a correlation between gesture and emotion. I want something more exact and so the kind of drawing I use for the print changes, becomes lighter and hopefully more precise. Much of my print work is concerned with bringing together the languages of drawing and photography and it has made the computer that I can work on both simultaneously. The computer also helps me avoid I florid strokes and unnecessary marks.

Christopher Le Brun’s printmaking takes place in intense bursts of activity as his two projects, 50 Etchings (1991 and 2000), attest. An influential painter right from the 1970s, and now the President of the Royal Academy, Le Brun is interested in the history of British art but observes that national identity has never been a strong force in its visual arts. In his own 30 years and worked at Peacock Visual Arts as a printer. Her own figurative drawing is devoted to the nude; she makes intaglio prints using multiple plates. Vigil (1999-2000), a suite of unique colour prints using the same four plates, inking them differently and altering their sequence of printing and overprinting, addressed the ramifications of serious illness in her husband Nick’s and the desperate uncertainty and fear she experienced: ‘Reproducing the same image again and again questions the body’s existence.’ She explains.

If drawing involves a sequence of making line, tone and texture and then working to build a surface, then intaglio extends that whole process. The type of line-making tool (engraving or etching), the type of metal for other materials, the acid type, the acid of the type, the resist, the stopping out, exposure to acid or abrasion, the scraping, the grinding back to re-working the surface for emphasis: structure and composition is built on drawing decisions and intuition and techniques both visual, tactile and intellectual. intaglio print is different, but in each case the importance of what the hand chose to do is felt. It is one way to do step-by-step, was cumulative experience of the acts of drawing and printing the love of the body, the fear for that body. In multi-plate intaglio you have many chances to draw the image because you can re-do without sacrificing what you already have. There are not fixed signs in the acts of ‘Drawing’ but it is all drawing.5

Beth Fisher RSA, Dark Night, Vigil Series, 1991, etching, intaglio, mezz, unique print, 127 x 101 cm, work he draws upon the literary imagery of Keats, Blake, Malory and Bunyan. Le Brun is a seminal figure for Le Brun, whom he considers to be a proto- Surrealist. In his own painting Le Brun’s imagery hovers between the figurative and abstraction. His enigmatic archetypal forms (horse, branch, shield, tree, tower) carry equal weight to the formal language employed. There is a constant dialogue going on between the printed surface and the works themselves, the images and the process. The works can be read as an armature for other works. A print with no line or a print with a negative line and a print with a positive line, can be read as an armature for other works. A print with no line or a print with a negative line and a print with a positive line, plus more portable and fluid than using traditional tools on an art paper.6 American-born Beth Fisher has lived in Aberdeen for over 3 years.

References
Drawing across borders

by Jayne Dyner, Australian artist and writer living in Beijing

The traditional hero (Hanuman, monkey god) is supplanted by Hanuma Ammasi, an obsessive, adolescent Indian girl who expresses social and cultural attitudes that delve headlong into themes of female sexuality and aggression in ways that are equally playful and provocative, using imagery derived from Hindu mythology, Bollywood, comics and science fiction.2 While Ganesh incorporates traditional drawing media such as charcoal and ink wash to produce large-scale wall and paper works, Tales of Ammassi was executed as a seamless union of technologies. Produced as digital C-prints that are part hand, part computer generated, Ganesh starts with brush and ink drawings, then scans, manipulates, collapses; at ease with both physical and virtual languages.

Since 2006, Ganesh has been working collaboratively with Mariam Ghani (b. 1979, New York, Afghan-American) on Index of the Disappeared. This ongoing archive tracks censorship and data erasure post-9/11 in America. Index of the Disappeared: Secrets Told opened in February 2014, a site-specific installation presented as part of an artist in residence at Asian/Pacific/AMerican Institute at New York University.

References
2. Ibid.

Pala Pathipitiye (Sri Lanka), May 2010. pen on paper and watercolour on print, 34.4 x 23.3 cm. Courtesy: Pala Pathipitiye, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

India: heritage and identity

Chitra Ganesh’s background (b. 1975, New York, Indian-American) offers an arms-length relationship with India, possibly permitting her license to probe attitudes to female identity and behaviours that expand to South Asian history, imperialism and queer politics.

Her subversive, popular Tales of Ammassi (2002-07) was included in The Empire Strikes Back: Indian Art Today at Saatchi Gallery in 2010, with a related series recently exhibited at the Gallerie Espace booth in the 2014 India Art Fair. Tales of Ammassi appropriates the tropes of the comic book, referencing the Indian comic books of Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) that retell stories from the great epics. Ganesh adopts the stylisation and direct story line where good triumphs over evil, but subverts expected content.

Chitra Ganesh (India), Atlas, 2013. oil on artist’s paper, edition of 14, 175 x 120 cm. Courtesy: Ganesh, New Delhi.

In early 2014, Jane Dyner attended the Colombo Art Biennale in Sri Lanka and participated in the India Art Fair held in New Delhi, where she met Chitra Ganesh.

www.jaynedyer.com

China: 21st-century introspection?

Today’s generation of young artists faces a very different China from the post-Man-huaiyan days. Emerging artist Ren Han (b. 1984, Tianjin) participation in Consciousness at Tianjin Art Museum, Tianjin, 2013, indicates a drawing praxis with a pronounced intimacy and a quiet intellectual/moral contradiction that simultaneously mirrors and refuses expected thematic and spatial relationships, referring to much as ‘nothing’ that is lost/demolished/unattainable’ as to presence.

Simply executed with graphite pencil, site-specific installations and discrete drawings slide between objective and non-representational form, that owes as much to his postgraduate training in France as to systems of cartography and classical Chinese calligraphic painting. Ren Han challenges assumptions about what constitutes Soft Impact (2013) exists only in documentation. Constructed in an abandoned factory site, the artist drew a perfect circle on a wall, filled the circle with black pigment and proceeded to assaulting the wall with debris – fragments from the site, such as machine parts, building materials. Resulting in accidental, white marks penetrating the black void, Ren Han created what he describes as a ‘landscape’. His massive wall drawing Little Labyrinth (2011) appears simultaneously as a fractured landscape viewed through a wide-angled lens and as an unidentified microscopic fragment from a domestic site. China in transition. Ren Han identifies the speed of change, boom-time uni-corona, an environment compromised; dismissed from a distance, identified.

Sri Lanka: war / post-war


The collaborative The One War Drawing Project, between fourteen pioneering Sri Lankan artists, including Lasantha Weerasinghe (b. 1954, Moratuwa), Chandraguptha Thenuwara (b. 1949, Salil), Tharmaharapathy Shanmuganathan (b. 1949, Jaffna) and Muhammed Cader (b. 1946, Colombo), tracks the first five months of fighting exchange to 2007. Drawings were swapped by post, between Jaffna in the north and Colombo in the southeast; centres that have been, and continue to be, ideologically and ethnically polarised. This seminal visual archive offers an acute lens to the civil war and is considered one of the most innovative contemporary art projects that has taken place in Sri Lanka. Commissioned as a Reaking Leaves publication, the project was launched at Art Dubai 2008 and exhibited in the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2009. Dr. Virginia Woolf describes the activity as ‘no parlour game.’ She suggests: The works were daily performances undertaken in the spirit of direct distortion: 208 pages of 52 sketches by each artist manifesting his reaction to the war-mongering factions which have tormented Sri Lanka for the last decade.3

While post-war, next generation artists’ interests have diversified, the legacy of Weerasinghe, etc. is evident in Jaffna Map (2010) by Pala Pathipitiye (b. 1972, Daniyah). Awarded the 2010 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, the work, drawn in ink on a panel on an antique map of the northernmost tip of the country, is a powerful pointer to Sri Lanka’s geopolitical landscape during the height of the war between the Tamils and the Sinhalese. We are familiar with mapping as a scaled portrayal of geographical features and political borders. Postwar plays metaphoric extensions to these conventions, revealing evasive ethnic terrains and identities and raising questions about the problematic construct of what is and what may constitute a national identity. Jaffna Map was included in Making History, the 3rd Colombo Art Biennale this year.

In 1967 Brazilian artist Filibio de Carvalho (1889-1973) stood by his sick mother’s bedside and recorded in a series of drawings the final agony at the age of an ailed woman dying of cancer. The series of 23 drawings contains the descriptive title: Minha mãe morrendo – My mother dying later also known as Sinhá Trágica – Tragic Sinner, was exhibited in 1968. This series of portraits – for they are indeed unique portraits, a compounded death mask were done with an economy of means and a clarity of touch that translated the emotions of extreme human suffering into clear and urgent graphic forms. They presented the pathos of death with urgency and yet with relative sobriety from a close point of view and, at the same time, with the kind of detachment proper to the type of vision, the seeing which is, in fact, that of the artist in the process of observing and recording the inherently unstable, moveable forms of reality.

For, indeed, a kind of displaced identification with the figures of reality is for the artist what brings close to the mind the mind-hand connection, the thinking as making that characterises drawing. The realities of things and processes or true configurations. Displaced, that is, in the objective of vision, as another object, in the act of seeing, as another vision, in the time and place as always. A time and place that are only the dead’s past to un enduring and prolonged or suspended in and by the powers and the constraints and limitations of aesthetic form.

All funerary related art wants to preserve the ‘likeness’ of the deceased person against death itself in the graphic (drawn, painted, incised, sculpted) representation of different times and places, what once is made present again now and for the future, as representation to memory counteracting the destruction and decay of time. In Filibio de Carvalho’s series, the focus is the event itself: the final event in which the subject is disclosed in all its frailty, in the last uneventful event of life. The subject, that is, ourselves, in the very particularity and universality of our condition as creatures of flesh (universally sons or daughters), attacked by the flesh and by the supreme and living through, thereby, each other’s fortune and misfortune, in all of life’s joys and miseries.

The past, then, is where the ‘ready a death mask’, the record of what was and is no longer, gone with time. All funerary art is a memento mori, the remembrance of the departed that serves also to exorcise the fear of their own mortal condition. An artist or art-historical ‘ancestry’ to Filibio de Carvalho’s series can perhaps be located in late Medieval funerary sculpture: the tomb torso: the tomb portal, the king, or the nobleman or high church dignitary, in the process of physical transformation by decay, symbolically a kelebratory counterfigure or partially transformed into a cadaver. The modern artwork, is, of course, informed by a somewhat different experience and concept of human time and human transcendence, and a different perspective on the ideological dimension, the functions or ‘uses’ of art, conscious or otherwise.

When for example, the calligraphy drawings were met with public shock and disapproval it contributed to establish the artist’s reputation as a kind of ‘artist maurd’ of Brazilian Modernismo. Filibio de Carvalho is, indeed, a precursor to the 20th century of artistic initiatives that only in the second half of the 20th century would be recognised as belonging to various and distinctive concept and forms of the art Experiência no. 2, from 1935, and Experiência no. 6 (in 1956).
The Centre for Drawing: University of the Arts London

by Stephen Farthing, Rookstein Hopkins Professor of Drawing, University of the Arts London (UAL)

Since 2000 the Centre for Drawing has championed drawing by publishing books, providing residencies for artists, organising and partnering with institutions to convene conferences in London, New York, Paris, Pittsburgh, Melbourne, Rome and Sydney, and as a matter of course supported research and student-led organised exhibitions. The exhibition The Whiteness of Paper was built on drawn images, taken from the Royal Academy’s collections. Its aim was to highlight the importance across time of a broad range of drawing conventions, and the importance of the paper left untouched in a drawing at the point of conclusion. In 2009 we moved on from a preoccupation with the metaphorical spaces contained in every sheet of blank paper, to exhibit and publish that strange mix of private/public spaces offered by designers and artists’ sketchbooks — first an architect, Nicholas Grimshaw, then the modernist theatre designer Joëllen Herbert. Although much of our work went on in London, we travelled and travailed came to us. These days, however, the Centre for Drawing is more about people and ideas and things, more and almost everything has become tighter! The network is now an informal group of interested people who are eager to encourage creative thinking, cross-disciplinary discovery and invention within the frame of what we think of as ‘the bigger picture of drawing’. In its early days, The Centre was more formally constituted and more actively engaged in programmed research and very much more expensive to run. By the start of 2011 we had developed a secondary school curriculum and a secondary education in drawing, launched a cross-disciplinary MA in drawing, and built a focused group of members who regularly shared ideas. By Spring 2011 the core University of the Arts membership (Simon Betts, Kelly Chorpening, Charlotte Hodges, Stephen Farthing and Michael Pavlica) realised it had achieved many of its founding goals and decided that the development of a specialist international knowledge-sharing forum should become its priority. With this objective in mind, in September 2011 we launched a blog that now works to service communication between network members and act as a means of promoting and supporting the events we organise.

Between 2010 and 2013 the primary focus of The Centre became The Drawn Out Network, which was funded by an AHRC Network Grant that initiated exploration into cross-disciplinary approaches to drawing and facilitated information sharing between our Centre and RMIT, Melbourne. This network’s focus has been the exploration of drawing’s relationships with writing, notation and general literacy. In 2012 our second conference published, through the CCW Graduate School at UAL, The Good Drawing, edited by Stephen Farthing, Kelly Chorpening and Colin Wiggins (ISBN 978-1-903391-01-0). Designed as a first stepping stone in a journey towards understanding drawing in terms of general literacy, The Good Drawing presented the views of: Irene Barberis, Michael Craig-Martin, David Hockney, Michael Landy, Tracey Emin, Katherine Stott and Anita Taylor, amongst others, on where quality might reside in drawing. In February 2014, in collaboration with Dr Janet McKenzie, the outcome of the Network’s three years’ collaboration with RMIT was This Drawn Word: even if you write my name I am drawing, published by Studio International Trust (ISBN 978-0-9583999-5-3).

As for the future, we of course plan to continue our exploration of the bigger picture of drawing and supporting our existing network. That said, we sense it is time to move out of what has become years of reflection and get back into growth mode. When I asked Simon Betts, the Dean of Wimbledon College of Arts*, and the person now responsible for The Centre for Drawing Wimbledon, for his take on the future of The Centre, this was his reply:

The notion of a centre implies that a thing or idea is at the heart of other things and ideas. At Wimbledon College of Arts we are exploring a new ‘centre’ for drawing that may well be on the basis of a more ‘virtual’ centre that shapes itself dependent on shifting discourses. However, while this more fluid notion of a centre for drawing should remain responsive and generative, it is because we believe that drawing remains at the centre of what we do as makers. •

* Wimbledon College of Arts is a constituent college of University of the Arts London.

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The Drawing Center, New York
Dr. Irene Barberis in conversation with Adam Neumann

Dr. Irene Barberis is an artist, Director Global Centre for Drawing and Metasalena Publications, Co-Director Gallery Langford 120 and Senior Lecturer RMIT University

Brett Littman is the current Director of The Drawing Center, New York.

1. Brett, what is the underlying premise and vision of The Drawing Center, New York? Its vision for artists and vision for the public because often they are two separate things?

2. I’m going to go back a bit in our history. The vision has changed, I think with each of the four directors. I’m the fourth director now since the founding of The Drawing Center by Martha Beck in 1977. When Martha founded the institution she had a lot of frustration with the Museum of Modern Art where she was curator — every time she proposed a drawing show, the director at the time said, ‘Well that’s great, we’ll put it in a closet on the second floor’.

Drawing wasn’t given a lot of importance in terms of art history; there was very little commercial importance placed on artists who primarily drew. We were still living in an age where drawing was secondary to painting and sculpture. Martha was quite insistent and saw the future, because in the late sixties and early sevenies there were many artists who were working both in land art and earth art and in conceptual ways, trying to develop new technologies, like neon or sound waves, and were drawing invisible things. So I think she saw through the artists’ practices that drawing was going to take on a kind of new importance, and when she founded the institution, it was more out of a defensive stance for drawing.

Drawing is important and we are going to plant the flag and we are going to make sure there’s an institution for artists who draw and maybe that’s the only thing they do in terms of their artistic output. She did found the institution with several other core principles: that it was going to be historical and contemporary. Her first show was the drawings of visionary Barcelonian architect Gaudi, followed by a Selections show curated from our Viewing Program of Terry Winters and several other artists that are well-known to us and first showed their work in New York. She moved very fluidly between 14th, 15th and 16th century drawing to contemporary drawing. The second thing that Martha was interested in was the vision of artists; if you had gone to MOMA with your portfolio you would probably have been escorted by a guard out the door — if you asked to see a curator, it was impossible at the time. Martha founded an institution where the wall between curatorial work and curators and artists was broken down. She also started the Viewing Program — a very important core program for us for the past 37 years, although now it is shifting to a new program called Open Sessions. In the 1990s, Kara Walker held her first exhibition of paper cut-outs at The Drawing Center when Ann Philbin was the director. Ann moved the institutional dialogue towards a much broader exploration of drawing in relation to pop culture, Ed Hardy’s Tatoo Show; and explorations of drawing in other kinds of other contexts; not necessarily as rendering or as skill, but as ‘markers’ for other kinds of things like dreams and economics. Ann also did a lot of shows with contemporary artists that highlighted current trends and ideas in drawing.

Catherine De Zegher, the third director, was interested in the idea of how line can move off the page and maybe even away from the idea of self-motivated itself. For her the apex of drawing practice might be someon like Opolo, the Venezuelan artist who made wire constructions and projected lights through those constructions and then showed the shadows on the wall as drawings. There were a lot of exhibitions during Catherine’s time exploring the sculptural aspect of drawing: what does line mean when it’s freed from the edge, freed from the rectangle, freed from the white page? Line that actually exists in space in the gallery. Also, there were some performances that she hosted at The Drawing Center during that period that addressed the idea of durational drawing. I’ve been director of The Drawing Center now for seven years and the thing that has been interesting to me is the idea that drawing is an analogue for thinking. (I’m not an art historian, I don’t have a PhD in art history and I come at the art world from philosophy and poetry). So I’m interested in how drawing actually intersects with many disciplines including architecture, food, engineering, science, mathematics and music. I have not abandoned visual arts, of course that’s the core of what we do, but I am very interested in what drawing means to many different kinds of practitioners in the 21st century; particularly as we move more and more to a digital age, and what that actually might mean for the future of the medium.

Part 2

1. Brett, another artist, Seonie, Bradbeer, has asked: Does the vision that you have now bear with the cultural responsibility to future generations and to past generations, and is there an artistic body of knowledge which will be inherited by the public?

2. It’s a pretty big question.

3. Well, I still really feel responsible as the director and chief curator of this institution in terms of setting the vision. My vision, however, is not absolute in the way approach things. I try to run The Drawing Center with my other curators as a ‘think tank’. It should be an institution that is constantly dynamic and I think we are asking more questions than we are providing answers for. Our responsibility to the future and past generations of artists is that when you come to The Drawing Center you’re most likely going to see an exhibition of maybe someone you have never heard of before or work that you have never seen. So I think that the key words for me for The Drawing Center are curiosity, intelligence, surprise, challenge; we’re not an institution that is easily digestible. If you’re looking for the kind of simple quick chip show that follows the galleries or collectors, we’re probably not a good institution for you. I hope for our visitors and general audience that The Drawing Center is a place where people are learning, and that includes myself and my staff.

3. Your new Lab Gallery is an innovative way of precipitating experimental dialogue around trans-disciplinary drawing. Has this been a successful program?

4. I think so. We built the Lab Gallery because it takes about two years, maybe three years, to put a big show together. So, going to a lot of studios and visiting all kinds of people who draw, including architects, urban planners, industrial designers, it’s very sad when you say to the artist, ‘Well, the earliest spot that we have is in 2017’. The Lab Gallery was really built for much smaller budget shows with faster turnover, with the goal of being a little more responsive to the present. The Lab Gallery is now coupled with Open Sessions, a curated group of artists who have submitted projects related to drawing that they would like to explore under the canop of The Drawing Center’s investigations. The artists are age, race, discipline and skill diverse. It is made up of not only visual artists but also includes architects, urban planners, and dancers who are all interested in the idea of what drawing might mean in their own work. We are viewing these artists like a class and they will ‘graduate’ in two years. During that time there will be six small shows in the Lab Gallery and one large show in the Main Gallery to bring together all the ideas that happened during open sessions. The program is being led by Lisa Sigal, an artist who is the Open Sessions curator, and Nan Benway, our curatorial assistant. Open Sessions is an international group; not everyone is living in New York. People are Skyping in and participating by email or by conference. It’s probably about 30% New York based, maybe 40% US based and then 40% out of country.

5. So The Drawing Center has an international type of program. Does the DCNY have a wide international and intercultural vision and program and in this is it interested in Australian artists’ perspectives?

6. I think we are interested in artists’ perspectives. To be honest we have not shown Australian work in a white but Catherine De Zegher (our previous director) had good relationships with Australia and I have been to Melbourne and Sydney in the past. We only show work if a curator can visit you and have access to that artist in the US. My curator and I have been spending more time in South America in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela and right now we’re finding that in Latin America artists are thinking philosophically about what drawing is, its social impact in terms of their own economies and how they use drawing as a kind of dialogue with the world around them. So we have found those countries to be very fruitful places to explore.

7. Yes, the Global Centre for Drawing is also liaising specifically with Brazil — very interesting works and understandings are coming from this part of the globe. In this set of articles there are three centres for drawing being discussed: The Centre for Drawing in London, The Drawing Center, New York and the Australian-based Global Centre for Drawing. Could you see an intercultural project, which could involve all three centres simultaneously in some way?

8. Absolutely. We just collaborated with the Drawing Room in London on dual exhibitions and a joint catalogue. You kind of flip the catalogue on one side and it’s ‘The Drawing Center’s book and you flip it the other side and it’s The Drawing Room’s book, and it shared one essay about both shows. Each show dealt with its own particular issue of drawn language but it was totally fascinating. I really respect what the directors of the Drawing Room have been doing over the years, and it’s the first time we’ve collaborated with them and I was very happy with the result. There’s also the Drawing Centre in the Netherlands and a few drawing centres in South Korea that are pretty much modelled on The Drawing Center in New York. I’m very optimistic about the kind of cross-cultural, cross-platform collaborations we could all do together if we begin a dialogue.

9. Then I’ll get to work!
