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D O I N G S

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Part 1

Drawing History, or Drawing as a Verb

Drawing is often associated with the plan-making stage of art. In the drawing section of New Zealand's national art collection held at Te Papa, many drawings include the word 'preparatory' or 'study', others are simply untitled. In these cases, drawing is not that which is designed for public viewing, but rather that which assumes a supplementary position within art. It supports the effective planning of future works, aids with the arrangement of compositions, and is a means in which to develop technical proficiency. In other words, along with its neighbours sketching and drafting, drawing is employed to achieve specific purposes. Traditionally speaking drawing is not an object of study¹, it is *instrumental* rather than affective or aesthetically important in its own right.

Within the canon of art history, Bernice Rose has outlined two central conceptions of drawing that have dominated since the 16th century - *conceptual* drawing and *autographic* drawing. Conceptual drawing encompasses an instrumental use of drawing as preparations for 'the work' (conceptual drawing is used in architectural practices as well as within the arts), whereas autographic drawing insinuates the figure of

¹ Catherine de Zegher notes that compared to the privileged status given to painting, sculpture and architecture, "drawing has been virtually ignored". Catherine de Zegher, *Eva Hesse Drawing* (New York: The Drawing Centre, 2006), 115.

the artist.² Coming with a notion of authenticity, the autographic could be described as “the artist’s first and most confessional marks”. As with diary entries, autographic drawing records the artist’s intimate gestures as direct and unmediated signs of the self.³

These conceptions of art and the artist became subject to more critical interrogation throughout the 20th century. Conventional understandings of drawing practice were inevitably expanded upon. Explorations (often under the rubric of conceptual or post-object art) began more self-reflexively considering the artist’s mark-making body in space and context. Here, the use of the word drawing no longer designates that which was flat, monochromatic, or preparatory. This type of conceptual, or at least conceptually-charged, drawing practice was very different to the *conceptual drawing* detailed by Bernice Rose; rather than a supplementary practice drawing was regarded as a primary medium in its own right, inextricable from the disciplines of painting, sculpture and performance art.⁴

An oft-quoted work in drawing’s history, Richard Long’s *A Line Made By Walking*, 1967, explores the line – the barest minimum of drawing – as a direct trace or index of the artist’s body. Situated in an open field, the artist walks repetitively through the grass, his footsteps inevitably flattening the surface beneath him. The trace of his path is

² Bernice Rose, *Drawing Now*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1976), 9.

³ Gregory Burke, *Drawing Analogies: Recent Dimensions in New Zealand Drawing* (New Zealand, Wellington: Wellington City Art Gallery, 1988), 9.

⁴ The Wellington City Art Gallery’s *Drawing Analogies* exhibition curated by Gregory Burke, 1988, is an excellent example.

recorded as a single line cutting through the field, the line becoming a drawing revealed in relief.⁵ This trace is subsequently documented; the black and white photograph's title refers back to its own making.

Typical for its time, Richard Long's approach to drawing in this instance is summed up succinctly by fellow conceptual artist Sol Le Witt: "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work [...] all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and *the execution is a perfunctory affair*" [my emphasis].⁶ *A Line Made By Walking* thus illustrates a common tendency within mid-late 20th century drawing practice whereby the concept or methodology that constitutes a drawing is positioned as *more important* than the drawing itself. The statement *drawing is a verb* sums up succinctly this attitude towards drawing. As Laura Hoptman explains, drawing became synonymous with 'process'.⁷

(Perhaps Richard Long's drawing is a curious example, as questions of photography might complicate my point. Nevertheless I hope it exemplifies a type of approach in which drawing is concerned almost primarily with *action*.)

Reflecting on my practice, I instead want to argue for an autonomy in the language of drawing, an autonomy for the language of line.

⁵ Tim Ingold, 'Traces Threads and Surfaces' in *Lines: A Brief History* (London and New York, Routledge), 43-4.

⁶ Sol Lewitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,' *Artforum* Vol. 5, No. 10. (1967): 79.

⁷ Laura Hoptman, *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002), 11.

This is to say, although drawing may fundamentally be the outcome of a process or action it is always *more* than just the event of its making. It may be constituted by a gesture “but must also be understood as always already caught up in a network of differences that give it ‘meaning’”.⁸ A drawing should not be seen to merely reference an event in the now-gone past but also to project forward.

Rather than treat drawing as simple sign, I go forward with the hope of referencing beyond the event of it’s making - towards its future orientation.

⁸ Simon O’Sullivan, *Science Fiction (or Painting; the Abstract Machine)*, in *DJ Simpson: Works* (Warwick: Mead Gallery, 2007), 81.

Part 2

Drawing and Redrawing Limits

In my work *Doings*,⁹ I wanted to literally and figuratively concretize *the limits of drawing*. On the one hand, exploring the limits of drawing through the limits of my outstretched hands. On the other, exploring the limits of drawing through a challenge to drawings' accepted materiality, scale and mark-making methods. I would say that in this work I am emphatically *redrawing the limits of drawing*.

On the floor, in a shallow bed of dough, I draw-out the line of my arm's reach. I think about how *drawing* etymologically originates from 'to pull'¹⁰ as my fingers drag through the resistance of the dough. The trace is mapped out as a large arc defining a limit. A cavity in relief is left in the dough. As I do the same again, each arc traces out a different path. I wanted to fill these negative cavities and solidify the limit of a/my body.

Thinking about a challenge to the accepted materiality of drawing, I happened upon the idea of plastic. As a ubiquitous yet complex material, I considered it wonderfully perverse.

⁹ The word *Doings* here not only plays with the idea of the verb (a doing word) but also *the noun*. 'Doings' is a term used to refer to things when has forgotten their name, or when no one word easily covers them. As in: "I kept a pair of doings on my desk"

¹⁰ "Draw" *Online Etymological Dictionary*, accessed October 5, 2015, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=draw&searchmode=none

As paper indexes *trees* and as glass indexes *sands*, plastic somehow has a far more complicated relationship to its source. Roland Barthes suggests “plastic is ubiquity made visible” and that it refers only to the event of its own transformation or making.¹¹

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A vat labelled *Polyester Ortho Resin* came with a smaller bottle of water-like catalyst. The making of plastic is only possible through a chemical negotiation between these two. The measurements of resin to catalyst have to be close to exact (its transformation is *made possible only by the hand*).

I pour the resin/catalyst mix into cavities left in the dough. When thirty minutes have passed and the plastic is setting, but hasn't hardened, the mix becomes warm. At this point I extract the line out of the dough and release it from its mould. In my hand the plastic is lighter than it appears. I let it lie against my chair or studio wall-floor confluence and as the warm and limp material gives way to gravity the drawing warps. I reflect on the fact that *plastic*, the term for something so resistant and durable, literally means ‘to mould’ or ‘of malleability’.¹² When the mix cools, it cools slowly. The two liquids resolve as an alchemical one. From

¹¹ Roland Barthes, ‘Plastic’ in *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Noonday Press, 1957), 97.

¹² “Plastic”, *Online Etymological Dictionary*, accessed October 2, 2015, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=plastic&searchmode=none

now on, they will be forever inseparable - it is magic. This line is both an index of my hand's movement and path as well as an index of the plastics' materiality under gravity.

For the following days I work on the various large forms, a process of sanding and polishing away the specific traces of its making. As I polish, the indexical connection from drawn-line to drawing-event is lost. The drawing becomes distanced from the autographic gesture. After hours of sanding their surfaces, they transform to become expressive semantic units unto themselves and in turn reference the hand in a more complicated way.

Each arc is lacquered in store-bought automobile primer. The paint comes in a mid-tone grey and has a high-build, matte finish. Finishing the lines in a primer [undercoat] is a way to mark them out conceptually as categorically *not finished*, the grey somehow signifies a need for further mapping out. This colour coincidentally references a history of drawing practice - lead and graphite - yet its affect is mutable. The colour shifts from washed out and flat in some lights to moody and evocative in others.

I later realise that their dissimilarity, their lack of uniformity, is very important. Each line's trajectory is a very separate signatory gesture [see: **O T H E R**]. Using the mid-tone grey as a colour from which to base the works on, I apply a different treatment to each surface. I investigate different applications - flocking fibre, hammer-glaze, lacquers in matte, satin and gloss - careful to attend to a

particular affect with each. Subsequently, each arc presents a different surface. Each surface lending a bizarre semantic inflection.

Doings (Drawing as a Noun)

There they are. I'm tempted to call them sculptures but they are drawings. Nothing more, nothing less. It is a mark that sits in relation to the body. These drawings may be the record of real gestures, but these gestures have been stretched and manipulated. Marks have lost, or at least complicated, any simple relation to the artist's hand.

Although constituted by a gesture, and then manipulated by hand, *Doings* appear fictional rather than record any gesture of intimacy. They appear as present in themselves, autonomous - gestural and machine-like, simultaneously minimal and surreal.

I figure it's not of interest what the line or drawing *is* - but rather what it could be.

I install *Doings* into the surfaces of a space - walls and floors - as I would do a blank page. I place a line here first, and then there. The forms, simultaneously two-dimensional and three-dimensional, extend out into the room; they penetrate into the space of the viewer. In the room it is about weight and balance between the forms, and because

there is no one direction with which to see the entirety of this room it is complicated. I will often erase the drawing and start again.

Appearing to defy both gravity and materiality, drawing has gone strange. Against the white surfaces *Doings* appear as symbols, incomplete parts of language, parentheses or hyphens. Each gesture becomes a distinct semantic unit unto itself. They are tools forming a typography of the body.

These works were made in response to a particular art history, following down a line of thought that linked drawing to language. Although *Doings* retains something of a sketch, a rough contour line, they are far from provisional. They may be seen to loosely map out a form to come, sit in the room like the first murmurings of creative expression, but their materials are definite and hard. Blurring any clear boundary between drawing and the work of art proper, it is with these that I form a response. Where mid-late 20th century artists claimed *drawing is a verb*, related fundamentally to aspects of performance and action, perhaps drawing's role in the 21st century is more concerned with *drawing as a noun*¹³ or drawing as an object.

Surely it is only within this, in the acceptance of drawing's radical autonomy outside of its constitution, that the emergent language of drawing can be said to really take hold.

¹³ Curator Laura Hoptman held similar contentions with the exhibition *Drawing Now: Eight Propositions* at Museum of Modern Art in 2002-3.