

# Drawn

7 February – 21 March 2021  
Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

*One of the enduring attractions of drawing is that it refuses easy co-option into categories, constantly wriggling out of its slippery boundaries.*

–Deanna Petherbridge

Artist-curators, Annie O'Rourke and Natalie Wood, both work beyond the boundaries of drawing.

For O'Rourke, drawing provides a method for dissecting photography. In the duel for realistic representation, photography has long-convinced audiences of its superiority. O'Rourke's *Wavell Heights* (2020) and *Beginning, middle, end* (2020) suggest otherwise. Her multi-layered depictions of historical Australian women undo the temporal freezing and spatial flattening of photography. O'Rourke breathes life, depth and movement back into these moments from the past. Here, drawing entangles with the source material of photography, the fixing gesso of paint, and the sculptural dimension of installation.

Similarly, Wood's renditions of everyday activities stretch beyond the straightforward category of drawing. By reiteratively capturing the activity of cleaning through drawing, erasure and redrawing – Wood shifts the drawing process of *House dress (chux blue)* (2018) into animation. The artistic back and forth of doing and redoing replicates the never-ending drudgery of domestic chores. Adjacent to this work, Wood's large trace monotypes, *Our performance #1, #2 and #3* (2020), engage three media in addition to drawing. They began as a cleaning performance, deploy print-making techniques to create marks on the reverse side of the kozo and chiri paper, and turn into sculpture during installation, when the lengths of paper unroll down the gallery wall and across the floor.

For this exhibition, O'Rourke and Wood bring together artists, with links to Brisbane, who also trouble the boundaries of drawing. In *Naksha, an untold odyssey* (2019), Piyali Ghosh performs in front of her earlier drawing. Hanging on the wall of the Museum of Brisbane, this large circular piece represents a Hindu military formation. To observe it closely is to recognise its spiralling structure, and imagine it circling around, closing in on, and suffocating the enemy at its heart. Dressed in a delicate gold, Ghosh performs slowly in front of this drawing before placing a similar work, rolled into a cylinder, over her head. This manoeuvre transforms the artist into a curious object: part human, part sculpture.

The artist's own body also appears in Sancintya Mohini Simpson's *Relative* (2015). Photographed in her mother's verdant garden, the artist swivels her body around toward the camera. Completing the triptych, her two brothers pose in the same spot. Their gazes are direct, yet their expressions are blank, simmering between proud and guarded, mute and enduring. Across the surface of each photograph and within the boundaries of their skin, Simpson practices *Devangari*, one of her mother's tongues. In the context of *Drawn*, writing is reframed as drawing. This shifts the scripts' literal, or linguistic, communication into one of abstract signs. Our eyes follow Simpson's neat lines, seeing the repetition of shapes, rather than reading the "vowels, consonants and conjuncts" of her text.

Painting as writing as drawing might describe Aaron Perkins' practice. In his black-on-black and glazed white works, Perkins borrows words and a faux-mechanical script from cryptic crosswords. Perkins rearranges his found words as communications that promise to tell us something about the world. But unlike the riddles of cryptic crosswords, which – even at their most difficult – are solved in the next day's paper, the meanings of Perkins' paintings are more elusive. Encountering Perkins in the gallery, making *Cardamom, agapanthus, trumpeter, and jasper (1–3 February 2021)* (2021), I found him waiting for his paint to dry. This passing of time is captured, physically, in the three shades of the work. In turn, Perkins speaks to the artist's labour and the physical process of making.

These themes are heightened in Helen Hardess and Branka Sinobad's artworks. On one level, Hardess' sculptural installation records Australian landscapes, and Sinobad's performance-drawing traces the figure of her model-and-cameraman, Cody. But there are also other marks, made by the artists' bodies.

These are the legible imprints of Hardess' shoes and the smudges made by Sinobad's limbs, as she moves her body across her drawing. These markings acknowledge the physicality of artistic practice and embed the artists' own bodies in their work.

Hardess' practice also engages with scale and perspective. To view her works is to imagine ourselves looking down on the land from a great height. *Scrub* (2021) references field trips to the Great Artesian Basin, with fellow artist Jude Roberts. This country exhibits the intense blues, sun-dried greens and rich browns of landscapes familiar to Australians, but Hardess recreates them in white. Her abstract marks are an attempt to make sense of, and eschew, colonial systems of surveying. Hardess' new language for landscapes prompts settler-Australians to recognise our foreignness on this land.

Sinobad's practice shares layering, iteration and abstract mark-making with other works in *Drawn*. Discussing her own work, Wood describes how "finding the form of the figure," with the blind technique of trace monotype, can "feel sculptural". This seems equally true of Sinobad's practice. Sinobad looks neither to the paper, nor to us and the camera, but beyond to the cameraman behind. Watch as her hands work in unison, as she seems to feel and find the way to draw.

If Sinobad positions us outside of her work, Courtney Coombs deliberately invites us in. On one side of the room a singular light tube emits blue light. Its simplicity conjures the single line that marks the beginning of every drawing. Across the room, a blue surface reflects this light only when viewed from the correct angle. Finding this angle requires us to move, physically, through the work. The 'blue hour' that Coombs references is a twilight moment, at dusk and dawn, when the receding or forthcoming sun turns the sky an intense shade of blue. Equally eerie, tranquil, full of regret or promise, the blue hour marks one day or night gone, another night or day to come.

Connections to the land, and the history of landscapes, continue in Jude Roberts' and Daniel Sherington's works. Where Roberts favours abstraction, Sherington's figurative drawings (seem to) champion a mechanical recording. And where Roberts' connection to drawing is more oblique, Sherington wields a pen. The connection between Roberts' work and the land is real and tangible. She creates them *en plein air*, placing her circular canvases into water holes, where they soak up water and sediment. Their rippled forms evidence this former wetness. Roberts then adds ink, synthetic polymer paint, charcoal and carbon. The process of making is equally important to Sherington. Rather than venturing to picturesque locales, like the Australian Impressionists before him, Sherington computer-generates archetypal landscapes in the studio. His precise rendering hints at their fabrication. Angular text, akin to graffiti etched into wooden classroom tables, reads: "You cannot take liberties as if your ego was cutting at you". The borrowed quote, from William Dobell's trial, is typical of Sherington's redeployment of art history to question the artists, and the strategies, that came before him.

Moving through this exhibition, drawing shifts from figuration to abstraction, photorealism to hastened sketch, scribbly line to neat typography. Collectively, *Drawn* champions the multiplicities of these lines, and favours art that is open to iteration, redoing, re-seeing and starting again.

Words by Louise R Mayhew, February 2021.

*Redland Art Gallery acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands, waters and seas where we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.*

*Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana*



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