

## Drawings ?

Exhibition title: JANE HARRIS Paintings and Drawings

Author: Godfrey Worsdale

Publisher: Southampton City Art Gallery, UK

Date: 2001

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When considering the central tenets of draughtsmanship, first amongst them is the notion of conception.

Drawing, beyond the basic physical act of pulling a line out of matter, has always been recognised as a means of conceiving and visualising an idea. Indeed, during the Italian Renaissance the term *disegno* had, as its two most fundamental definitions, drawing and design. By tradition artists, along with inventors, engineers, designers and architects, begin their creative operations at the drawing board. It is often at this moment that many of the most significant images in visual culture are manufactured. It is also the point at which the artist's ideas are most unfettered by conscious process and issues of reception; a degree of freedom is sustained that facilitates the generation of a pure visualised thought. The act of manufacture thereafter can be pursued in any number of ways but all of them must be consequent to and reliant on, the first draught.

Jane Harris has, of late, begun to produce drawings that make a departure from this traditional understanding. The series of works illustrated here, though made with the most basic materials, represent a nonconformist approach to the production of drawings. In physical essence the works are created by applying pencil onto paper but beyond that, they very persuasively resist the experimental, investigative and curious position that is introduced above. Harris' drawings are calculated in the extreme. The only irresolute element in the process is the way in which these creations might be intelligible to the viewer, ie, how they might function as the visual communication of information or ideas. These drawings are predetermined to such an extent that their realisation almost feigns an absence of artistic intervention, that they came about by some other means. There is a strong sense in these works that they are not intended to disclose their means of production readily. This is not to imply some kind of deception in their production and presentation, rather to generate an understanding of these drawings as phenomenological entities. As such, this work is as capable of surprising the viewer, as it is able to reassure through its resolve. In an analysis of this work it is within such oppositional qualities that the drawings inevitably function and find their momentum.

In real terms, these drawings present themselves as a series of creative artistic statements, albeit somewhat closed and composed. At the same moment however, this interpretation is directly contrasted by the mechanical and quasi-mathematical detachment that seems to account for the works realisation. Similarly, whilst at one moment the forms that exist within these images are clearly contrivances of conscious invention they also make a forceful claim to some sense of natural evolution. This paradoxical interpretation is extended further within the relationship between the visual and physical nature of the work. Whilst, as will be argued further, the work maintains a strong illusory quality, it is also brought about by a powerfully sculpted process, which scrutinises the physicality of both paper and pencil. To an extent, the very texture and imperial sized proportions of the Fabriano paper that is used exclusively in the production of these works, makes them in part, ready made. The movement of the pencil thereafter, navigates the characteristic inconsistencies of the surface with a definite purpose, both exploiting and enhancing these qualities

whilst ultimately rendering them inconsequential in the eventual achievement of a true description of form. As a corollary to this, an illusion of tension is established between the medium and its support. The pencil graphite, which is so laboriously forced into contact with the surface of the sheet, then seems to exist both as some kind of shallow atmosphere above the whiteness of the paper and as deep space behind it. The visual sense that one makes of these works, therefore, can be either a physical one or an illusory one but the discordance of the two positions is perhaps the central charge to a unified visual engagement with these objects.

Above and beyond a physical analysis of these objects, for they are as much physical as they are pictorial, the central visual concern is surely a formal one, and this consideration is dominated in each and every case by the duality of the compositions. As a result of the issues reflected upon above, there is a question about the relationship between the two forms and their ability to function as a plausible singular and unified composition. This is heightened by the potential for each form to operate in its own right, isolated in a separate part of the sheet. Whilst one could determine the works as being the presentation of two related but independent forms, it is also reasonable to be occupied by the implications that one form has for the other. As a classic modernist device the notion of contrapuntal forms is by no means a new one. Nor, however, is it a concern unknown to physicists who are occupied by the forces that simultaneously attract and repel pairs of bodies, from the molecular to the stellar. By the intensity of her use of materials, Harris is able to create a delusion of mass, which effectively harnesses our understanding of these forces. The forms are juxtaposed to the same extent that they are counterposed and with this, the dynamic is established.

Visually, the coupling of these forms provides a balance that accentuates the sense of resolve discussed but there are also implications for the way in which one sees the individual elements. Neither part can exist in isolation but at the same time, nor can their clear isolation on the surface of the sheet be disregarded. Optically the implications of this are twofold. Initially one's attention is pulled from side to side, establishing the symmetry or asymmetry that may exist between the pair of forms. This is arrested with the second visual consequence that is derived from the distinguishing details with which each of the basically ovoid forms is characterised. Though the manipulations of the forms are usually balanced on either side, they inevitably snag the eye as one seeks to contemplate the whole.

When seen as a body of works these manipulations can run together to animate the same basic foundation. In this sense, this work recreates the model by which we already visually understand and rationalise the world. As trees in a forest for instance, are each accepted as being the same, we can be sure that they will all be uniquely distinct natural occurrences, so too are these works endorsed by their individual manipulations. This leads one to consider Harris' work in the currently topical contexts of cloning and genetic modification. As one moves from work to work they pursue one particular formal direction for a number of images before following another tangent. The ovoid form might swell to almost circular proportions before being stretched into a slender torpedo shape. A fringe of small round protrusions may develop into a line for thrusting blade-like fingers or alternatively they may become the very negative of their own form, defining the spaces previously between. As a consequence, the viewer is always left with a sense of curiosity as to the direction of the work. The options are potentially endless and yet the end game for this work is at the very least, a source of intrigue. The artist is able to conceive of these works as being without a linear sense of progression, rather that they represent a series of manoeuvres within a given field. Despite this the very potential for the eventual evolution or cessation of this body of work is in itself engaging. The drawings manifest themselves as the antidote to their own anxieties. The limitless potential for new variants is held in check by the meticulousness of the

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resolve of each individual production, Each new form thrives on its uniquely defining features and yet is repeated, or mirrored, on the same sheet of paper. Paradoxically, none of these forms is perfect and yet each of them is faultless. The materials are deployed in a way devised, in part, to overcome their own reality, enabling the artist to manufacture something that alludes to be much more than a combination of its component elements.

These works, which enjoy an engaging relationship to Harris' paintings, to some degree represent the full extent of her position. Her work has always reflected on ideas of control and sensation, facility and aesthetics, and in this recent body of works on paper these issues have been considered with great elegance and an almost diagrammatic rigour.