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Motion Capture: Drawing and the Moving Image. Curated by Ed Krčma and Matt Packer
Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork, 26 July–4 November 2012

An Exhibition Review by Jill Murphy, University College Cork

"Step by step what is at stake is nothing less than this question: how is the world formed and how am I permitted to embrace its movement?" (Jean-Luc Nancy qtd. in Michaud 86)

The desire to record bodies in motion, regardless of technological capabilities, has been inherent in the visual arts for as long as they have been in existence. This is manifest in Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), in which the director is granted rare access to the Chauvet caves in southern France. The caves contain rock drawings, mainly of animals, that are thought to be 32,000 years old. Contemplating drawings of horses running, in which the movement is captured by several images overlaid on each other, so as to suggest motion, Herzog remarks that they resemble "proto-cinema". His prescient observation and his 3-D digital-video documentary of one of the earliest known examples of art come to mind with respect to "Motion Capture: Drawing and the Moving Image", at the Glucksman Gallery, Cork. While all of the works on display are, of course, much more recent than the Chauvet cave drawings, taken as a whole, they encapsulate a spectrum that ranges from the most fundamental mark-making to highly sophisticated digital technology, all mediated in some way by the instinct to describe movement visually.

The strength of "Motion Capture" lies in the restriction of its focus to a defined set of relationships that each of the exhibits informs and develops in some respect. These relationships may be loosely defined as those in which drawing speaks to, and is present in, the moving image and, in some instances, vice versa. The digital/analogue divide, inherent in any examination of the moving image, is subtly indicated in the choice of the different works that comprise the exhibition, without being positioned so centrally as to override its primary objective of exploring the relationship between moving image and drawing. The curators of "Motion Capture", Ed Krčma and Matt Packer, create a fine balance in this respect between works that move from film and video towards drawing and from drawing towards film and, to a lesser extent, video.

Like the Chauvet cave drawings, the drawn works on display, although all from the twentieth century, seem to prefigure the incremental movement of the film frame. Henri Michaux's artist's book, *Mouvements: Soixante-quatre Dessins, un Poème, une Postface* (1951) achieves this in the form of tiny, dense figurative shapes, the multiple intricacy of which is suggestive of the zoetrope. A further degree of intermediality is introduced by the calligraphic nature of the images, which the artist's book format only serves to emphasise.

These images, although entirely different in scale, closely relate to Henri Matisse's series of drawings, *Dessins: Thèmes et Variations* (1943), presented as lithographic prints, in their deconstruction of motion into a series of individual static images. Matisse's drawings record the slight shifts in position of his female model; they are effortlessly simple and yet, created using the most traditional drawing tools, speak as directly to the filmic image as any of the other works in the exhibition. Matisse acknowledged this equivalence, describing the series as the "cinema of my sensibility" (qtd. in Kearney, Packer, Clarke 16).

In several works on display, one of the two forms under scrutiny serves to document the other. This is the case in Dennis Oppenheim's video *Two Stage Transfer Drawing* (1971), which functions both as drawing and performance. The video depicts the artist and his son in turn drawing on the other, as the latter attempts to reproduce on paper the drawn lines he feels on his skin but cannot see. The work illustrates both the centrality of the body and the passing of time—as evidenced by the generational difference—to the visual description of motion. In this case, the moving image documents both the drawing and the inherent performative nature of the work. Conversely, in Brian Fay's works, which chart the material deterioration of an old roll of a Buster Keaton film, *Dust and Scratches, Buster Keaton, One Week, 1920* (2007), a digital form of drawing serves to document the materiality of film and its sensitivity to time. Likewise, Pierre Bismuth's three works trace the gestural movements of the human body, originally recorded on film, using a simple line. Here, as in Fay's work, it is drawing that becomes the documentary interloper, rather than the more recent art of film, particularly in the static images of Sophia Loren and Greta Garbo, in which the black line that traces their hand movements resembles graffiti marks defacing the iconic images of the actresses. Bismuth takes a different approach in *Following the Left Hand of Jacques Lacan – The Soul and the Unconscious* (*En suivant la main gauche de Jacques Lacan – l'âme et l'inconscient*, 2010), a filmed recording of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, in which the movement of Lacan's left hand leaves a trace in the form of a white line, producing a *de facto* optical or graphical psychoanalysis. The contrast between the stasis of the first two images and the movement of the Lacan footage adds an extra layer to the conceptual meaning underlying the works by juxtaposing the embalming, idolatry nature of classical cinema with the more functional role of film as a documentary tool.

The visual description of motion is expanded and translated by Tom Hackney in his *Projections* series (2012), which maps data relating to chess games played by Marcel Duchamp onto mathematical planes, resulting in an altered form of recorded movement. In tracing and recording Duchamp's chess moves, Hackney returns the artist to a very deliberate motion capture, just as Duchamp himself attempted with *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (*Nu descendant un escalier, n° 2*, 1912), which in turn referenced the chronophotographic experiments of Eadweard Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey. Duchamp, after dispensing with painting and drawing in favour of readymades, subsequently renounced art entirely, choosing instead to play chess. By returning Duchamp's abandonment of art in favour of chess to the simple—albeit technically complex—recording of movement by line, Hackney creates a rich, multifaceted work that expands and complements the premise of the exhibition.

A type of altered drawing is also evident in Susan Morris's inkjet print series *ESRD* (2012), formed from the visual output of motion sensors that digitally recorded the movements of the artist's body within a determined space. The work deals with the spatio-temporal concepts fundamental to both drawing and the moving image in an abstract, highly technical manner, in which the body becomes both drawing instrument and drawn object,

while in the process yielding unexpectedly beautiful traces, printed in large-scale format. These images are all the more striking given that at the heart of their abstractness and obscure readability lies a human body.

Like Hackney's work, it is the lateral shift in the concept of how the act of drawing can be interpreted that is most impressive in Morris's prints. Ailbhe Ní Bhriain's video work may also be viewed in a similar light, in that it does not involve any conventional form of drawing. However, her digital video, *Residuum* (2007), in which an ethereal canvas-covered building seems to sink beneath black plumes of ink in an Atlantis-like manner, almost obviates the need to identify the relationship between drawing and the moving image within it, as its compelling, ghostly images render the viewer content to allow the video's abstract narrative to unfold. This is not to diminish the theoretical concepts behind the work, but rather to emphasise how eloquently it illustrates the strength of video as an artistic medium.

Alice Maher's video animation *Flora* (2009) is a highly personal investigation of figurative drawing. In this case, however, the role of the moving image goes further than merely documenting the drawing process, but instead enters into a dynamic relationship with the drawings, recording the acts of creation and erasure inherent to drawing. The resulting fantastical images celebrate the process of artistic endeavour and the body, both human and otherwise. In her previous work, Maher has often engaged in a productive dialogue with art history; in *Flora* one also feels the latter's undeniable presence. The art-historical references contained in the animated line drawings are experienced as flashes of recognition: allusions to the work of Hieronymus Bosch, Breugel, Dürer and Leonardo da Vinci, inter alia, surprise the unsuspecting viewer absorbed in the visual wanderings of Maher's imagination. A further aspect of *Flora* deserving of mention is the sheer virtuosity of draughtsmanship on display, which makes it all the more compelling to watch as the images appear and vanish, while the work as a whole evolves with its own bizarre but indisputable logic that leaves behind both a filmic and graphic trace.



Tacita Dean, *Still Life* (2009)
Courtesy of Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College Cork

William Kentridge's *Drawing for "What Will Come" (Fly II)* (2007) takes the elements of drawing, projection and motion, but subtly alters their respective functions with regard to the moving image. The work consists of a charcoal drawing of a distorted fly, which is placed

on top of a round table. At the centre of the table is a stainless steel cylinder, in which the drawing of the fly is reflected to show an anatomically correct specimen. As the viewer walks around the table, the sensation is that the fly is moving rather than the viewer. Here, reflection substitutes projection, the viewer's movement substitutes the movement of the image, and the perfect drawing becomes a distortion that, as in analogue film, must be translated to a second surface to be properly read. Alongside this exhibit—not coincidentally, one imagines—is Tacita Dean's *Still Life* (2009), which also subtly inverts the elements of the moving image and drawing. Apparatus and substrate, as in all of Dean's work, are fundamental here. The film projector screening the 16-mm black-and-white images is prominently positioned within one of the gallery's white spaces. The images seen on the screen are the marks made on the wall of the studio belonging to Italian artist Giorgio Morandi. The texture of the substrate, the studio wall, is prominent, while the drawn lines on it are very fine, emphasising the notion that they represent a trace of Morandi's now absent paintings. The film quality in turn is grainy and shaky, weakening the solidity of the drawn lines depicted even further. Watching the static images of the arcs and circular swirls of Morandi's mark-making, one becomes progressively more aware of the apparatus projecting the images, its movement and its sound: to the extent that the circular and linear path of the film stock through the apparatus eventually seems to be reflected in the drawn lines on the film. In this context, the title *Still Life* takes on new meaning, in that it is the projector that in effect becomes the moving image, the filmed images on the screen representing their static reflection. The work, in this respect, enters into a dialogue with Kentridge's drawing placed alongside it, in which the apparatus that reflects the image is also dominant.

Kentridge's filmed charcoal drawing, *Other Faces* (2011), dealing with the traumatic legacy of apartheid in South Africa, comes closest of all the works presented to marrying drawing and the moving image, while highlighting the notion of trace that recurs throughout the exhibition in various respects. It is a technically brilliant work that seems to dissolve the boundaries between the two media. Here, unlike Matisse's or Michaux's drawings, but in common with Alice Maher's animated video, the different images are not realised on a series of different supports, but rather each image is erased and the subsequent image is overlaid on the site of its erasure. Clearly, this is extremely pertinent to the subject matter, in that the post-apartheid era in South Africa will forever be subject to the history of apartheid that underpins it; however, from an artistic perspective, it not only references the process of drawing, erasure and re-drawing, but also the cinematic process whereby one image is displayed on a substrate (the screen) and then replaced by a subsequent image, which in turn will also be replaced by the following image. Most striking in the succession of images in *Other Faces* in this regard is Kentridge's depiction of an open-air movie screen (subtly reminiscent of Hiroshi Sugimoto's time-lapse photographs of American drive-ins and movie theatres, in which the images on screen meld into white over the time interval, while the surrounding landscape remains clearly depicted). The drawn drive-in screen displays drawn, but ostensibly filmic, images, while the surrounding (drawn) landscape on the actual screen remains static. Here, Kentridge plays with the tropes of both drawing and the moving image to dizzying effect, so that the notion of motion capture takes on the aspect of a *mise-en-abyme*, in which the relationship between the two forms seems to move towards infinity.

All of the works in this intriguing and intelligently curated exhibition "capture" motion, while simultaneously informing and expanding the relationship between the moving image and drawing. For this reviewer, the works that go furthest towards encapsulating the intrinsic relationship between the two forms are those by William Kentridge and Tacita Dean, in which a symbiosis occurs that erases the boundary dividing the drawn image and the moving

image as captured by the apparatus. By attributing equal weight to both forms, they move beyond the documentation of one by the other to yield an intermedial synergy, while simultaneously preserving the formal and material characteristics of each. Thus they exemplify what all of the works in the exhibition seek in some way to address: the common goal of the two forms to visually harness the spatio-temporal trajectories of the world and its movement.

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Jill Murphy completed her PhD in Film Studies at University College Cork in 2012. Her thesis is entitled *Hoc est enim corpus meum: Christian Art and Passion Iconography in the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Jean-Luc Godard*. She currently works as an assistant lecturer in Film Studies at UCC, and has published articles in the *Journal of Screenwriting* and *Artefact: Journal of the Irish Association of Art Historians*, as well as a book chapter on Pasolini in *Faith and Spirituality in Masters of World Cinema. Vol II.* (Cambridge Scholars Press 2011).