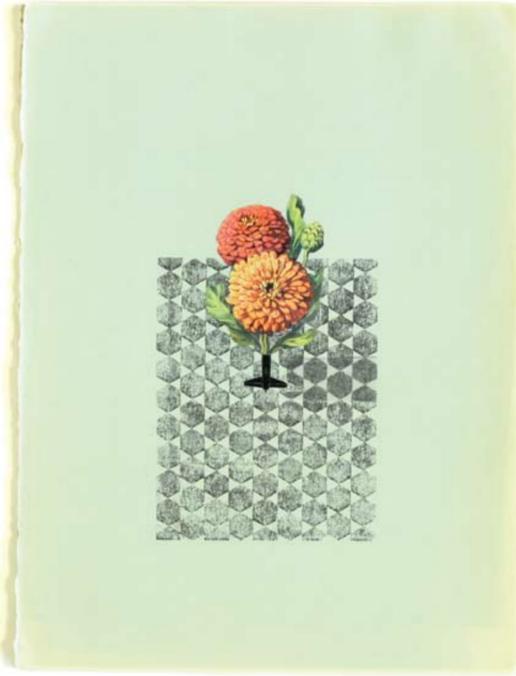


Drawing Form



Drawn from Life is an exhibition in three parts, looking at the drawing practice of a diverse group of artists. The first segment, Drawing Process, emphasised the artists' interest in the act, process and practice of drawing. The second, Drawing Space, highlighted how artists conceptualised and made use of space within their work. In this, the third exhibition, the curatorial emphasis is placed on the drawing of form. There is of course significant and varying overlap between the ideas of process, space, and form, nevertheless, the assembled works for this exhibition all bear witness to, or articulate the forms that emerge from the artists' interactions with others or the natural world. The artists represented in these three exhibitions come from a range of backgrounds but many of the Drawing Form practitioners have a proximity, through birth, study, work, or residence, to one or more of the many different countries that meet the Indian ocean and its adjoining seas. This though, is not a criterion, or even a defining characteristic, of this grouping of artists. Drawing Form, like the other exhibitions in the series, seeks to broaden conventional definitions of drawing practice and it does so by bringing together a disparate range of work by an equally disparate grouping of artists. Some of the artists, such as Ahmed Ali Manganhar, Ayaz Jokhio and Roohi Ahmed, are based in Pakistan, in cities such as Lahore and Karachi. Others have biographies that speak of dramatic

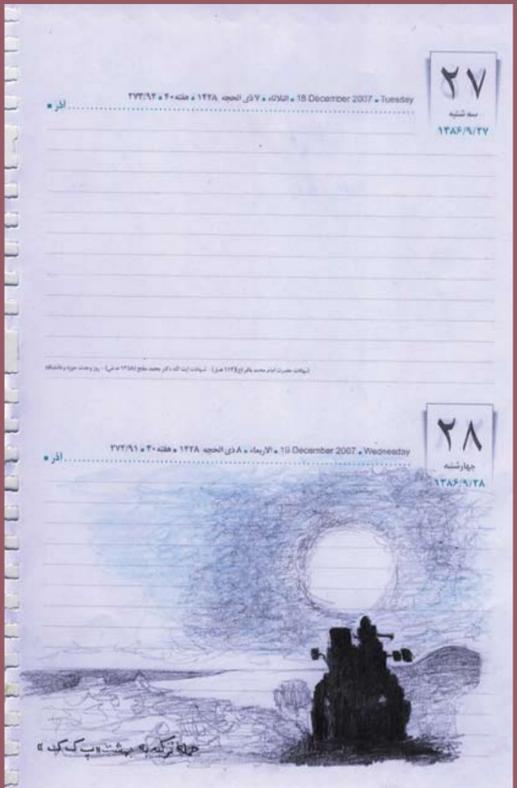


patterns of migration, movement, and travel, from literally one end of the globe to the other, or more localised movement (if we can employ such an adjective, given the enormity of the Indian Ocean) from one part of the region to another. Hajra Waheed, of Indian/Pakistan origin is based in the Canadian city of Toronto; Muhanned Cader is from Sri Lanka and is based in the English city of Oxford; Nusra Latif Qureshi - another artist from Pakistan - is based in Australia; and Nadia Kaabi Linke is a Tunisian artist living in the German capital, Berlin. This contemporary grouping of artists, is reflective of the ways in which notions such as geography, location, diaspora, and mobility have become such important and core signifiers of the present-day human condition. A consideration of the geographic spread of these artists, and the routes/roots of their artistic practice is central to our understanding of the exhibition. Within Drawing Form we perceive a multiplicity of ways in which, when an artist puts pencil to paper (or otherwise involves themselves in the drawing action), a range of social and personal narratives (reflective of the artist's own place within the world around them) will flow from that process. It is this critical point in the creative process, or the moment in time, when these narratives take form that is the central consideration of this exhibition. The Drawn From Life exhibitions reach beyond simple or uncomplicated understandings of the act of drawing - these artists

not only utilise an enormous variety of media in the execution of their work and ideas, but similarly the subject matter they embrace has no borders, or frontiers. Their drawing becomes a liberated and liberating act, ideally suited to exploring any number of dimensions of the human condition, and any number of aspects of the built or natural world around them and us. And yet, despite the complexity of these artists' work, there is at its core something that is almost primeval in its expression. It is almost as if all art must start - in the artist's mind - as some sort of drawing. The urgency of drawing - the ways in which it yields instant results - is something that has ensured the continued primacy of the act within the realm of art practice. Likewise, drawing remains a somewhat steadfast barometer of artistic skill and ability. Those who can draw have our respect; not so much because of any technically correct rendering, but because we see before us the profound working of the human mind at its most creative and engaging, impulsive and compulsive.

Equally important though, are the ways in which meaning is embedded within the works of these artists. Emphasised meaning, implied meaning, created meaning, and layered meaning. The exhibition is a series of arresting, provocative and engaging studies of what is meant by a mark, a line, a drawing, particularly when such things are juxtaposed or layered with other images or surfaces. Each of these works has an implied or explicit significance that goes beyond the supposedly uncomplicated act of drawing. These artists declare drawing to be a means of understanding and engaging with the world around them and the complexities and anomalies of their place within that world.

The assertion that Eliza Williams made in her text, to accompany Drawing Process bears reiterating, as it has a wider relevance that certainly embraces Drawing Form: 'The techniques the artists have used to create the works...vary radically, bringing in experiments with materials, form and style, as well as regularly encouraging random events to dictate the development of the works. Yet despite this diversity, the artists retain an intimate, personal quality within their work...In doing so, the works reach out to the audience emotionally while simultaneously challenging our conventional associations with drawing's aesthetics to exciting, dynamic effect.'



Imran Mudassar, as one example, has used his drawing ability to extraordinary and powerful effect. He has drawn human bodies on to photographs of walls pockmarked by bullets, mortar shells and other such damage inflicted on the built environment during the course of urban warfare. The photographs alone, taken in Kabul - even without their dramatic embellishments - speak eloquently of great violence and harm done. Each bullet hole, each fractured and damaged piece of cement work or masonry is in effect a scar, mark, or pitted area disfiguring the surface. But it is people, rather than merely buildings, which define and populate the built environment and whilst the unadorned photographs imply savagery and indiscriminate killing unleashed on humanity, the victims of urban warfare, are themselves absent. Imran Mudassar attends to this absence by drawing human bodies exquisitely on to these photographs.

In so doing he creates works of great beauty and terrifying violence. There is dignity, humanity, and - I use the word again - beauty in the male bodies Mudassar draws. Yet these are bodies torn apart, damaged, mutilated, destroyed by having been juxtaposed with the most brutal urban scarification created in the wake of a hail of bullets or the exploding of bombs. Mudassar creates for us the realities of a large number of missiles hurled forcefully through the air, with intent to cause indiscriminate damage. The artist brings to our attention the men, women, children killed, maimed, brutalized, and traumatized in the course of urban warfare. And yet, other, perhaps more personal narratives emerge from Mudassar's work. Alongside these graphic displays or enactments of violence is an almost tangible sense of loss.

We might ordinarily think that access to someone's journal or diary entries might offer us the most privileged access into that someone's private or personal world. Yet when Iranian artist Neda Razavipour uses the pages of a dated journal as paper surfaces on which to draw, she produces enigmatic, poignant studies that lead us to all manner of intriguing, cryptic and open-ended considerations and suppositions. Her drawings come embellished with the Iranian language of Farsi, thereby intensifying the sense of intrigue surrounding the images. Farsi readers might well be able

to avail themselves of certain pointers or clues when looking at these works; but the formidable impression exists that literal understanding of the text will avail the reader little or nothing. The text exists almost as an additional cryptic layer of meaning or understanding. These are, after all studies that, despite the graphic nature and element of social and political reportage that we might perceive in the images, have meanings that are ultimately enigmatic or obscured.

There is a profound sense of exploration - that is, the action of travelling in or through the familiar, the unfamiliar, the different, and the unusual, in order to learn about it - that resonates throughout this exhibition. In that regard, these artists are possessed of both purpose and ability. The drawings of Mudassar, Razavipour, and the other artists represented in Drawing Form are sophisticated, multi-layered and highly skilful renderings that succeed in prompting us to consider all manner of relationships and engagement that they - and we - might have with the world around us. We have much to thank, admire and respect these artists for.

Eddie Chambers is an Art Historian, curator and writer. He is visiting professor of Art History at Emory University, Atlanta, US, where he teaches African Diaspora Art History, he a regular contributor to Art Monthly and a collection of his articles and essays titled Run Through the Jungle was published by the Institute of International Visual Art (INIVA) in 1999. His curatorial projects have included exhibitions of works by Eugene Palmer, Avtarjeet Dhanjal, Madina Hammad and others. He was also curator of Curator's Eye II, Identity & History: Personal and Social Narratives in Art in Jamaica, at the National Gallery of Jamaica, Kingston in 2005 - 6.



