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Lucienne Rickard's drawings are grounded by themes of beauty, death, brutality and obsession. In all of her works, Lucienne presents the viewer with richly detailed, textured and challenging works that are hauntingly beautiful in both execution and composition. Lucienne talks to Melissa Pesa, Art Almanac Digital Editor, about her practice.



***MP: You switched from sculpture to drawing only a few years ago. Why the change?***

LR: Initially it was a purely practical decision. When I left art school I found I just didn't have the equipment and space to make sculptures, or at least the kind I had the propensity to make (huge, heavy, requiring forklifts to move, incredibly messy). I was living in rental properties, working minimum wage jobs, and had to find a way to keep making in a home environment on a small budget. Drawing seemed the most accessible option. Plus I liked the simplicity and democratic nature of it. Everyone can draw if they want. You just need pencils, paper and a flat surface.

Despite the practical impetus for the decision, I've found that my drawing process has gravitated back to being very sculptural. Apart from the very first step of each work – the sketching of outlines of my subject matter – nothing else about it feels like drawing. The weight I feel I need to put into each gesture makes the process feel more akin to carving or engraving.

Also, the directional method I've developed with the graphite on drafting film has forced a focus on the three-dimensionality of my subject matter. The absolute smoothness of the drafting film means there is no interruption, no texture, to break up the shine of the graphite. I've discovered that the marks I make shine the light back at the viewer in different ways depending on the angle and direction at which I lay them down. This partnership of the pencil and film means that, whilst I only use 9B pencils, I can still generate a spectrum of tones. When drawing I have to consider what the light will do, rather than being caught up in traditional rendering.

Because of this effect, when in progress the works feel more like uncovering something rather than drawing.

***MP: Your work is very detailed – a perfect likeness to the actual subject. Could you describe your drawing and thought process whilst creating each work?***

LR: I have realised that I only make one decision when making something – the form of my subject matter. Once that is outlined and I begin filling it in there are no more creative decisions to be made. I just have to labour to flesh it out, complete it. The detail I go into isn't a choice. If I can see it, then I have to fill it in.

As with the answer to the last question, my works are not a depiction or interpretation of something... It's sort of like creating a clone of the subject matter. Every detail, no matter

how small, is equally important. I feel a strange kind of obligation to the subject matter. It must be recreated whole, as it is in life. The space within the subject matter has to be filled in with as much precision and commitment as I am capable of.

***MP: The idea of death is prominent in your works. Why?***

LR: The death thing initially emerged because of the influences that have inspired me over the last ten years or so.

I have always been more inspired by literature than by visual artists. Works by Hemingway have been a hugely important to me (primarily *Fiesta*, *Death in the Afternoon*). His descriptions of bullfighting – the gore and violence offset with the beauty of the matador’s garb and dance like movements (as well as the love stories that he paired with and compared to those kinds of rituals).

More recently the works of Cormac McCarthy have become a huge influence. I love the way he writes about abhorrent deeds in language so beautiful that you find yourself devouring and enjoying his descriptions. I find the clash of violence and beauty entrancing, because it’s like two opposite poles coming together. I find the idea of all of existence – absolute evil and absolute good – existing in the same place and moment, irresistible. I suppose that’s a reason why I only use 9B pencils. I like the idea that these opposite elements can be reflected in the same medium. I see everything, all of existence, to be woven in the same fabric.

Also, I feel there’s a logic to putting extremes together to emphasise each other. If there is an element of death in my work, it is only there to highlight the beauty and fragility of the living thing that I draw.

***MP: You have mentioned a “Samuel Beckett-y” effect to your works. Could you elaborate?***

LR: Beckett was one of the main sources I researched in my PhD thesis, and he remains an ingrained influence to the present. I found that I empathised with his work through the physical process I adopted in my making. It’s a personal bent that I have never been able to stray from, for whatever reason, but I have always made by performing repetitive arduous individually unspectacular actions. I identify with the way in which he focused on ordinary

(even boring) events. I suppose it's the same idea present in my choice to use one pencil to create every work I make – The idea of everything in existence made from the same fabric.

The sense of insanity evident in his work appeals to me too. There is something insane in my commitment to describing every detail I can see in my drawings. There are things I spend hours labouring over that I know no one else will ever notice – the gaps between feathers that reveal the microscopic layers beneath, the pores on a dog's nose etc. I think I am just in love with the ridiculous endless detail that is present in everything if you spend time looking closely enough.



*Lucienne Rickard, Same old dance, graphite on drafting film, 119 x 97cm*

*MP: How do you choose your subject matter?*

LR: The things I choose to draw embody the Hemingway/McCarthy clashing of violence and beauty. I love drawing anything that offers texture and complexity enough to encapsulate me. I often joke about my drawings being evidence of me being a masochist, but I do seem to gravitate to subject matter that will take a very long time to depict. I think the detail and difficulty is just a way to ensure that I become completely involved in the work.

***MP: Works like the 'Bruiser' series seem almost unfinished with only parts of the subject completely rendered, with no background or scene accompanying the subjects they seem to be floating. Why have you chosen this technique?***

LR: This is only a fairly recent development in my work, and its probably more a nod to the viewer's experience of the work rather than satisfying myself. To be honest, I find leaving areas of my work unfinished a very hard thing to do. It annoys me.

I made the choice to leave areas undrawn to highlight the intensity of the filled in areas. Otherwise, on a quick glance, the detail and my investment in the work are easy to miss. The amount of work I do in making my drawings can be missed if there is nothing, no sketchy area, to compare them to.

***MP: What has been your most satisfying achievement so far?***

LR: The most satisfying thing I have made so far might not be classified as an actual art-work. I have kept all my pencil stubs and shavings from the last five years (approximately the time frame that I have worked exclusively with 9B pencil on drafting film). The pencils stubs have been glued in rows inside an old window frame I bought from the tip shop. I refer to it as the pencil graveyard, and the stubs have to recede to an unusable length to be included. There are around 1,200 pencils stubs, which have just recently filled the frame. The pencil shavings fill around 12 or 13 jars/tins of varying sizes. These collections are insane on a Beckett scale. I feel incredibly attached to the materials I make with, and am weirdly proud of these collections.

Its funny to choose these things to write about as my most satisfying achievement, as I should probably talk about being included in Primavera, or selling particular pieces... I guess I like the ongoing nature of them. They are evidence of my day-to-day work. I feel like I've been productive when I look at them (they are kept in my studio). When I look at them I feel like I've been doing my job.

***MP: What's next?***

LR: I received a grant to travel to Lord Howe Island in 2014 to shadow scientists working with the Shearwater population. They study the effects of plastics pollution and other environmental changes on the birds. It was a serendipitous trip, as my grandmother was an islander and I spent a great deal of time there as a child on school holidays, yet the people funding it had no idea of my connection to the island when considering me for the project. I am currently finishing drawings that I hope will communicate the plight of these amazing birds. I hope to convey a sense of their perfection, while also communicating the carelessness evident in the pollution of the seas over which they migrate.

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