

Half a lifetime ago as a bright-eyed eager art student, I expressed to one of my tutors a strong desire to draw, the tutor, a child of the 1960's, looked at me with utter incredulity & said, " Why on earth would you want to do that for". This attitude reflected that of many artists of their generation, the last to study under the Ancien regime, which revolved around the cult of the life room, for them drawing meant endless hours of drudgery & toil in front of the life model. Meanwhile outside in the wider world people were expanding what art was and could be, using new materials & industrial techniques, going to happenings, making land art, doing performances. When viewed against that incredibly exciting backdrop, drawing seemed like an anachronistic irrelevance or at best a mere craft, a skill anyone if they could be bothered, would pick up or if not they could just use a projector.

Then of course, as it always does, the wheel turned full circle and for a lot of the 1990's and mid noughties, there was what seemed like a drawing epidemic. Everywhere you looked, there it was. Several years ago, while granted brief face time with an eminence grise of the International art world, who brought our brief one sided conversation to a end with the curt dismissal "Drawing's over, it's been being done".

Between these two extreme boom and bust views, (the former being more understandable than the latter) I'd like to posit, make the case that drawing should never be in or out of fashion, it is a fundamental, some would say the fundamental creative act, the urge to draw & make a mark stretches way back into our origins as a species. I do not believe in being prescriptive about what drawing is or should be, that it does not need to be representational or "well made" nor am I concerned with the niceties of "Good Drawing". It is so rich with possibilities, drawing can be almost anything and you can draw anywhere with what ever happens to be at hand, and as a result it is the ideal tool to explore new ideas, change, and experiment. "Da Vinci understood drawing to be part of a process which is constantly going on in the artist's mind, instead of fixing the flow of the imagination it keeps it in flux" (1)

And you catch a glimpse of an imagination in flux, in Melissa O'Faherty's new body of drawings 'Spaces of the Imagination'. As sustaining life on our planet becomes increasingly difficult, she found herself fascinated by the idea of Exomoons, undiscovered habitable moons where life might be possible, where we could escape to, as our planet slowly starts to unravel & fall apart. This fascination triggered this series of drawings, in which she imagines what these strange unfamiliar worlds might look like. O'Faherty is very interested in the connection between art and science, and in particular the work of romantic artists like John Martin or William Constable, who were in close contact with scientists and the science of their time, and her drawings manage to maintain a tension between the scientific and the artistic that you find in some of their work. Her drawings conjure up a young, habitable but still evolving place, with all the excitement that goes with it, with great plumes of smoke issuing from vents in 'Volcanic vapors' or 'Divine Explosion' or the more Blakean mystical visionary of 'A New Era' or 'Moonlight Turbulence'.

She says about this body of work "I believe that drawing is an open act with unending possibilities", to that end O'Faherty uses a wide array of materials - burnt cork, photo paper, homemade driftwood charcoal charred wood and many different processes and techniques - incising, rubbing textures, erasing, chalk on blackboard. She says "I'll try anything that might result in an interesting and original mark or image" and this readiness to take chances, so vital to any artistic practice, marks O'Faherty out, as being prepared to try out something with the full knowledge that it may not work out and risk losing it all.

"Drawing is a testing of ideas, a slow motion version of thought. It does not arrive instantly like a photo. The uncertain and imprecise way of constructing a drawing is sometimes a model of how to construct meaning. What ends in clarity does not begin that way". (2)

**Gary Coyle, Visual Artist**

(1) Naginski, Erika, What is Drawing? London . Blackdog Publishing , 2004. P153

(2) Kentridge, William. In Conversation with Carolyn Christov-Baragiev, William Kentridge, London Phaidon 1999.