

**Lynette Smith**  
*Ambiguity (a number  
of drawings)*

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**CREATIVE**  
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# S

*Drawings: staged and reflected*

Lynette Smith  
*Ambiguity (a number  
of drawings)*  
12.04.17–06.05.17

On the far wall the work labelled *Drawing* appears as a *mise en scene* - a stage set for a study. What appears on this stage is a drawn-object. Not a drawing of an object, something observed and described, but a strange thing that is between drawing, surface, and form: A crumpled thing. The lighting of the stage makes the crumpled form appear hard. The object seems for a moment like an action that has been fixed in chrome, reminiscent of a futurist form<sup>1</sup>. But this form moves, ever so slightly, it unfolds under the internal compulsion of its own material, shifting as if to fill the space of the stage. And then it is withdrawn, taken away and returned again and again until exhausted. The object in question turns from chrome to carbon; its crackling is reduced to rustling. As the drawn-object fades it draws itself onto the hands of its operator. It is a drawn and drawing object. This indeterminate refraction, being both the thing and its actions, continues across the four walls of the gallery space.

*A Picture*, the work opposite *Drawing*, shows another scene: A work is placed on the wall by a protagonist who keeps her back to the camera. The action is allegorical. Like Gentileschi's *Allegory of Painting* the work collapses the literal and the metaphorical. The video shows the ordinary scene of the artist at work, but becomes a commentary on the conditions of production. The drawing in the work is abstract: it is nothing but the medium of graphite representing itself. This is a drawing of drawing, and this echo produces a loop inside the work. Like Craig Owens' use of the phrase *mise en abyme* to analyse the appearance of a mirror in a photographic scene, the drawing of drawing is a commentary. Taken from literature, "'en abyme' describes any fragment of a text that reproduces in miniature the structure of the text." This is a structural device that allows the work to reflect on itself via an apparatus of self-interpretation. The phrase *mise en abyme* indicates a fissure of reflection leading to an abyss of interpretations. The graphite square is the opening of a void, from which we can fall into the question ... what is drawing?

Like photography drawing is everywhere and nowhere. Drawing is the planning that precedes each artwork; it is the part of the work that is covered over in the processes of production. Drawing is also in the path the audience makes towards and around a finished work. The way the audience here might move from one video to another to draw together the ideas of the work. At the most elementary to draw can be to see, to really look at what is there. To draw perceptually is to try and break down the presumptions of form, the persistent icons that the imagination fixes in place. When I draw in order to see I start by looking before any marks are made. I let my eyes run over surfaces and feel textures, I imagine translating forms. To draw can be to translate one thing into another, copying, transcribing,

and therefore changing. In Smith's work drawing is defined by its activity. When drawing is thought of in this way, as a verb, its actions lead us back to the body: a body that holds, places, expands, and grasps. Drawing can be a proposition; like placing an image on a wall. And this action, to place and reflect, seems like the final gesture in the series of works. But if this graphite square placed on the wall is the same one that we see later crumpled then this film must have come first. The apparent finality of this gesture is predictive, and through the video loop is repetitive, it brackets other actions. Finally, to experience the final two works, *Right Hand* and *Left Hand*, as duration is to allow your body to feel the suspended discomfort of these hands at work.

Tamsin Green

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1. For me this drawn-object echoes Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1919): a depiction of motion that remains staunchly solid.
  2. Gentileschi was able to perform this collapse only because she was female painter. See Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia Gentileschi's Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin*, V. 62, No. 1 (1980), 97 – 112.
  3. Craig Owens, "Photography "en abyme"," *October*, Vol. 5 (1978), 73 – 88.
  4. *Ibid.*, 75.
  5. Geoffrey Batched, *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001, 109.





*Ekphrasis (of what can't be seen)*

*This tabula has two faces. Each shines like a dim mirror.*

*A tabula rasa (an absence of preconceived ideas or predetermined goals; a clean slate).*

The tabula is in a state where nothing more can be added. Or nothing will change if you keep adding, nothing significant. I don't think this is a state of completeness, or fullness. It is the opposite. Its potentiality is now zero. What can you do with something whose potentiality is exhausted?

You don't get to see the tabula rasa. You never do because you can't. To see it would be to see something other than it, something that was it.

Time.

The time in which the tabula rasa was made into something other than itself is not the time you see here in this work. That other time has been embodied in that doubled dark mirror (which you never saw), then embedded in an image (of an event of presenting), and then embedded again so that time stops and runs, both at the same time. It is that last bit that you get to see.

What can you do with something whose potentiality is exhausted?

It turns out that there is always something that can be done. Even if it is just to destroy something. But even this should be seen only partially. You never see the act. Just the consequences. On the stage. Eventually it stops. It is a point of indecision, of ambivalence.

And the hands. Not the act but the form of the act.

Lynette Smith





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