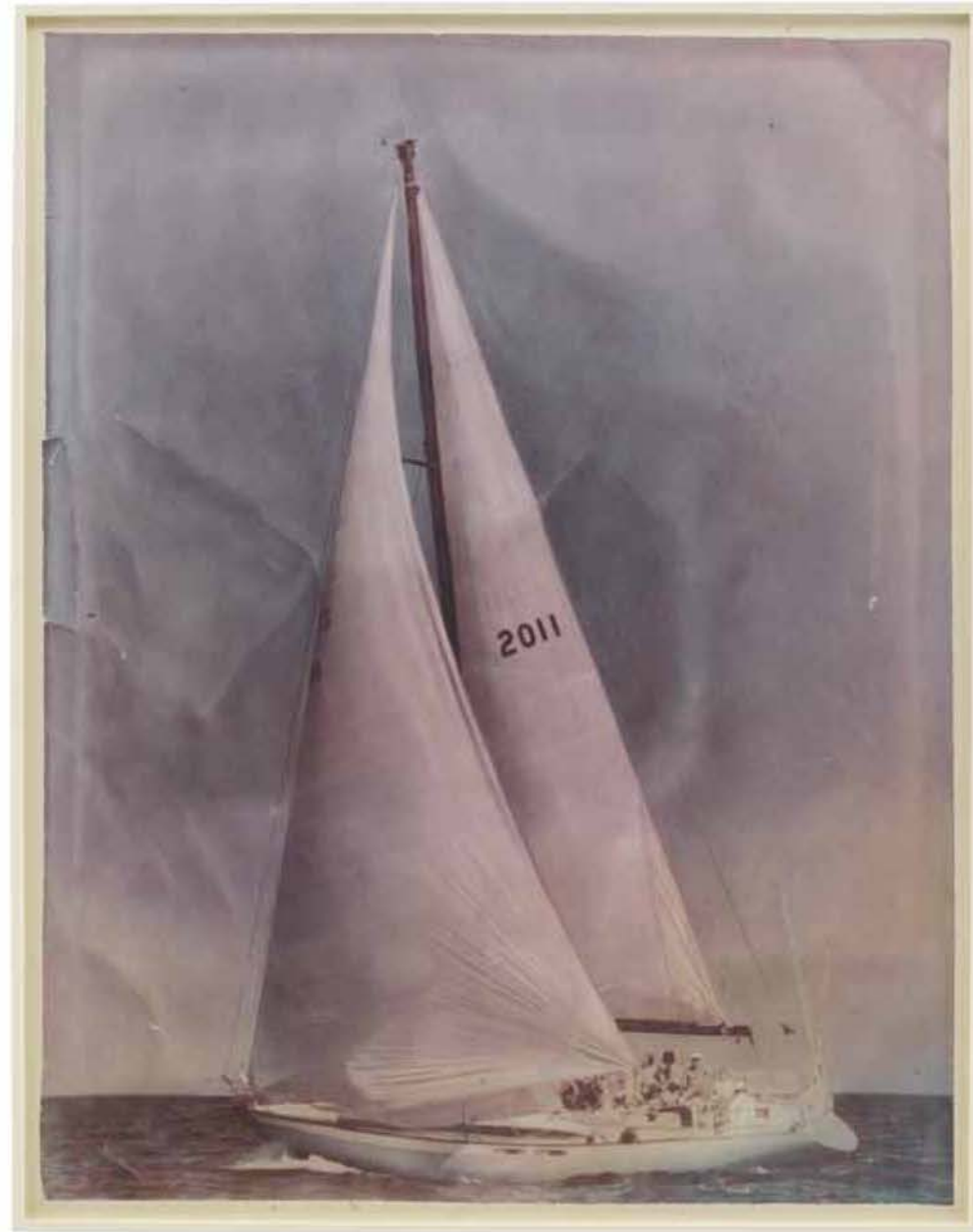


DRAWING ROOM

Paul Sietsema

20 Sept – 10 Nov 2012

Drawing Room
Tannery Arts
12 Rich Estate
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London SE1 5TE
020 7394 5657
www.drawingroom.org.uk
mail@drawingroom.org.uk
Tues – Sat 12 – 6pm



Calendar boat 2
2012

Ink on paper
64 ¼ × 50 ½ inches, 163 × 128 cm

Paul Sietsema's studio forms a tangible and visceral part of the intensely authored artworks he produces. In the studio the artist collects a range of materials, such as sheets of newspaper, fragments of wood, reclaimed pictures, hammers, chisels, and nails. Over time, and in stages, some of these items are incorporated into his artworks – they form both the material of the artwork – canvas, wood, enamel and so on – and the 'images' we view in his drawings, films and paintings.

Consistent with the artist's studio based practice is his interest in specific art historical moments, the consideration of which informs the conceptualisation of his projects and his approach to their production. Sietsema adopts the mode of enquiry of an archaeologist or anthropologist to consider the role of the artist in the production and classification of culture. He capitalises on opportunities to time-travel, accessing information both through history books and through the internet. This notion of time travel is applied to his employment of outmoded techniques and processes which are brought together in the production of a single artwork. Images are similarly scavenged. Whilst some have very specific references and associations, others, such as a range of sailing vessels, represent 'a kind of non-space of achronic time, not past not present, not future'¹. Together, these images and processes of production provide Sietsema with the means to explore the factors at play in perception, in our classification of objects and how their meaning alters over time.

Sietsema has said: 'Drawing has always been the beginning and, perhaps, the end of every project I make. Not making sketches per se but investigating the relationships between imagery, form, and material that dominate in our mediated experience in the world.'² There are a number of attributes linked with both the production and the reception of drawing, including its intimacy and its relationship to process, that make it a particularly rich medium for Sietsema's exploration. In drawing, the mark by mark application of material to surface is necessarily slow. *Event drawing* (2009), now in the collection of MoMA, New York, involved the precise replication of the myriad words and multiple images of the art pages of the New York Times. These pages include a review of his exhibition *Empire* at the Whitney Museum and were a presence in his studio over a period of time. In his words: 'the processes the ink is applied with have some congruity with the way a laser printer produces an image, mixing colours on the sheet to achieve tones, the image is copied paying attention to the photographic/image/digital/printing noise and not the image of the newspaper, a broken down pixel by pixel, somewhat dehumanized view'³. To this objective process of image production is added, rendered in enamel, a seemingly unconscious splatter of coins covered in paint, which partly obscures the information in the newspaper pages. Sietsema has referred to *Event drawing*,

and other related works, as 'figure/ground studies' which he uses to explore his interest in the transformation of the figure of the replicated newspaper to ground, once the enamel spill is added. These works 'also refer[s] to the relationship between abstraction and information, in the representation of a newspaper, or the representation of a paint mark, but also simply in the relationship of a story and its images.'⁴

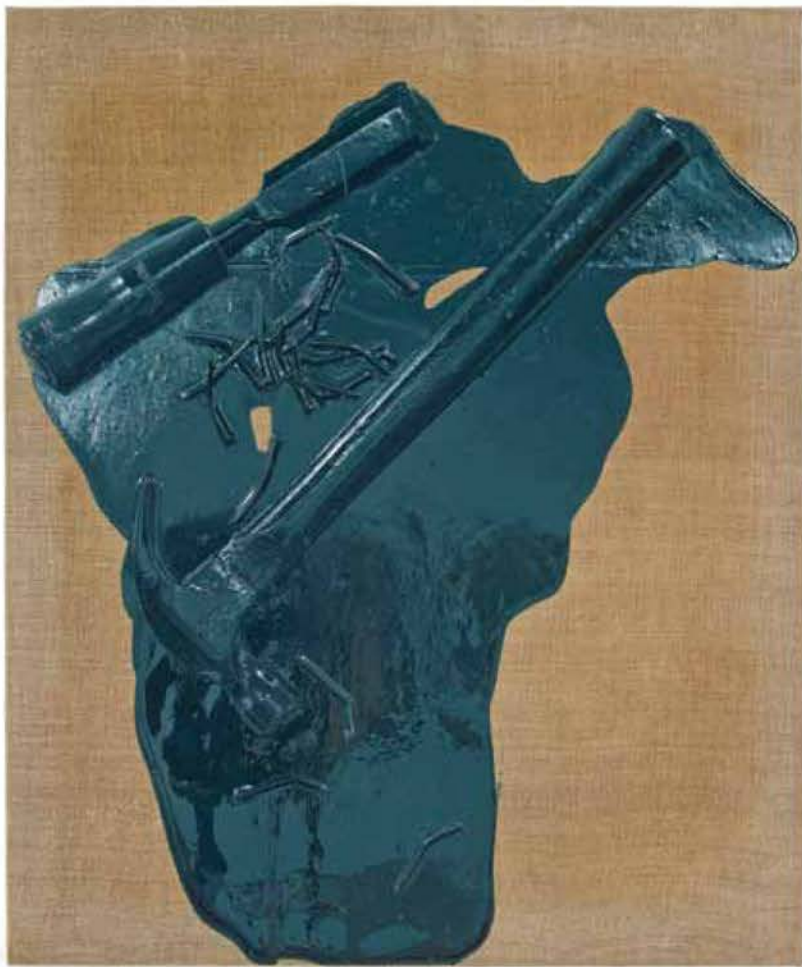
Film is the medium that pulls together the various lines of enquiry that inform Sietsema's practice. He feels that film approaches the 'versatility and topographical quality



Brush painting
2012
Enamel on canvas
28 × 20 inches, 71 × 51 cm

of language, especially the written word, with its limitless variations of form and surface and the various relationships between the two.’⁵ He describes how he started using 16mm film in 1997 ‘because it already has a “found quality”...the anachronistic scaleless-ness of film seemed ideal for the kind of state or experiences I was interested in building, where times and places could be both specific and non-specific at the same time...’⁶

The films result from a long period of gestation and are hand-made, in the studio, using time-consuming sculptural techniques to achieve specific imagery



Painting for assembly
2012
Enamel on canvas
26 ¼ × 21 ¾ inches, 67 × 55 cm

on film. *Empire* (2002) used a photograph of Clement Greenberg’s apartment as a conceptual armature and to generate a filmed sculpture of Greenberg’s living room. Sietsema imagined which books would have sat upon Greenberg’s bookshelves in 1964, the year this photograph appeared in *Vogue*, and a year which epitomises a turbulent and contested period of art history. For his next film, *Figure 3* (2008), the artist sought non-iconic images of nets, carrying straps, plates, pots and mats, which he culled from a range of history books, including those about Eskimo and various pre-colonial cultures and early colonial America. He was interested in objects that had been fabricated for purely functional and practical rather than commercial reasons. The resulting sculptures were hybrids of these objects, crossing cultures and periods of time. He employed various materials and techniques. For example, one was fabricated from newspaper and tape and then coated with white, fire-retardant paint. The paper was burned away leaving an outer shell that was set against a black background to be photographed. In *Figure 3*, these ambiguous sculptures appear, in slow sequence, and with black intervals, as the subject matter of the film. Concurrent with the making of this film, Sietsema was gathering images of paint spills and splatters. Signs of production, and referencing the marks of abstract and expressionistic painting, these random-appearing drips and splatters are transported to the status of image. *Event drawing*, and other drawings in this series, explore the intersection of authorship and emptiness, the potential for meaning or meaninglessness in mark-making.

A new series of works on reclaimed canvas continue these interests. Sietsema sources paintings by unknown artists from the recent past. The components of the paintings are taken apart, the canvas reversed and put onto new stretchers using current materials and techniques. In *Brush painting* (2012) traces of a partially obliterated abstract painting vie with an image of a brush soaked in yellow paint that tellingly drips down the canvas. The still life painting of the original now forms the back board of the work, whilst the once hidden fingerprints of the artist and handlers contribute to the noise of the picture. In *Painting for assembly* (2012) the nails that held the canvas to its original frame have created ‘waves’ in the weft of the fabric, presenting a perfect ground for the artist to render the image of the hammer, chisel and nails permanently stilled in a pool of black paint. In this series of works the pooled paint performs the role of analogue image capture. Once photographed the image is digitally clipped from its background. The inevitable slippages and miss-registers that result from a combination of analogue and digital techniques add to the ambiguity of the image and the process of production.

The exhibition includes a sequence of four sailboat drawings, *Calendar boat 1, 2, 3 and 4* (2012), made with ink on paper. These works continue Sietsema’s interest in the dependency of pre-digital images on their carrier as explored in earlier pictures of

sailing vessels. The scale of the images, and the repeated 'frames', with their stilled image and subtle, non-linear transformations to the palette, pay homage to stasis, a quality of structuralist film that informs much of Sietsema's practice. To duplicate the image, he has employed techniques borrowed from pre-digital manuals for touching up photographs. Using latex to mask out sections of the image, he has employed this restoration technique to build the image bit by bit - so it is a little like making an image in reverse. As such, the sailing vessel becomes an empty vessel, a carrier for his complex, absorbing technique of producing an image. Sietsema has said: 'I think I'm trying to get at something specific about representation, something about structures and reception vs. depiction.'⁷ Breaking the image down, and tackling its replication bit by bit, enables him to adopt an objective approach in the exploration of its physical facts. The various processes and methods the artist has employed serve to heighten the clichéd nature of the image.



Blue square 1
2012
Ink on paper
54 ¾ × 57 ⅞ inches, 139 × 146 cm

Blue Square 1 and *Blue Square 2* (2012) take as their subjects a torn sheet of paper and a broken frame. Sietsema has rendered, editing as he does so, the creases, tears and scuffs of the blue backing paper. The abstract lines on the accompanying picture are formed from the broken frame parts. 'I'm interested in the representation of the materiality of things, materials under stress (physical, time-based and so on) happen to display their physical properties more clearly. This display is what makes the image.'⁸ In this work abstraction - the square of the paper, the lines of the wood - collide with representation - the rendered sheet of paper and partly dismembered frame. 'A lot of what I do is trying to choose subjects that are basically invisible things you can see through.'⁹

Whilst earlier films took, as their starting point, existing images, two new films use abstract elements to explore the concrete quality of 16mm film. *Telegraph* (2012) is composed of a series of photographs of splintered wood arranged to form a letter of the alphabet, which, over the course of the film reads: L/E/T/T/E/R T/O A Y/O/U/N/G



Telegraph
2012
Still from 16-millimeter film
app. 12 minutes / loop

P/A/I/N/T/E/R. Whilst the process of making a digital film is mostly imperceptible, the mechanical quality of this 16mm film is palpable as its technology is redundant in current information exchange and its physical means of production – the placement of shards of wood against a black background – is apparent. The broken wood serves the same function as the frame fragments in *Blue square 1* and *Blue square 2*; the heightened material nature has a very concrete, physical quality that might engender a phenomenological response. Sietsema is interested in ‘how an agent like that can work against language, or linguistic thought, and perhaps expose the limits (and perhaps untapped potentials) of language. But of course also the ambiguousness of a piece of wood parallels the formless ambiguity of the mechanism of digital communication, the 0 and the 1, the rootlessness of the kind of non-relationship of the carrier and the message.’¹⁰

Sietsema has talked about his desire to expand the potential of each medium he works with whilst forcing the medium itself to become more apparent. *Encre chine* (2012) is a 16mm film in which a series of studio objects are coated with iridescent black ink, called ‘encre de chine’. An etching ink that has a consistency thicker than paint, Sietsema equates it to the emulsion coating 16mm film: ‘I like that the ink coating the objects both obscures them and also forces an attention that may keep some of the things from escaping a conscious read. The thick ink has a parallel in the 16mm prints, which are very dense with emulsion, blocking much more light than usual from passing through the physical filmstrip. The film begins to become opaque, which is a quality *Encre chine* has as well. I was thinking both of structurally layered qualities – Chinese boxes – and the thought experiment known as “Chinese Box”...[which] deals with the possibility of understanding in systems as it relates to computers and the possibility of artificial intelligence; it is meant to point out the difference between understanding and translation.’¹¹

Kate Macfarlane

- 1 Paul Sietsema, note to author, July 2012.
- 2 Paul Sietsema in ‘Skeleton Key: A Conversation with Paul Sietsema’, Bruce Hainley, *Figure 3 Paul Sietsema*, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), p.42.
- 3 Paul Sietsema in ‘Paul Sietsema Interview with Carter Mull’, Marcel – Issue #3, September 2010, reprinted in *Paul Sietsema: interviews on films and works*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p.34.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.35.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p.36.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Paul Sietsema, see 2, p.64.
- 8 Paul Sietsema, see 1.

- 9 Paul Sietsema, in Andrew Berardini, ‘Dig forever and never it bottom’, *Mousse Magazine* – Issue #16, December 2008, reprinted in *Paul Sietsema: interviews on films and works*, p.54.
- 10 Paul Sietsema, see 1.
- 11 Paul Sietsema, in Adam Szymczyk and Quinn Latimer ‘Impossibly Clean Models: Paul Sietsema in Conversation’, April 2012, in *Paul Sietsema: interviews on films and works*, p.105.

All images courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery.

PAUL SIETSEMA, b. 1968, Los Angeles, lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles. **Studied:** 1999, M.F.A. University of California, Berkeley and Los Angeles. **Recent solo exhibitions:** 2012: *Paul Sietsema*, Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland; *Paul Sietsema*, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio; 2011: *Paul Sietsema – Anticultural Positions*, Midway Contemporary Art in collaboration with Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; *Paul Sietsema*, Matthew Marks Gallery, New York; 2010: *Paul Sietsema: Anticultural Positions*, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin; *Paul Sietsema*, Cubitt Gallery, London; 2009: *Paul Sietsema: Figure 3*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York & Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; 2008: *Paul Sietsema*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; *Paul Sietsema: Three Films*, de Appel Foundation, Amsterdam. **Selected Group Exhibitions:** 2011: *All of This and Nothing*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; *Exhibition of Distances*, Tulips and Roses, Brussels, Belgium; *Drawn from Photography*, The Drawing Center, New York; *The More Things Change*, San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art; 2010: *Selections from the Hammer Contemporary Collection*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; *A Selection of Works From MOCA’s Permanent Collection*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; *Hauntology*, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley, California; *Following A Line*, Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; *Image by Image: Film and Contemporary Art from the collection of the Centre Pompidou*, Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, Germany; *The Artist’s Museum*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; 2009: *3 Artists Selected by Dan Graham and a work by Dan Graham*, 303 Gallery, New York; 2008: *Progress*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Life on Mars: 55th Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; *5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art*, Berlin. **Awards:** DAAD Fellowship, Berlin (2008); John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2005); Foundation of Contemporary Arts Award for Visual Arts (2002).

Drawing Room explores ideas around contemporary drawing and makes them visible in the public domain.

Benefactor: Paul and Louise Cooke Endowment
Patrons: Marie Elena Angulo & Henry Zarb, Elizabeth Bauza, Miel de Botton, Brian Boylan, Paul Hobson, Mina Park, Sigrid Wilkinson.

Directions: Underground/Overground: London Bridge, Borough, Bermondsey, Canada Water
Buses: 1, 42, 78, 188.

There is car parking in the courtyard Mon – Fri until 6pm.

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Kate Davis, solo exhibition

14 February – 6 April 2013
DRAWING : SCULPTURE
Sara Barker, Anna Barriball, Alice Channer, Aleana Egan, Knut Henrik Henriksen, Bojan Šarčević, Dan Shaw-Town

Opens 18 April. Auction Wed 15 May 2013
Drawing 2013: Biennial Fundraiser exhibition