



Review of Abstract Drawing, Drawing Room, London

Several variants of abstraction are investigated in an excellent exhibition of drawings, *Abstract Drawing*, curated by Richard Deacon, the current Last Words artist in Aesthetica. The show at London's [Drawing Room](#) features 57 works made between 1907 and 2014 by artists including Anish Kapoor, Richard Serra, Jackson Pollock, Eva Hesse, Kasimir Malevich and Sol LeWitt.

Deacon defines abstraction's various strands as: "inscriptive, calligraphic, ornamental, generative, individuating and identifying." Although the exhibition never purports to be a universal survey, Deacon has judiciously suggested a narrative arc to the story of abstraction by the works that bookend the exhibition. The first work the audience encounters is painted directly onto the gallery wall, and is Victoria Haven's most recently created *Rabbit Hole #8 & #9* (where two looping ribbons of colour suggest Alice's mystical portals). At the end of the exhibition is the earliest drawing in the show. It is from

1907 and by the Swedish artist Hilma af Klint, who is now considered a pioneering abstract artist of the century.

Klint was a spiritualist who made her drawings during séances – a fact that allows you to understand one motif of the exhibition: abstraction as a spiritual, reality-creating medium. Emma McNally's *Field 12*, 2010 – reminiscent of an astral chart with its web of graphite lines insinuating planetary orbits and meridians – invents a universe most explicitly. Even the computer drawings of Frederick Hammersley and the typescript compositions of Dom Sylvester Houédard (the British Benedictine monk, scholar, poet and artist) introduce you the viewer to an out-of-body world of technological absolutes.

Throughout the exhibition drawings are presented as autonomous works of art, which means that preparatory pieces and idle doodles have not been included. As if to underline the self-sufficiency of drawing Deacon has opted for control and craft over spontaneity in his selection. McNally's precision-tooled work and Sol LeWitt's stringently hatched *4 Colour Drawing* of 1971, are cases in point. As a result of this preference, but also because of the small scale of most of the drawings, they invite close inspection, and thus one's judgment is inevitably guided by levels of finesse in execution. In these stakes Eva Hesse, Houédard and Anni Albers triumph at the expense of Tomma Abts and John Golding.

It's a shame that the majority of drawings here were made after 1980 when there are so many excellent examples to have been aired from the earlier decades of the twentieth century. Nonetheless Deacon has a deft hand as a curator and manages to imply many diverse paths of abstraction without cataloguing them explicitly. He also succeeds in showing how abstract art can be precisely executed and rapturous at the same time, and gives a rough shape to the unfolding – or should one say the perpetual regeneration – of abstract art since 1907. His sequencing of the drawings is meticulous, visually satisfying and dryly intelligent, much like his own sculpture. If you have a spare day and enough cash for a travelcard, see it in conjunction with Richard Deacon's major retrospective at Tate Britain; it's a gem.

Abstract Drawing, until 19 April, [Drawing Room](#), Tannery Arts, 12 Rich Estate, Crimscott Street, London SE1 5TE.

Matthew Wilson

Credits

1. Eva Hesse, *No title*, 1965, Ink on paper, 64.8 x 49.8 cm © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth.

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