



installation view of Ian Kiaer's 'Tooth House'

on, subject to subtle mutations like the shaft of discoloured clear plastic in *Black tulip: sleep*, 2012. It resembles both a dreamtime thought-bubble and a troubling incubus from a Gothic novel. Suspended from the cable of the electric fan heater that blows air into its hollow body, this modest form flutters in agitated tumescence as the current whips it, tilting over the black, bed-like mat stretching out from the wall into the floor. Above the mat is a single, vacant brass picture hook, while in the reflective surface of the clear PVC pinned to the wall nearby, distorted reflections dance.

Kiaer's evasive, tentative probings are indicative of a course taken between conventional idioms. Instinctively, he may remain a painter, as commentators regularly insist; he projects his concerns about the deficiencies of representation beyond the picture plane to be scrutinised in the round by mobile onlookers. Yet his work seems more comfortably located in hybrid territory shaped as much by sculpture's properties of scale and material as by faith in the imagination, the broad horizon of visionary texts and the capacity of humans to store, process and retrieve their perceptions. ■

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Abstract Drawing

Drawing Room London 20 February to 19 April

With rare tact and generosity – rare, that is, in the case of artist-curated shows – Richard Deacon did not include his own work in either the exhibition or the accompanying catalogue. Of course, his concurrent retrospective at Tate Britain, a stately parade of works from every decade, included five of his drawings, so perhaps there was no need to include any, but I doubt that was the reason.

From the point of view of the viewer, however, such reticence is regrettable since it would have been good to see one of Deacon's drawings – *It's Orpheus when there's singing*, 1978-79, perhaps – juxtaposed with Gordon Matta-Clark's *Untitled*, 1976-77, one of the knock-out pieces in the exhibition. Both artists deal with space in opposing but equally determinedly non-illusionistic ways that are quintessentially sculptural. Deacon's large-scale, curvilinear drawings, partly inspired by the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke, are characterised by quasi-geometric forms described with looping, parabolic lines that, while unequivocally two-dimensional, nevertheless seem to lasso space. Matta-Clark, in a gesture that both echoes and prefigures his direct architectural interventions, respectively the *Conical Intersect* made for the Paris Biennale of 1975 and the later circle cuts of *Circus* or *The Caribbean Orange* carried out in Chicago in 1978, inscribed circles and lines on a stack of white paper and, using the lines as a template, literally cut out the spaces in between the forms. The result is not so much a drawing as the record of a performance. The same could be said of Deacon's drawings not only in terms of their scale and reach, but also in that in some ways they were a substitute for making during a sojourn in New York.

At the other end of the scale, but equally sculptural in its literal treatment of space, is a delicate undated drawing by Anni Albers, *Teaching*

melancholy, mute profundity and jaw-dropping finesse. Kiaer excels at shifts between scale, idiom, definition and metaphor, and by setting new work amongst a selection of projects spanning almost a decade of activity, this exhibition underlines the consistency, clarity and complexity of his purpose. Multiplying the clusters of obscure references invariably found in each of Kiaer's precisely arranged installations of austere elements, the six projects gathered here seem to reflect on Modernism's lost project: a world based on spiritual ideals rather than efficiency and logic.

Until recently, Kiaer has used the word 'project' to describe bodies of work, in preference, even, to the word 'work'. By its nature, a project is active and the term resonates with thoughts of experimenting, continuity and possibility. Possibility recognises no temporal restriction, putting time on a loop that dissolves past and present into a future moment when the work will still be evolving. This process contradicts the ephemeral nature of the chipped and abraded materials with which Kiaer articulates his compositions; it is emblematic of ideas in perpetual circulation, activated by the maker and viewer in relation to their surroundings.

The reach of Kiaer's references invariably exceeds the grasp of his audience which, in the course of this show, encountered titles citing, often obliquely, Paul Scheerbarth, Alexandre Dumas and Aldo Rossi. The earliest piece, *Grey Cloth project: Glashaus*, 2005, was inspired by the thwarted aspiration of the architect Bruno Taut's prismatic glass-domed pavilion of 1914; it comprised a miniature model in cardboard and bilious yellow plastic, placed vulnerably on the gallery floor, and a watercolour of the dome's disc-like plan, mounted low on the wall behind and resembling a rising sun. The most recent installations, collectively called *Tooth House*, 2014, emerged from Kiaer's fascination with Frederick Kiesler's postwar drawings and models. Hopeful conceptual prototypes rather than pragmatic plans, Kiesler's curving biomorphic designs promoted the interaction of space, people, objects and concepts in an architecture that was infinitely adaptable to its occupants' needs. Some elements in Kiaer's projects appear to breathe, among them the big inflated ball of translucent plastic in *Erdinrindenbau project: inflatable*, 2006. As if to loosen up the Institute's geometrically precise and impersonal exhibition galleries, it is one of the first objects seen on entering the show.

Kiaer's compositions refute any notion of disposability, either physical or conceptual. The ideas gestating within each project float



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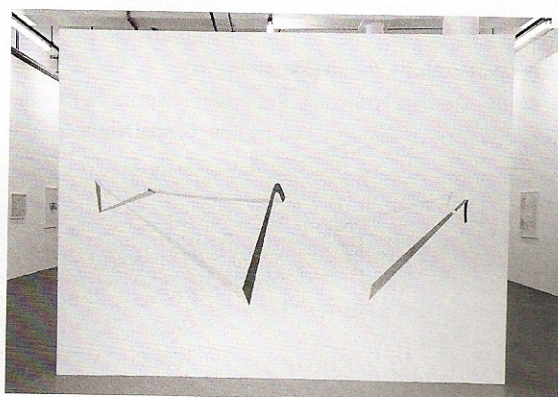
He likes the fiestas. He likes the music. He likes to dance. 7 June – 13 July 2014
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Study made with pin pricks, a relief-like work that creates a chequer-board effect from alternate squares of positive and negative prick marks. In a manner that anticipates both Sol LeWitt (there are two stunning drawings by him in the exhibition, *Black and yellow drawing* and *4 Colour Drawing*, both dating from 1971) and Minimalism, the deadpan title accurately describes the work while giving no hint of the subtleties within. The same is true of the other work by her, *Typewriter Study*, a sheet typed with alternate lines of repeated 'open bracket' and 'close bracket' symbols. This opens up a rich seam of works in the exhibition that are typed or computer-generated, including in the former category works by the concrete poet Dom Sylvester Houédard and, in the latter works by Darrell Viner and Frederick Hammersley. Hammersley began as an abstract painter but his experimental *Punched card for computer-generated drawing*, 20 March 1969, reproduced in Anna Lovatt's essay in the catalogue but not included in the exhibition, forms a neat bridge between literal space – the punched holes – and imagined or virtual space (the card is in a sense not the completed drawing but rather the means to it since it contains the coded programme for generating the actual drawing), between mechanical and manual mark-making (the words 'DO NOT FOLD' are written in felt tip on the card), and between word and image, drawing and artefact.

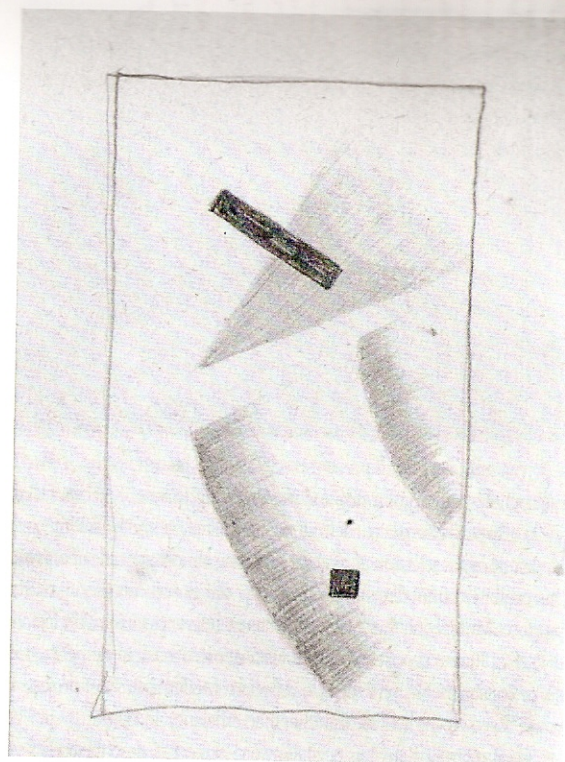
All the works mentioned so far are characterised by graphic clarity – whether in the form of line, letter, symbol, cypher or mark – rather than by tone. A set of drawings, dated between 1906 and 1909, by Swedish artist and mystic Hilma af Klimt and the Group of Five, recently hailed as precursors of abstract art, look like something between psychic doodles and mundane exercises in line and tone. However, the two works by LeWitt could be said to embody both. Though they are made up solely of parallel lines – horizontal, vertical and diagonal – deployed in a carefully disinterested manner, they do not describe form but constitute it, and, while never losing their integrity, when seen from a distance the lines coalesce into skeins of subtly modulated tones.

At the other extreme from these gossamer-light drawings are two works that appear to obliterate tone altogether: Dorothea Rockburne's elegant diptych, *Carta Carbone*, 1972, a black square, inscribed in pencil on a piece of white squared paper, juxtaposed with a collaged sheet of inky carbon paper, correspondingly inscribed with a white square of the same dimensions; and Richard Serra's powerful *Untitled*, 2009, one of his characteristic oil stick drawings on thick white paper that act like black holes, absorbing all light and tone into their dense surfaces. In between are a number of works by artists exploring the relationships between line, tone and texture, among them Lothar Götz, Sam Messenger, Emma McNally and Kishio Suga.

Victoria Haven's collaged wall drawings in coloured ink on paper, *Rabbit Hole #8* and #9, 2014, commissioned for the show, riff on the symbol for infinity, hovering between fact (the joins between cut-out sections are clearly visible) and illusion. The bands of colour dart across the surface, alternately disappearing and reappearing from view



Victoria Haven
Rabbit Hole #8 & #9
2014



in an apparently endless loop, like the rabbit of the works' title. Their lightness and agility comes closest to the seemingly effortless poise of Kazimir Malevich's exquisite pencil study *Composition 9 m*, 1917-18, measuring a mere 17.1x11cm, in which three delicately shaded curving forms and two darker rectilinear forms – a small square and a long, thin rectangle – appear to float in an indeterminate space, perpetually orbiting in their own tiny universe.

Jackson Pollock's *Untitled*, 1951, a work in ink and gouache on paper, which effectively elides drawing and painting, was included perhaps to give weight to the gestural mode in drawing which was otherwise under-represented (the inclusion of a number of works by John Golding notwithstanding), this being an exhibition curated by a sculptor, after all. This was not necessarily a weakness of the show. On the contrary, in many ways this exhibition was very much about the limits of gesture – the inclusion of several works by Garth Evans, who used collage to contain gesture, being a case in point.

There is a whole other debate to be had about the definition of abstract drawing, which this exhibition doesn't really address. There is not space to do so within a short review, but to take a couple of examples: can Bob Law's *Broken Cross and Kiss CCCXVI* 02.01.00 and *Cross for Me, Kiss for You CCCXVII* 03.01.00, both 2000, or Roger Ackling's time-based work *One minute is long enough, so it's a second*, 1977, an affectionate dig at Richard Long, be considered abstract in the same way as Eva Hesse's untitled drawings of 1965 or Tomma Abts's *Untitled #28*, 2005? The clue is perhaps in the title, or lack of one. But that is a debate for another time and, except in debates about Modernism, it is hardly a burning issue today. This was a thoughtful, intelligent show that assembled a range of work, much of it from private collections, by both well-known and less well-known artists – and artists whose work should be better known. It was full of surprises and telling juxtapositions, while the cultural and gender mix was refreshing and didn't feel forced in any way. National museums take note. ■

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