

## Shaping futures Drawing together

A new exhibition shows how artists are using drawing to respond to the modern world. Curator Stephanie Straine, who was supported by a Jonathan Ruffer curatorial grant from Art Fund, tells *Hester Musson* how the show came together



In an age of proliferating digital imagery and technological advancement, drawing as an art form might be expected to be losing relevance. The exhibition 'A Slice through the World: Contemporary Artists' Drawings' at Modern Art Oxford and Drawing Room in London demonstrates the opposite is true: rather than rejecting traditional media, many artists across the world have not only embraced drawing, but are expanding its boundaries through experimental approaches that include the use of photomontage, hyperrealism and found objects.

Stephanie Straine, curator of exhibitions and projects at Modern Art Oxford, who received a Jonathan Ruffer curatorial grant from Art Fund (which supports museum professionals in developing their expertise), says, 'The vocabulary around drawing is still often couched in terms of being preliminary,

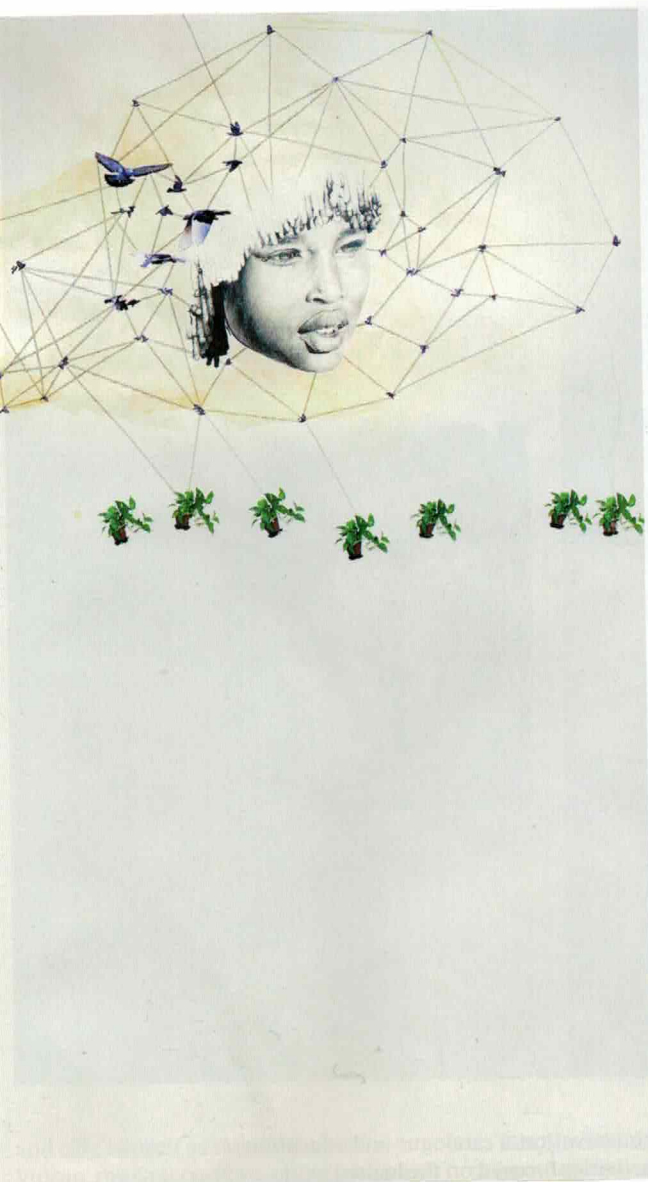
a research tool. I wanted to look at examples of artists who are making drawings to resolve a creative process.'

The exhibition brings together recent and new works by 14 international artists across the two venues, among them Kate Davis and ruby onyinyechi amanze. It also pays homage to Modern Art Oxford's 1972 group show '[Drawing]', (then under its former name of Museum of Modern Art Oxford), which championed graphite and paper in an era dominated by art that was less focused on objects or artistic skill. Through innovative use of traditional tools, the works respond to many of the conditions that are shaping our world today. Comparing the two shows, Straine says, 'Both lists of artists are not exclusively works-on-paper practitioners, yet there's something that drawing offers their practice – I was really intrigued by this idea.'

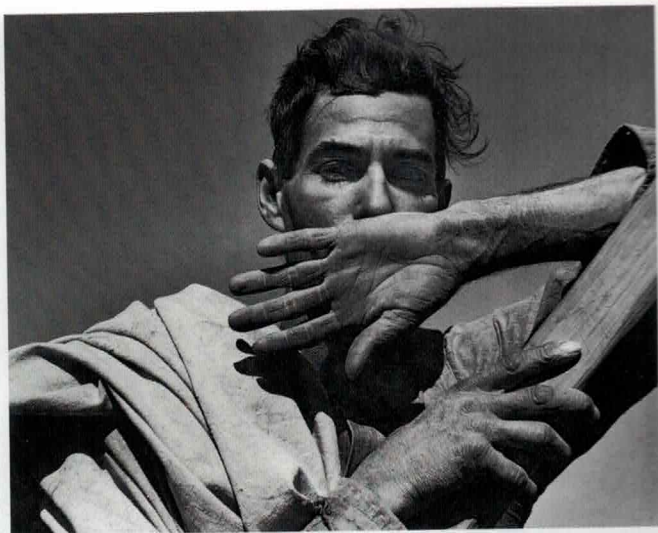
Exhibiting work by international artists, some not shown in the UK before, was an important element of the show but also a challenge. Art Fund's Jonathan Ruffer grant enabled Straine to visit solo exhibitions by three of the artists whose work she had not previously viewed adequately 'in the flesh'. At ifa-Galerie in Berlin, she attended the exhibition 'Every Mask I Ever Loved' by Guggenheim Foundation Fellow Wura-Natasha Ogunji, and met with the artist, who is normally based in Texas and Nigeria. 'We agreed there and then that a particular drawing would be included... so on a practical level, it secured one of the biggest works in the show, a six-part drawing on architectural tracing paper.'

Algerian-born Massinissa Selmani, who was exhibiting at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, is another artist Straine was keen to bring to Oxford. Selmani's approach is

Below: Dorothea Lange, *Migratory Cotton Picker, Eloy, Arizona, 1940*



Left: ruby onyinyechi amanze, *that low hanging kind of sun, the one that lingers two feet above your head, (never dying) house plants in exchange for your freedom... orchids in exchange for your love, who are you kissing, when you kiss a mask?*, 2015



### Jonathan Ruffer curatorial grants

Other curators who have recently benefited from a Jonathan Ruffer curatorial grant from Art Fund include Sarah Rothwell at National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh, together with Bryony Windsor at the National Centre for Craft & Design, Sleaford, towards the exhibition 'Art of Glass' (see page 12); and Jilke Golbach at the Barbican Art Gallery, London, whose grant went towards a research trip to California to develop the first UK retrospective of American photographer Dorothea Lange (opening 22 June).

### New Collecting Awards

As part of Art Fund's New Collecting Awards scheme, curator Mark Doyle has acquired two works for Touchstones Rochdale's collection: Jessica Rankin's *Silver Study* (2011) and Clare Kenny's *MG Montego 2014 (Heywood)* (2017). Doyle is using his grant to strengthen the gallery's collection of works by female artists (see also feature page 58). Working with the Bowes Museum, in Barnard Castle, County Durham, Hannah Jackson's latest acquisition, purchased at auction, is a 1970 Yves Saint Laurent Couture evening ensemble featuring a long jacket and harem pants in blue

and gold brocade. This will join the museum's growing collection of French haute couture.

### Traineeships and courses

Art Fund has awarded the not-for-profit organisation Bold Tendencies, based in Peckham in south London, a grant to create an Art Fund Trainee position as part of its voluntary learning and mentorship programme, offering young people insight into the skills required for the running of a contemporary arts organisation.

Celebrating five years of partnership with the Whitechapel Gallery, as part of its Inside the Gallery courses, Art Fund is also providing funding to cover 50 bursaries for curators and museum professionals to attend one of a series of 10, one-day curatorial development courses this summer.

### Art Night Guides

Art Fund is once again supporting Art Night's student guides, who will be present at each location around London's Southbank, for this annual, single-night, contemporary-arts festival, this year taking place on 7 July and curated by the Hayward Gallery. The Art Night Guides programme draws on Art Fund's growing Student National Art Pass network.

highly experimental, often using montages of drawings and images to explore subjects sourced from political and social news. Both Ogunji's and Selmani's work embodies the nomadic qualities of drawing, how it can move between different materials, but also how artists have 'built into the fabric of their work their geographical and personal movement across the world... both in a physical reality and also in digital spheres'.

Ian Kiaer, by contrast, is based in Oxford, but meeting Odile Burluraux, the curator of his exhibition at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, gave Straine invaluable insight into his use of drawing in site-specific work. She explains, 'His is the most expanded idea of drawing; it's really drawing with a much more architecturally situated installation. Meeting the curator helped me

understand how the different elements relate.' All three exhibitions underscored 'the complexities of how artists approach the installation of their drawing' and how visitors will see connections between even discrete, individual works on paper.

How we see is ultimately key to Straine's vision for the show. 'I think what I'd like people to understand is that drawing is a way to slow down and take stock, to make us think: do we really see things any more?' The endurance of drawing in this digital age demands our attention and asks us to reassess our own visual experience of the world.

*'A Slice through the World: Contemporary Artists' Drawings; Drawing Room, London SE17, 13 June to 5 August. drawingroom.org.uk, free to all. Modern Art Oxford OX1, 16 June to 9 September. modernartoxford.org.uk, free to all, 10% off in shop and café with National Art Pass*

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