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Graphology at Drawing Room

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14 May, 2012
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Claire Flannery ponders the relationship between freedom and constraint in the latest exhibition at Drawing Room.



Once upon a time, I had the privilege to work with an artist-educator who realised that a principle barrier to creativity was embarrassment. To overcome this hurdle, she would equip groups with a simple pencil and sheet of paper each and tell them to scribble; "don't think, just draw". And after a moment's hesitation, everyone did. On turning the idiosyncratic creations around for all to see, the group was asked, "whose is the best?" The answer, "no one's", we all agreed. There were natural rhythms, raw energy, delicate considered touches and determined dictatorial strokes. All had something beautiful about



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them and everyone had been set free. Creativity was loosened up by the combination of constrained materials – a simple pencil and piece of paper – and the freedom to create a thing, unthinkingly, that cannot be judged by normal criteria.

With [Graphology](#), curator Edwin Carels brings me back to a very similar realm of free creativity through his genealogy of automated drawing. The exhibition presents the work of twenty established 20th and 21st century artists and some very celebrated names such as Carl Andre, Man Ray, Laszlo Maholy-Nagy and, very fittingly, Sigmund Freud. Playfulness abounds across an impressive variety of mediums; all challenge and confirm the instinctual primacy and pliability of drawing.

As a creation in itself, the exhibition transforms [Drawing Room's](#) new Bermondsey home – a large industrial white space that is akin to a piece of paper itself, so white and open. The artworks are like short stories and poems writ onto it, all grey and black, negative spaces and positive traces. The breadth of the exhibition in such a tight framework is rich and sophisticated and demonstrates how this tiny operation really punches above its weight.

Almost every work is a highlight, but the first to grab my eye is an interactive typewriter made (yes 'made'; despite appearances this is no ordinary typewriter) by Fiona Banner that allows one to type and take home any number of combinations of the letters available on the keys, which are 'f', 'u', 'c', and 'k'. The name of the typewriter is 'Mother' by the way.

A large handwoven rug on the gallery floor faithfully depicts the native language of artist Mekhitar Garabedian's parents; the Armenian alphabet written repeatedly on a lined A4 sheet, complete with its punched holes and faint blue lines. Its tactility invites us to imagine ourselves barefoot and walking across the mother tongue, at once comfortable and soothed and yet oblivious to anything but the language's decorative qualities, devoid as it is to the artist of understood use and meaning.

Anthony McCall, best known for his captivating works in light, is represented by a 1974 graphite on paper work – *Pencil Duration (Long Strokes)* – which weaves a large, patterned pencil-scape in joined up sections. Up close its abstract qualities delight, and from a distance the depth it creates in itself is like an urban landscape looked down upon sharply from the sky.

Marcel Broodthaers' *Magical Slate* is a tiny Etch A Sketch encased in aggrandising perspex. The toy was invented in 1952, 20 years before Broodthaers's deification of it and the name of the work is a direct translation of the French word for the now traditional children's toy. How much more poetic French often is than English...

Summing up the exhibition in some ways is Wim Janssen's *Corner Piece* [pictured above] made in situ at the Drawing Room. Armed with glue and lots of those tediously thin lead pins that you insert in plastic pencils (and which always break), Janssen has created what looks like a CAD landscape design

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This clever interruption of the space plays with craft, the handmade and what looks like a delicate yet robust wireframe representation in the real of something virtual. Intriguingly, at the private view, a daddy longlegs had actually taken up residence in the work, using it as a prefabricated web (almost like it could be an insect Ikea piece). Freedom within constraints plus the magic of unpredictability = one word, genius.

[Graphology](#) is at Drawing Room until 30th June 2012.

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