

Reviews

Death, discovery and drawing

Art

Lucia Nogueira

Drawing Room, London

★★★★☆

Throughout her career, the sculptor Lucia Nogueira made drawings, often in ink and watercolour, and these are the focus of the first British exhibition devoted to the Brazilian-born artist since her death, at the age of 48, in 1998. Drawing was, for Nogueira, always an act of discovery.

Some works here are directly related to the forms of her sculpture and installation works — things dangle as if from the horizon or a washing line; forms are laid out in loose grids, or are isolated on the paper as they might have been in the emptiness of the gallery, without clear indication of scale or material.

While some drawings depict the kind of thing she often used in her sculpture — retorts and test tubes, plastic funnels and bits of science apparatus — others relate more to the transformations of an inner imaginary process: rows of buttons become heads, heads are suspended from the wires of headphones, or are transformed into laboratory glass-wear. Bodies are reduced to blobs of black matter on a row of folding chairs.

Everything is figurative, everything an abstraction. In her art, the vulnerable, the delicate and the violent co-existed, often in a single work. The humorous and the sinister went hand in hand, even when she drew such an everyday form as a step-ladder, or an endless row of plus and equals signs, or a helicopter floating on thermals of yellow light. But many of the forms she drew were as unnameable as the objects she made.

We might be reminded at times of Thomas Schütte's drawings, of Eva Hesse or of certain drawings by Beuys. This is because drawing is both a shared and direct language, and as individual as handwriting. Although Nogueira made her career in London, her work shared a great deal with Brazilian art of the later 20th century, not least in her belief in drawing as a language as tactile as it was symbolic and metaphorical.

There's a kind of magic at work here. Over a few dozen works, we trace the development of her ideas and forms, and the physical difficulties her final illness, cancer, presented. Even at the end — when, partly paralysed, she had to learn to draw with her left hand — she had an enviable and consummate sense of touch, placement, invention and contradiction. This show is a lesson in drawing, and the process of creation.

Adrian Searle

Until July 10. Box office: 020-7729 5333.