

who restored the painting to aesthetic completeness enacted a form of institutional, proprietorial care, Kate's redrawn cuts care instead for the political force which motivated Richardson. Alfred Gell theorised that Richardson's attack produced a new work, a contestatory collaboration with Velázquez, and it is this work that *Curtain I-VII* reinscribes, I suggest. As Gell writes, 'The *'Slashed' Rokeby Venus* by Richardson, is, without question, a more powerful image than the old one by Velázquez, though infinitely less aesthetic, because the image bears traces which testify directly to, rather than simply represent, the violence women endure [...] The restoration of the picture to its original condition, though of course necessary and desirable, was also a means of re-erecting the barrier which prevents such images from troubling us unduly, politically, sexually, or in any other way.'<sup>8</sup>

Can drawing cut through that barrier to troubling images and experiences – 'not just the perfect moments,' as Jo Spence put it?<sup>9</sup> At the heart of what Kate tries to do in her work is an aspiration to the drawn line as cutting and joining at once, a kind of radical care. This is why drawing still offers her the room to ask questions of the spaces we live in as well as the images we live with.

DR DOMINIC PATERSON (HISTORY OF ART, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW)

- 1 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Corpus', in *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p.51.
- 2 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, (London: Vintage, 2000), p.8.
- 3 Jo Spence, 'Photography Workshop,' in *Putting Myself in the Picture: A Political, Personal and Photographic Autobiography*, (London: Camden Press, 1986), p.64.
- 4 Jo Spence, 'Beyond the Family Album,' in *ibid*, p.92.
- 5 Ann Bermingham, *Learning to Draw: Studies in the Cultural History of a Polite and Useful Art*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.159.
- 6 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Fifty-eight Indices on the Body,' in *Corpus*, op. cit., p.155.
- 7 Cited in Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, (London: Reaktion, 1997), pp.94-95.
- 8 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.64.
- 9 Jo Spence, 'Facing up to Myself', *Spare Rib*, No. 68 (March 1978), pp.6-9.

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**Kate Davis**, b. 1977, NZ, based in Glasgow.

**Recent solo exhibitions:** Galerie Kamm, Berlin; GoMA, Glasgow; Museo de la Ciudad, Queretaro; La Galeria de Comercio, Mexico City; CCA, Glasgow (with Faith Wilding); Sorcha Dallas, Glasgow; Art Now, Tate Britain; Kunsthalle Basel.

**Selected group exhibitions:** *eva International 2012* (curated by Annie Fletcher), Limerick; *Sanctuary/Comraich* (curated by Sophie Crichton Stuart and James Mackay), Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute; *The End of the Line: Attitudes in Drawing*, a Hayward Touring Exhibition; Art Sheffield 10 (with Jimmy Robert); Das Gespinst, Städtisches Museum Abteiberg Monchengladbach; *Poetical Political*, Simon Lee Gallery, London; *Like Leaves*, Tanya Bondakar Gallery (curated by Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith), New York and *If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution*, De Appel Amsterdam.

**Recent awards:** Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship; Creative Scotland Visual Arts Development Bursary; Artist Residencies at Camden Arts Centre, London; Banff Arts Center, Canada and Cove Park, Scotland.

**Forthcoming projects:** Group exhibition at Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico (curated by Adam Szymczyk); solo exhibition at Temporary Gallery, Cologne (curated by Regina Barunke).

**Exhibition open: Tues–Fri 11–6, Sat 12–6**

**Sat 19 Jan, 1.30–5.30pm**

*'I Wish I Could Draw'*

Artists' Forum and Workshop with contributions from Kate Davis, Jimmy Robert and others to be confirmed. Open to all. Visit [www.drawingroom.org.uk/events/events.php](http://www.drawingroom.org.uk/events/events.php) for further information.

**Mon 21 Jan, 6.30pm**

Kate Davis in conversation with Roger Malbert, Senior Curator, Hayward Touring, Southbank Centre, London. He is working on exhibitions: 'Mark Leckey Curates: The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things', and 'Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing', curated by Brian Dillon. He is also writing a book about contemporary drawing. Book online: [www.drawingroom.org.uk/events/events.php](http://www.drawingroom.org.uk/events/events.php)



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*Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book). This touch is infinitely indirect, deferred – machines, vehicles, photocopies, eyes, still other hands are all interposed – but it continues as a slight, resistant, fine texture, the infinitesimal dust of a contact, everywhere interrupted and pursued. In the end, here and now, your own gaze touches the same traces of characters as mine, and you read me, and I write you. Somewhere this takes place.*<sup>1</sup>

One of the most admirable features of Kate Davis's art practice is how directly it brings an exploration of the possibilities for representing lived, subjective, affective experience into contact with a critical questioning of history and art history. I feel vividly aware of this as I write these words in the living room of the home Kate and I share; a markedly different context to the Drawing Room. How to relate the private space in which I write to the public one where the exhibition will reside? I cannot, as Kate's husband, refer to her impersonally as 'Davis' without implying an objectivity I do not possess, but I am wary too of turning a more intimate mode of address into a rhetorical device. Barthes writes of the 'uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical.'<sup>2</sup> I think that drawing is the medium which allows Kate to expose the two registers, expressiveness and criticality, to each other, and to open out an intimacy which is at the core of her practice – an intimacy with specific images that emerges in the days and weeks she dedicates to making drawings that marry calm precision with deeply felt love, anger, protest, or ambivalence. I wish I could touch in writing the way she draws; this text will try at least to trace some of Kate's concerns.

Let's start with what's immediately at hand. This booklet features images not included in *Not Just the Perfect Moments*: a photograph from a book on how to teach children drawing, and a sequence showing a pair of spectacles, the blackened-out lenses of which seem to be pierced by pencils that float free as the frames are gradually effaced. These images introduce the exhibition by placing a subtle emphasis on pedagogy, and proposing drawing as – at least potentially – a disruption of our usual ways of seeing; as a tactile as well as a visual medium; as a translation of the act of one subject touching another (in every sense); or even as a kind of 'extramission' in which the pencil embodies those rays once thought to be sent out from the eye in the

act of looking. Might drawing open a space where senses, subjects, and bodies touch, however indirectly?

Like several pieces in the exhibition, the pencil-glasses have a strong relationship to the exemplary work and thought of Jo Spence (1934–82). Specifically, they reference the 'Welliflex', a Wellington boot turned into a usable camera that was created in a children's workshop with the aim of encouraging a 'self-reliant, non-fetishistic, low-cost approach to the tools and materials of photography.'<sup>3</sup> For her 2011 exhibition at Glasgow's GoMA, Kate made *Reversibility (Welliflex with HB versions)*, a drawing of Spence's eponymous gadget, accompanied by an ordinary wellie with pencil and eraser attached. The work asks whether Spence's trenchant feminist critique, demystification, and revisioning of photography might be applicable to drawing too.



*Having Put Herself in the Picture* (2012), turned Spence's book *Putting Myself in the Picture* into a camera which photographs its own reflection, propped on filing boxes in Glasgow Women's Library; Kate then drew the resultant figure-like image. *Reversibility...* (2011), titled after a term used by conservators for the principle of making only those reparative additions which can later be undone, is a digital print of a painstaking drawing of (a photograph of) two of Spence's works in museum storage. These works are shown alongside new drawings of the Jo Spence Memorial Archive as it resides in the home of Spence's former partner, Terry Dennett. I think that Kate is always asking questions of her drawings, and that the drawings themselves pose these questions, making them public, rather than answering them. The works which relate to Spence ask where and how her body of work should be cared for, and how Kate's own practice relates both to the institutional



imperative to materially preserve the past (which might see Spence wrongly sequestered in the archives of art), and to Dennett's personal dedication to keeping her work alive. Though Kate uses representational drawing to raise this question, she shares Spence's suspicion of what, and how, images represent. Writing of the way the face is 'supposedly the repository of our character' and therefore frequently photographed, Spence states: 'Quite clearly how it is photographed and by whom is a matter for some concern. Quite clearly also it cannot possibly represent us, even though we are taught that it can.'<sup>4</sup> The possibility of politically, subjectively, just representations is tested, not assumed, in Kate's practice. Representational drawing is a way of drawing others – such as Spence – into that testing.

These concerns are visible too in the works which present Kate's copying of images of bodies taken from 18th- and 19th-century instructional drawing books. These images, with their intensely strange arrangements of body parts, their uncanny juxtapositions of life and death, are combined with contemporary 'stock' photographs and exhibited on structures which recall the tools by which drawn marks might be erased, contested or redrawn. Stock images are useful – marketable – precisely insofar as they are unremarkable, generic, re-usable, and legible through existing ideological lenses. Bringing these images into contact with copied drawings suggests a taking stock of the history of drawing and of its pedagogy. Ann Bermingham offers a detailed, genealogical account of how drawing functioned in this period as a discursive space marked by class tensions and gender inequalities. She shows how the commercial, amateur status of the copying exercises which 'accomplished' women were encouraged to practice was deemed to disqualify their drawings as properly artistic creations. In copying, Bermingham notes, the female amateur's subjectivity is 'effaced through the reproduction of work done elsewhere. The woman amateur is not fully present in her work.'<sup>5</sup> As if to redress this, Kate literally 'puts herself in the picture' in the *Rudiment* series of photographs, where her own face is juxtaposed with instructional drawings of eyes, ears, and lips. What is represented here, however, is not the 'full presence' of a complete body, but something like what Nancy calls a 'corpus' – 'a collection of pieces, bits, members, zones, states, functions [...] whose unity remains a question for itself.'<sup>6</sup> Kate's body of work might indeed be a corpus in this sense.

In *Curtain I-VII* (2011), as in the earlier *Disgrace* drawings, where Kate traced the outline of her body over a number of reproductions of Modigliani nudes,

an ostensibly iconoclastic act becomes a reparative gesture, a caring for subjective and political experiences veiled in the 'perfect' aesthetic image. *Curtain...* consists of seven framed posters derived from reproductions of Velázquez's *Toilet of Venus*. These have been adapted to make visible the traces of militant Suffragette Mary Raleigh Richardson's 1914 attack on the work, which she explained as an effort 'to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the government for destroying Mrs Pankhurst, the most beautiful character in modern history.'<sup>7</sup> Rather than simply redrawing Richardson's incisions, Kate made successive photocopies of the only extant photograph of the damaged canvas, so that with each the image becomes more warped and abstracted. As the very technology that enables the reproduction and dissemination of Richardson's act threatens to obscure it, the cuts are then drawn back in. If the conservators

