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Drawing Room, Tannery Arts, 12 Rich Estate, Crimscott Street, London SE1 5TE , 26 Jun 2012

## Graphology



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**Artist :** Brian O'Doherty

**Title :** Portrait of Marcel Duchamp

**Date(s) :** 1966

**Dimensions :** 10.5 x 5.7 x 4 cm

**Material :** Cardiogram reading, cardboard box

**Website :** [www.drawingroom.org.uk](http://www.drawingroom.org.uk)

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### 'Graphology' at The Drawing Room Review by Gloriana Riggioni

Step into the room and it's Fiona Banner's 'Mother' (2009) that exerts the initial pull, impossible to resist as you hear the mag still scrambling for your bearings: you can interact with the piece. An old typewriter sits at the ready on its plinth. Next to it, a

perfectly aligned stack of paper teases the appetite of anyone with the slightest creative inclination. Immediately, you feel compelled to leave your mark. You search your brain for the appropriately witty/meaningful/obscure thought that will act as your distinctive evidence forever after of your contribution to the artwork. You crack your knuckles and wiggle your fingers as you prepare to interact with the machine with the force of your unique personality... and that's as far as you get. Staring back at you like a metaphorical middle finger, the letter keys F, U, C and K, repeated in continuous succession. Stripped of a voice, if you then proceed to interact with the machine so subserviently, as a force more mechanical even than the machine, conceding to become mere kinetic energy in the process about an already predetermined script. The trace on the page is thus the product of an inverted interaction, where the text disappears and remains its own master.

Banner's piece sets the perfect tone for an exhibition full of double bluffs and questioning of the status and authorship of the text. In every image, every text presented, the notion of its pre-determination is brought home with the awareness of the process by which it was created. On the wall hangs 'Pocket Drawing' (2000) by William Anastasi, a piece which delegates authorship to serendipity itself. The first few lines appear to be eight pointless scribbles in a frame, take on great significance with the realisation of their genesis by a process of stuffing ingredients in a magic bag and shaking it. The act of putting pencil and paper in his pocket and simply walking around with it as an artist in just as subservient a position as previously the viewer with the typewriter: he merely sets the elements in motion, before relinquishing all creative control. The scribbles can thus be deemed an imprint of fate, the record of chance determination.

Several other pieces in the room can be understood in terms of the complete abnegation by the artist of the power to design. 'Corner Piece' (2011) and Paul Sharits' 'Untitled' (1977) seem to be the product of a topographical and a sound record respectively that came into being by design of an occurrence in nature. Anthony McCall's 'Pencil Duration' (1974), on its part, takes a step further and attempts to relinquish control at the level of consciousness, allowing his hand to act freely without the agency of his rational mind. Meanwhile, Pierre Bismuth leaves it up to a film record of the movement of Sigmund Freud's right hand to decide the trajectory of the drawing (2009).

The record of shapes by means of a photogram on a film strip can be just as undermining of human agency when compared to taking a photograph. In a still presentation of sections of Man Ray's 1923 film 'La Retour á la Raison', it becomes clear that the shape of the shadow through light is not a representation but a direct imprint, in some way executed by the object itself. Juxtaposed with images of a human body in expressive, theatrical poses, a sense of make-belief and arbitration is highlighted in the contrasting photography. The placement of the strips over horizontal light boxes adds a further twist to the agency factor, turning them into ready-made sculpture and thus highlighting the materiality of the trace rather than its content.

In a similar way, Mekhitar Garabedian's 'fig. a, a comme alphabet' (2012) literally spells out the transformation of traces on a material substance. By using the image of his scribbled letters on lined paper as the motif for a 3x2m rug, he transforms them from an object of aesthetic contemplation. The result is a kind of conceptual piece of applied art that reassesses the properties of text to act as signified rather than signifier. Likewise, Brian O'Doherty's 'Portrait of Marcel Duchamp' presents a strip of cardiogram as ready-made sculpture. This goes a step further in eliminating its original condition as a signifier, by displaying it rolled up within a frame that most of the actual trace remains hidden.

The case of Julia Borinski's 'In the soul of film' (2010) differs from the above concerns with the authorship and status of the trace, but is worthy of note for its sheer poetic value. Her concern lies in with the pre-determinacy of the image in that she aims to reveal what is already present, yet impossible to detect with the naked eye. Twelve photographs taken with an Electron Microscope present an amplification of a corner of what appears to be a sprocket hole on a film strip. A blemish that seems wholly insignificant to begin with, develops into what can only be described as a prodigious abyss. It promotes a sense of awe and sublimation that come about as the viewer experiences a glimpse of infinity (something akin to the visualization of the vastness of distant galaxies or the complex Mandelbrot fractal [1] ), for the notion that an unseen universe can physically materialise with a simple shift in perspective is indeed a powerful one.

In all, 'Graphology' presents a view of artistic production as a kind of Library of Babel [2], where all that is text and image is in fact the product of a creative power intrinsic in the fabric of the universe which the artist merely sets in motion.

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[1] Mandelbrot set: visual example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G6uO7ZHtK8&feature=related>, definition <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11564766>, definition <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11564766>

[2] Short story by Jorge Luis Borges, 1941.

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