

BEST KEPT SECRETS

LONDON MUSEUMS: DRAWING ROOM

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Located in the depths of Bermondsey is a gallery secret that is both well kept and extremely well hidden. An average 20-minute walk away from any tube line, [Drawing Room](#) is reached by wandering through the slightly schizophrenic discombobulation of industrial architecture that seems to characterise much of South East London. Only after growing increasingly doubtful of finding a notable contemporary art gallery amidst warehouses, storage spaces, car parks and disorienting council estates do I spot the large signboard announcing Europe's only public non-profit gallery dedicated to contemporary drawing. Yet, occupying a unique and pivotal place on London's contemporary art scene, Drawing Room is very worth the ambulant adventure.

Drawing Room's aim is to [explore ideas around contemporary drawing and make them visible in the public domain](#). Since the dawn of man, drawing has formed the foundation of human creativity; invariably considered by artists the most prehistoric (Keith Haring), honest (Dali) and technically challenging (Ingres) method of making art. Yet it has chronically suffered from a reputation as either the mere preamble to the production of a 'real' final work, or as belonging to the 'non-art' realms of illustration, design or amateur doodling. Drawing remains undervalued – by the market as much as in academia – yet is crucial to an up-and-coming generation of contemporaries that has shown a resurgence of interest in the medium. This group includes artists ARTUNER has exhibited such as [Nick Mauss](#), [Michael Armitage](#) and [Frank Ammerlaan](#), each of whom have exhibited and collaborated with Drawing Room. The non-profit gallery's explorations are fuelled by the importance that artists attach to drawing, their support taking the form of, for example, donations of work to the gallery's [Drawing Biennial](#) and auction, set to return March 2 – April 26, 2017.

Since 2002, when curators Mary Doyle, Kate Macfarlane and Katharine Stout initiated Drawing Room to provide the major European resource for examining contemporary drawing, the gallery has acted as a catalyst to test the parameters of the medium and support the production of new work by artists, writers and curators. It is of invaluable academic importance, especially since the 2013 opening of its **Outset Study**: an open-access research hub comprising a specialist library with unique editions and resources unavailable anywhere else. Furthermore, Drawing Room's inter-institutional exhibition programme exposes how drawing underpins the most experimental, radical and interdisciplinary of art practices. This was recently illustrated by the noteworthy 2015 exhibition **The Naked**s, which featured Egon Schiele, Carol Rama and Louise Bourgeois alongside Paul McCarthy and Tracey Emin. Its current collaboration **Double Take**, takes place simultaneously at Drawing Room and **The Photographers' Gallery** and illustrates how artists have intermeshed, cross-fertilised and *doubled* the two most instant, unadulterated media they can use to engage with the world: photography and drawing.

For the Drawing Room's exhibition space – literally a single room – the curators have chosen existing work by **Dove Allouche**, **Thomas Zummer**, **Josh Brand**, and **Tacita Dean** and new, especially commissioned work by **Margarita Gluzberg** and **Matt Saunders**. The show underlines the ways in which contemporary drawing and photography share striking points of reference: both involving the direct exposure of a blank sheet of paper to the mark-making of an apparatus – camera or pencil. Both engage with surface, light, the mapping of positive and negative form in shadows and highlights; and both indexically trace and evidence touch –

either of light or of the human hand.

Thomas Zummer's charcoal *Portraits of Robots* imitate photographs of lifeless machinery, edited in the artist's mind during rapid execution to result in photo-realist renderings of uncanny beings with emotive, seemingly human presences. Drawing here has taken on the form – and the aura – of traditional portrait photography. Inversely, Tacita Dean imitates drawing with photography in six unframed fibre-based prints that form an unassuming grid of photographs of 'found drawings' by Giorgio Morandi. The Italian artist produced these sheets through incidental mark-making to keep objects in his studio in the right position for his still-lives. Like Zummer, Dean's formal play with the two media imbues otherwise unremarkable aspects of reality with a new, genre-bending mystery.

Instead of imitating and re-presenting one aesthetic with the other, the remaining artists at Drawing Room break down the divide between the artistic operations of drawing and photography entirely. Matt Saunders produces dream-like visions of nostalgic interiors by developing his own DIY ('draw-it-yourself?') ink-on-plastic negatives. Dove Allouche radically obliterates process distinctions with his *Spore drawings*: five elusive, visceral surfaces that show the artist drawing with silver oxide, ethanol and lamp-blacks – sunk deep into the paper support – to mark what a silver-gelatin-devouring fungus had previously done to archived photographic prints. Allouche uses the fugitive materials from the early days of photography to draw transient sky-scapes – changeable like the weather – that both undermine medium-specificity and emphasise the ultimate fragility of both the mediums' physical constitutions.

Much of *Double Take* eludes quick consumption or easy interpretation. Yet it is its disorienting mix of materials, processes, aesthetics – the excursion of one medium's activities into the domain of another – that leads to greater engagement with each, inspiring the desirable doubling not only of looks, but of thoughts too.

Double Take is on at the Drawing Room until 12 June 2016.

The gallery is open Tues – Fri 11am–6pm & Sat and Sun 12 – 6pm

Entry is free.

Double Take at **The Photographers' Gallery** lasts until 3 July 2016 and includes works by: Anna Barriball, Pierre Bismuth, Marcel Broodthaers, Paul Chiappe, Richard Forster, Jolanda Havelkova, Nancy Hellebrand, Lisa Junghanß, Běla Kolářová, László Moholy-Nagy, Jiří Thýn. More info [here](#)

Images in order of appearance:

Drawing Room exterior. Photo by author

Drawing Biennial 2016. Photo by Dan Weill.
Image courtesy of Drawing Room

Thomas Zummer, *Study for a Portrait of 'Elektro,' Smoking (No. 2) 1939, 2005*
Image courtesy of Drawing Room

Thomas Zummer, *Study for a Portrait of 'Robonaut,' NASA (no.1.) 2002*
Image courtesy of Drawing Room

Tacita Dean, *Still Life III, 2009*
Image courtesy of Frith Street Gallery, London

Dove Allouche, *Spores 4, 2014*
Image courtesy of Gaudel de Stampa, Paris

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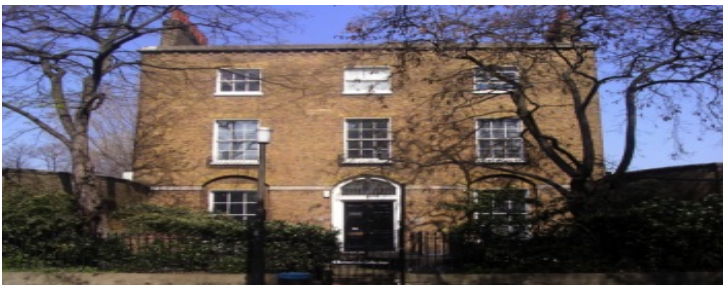
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