

Kiera O'Toole – a fragile intensity

In the fascinating exhibition *You'll Never Know: Drawing and Random Interference* curators Jeni Walwin and Henry Krokatsis chose drawing as a way of considering randomness, chance and the drawn mark. Importantly for them in the case of their show, and equally significant when we think about the works of Kiera O'Toole, randomness provides a system to allow us to find the unexpected. While harnessing chance can bring us on an intriguing journey, Walwin and Krokatsis importantly suggest that this might not be enough. They state that “Randomness for its own sake is not interesting. It's the right kind of randomness – the kind that resonates in a relevant way ... that's important.”¹ With this sentiment they converge with the work of O'Toole. As her drawing practice evidences this relevance and importance, and goes beyond using only chance – to richer outcomes.

Her compelling drawings and video work operate in a space between using a process outside of her control and then entering in to this action with a measured delicacy and refinement. Her work reads as an open and generous act responding to a disruptive set of elements that coalesce and point towards something greater outside of the drawing process alone. In this sense we could consider her work as having an engagement with the legacy of experimental process led drawing practices associated with high moments of conceptualism. Similar, on an initial reading, to intentions in the process works of William Anastasi subway and walking drawings² or Richard Serra's thrown molten lead drawings.³ In these examples the act and conditions of the drawing dictate the outcome of the work. But this is only half the case in O'Toole's approach to both her drawing process and the range of subject matter she brings to her practice.

There is also, rewardingly, in her working process the next stage. Here she intuitively and aesthetically adds to what has already emerged through the earlier employment of chance. Through her considered actions of incising, cutting or puncturing the drawings surface, or the removing of geometric patterns, the additional mark-making, or indeed the blowing of pigment in response to the initial system she sets in place, O'Toole creates and communicates a richer experience in how she draws and what she draws. As artist and writer Patricia Cain points out that this double staging of drawing provides an enhanced engagement and outcome. One that might initially involve ambiguity “... in the initial tacit act of externalising a drawing, whilst a second more explicit process, could resolve ambiguity.”⁴ O'Toole's drawing method offers a space for her to be informed by the work and equally for her to inform the work. But the drawing still possess Cain's call for a rich ambiguity that allows us, as an audience, to be informed by the decisions she has made in the drawing. Her drawings do not stand only as sequential stages denoting a process, but as entities that have their own material history and sets of artistic intentions.

1 From the conversation between Walwin and Krokatsis, page 15 of the exhibition catalogue *You'll Never Know: Drawing and Random Interference*, 2006.

2 Anastasi provides a clear account of his working method in his 2012 interview with Rachel Nackman for *Notations: Contemporary Drawing as Idea and Process*, see the link <http://notations.aboutdrawing.org/william-anastasi/>

3 For a brief description of this work see [*To Collect*](#) by Samantha Friedman, on the link http://www.moma.org/explore/inside_out/2011/10/20/to-collect

4 Cain discusses this fully in her text *Drawing as Coming to Know*, available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/microsites/sota/tracey/journal/ambi/images/cain.pdf>

The three strands of Kiera's practice in this show demonstrate a considered pursuit of drawing across media and materials, each form sharing a particular intimacy and a persuasive intensity. This concept of intensity is, as Alain Badiou points out, a key property of drawing. For him "A Drawing is fragile. But it creates a very intense fragility."⁵ The focus this suggests is most suited to her interest in the re-use of emblematic burial and funereal imagery. The history of the drawings production over time parallels the temporal experience of the burial markers and structures over time. Each maintaining a significance outside of their own function and aesthetic, a significance that points to entropy and fragility.

That O'Toole brings all these competing elements and more to her work is an assured performance. This enriched process provides us with something that is more than an interaction with chance, yet still it is something we feel lucky to receive. It is also one that emerges far from mere chance or randomness.

Dr. Brian Fay
Lecturer and Assistant Head of School
Dublin School of Creative Arts
DIT Grangegorman

⁵□The full version of Badiou's text on drawing is available at <http://lacan.com/symptom12/?p=65>