

A British Museum touring exhibition

**Pushing Paper:
Contemporary drawing from 1970 to
now**

Welcome to the online resource for *Pushing Paper: contemporary drawing from 1970 to now*, here you can find out more about the artists and exhibition.

Although this exhibition is currently closed to the public at the Oriental Museum, Durham University, you may get the chance to see it at the other UK partner venues: Pier Arts Centre in Stromness, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery in Swansea and Cooper Gallery in Barnsley.

[Find out more about the touring exhibition programme.](#)

Introduction

Since the 1970s, drawing has been at the forefront of artistic practice, no longer regarded as preparatory, but rather as a fully independent medium. Over the past 50 years, the definition of drawing has continually expanded, encroaching on territories traditionally associated with other mediums including sculpture, installation art and even performance.

Artists are increasingly choosing drawing as a means to examine the modern world, with topics ranging from investigations of gender and political activism to questions of belonging and human sexuality.

This exhibition explores the significance of drawing to some of the most important contemporary artists from across the globe.

The display's five sections explore themes of power and protest; systems and process; place and space; identity; and time and memory.

The British Museum has co-curated this exhibition with partner museums from around the UK, including Durham University.

In a new way of working, curatorial staff from the partner museums collaborated to decide on themes within the exhibition and to research and select the works on display from more than 1,500 contemporary drawings in the British Museum's collection.

Supported by the Bridget Riley Art Foundation.

Watch a film tour of the exhibition [here!](#)



Theme one
Power and Protest

Throughout history, social and political unrest has prompted a response from artists. There is something democratic and unmediated in the act of drawing: anyone can create their own poster or placard, or graffiti a wall to make a public protest.

This section displays artists who have used drawing as a way of processing and questioning the turbulent world around them.

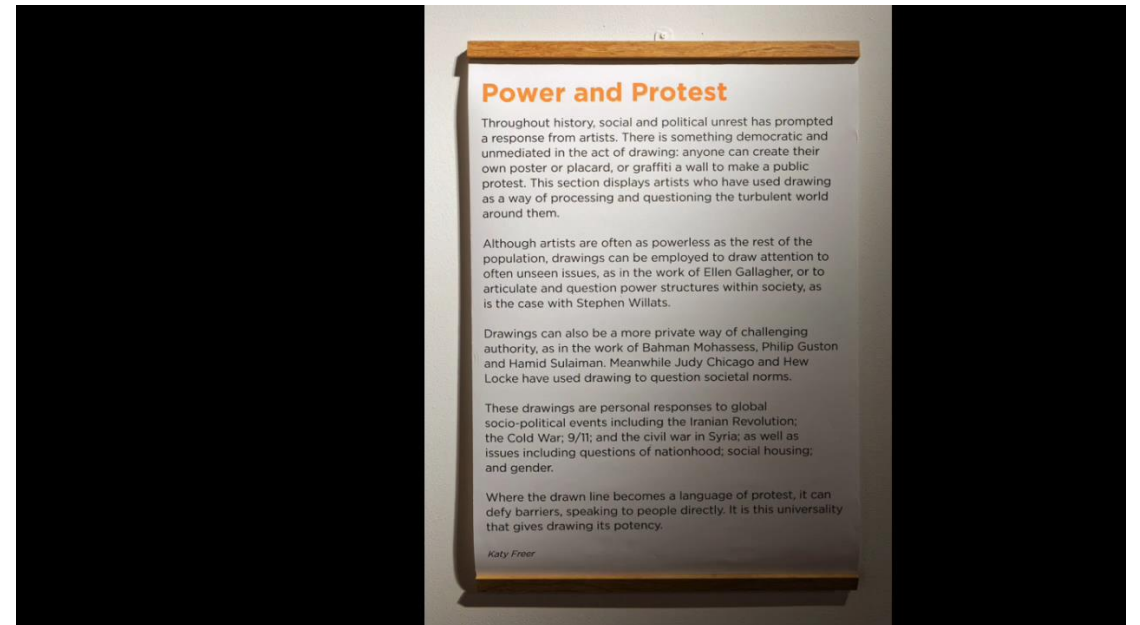
Although artists are often as powerless as the rest of the population, drawings can be employed to draw attention to often unseen issues, as in the work of Ellen Gallagher, or to articulate and question power structures within society, as is the case with Stephen Willats. Drawings can also be a more private way of challenging authority, as in the work of Bahman Mohassess, Philip Guston and Hamid Sulaiman. Meanwhile Judy Chicago and Hew Locke have used drawing to question societal norms.

These drawings are personal responses to global socio-political events including the Iranian Revolution; the Cold War; 9/11; and the civil war in Syria; as well as issues including questions of nationhood; social housing; and gender.

Where the drawn line becomes a language of protest, it can defy barriers, speaking to people directly. It is this universality that gives drawing its potency.

Text written by Katy Freer, Exhibitions Officer, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.

Watch the Power and Protest exhibition film [here!](#)

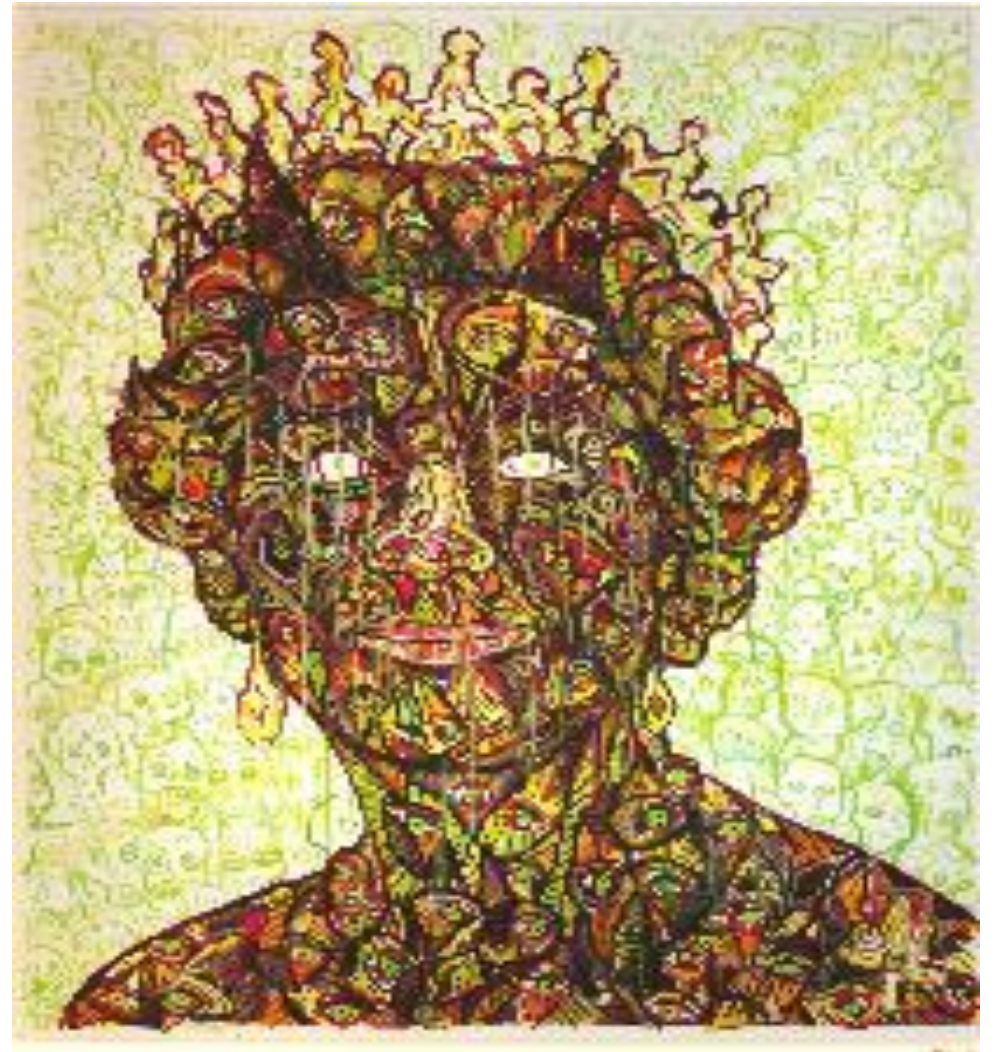


Theme highlight – Hew Locke

British royalty, the Queen in particular, has been a fascination for Locke since his early childhood in post-colonial Guyana, where the head of Elizabeth II was on his school exercise books and on signs and statues all around him. This drawing is part of his ongoing series of drawings and sculptural assemblages, House of Windsor. Locke has described the Queen as a keeper of ‘political secrets’ for more than sixty years, with her lips tightly shut.

The corrosive effects of that secrecy and power can be seen in this head of Elizabeth, tattooed with hundreds of eyes (some morphing into the shape of the devil), her head adorned by devilish horns. Drawn in acid colours that drip down the sheet, the portrait has a background of laughing, gurning skulls. These may refer to Renaissance portraits of royalty, which sometimes included skulls or skeletons as a memento mori. Through this drawing Locke asks us to question the Queen as a symbol of nationhood, as well as the power and history that she embodies.

2005,1031.5 Funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation



Hew Locke (b. 1959), *Sovereign 3*, 2005, watercolour
© The Trustees of the British Museum.
Reproduced by permission of the artist
British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Philip Guston

This drawing is from Guston's satirical series Poor Richard: around 180 works mostly drawn in the summer of 1971, charting the seemingly inexorable rise of the 37th President of the United States, Richard Nixon. Guston reduces Nixon to a bloated testicular head with a flaccid phallic nose. Spiro Agnew, his hapless Vice President, and constant golfer, is depicted as a blockhead propped up by bent golf clubs, and with golf tees, or nails, tacked in his back. Nixon's closest advisor, Henry Kissinger, is portrayed as a pair of crab-like spectacles. All three appear washed up on a beach or golf bunker.

Inspired by conversations with his friend Philip Roth, whose fierce anti-Nixon satire *Our Gang* was published in 1971, Guston mocks one of America's most divisive politicians a year before his re-election by a landslide. Guston's fury and disgust was fuelled by his country's failure to see Nixon's paranoia and duplicity, even before the Watergate scandal erupted in 1972. His visceral depictions of a beached president were remarkably prescient, and skill in mockery remains a potent tool for artists wishing to puncture the aura of power.



Philip Guston (1913 – 1980), *Untitled*, 1971, ink on paper
© The Trustees of the British Museum
Reproduced by permission of the artist's estate
British Museum, London

Theme highlight - Sun Mu

Sun Mu is not the real name of this artist, but a pseudonym that translates as 'the absence of borders'. The artist's name represents his belief in the ability of art to transcend limits, but also the physical border that keeps the Korean people separated. The artist often hides his identity afraid his family may face reprisals for his art. Sun Mu previously created propa-ganda for the North Korean communist government. Now he produces parodies of the regime, printed digitally for wider consumption and influence. This digital print, *Landscape of North Korea* (2015), presents a portrait of a smiling Kim Jong II, its title hinting towards the pastoral. It is only upon closer inspection that the satirical nature of the portrait is fully realised; reflected in Kim Jong II's sunglasses are scenes of devastation and war, the blood red background taking on a sinister interpretation.

DUROM.2017.179, Purchase



Sun Mu (born DPRK, dates unknown)
Landscape of North Korea, 2015
Digital print on paper
Durham University Collection

Theme two

Systems and Process

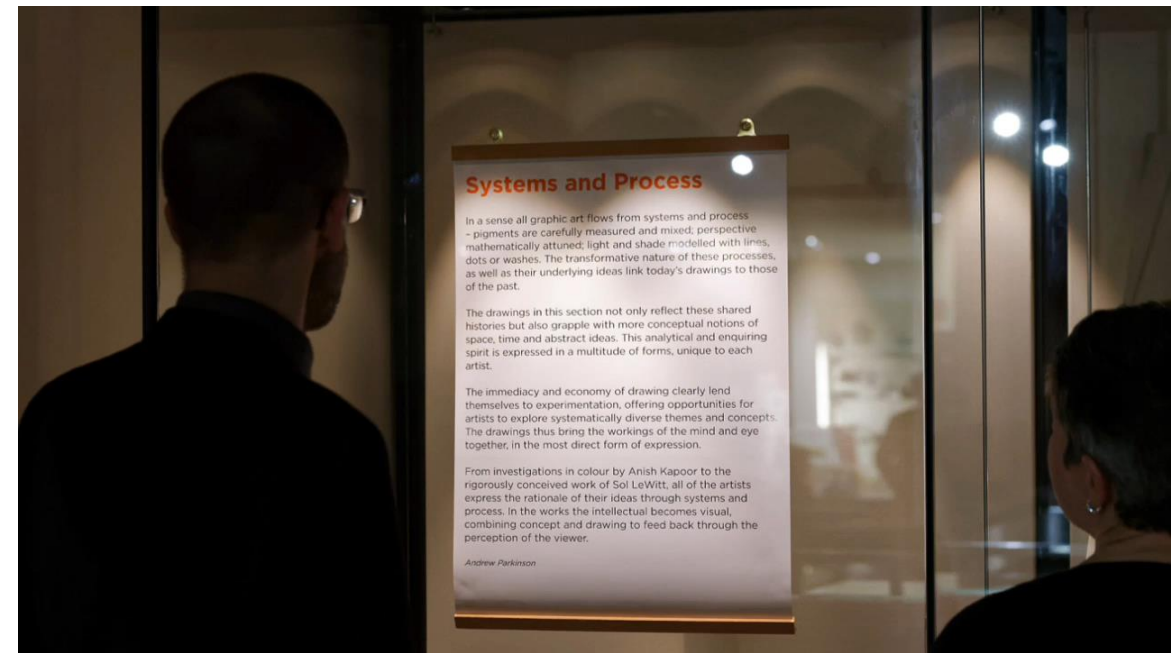
In a sense all graphic art flows from systems and process- pigments are carefully measured and mixed; perspective mathematically attuned; light and shade modelled with lines, dots or washes. The transformative nature of these processes, as well as their underlying ideas link today's drawings to those of the past.

The drawings in this section not only reflect these shared histories but also grapple with more conceptual notions of space, time and abstract ideas. This analytical and enquiring spirit is expressed in a multitude of forms, unique to each artist. The immediacy and economy of drawing clearly lend themselves to experimentation, offering opportunities for artists to explore systematically diverse themes and concepts.

The drawings thus bring the workings of the mind and eye together, in the most direct form of expression. In the works the intellectual becomes visual, combining concept and drawing to feed back through the perception of the viewer.

Text written by Andrew Parkinson, Curator, Pier Arts Centre, Stromness.

Watch the **Systems and Process** exhibition [film here!](#)



Theme highlight – Roger Ackling

In the artist's words, 'This source I'm working with is light. Just as it's about to hit the earth, I put this small lens and catch it and focus it down into a point.' Ackling's work is closely attuned to nature (it could be made only out of doors when the sun shone), creating discreet but beautiful scorched dots – literally impressions of the sun – 'drawn' on wood, found and collected.

While Ackling's system of working changed little over the years, his drawings and sculptures took on many different forms using card, broken branches, scrap or driftwood, depending on the location and the material available. 'It's a very physical activity... But it's a very ephemeral one, because the actual amount of... touching anything else is very minimal.' An hour walk along forest paths... elegantly reflects the experience of walking in a particular place, as well as offering a record and meditation on the passing of time.

2003,0601.119

Bequeathed by David Brown, in memory of Liza Brown



Roger Ackling (born UK, 1947-2014)

An hour walk along forest paths from one shaft of sunlight to the next/
Ashridge Hertfordshire/ May 1978 England, 1978

Sunlight on wood

British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Juliet Haysom

Haysom uses a simple pencil line to pick out the outline of a monstrance, a vessel used in the Roman Catholic Church to display the sacramental Host.

A circular hole is burnt into the paper to represent the symbolic focal point of the monstrance, often made from transparent material. Around this, Haysom creates a 'blind' drawing (looking only at the object being drawn, not the paper), using her fingers as a guide and following the circumference of the hole. From this simple act, uniting absence and presence, the artist makes the form of the monstrance anew.

2005,0630.2

Acquired with the Philip and Psiche Hughes Fund



Juliet Haysom (born UK, 1978)
Blind Monstrance Drawing No. 8, 2003
Graphite on cartridge paper with burnt hole
British Museum, London

Theme three

Place and Space

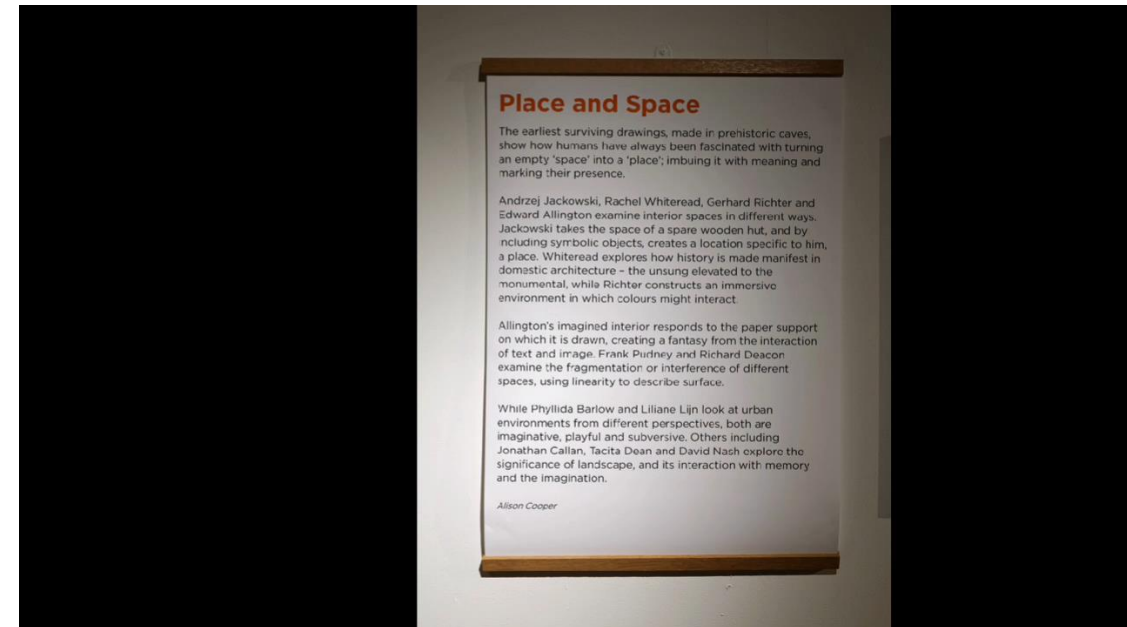
The earliest surviving drawings, made in prehistoric caves, show how humans have always been fascinated with turning an empty 'space' into a 'place'; imbuing it with meaning and marking their presence.

Andrzej Jackowski, Rachel Whiteread, Gerhard Richter and Edward Allington examine interior spaces in different ways. Jackowski takes the space of a spare wooden hut, and by including symbolic objects, creates a location specific to him, a place. Whiteread explores how history is made manifest in domestic architecture – the unsung elevated to the monumental, while Richter constructs an immersive environment in which colours might interact. Allington's imagined interior responds to the paper support on which it is drawn, creating a fantasy from the interaction of text and image. Frank Pudney and Richard Deacon examine the fragmentation or interference of different spaces, using linearity to describe surface.

While Phyllida Barlow and Liliane Lijn look at urban environments from different perspectives, both are imaginative, playful and subversive. Others including Jonathan Callan, Tacita Dean and David Nash explore the significance of landscape, and its interaction with memory and the imagination.

Text written by Alison Cooper, Exhibitions Officer, Barnsley Museums.

Watch the Place and Space exhibition film [here!](#)



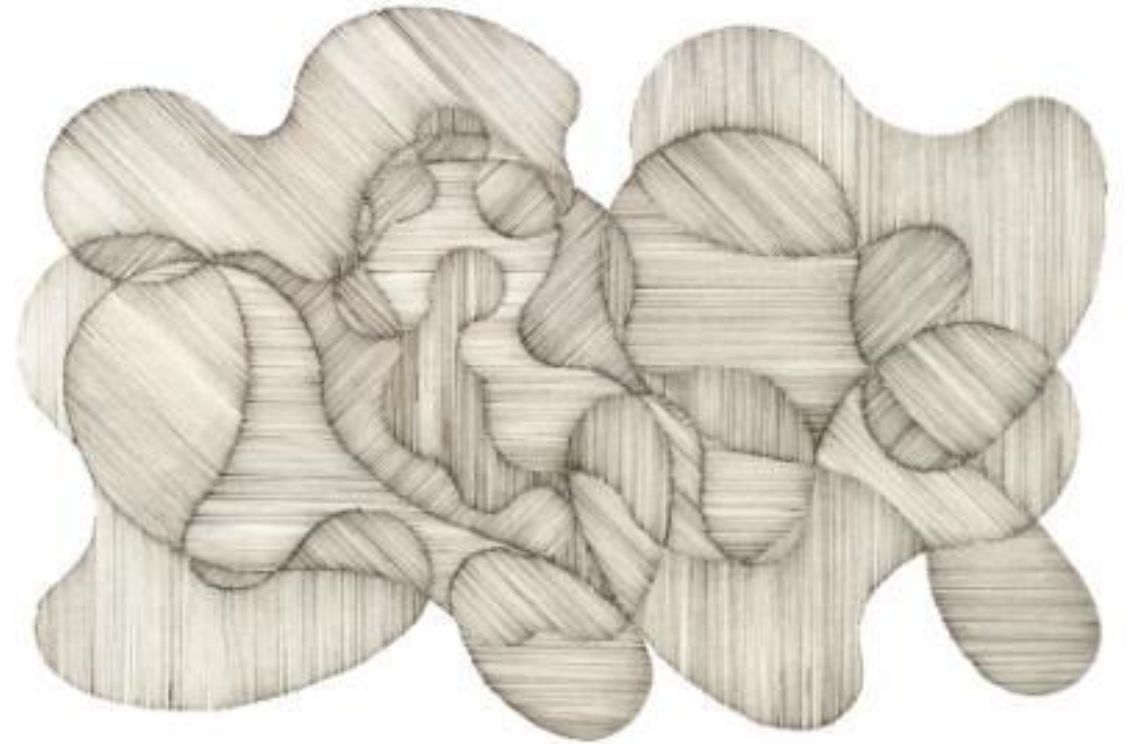
Theme highlight – Richard Deacon

This drawing is one of a group begun during the artist's residency at the Oxford Centre for the Study of Gene Function in 2005. Initially, the drawings were intended to represent multiple surfaces on a flat plane, as if paper were splitting into interconnected layers.

As they developed, the artist realised he was drawing things that were difficult to clarify, which then became the new focus of his work, in his words, an equivalence between 'trying to visualise a complex interwoven surface and the perception of something that is difficult to bring into focus.'

2006,0930.9

Funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation



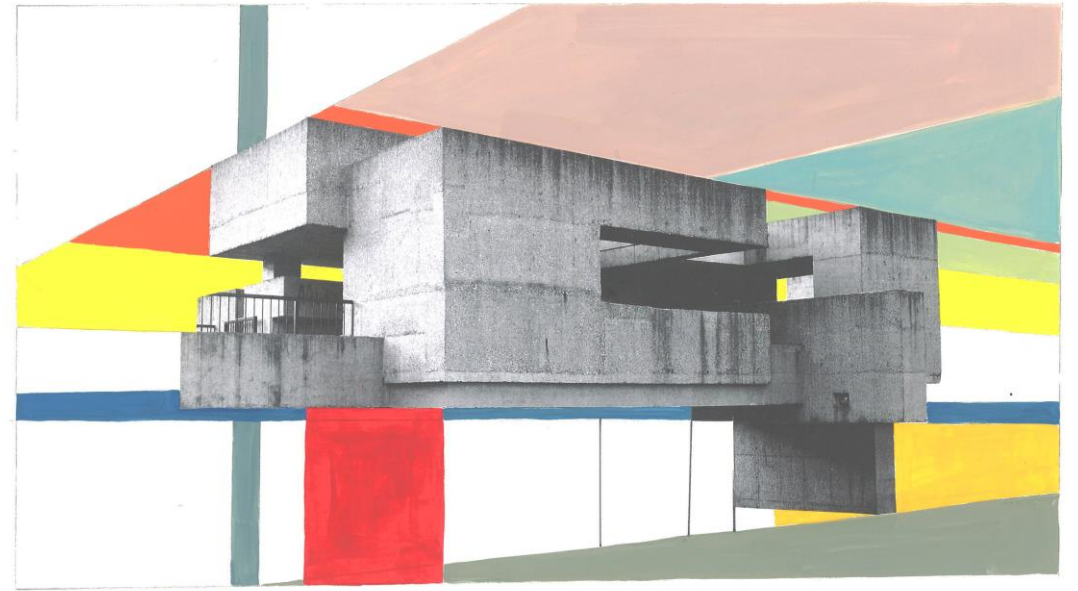
Richard Deacon (b. 1949),
Some interference 14.01.06, 2006,
Ink and graphite on paper
© The Trustees of the British Museum
Reproduced by permission of the artist
British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Jo Stanness

Jo Stanness often uses the brutalist and modernist architecture of the North-East as a central element in her work. Dunelm House and Apollo Pavilion are architectural cut-outs, part of a series of works the artist began in 2015. Initially drawn to the clean lines and geometry of brutalist architecture, the artist found their surrounding urban landscape untrue to their intended form.

Stanness began instead to create her own compositions; 'Architecture can slice through and divide up physical space; I am interested in using images of structures or elements of buildings as a catalyst for the division of pictorial space.' In this work she followed one simple self-imposed rule; 'I only follow or extend lines and angles which already exist within the photographic image.' Using this method, Stanness relates the physicality of architecture to three-dimensional drawing in the landscape.

DURART.2020.12Purchase



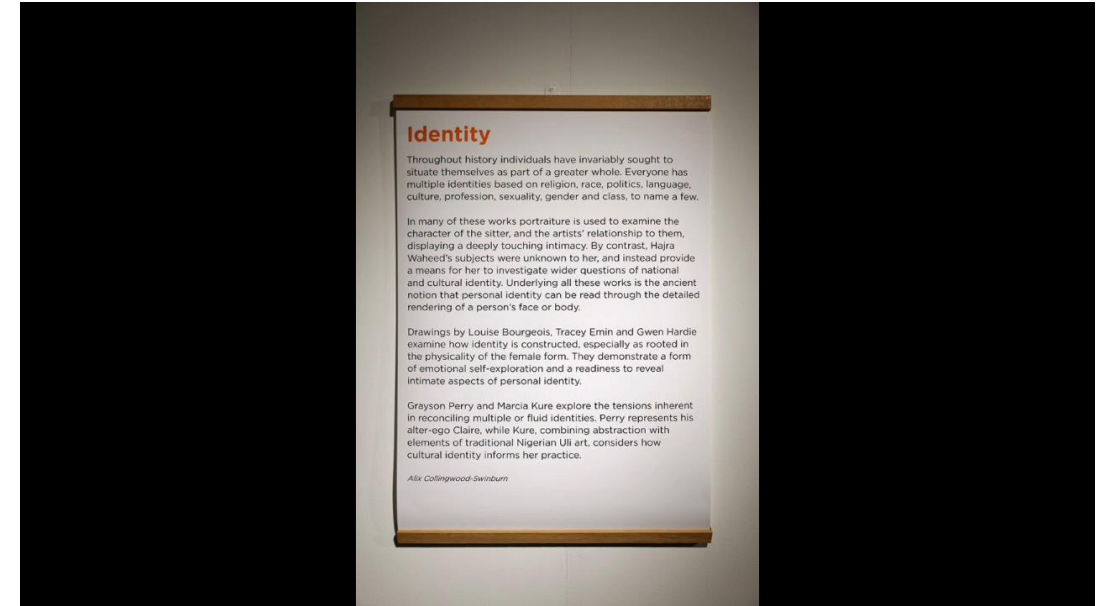
Jo Stanness (born UK, 1979)
Dunelm House, 2018/19, Apollo Pavilion, 2018/19
Collage and acrylic paint on paper
Durham University Collection

Theme four

Identity

Throughout history individuals have invariably sought to situate themselves as part of a greater whole. Everyone has multiple identities based on religion, race, politics, language, culture, profession, sexuality, gender and class, to name a few. In many of these works portraiture is used to examine the character of the sitter, and the artists' relationship to them, displaying a deeply touching intimacy.

By contrast, Hajra Waheed's subjects were unknown to her, and instead provide a means for her to investigate wider questions of national and cultural identity. Underlying all these works is the ancient notion that personal identity can be read through the detailed rendering of a person's face or body. Drawings by Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin and Gwen Hardie examine how identity is constructed, especially as rooted in the physicality of the female form. They demonstrate a form of emotional self-exploration and a readiness to reveal intimate aspects of personal identity.



Watch the Identity exhibition film [here!](#)

Grayson Perry and Marcia Kure explore the tensions inherent in reconciling multiple or fluid identities. Perry represents his alter-ego Claire, while Kure, combining abstraction with elements of traditional Nigerian Uli art, considers how cultural identity informs her practice.

Text written by Alix Collingwood-Swinburn, Curator, Durham University Library & Collections.

Theme highlight - Grayson Perry

This is an early representation of Perry's transvestite alter ego Claire. Claire is shown barefoot, moving like a cat on all fours in a field, with a pink tail. The sky is full of collaged images, including a female mannequin in lingerie and cheesy shots from a teenage magazine showing a couple eating apples and messing around. The leering, balding middle-aged man (the image of a medallion nestling in chest hair seems to be associated with him) is perhaps as trapped as Claire - hemmed in by the shots of the playful Adam and Eve from the late 1970s.

These symbols of cisgender and heteronormative culture are presented as strange and faintly grotesque, in contrast to Claire's uninhibited, animalistic behaviour and knowing facial expression. Wearing a casual outfit of a hooded jacket and rah-rah skirt, Claire flees from these conventions, but her path to the camping site is blocked by a wire fence. The drawing is typical of Perry's practice in its very personal angle on questions relating to identity, gender, sexuality and social class.

2007,7080.1

Funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation



Grayson Perry (b. 1960), *Untitled*, c. 1984,
Coloured crayons, watercolour, gouache, pen and ink, with collage of
photographs, magazine illustrations and silver glitter
© The Trustees of the British Museum
Reproduced by permission of the artist
British Museum, London

Theme highlight - Gwen Hardie

Hardie's often-autobiographical paintings comprise close-ups of the female form, including intense observations of skin. Sharing similarities with prehistoric cave painting, such as the bold and simplified outline, this reclining figure illustrates her longstanding preoccupation with the body and its perception.

Particularly striking are the sharp, nail-like markings beneath the skin's surface, and the focus on genitals and breasts. These evoke a form of symbolic mapping, presenting the physicality of female identity as a complex landscape to be read.

2003,0601.58

Bequeathed by David Brown, in memory of Liza Brown



Gwen Hardie (b.1962), Untitled, 1987,
Charcoal on thin white paper
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Theme highlight - Lady Kitt

Lady Kitt is an artist, activist, performer and researcher based in Newcastle. They use the pronouns they/them. In their Worth series (2016–ongoing) they depict strong and influential women by cutting heart shapes out of £50 banknotes. This is a portrait of Charlotte Roberts, Professor of Archaeology at Durham University. By depicting inspirational women from all walks of life, the series highlights the fields in which women are still underrepresented and experience discrimination.

In the British Museum's collection is a British penny of Edward VII. Stamped across the king's head are the words 'VOTES FOR WOMEN'. It was created in 1913-14, as a form of direct action against the state. By defacing the banknote, Kitt is likewise denouncing the state and suggesting equality should take priority over patronage. Kitt keeps the cut-out hearts, displayed inside a miniature bottle, perhaps in reference to their new-found worth as symbols of love and respect.

DURART.2020.9. Purchase



Lady Kitt (born UK, 1980)
89 Ways You Are Worth More To Me Like This, 2018
Bank note and glass bottle mounted on board
Durham University Collection

Theme highlight – Murni Mo Selle

Murni Mo Selle is a multi-disciplinary artist and social activist, whose practice incorporates film, sound, photography and digital drawing. Her works often explore issues of social divide, identity, gender, eco-consciousness, and the protection of indigenous peoples.

This digital drawing features the image of a woman from the Ainu community, the indigenous inhabitants of Japan. It was only in 2008 that Japan officially recognized the Ainu as an indigenous people, reversing an 1899 action that had declared them 'former Aborigines'.

In creating this print, the artist researched her subject's 'lives' through their digital traces. A self-described 'digital remixer', the artist then used this material to generate the prominent gestural marks and forms.

DUROM.2020.3. Purchase



Murni Mo Selle (born Singapore, 1976)
CultureX Series – Ainu, 2018
Digital print on paper
Durham University Collection

Theme five
Time and Memory

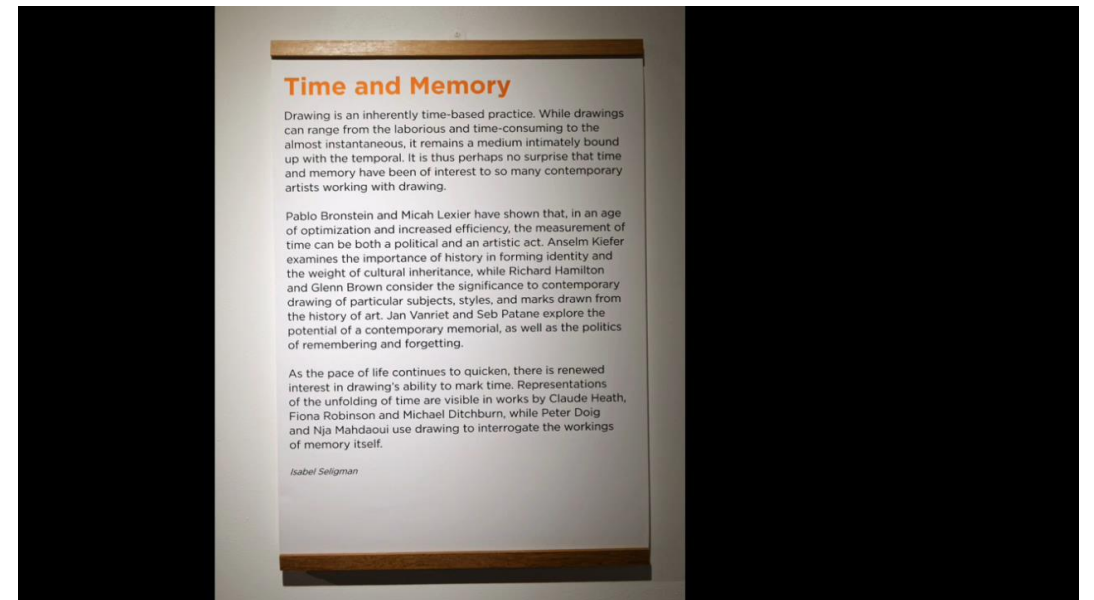
Drawing is an inherently time-based practice. While drawings can range from the laborious and time-consuming to the almost instantaneous, it remains a medium intimately bound up with the temporal. It is thus perhaps no surprise that time and memory have been of interest to so many contemporary artists working with drawing.

Pablo Bronstein and Micah Lexier have shown that, in an age of optimization and increased efficiency, the measurement of time can be both a political and an artistic act. Anselm Kiefer examines the importance of history in forming identity and the weight of cultural inheritance, while Richard Hamilton and Glenn Brown consider the significance to contemporary drawing of particular subjects, styles, and marks drawn from the history of art.

Jan Vanriet and Seb Patane explore the potential of a contemporary memorial, as well as the politics of remembering and forgetting.

As the pace of life continues to quicken, there is renewed interest in drawing's ability to mark time. Representations of the unfolding of time are visible in works by Claude Heath, Fiona Robinson and Michael Ditchburn, while Peter Doig and Nja Mahdaoui use drawing to interrogate the workings of memory itself.

Text written by Isabel Seligman, Bridget Riley Art Foundation Curator, Department of Drawings & Prints, British Museum.



Watch the Time and Memory film [here!](#)

Theme highlight – Minjung Kim

Hanji is traditional Korean paper made from the bark of the mulberry tree. An understanding of its properties is integral to the art of calligraphy and painting, which Minjung Kim studied from the ages of thirteen to twenty-nine. This training has given her an exceptional intimacy with the material. She notes: 'today, I only have to touch the paper with my fingers to know how it will absorb the water, how the ink will spread on it, how the flame will burn it.' In this drawing, the artist delineates mountains using the wet-on-wet application of ink, resulting in haphazard tide lines as the ink bleeds upwards.

The impossible density of peaks seems to evoke an abstraction rather than a particular location. Although Kim began this series of drawings after a trip to southern Italy, the work also recalls the mountainous landscape of South Korea. After permanently resettling in Europe about twenty-five years ago, the artist has imbued the drawing with a certain nostalgia for the landscape and cultural history of her homeland.

2017, 3029.1



Minjung Kim (b. 1962),
Mountain, 2009,
Ink on hanji paper
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British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Pablo Bronstein

This fantastical clock reveals the measurement of time to be neither natural nor objective, but rather the subjective product of human invention. A large dial showing twelve o'clock Greenwich Mean Time dominates smaller faces detailing the corresponding hours in Britain's former colonial capitals. Standardized timekeeping was the result of a late nineteenth century European desire for enhanced efficiency in trade, and following the 1884 International Meridian Conference in Washington, DC, its mean time zones were calculated at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, London. This erasure of local time-keeping was both a symbol and tool of colonial power, and as such fiercely resisted. Britain's redefinition of its colonies as 'peripheries' to London's 'centre' is symbolized by Greenwich Mean Time's domineering pre-eminence, and the clock's decorative finial of 'exotic' palm trees. While this historical pastiche might seem fanciful, such clocks did exist. Indeed, the pendulum of this clock remains in motion, serving as an uncomfortable reminder of the enduring legacy of Britain's recent colonial past.

2018,7052.1. Funded by the Rootstein Hopkins Foundation



Pablo Bronstein (b. 1977),
Greenwich Pendulum Mantel Clock, 2018,
Ink and watercolour
© The Trustees of the British Museum
Reproduced by permission of the artist
British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Jan Vanriet

This drawing is part of the series *Losing Face*, depicting Jewish people deported from Dossin Barracks, Mechelen, in Belgium to the death camps of Auschwitz from 1942 to 1944. Based on portrait photographs, Vanriet's moving drawings are an attempt to reveal the identities behind the abstract statistic of six million dead, and restore individuality to victims of the Holocaust in the face of the overwhelming magnitude of Nazi atrocities. Vanriet interprets his black-and-white source material using watercolours in slightly acid shades, while their application lends them a diffuse luminosity. Details from the broad ribbon pulling back Ruchla's hair to her open, if slightly ambivalent, smile serve as reminders of each person's unique humanity.

Each portrait shares the same format, a haunting reminder of the victims' common fate, but the physical inscription of each name, combined with such telling details, offers an evocative memorial of these individuals.

2015,7022.1

Presented by the artist through Roberto Polo Gallery, Brussels



Jan Vanriet (b. 1948), *Ruchla*, 2011,
Watercolour over black crayon with white gouache
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British Museum, London

Theme highlight – Stuart Langley

Stuart Langley works with light and colour, making use of waste materials to create sculptural artworks, neon drawings and installations. 36point7 is a three-dimensional neon drawing that reimagines the World AIDS Day charity ribbon.

The work's title refers to the estimated 36.7 million people who were living with HIV/AIDS globally in 2016. Since the 1980s an estimated 78 million people have become infected with HIV and 35 million people have died of AIDS-related illnesses, making it one of the most destructive epidemics in history. By creating this ribbon from neon tubing, Langley intends to make visible the continuing difficulties of those living with HIV/AIDS. This ribbon is a beacon, continuing to shed light on the cause for as long as it is needed.

Find out more about 36.7 and World Aids Day here:
<https://dulib.blog/2019/12/06/using-art-to-create-a-conversation-for-world-aids-day/>

DURART.2020.8. Purchase



Stuart Langley (born UK, 1982)
36point7, 2018
Neon tubing, Perspex
Commission by Curious Arts
Durham University Collection

Theme highlight - Rima Fareh

Born in Amman, Jordan, to Syrian and Palestinian parents, Rima Farah studied at Eastbourne and Cambridge Schools of Art. Through her work, the artist explores her love of traditionally drawn Arabic calligraphy using a variety of mediums, favouring the earthy qualities of handmade paper, marble dust, clay and linen. Her works do not include actual words that can be read, but instead seek to create an abstract symbol that her audience can interpret for themselves.

Farah is passionate about her heritage and the Arab world, drawing inspiration from its language, stories, faiths and most importantly her deep connection with Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism. The Dance is a celebration of the traditional meditative Sufi veil dance with the symbols swirling and flowing across the surface.

DUROM.2017.298
Purchase



Rima Farah (born Jordan, 1955)
The Dance, 2012
Earthenware
Durham University Collection

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[Judy Chicago](#)

[Stuart Brisley](#)

[Hew Locke](#)

[A.R Penck](#)

[Imran Qureshi](#)

[Stephen Willats](#)

[Bahman Mohassess](#)

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