DRAWING

SCULPTURE
Drawing : Sculpture is a partnership between Drawing Room and Leeds Art Gallery. Drawing Room is dedicated to the investigation and presentation of international contemporary drawing. Leeds Art Gallery is home to one of the most significant collections of 20th century British sculpture, with a focus on artworks that demonstrate and reiterate the relationship between drawing and sculpture. Drawing : Sculpture draws upon these resources and expertise to produce two exhibitions – at Leeds Art Gallery and then at Drawing Room, London, this publication and a symposium.

Drawing : Sculpture is a selection of artworks that explore whether the languages of drawing and sculpture are now intertwined or if they continue to exist in parallel. It includes work by a generation of international artists who make work that moves between sculpture and drawing, often using the medium of drawing to create works that might be defined as sculpture. The exhibition presents an international line up of artists working in some of the key cultural capitals: Anna Barriball and Alice Channer in London, Sara Barker in Glasgow, Aleana Egan in Dublin, Knut Henrik Henriksen and Bojan Šarčević in Berlin and Dan Shaw-Town in New York.

For the exhibition in Leeds, visitors will have the opportunity to view the work of the above artists alongside key pieces from Leeds Art Gallery’s 20th Century collection by Martin Boyce, Alexander Calder, Lynn Chadwick, Barry Flanagan, Martin Naylor, Eva Rothschild, and Alison Wilding. The works reiterate the historical relationship between drawing and sculpture, providing a context and a counterpoint for the more recent pieces on display. The earliest works – mobiles by Calder and Chadwick from the mid-20th century – present Modernist conceptions of ‘drawing in space’. These skeletal structures, made from wire and thin plates of metal, depart from the traditional notion of the art work as a static object and incorporate ideas, which are embedded in drawing, of motion and change and of form liberated from mass. Sixty years later Boyce’s mobile references such creations, suspending leg splints by the Modernist designer, Ray Eames, on metal armatures so that they float in the air. However, in his work, heroic visions of soaring and weightlessness morph subtly into suggestions of slightness, ephemerality and the mutability of material things. Naylor’s wall-based assemblage, entitled ‘A Young Girl Seated by her Window’, is both abstract and expressive, using qualities of line to create atmosphere and a sense of place. It is made from delicate lengths of wire and rigid metal rods, with a teacup balanced precariously on top. The wire and rods cast insubstantial shadows, so that further lines are scattered and rear up into space. Chadwick, Flanagan and Rothschild harness the primeval associations of drawing, using hieroglyphic symbols to create totemic objects: a grid scratched onto slate, a spiral etched into clay and perfect geometrical shapes cut into plastic and transposed one over another. The lines highlight the physical properties of the materials: hard slate, soft clay and immutable plastic. Rothschild and Wilding focus on qualities of surface, using reflective, transparent and translucent materials to create an illusion of depth and layering, folding and joining flat planes into three dimensional forms.

This project is inspired by the work of the artists included, to whom we extend our gratitude. It has developed through the conversations, knowledge and generosity of many people, including the featured artists, Mary Doyle and Katharine Stout of the Drawing Room and the artists, writers and curators involved in an idea sharing forum held in November 2011, not all of whom can be mentioned here. Anna Lovatt was one of those who participated and her featured essay sheds light on the history of drawing and sculpture and suggests how: ‘Moving beyond the familiar trope of “drawing in space,” [the artists] explore alternative dialogues between drawing and sculpture that include, but are not limited to, the condition of linearity... I will identify four alternative points of contact between the two practices: structure, scale, surface and slightness. These are not intended to be all-encompassing or mutually exclusive categories, but to indicate the multifarious connections between drawing and sculpture being explored today.’

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We would also like to thank Jacqui McIntosh and Amy-Rose Enskat at Drawing Room and Sarah Hanson at Leeds Art Gallery.

Sarah Brown, Curator, Leeds Art Gallery
Kate Macfarlane, Co-Director, Drawing Room, London
Sophie Raikes, Curator, Henry Moore Institute
Initially, it may seem surprising that the “post-medium condition” of art since the late 1960s has coincided with a resurgence of interest in the practice of drawing.¹ As artists deploy an ever-expanding range of materials and technologies in their work, one might expect this ancient, humble activity to be rendered anachronistic, if not obsolete. Yet recent years have seen numerous artists turn to drawing not as a preparatory or subsidiary practice, but as the primary means of their production. This interest has coincided with the foundation of institutions dedicated to drawing, high-profile exhibitions at major public institutions, and monographs and catalogues on the subject.² What is often called the “medium” of drawing appears to be thriving, at a moment when medium-specificity is supposed to be a thing of the past.

But since its earliest theorisation, drawing has been conceived as a transmedial practice, spanning various forms of artistic production. Giorgio Vasari described disegno as “the parent of our three arts, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting,” pointing to its fundamental role in the structuring of buildings, the delineation of form in sculpture, and the proportioning of figures in painting.³ During the Renaissance, disegno was understood as a cognitive process through which the artist gave form to his or her ideas – their physical execution was secondary to this “inner conception.”⁴ If sculptors were inexperienced at strokes and outlines, Vasari proposed that they “work instead in clay or wax, fashioning men, animals, and other things in relief, with beautiful proportion and balance. Thus they effect the same thing as does he who draws well on paper or other flat surface.”⁵ Drawing was not limited to a particular set of materials or techniques, but was instead concerned with the apprehension and articulation of form and space.

Indeed, the practice of drawing extends beyond the visual arts to play a role in fields as diverse as engineering, cartography, mathematics, medicine, physics and psychology. This roving promiscuity is perhaps what makes drawing so attractive to contemporary artists working in a variety of media and disciplines. While this exhibition focuses on the relationship between drawing and sculpture, the artists included are variously engaged with architecture, fashion, filmmaking, literature, painting and photography.
Drawing provides a means of moving across and between these categories, untroubled by modernism’s erstwhile obsession with purity and autonomy.

Drawing and sculpture have long been interrelated. Within the atelier, drawing from plaster casts was a fundamental part of the curriculum, a skill to be mastered in order to progress to sketching from life. These studies sought to approximate the sculptural object in two dimensions, using a linear outline to describe its contours and tonal shading to represent its volume. Their mimetic quality differentiates them from “sculptor’s drawings,” which often envisage works that do not yet exist. Projective, speculative and schematic, such drawings are characterised by a sense of futurity that renders them visionary, even utopian. Yet they are nevertheless haunted by the prospect of failure, like the prototype that succeeds by being superseded. Distinct from drawings of sculpture and drawings for sculpture is a third kind of drawing that occurs within sculpture, in the chiselling of an outline or the carving of detail into a surface. As Vasari notes, this mode of drawing substitutes pencil and paper for the delineation and inscription of sculptural form itself.

Until the early twentieth century, the relationship between drawing and sculpture usually fell into one of these three categories. But in the late 1920s, Alexander Calder, Pablo Picasso and Julio González developed an approach to sculpture that came to be known as “drawing in space.” Calder applied the phrase to the wire sculptures he produced during his time in Paris, which began with his playful Circus, 1926–31, and developed into a series of linear portraits and abstract compositions that resulted in his mobiles. Yet the concept is generally associated with the history of constructivist sculpture initiated by Pablo Picasso and Julio González in 1928-29, during an intense period of collaboration that transformed the work of both artists. By welding together lengths of wire, iron, and found objects, Picasso and González produced a kind of sculpture that demarcated space without filling it, devising a means of sculpting volume without mass.

In the decades that followed, this attitude to sculpture was famously adopted by the American sculptor David Smith, who emphasised its emancipatory potential: “If a sculpture could be a line drawing, then speculate that a line drawing removed from its paper bond and viewed from the side would be a beautiful thing.” Smith’s legacy was inherited by the British artist Anthony Caro, and both were championed by the critic Clement Greenberg – a vociferous advocate of medium-specificity. In his essay “The New Sculpture,” Greenberg proposed that the dialogue between drawing and sculpture was one instance where this Modernist imperative might be relaxed, since the physicality of sculpture would always override any latent pictorial impulse. Greenberg remarked approvingly that: “The constructor-sculptor can, literally, draw in the air with a single strand of wire that supports nothing but itself.” Drawing offered a way forward for sculpture, liberating the medium from its monolithic past.

Yet the same practice that promised a new freedom for sculpture ultimately threatened it with collapse. During the late 1960s, the rigid iron and steel structures produced by Smith and Caro gave way to sinuous, tenuous materials such as rope, string, tape and thread-waste. In the work of Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, Fred Sandback, Rosemarie Castoro and others, the three-dimensional line was presented not as a heroic projection of drawing into space, but as a deconstructive unravelling of sculptural form. Writing in 1971, Lucy Lippard observed: “What has happened since [1967] is that the pictorial impetus in sculpture has been dematerialized and has often taken the form of drawing, either literally, on surfaces, in space, or on the ‘ground.’ The question is, and I can’t answer it, whether such drawing or pictorial effects in real space are essentially bad, dishonest, untrue to the internal necessities of something called sculpture.” Lippard’s comments reveal an anxiety about sculpture’s embrace of draftsmanly devices that is absent from earlier, utopian accounts of “drawing in space.” For Richard Serra, such “drawing effects” marked the unwelcome return of an illusionistic impulse that had been repressed in Minimal art, threatening to push post-Minimal sculpture ever closer to the pictorial.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, the phrase “drawing in space” has been repurposed to describe the work of contemporary artists engaged in the production of linear installations. Amongst others, the work of Monika Grzymala, Ranjani Shettar, Alyson Shotz and Sarah Sze is frequently conceptualised in this manner. Dispensing with the anxiety that attended the graphic impulse in post-Minimal sculpture, this recent work has once again been couched in celebratory terms. By contrast, the artists in Drawing: Sculpture offer an alternative perspective on the relationships that exist between the eponymous practices. Moving beyond the familiar trope of “drawing in space,” they explore alternative dialogues between drawing and sculpture that include, but are not limited
to, the condition of linearity. In the second half of this essay, I will identify four alternative points of contact between the two practices: structure, scale, surface and slightness. These are not intended to be all-encompassing or mutually exclusive categories, but to indicate the multifarious connections between drawing and sculpture being explored today.

Structure
The term “structure” suggests a kind of armature or framework to be fleshed out, an image that resonates with the practices of drawing and sculpture. Yet the word has much broader connotations, pertaining to the organisation of almost anything, including concepts and texts. In the work of Sara Barker, “structure” refers as much to the articulation of imaginary, mnemonic or literary spaces as it does to the physical spaces her sculptures delineate. Slender strips of aluminium sheeting are combined with stainless steel rods, cardboard and chains to create spindly structures that jut from the wall, rest on glass tables, or balance precariously on the floor. Emphatically graphic, they are also densely textured and multicoloured, imbuing the line with precisely those properties to which it is habitually opposed. Each work is generated via a complex process of fixing, layering, scraping and unpicking, so that it appears as much deconstructed as it is constructed. As the viewer moves around the work, spaces coalesce and disperse, as edges, corners, niches and apertures swing in and out of view. I’m reminded of Marcel Proust’s In Search of Lost Time, where the protagonist awakes disoriented in an unfamiliar place, briefly glimpsing in rapid succession all the rooms in which he has ever slept. These swirling, transmuting interiors are finally anchored to the present, stilled by the pragmatic hand of custom. Barker has suggested that her structures respond to the motif of the room in Modernist literature, pointing to its importance for female writers including Doris Lessing, May Sarton and Virginia Woolf. Aleana Egan has also spoken of the importance of literature for her work, although she appears less concerned with literary accounts of architectural space than with linguistic structures and the emotions they engender. Inside a sentence, 2012, is a steel framework that rises from a square base to meet in an elegant, bowed
arch. While the base is freestanding, the top of the structure leans against a wall, framing two flaccid loops of roofing felt, cardboard and tape. On the floor, folded sheets of red, blue and pink fabric are laid carefully – almost ritualistically – within the square that forms the sculpture’s base. These humble materials are handled with a precision that lends them a certain communicative power, like familiar words meaningfully articulated. Egan has emphasised the importance of titles in her work, suggesting that they carry an equal weight to the materials deployed. The phrase “inside a sentence” implies that rather than being spoken or written, language is inhabited – structuring and limiting our experience of the world.

Despite their linearity, the structures produced by Barker and Egan differ from the Modernist and post-Minimalist precedents referenced above. Unlike Picasso, González and Smith’s “drawings in space,” these lines do not describe figures or objects, but neither do they seek non-referentiality in the manner of a Sandback or a Hesse. Laden with reference, they evoke spaces and feelings without necessarily representing them, while wearing their literary sources on their sleeves. In these works, the term “structure” might refer to a psychological state, a memory, a sentence, a text, or a room. Exploiting a shared tendency in drawing and sculpture, Barker and Egan cast their lines beyond these practices, towards other media and disciplines.

Scale
Rather than conjuring imaginary spaces, Knut Henrik Henriksen uses line to articulate and interrogate pre-existing architectural structures. His work deals in measurements, angles and vectors of force – recalling Mel Bochner’s measurement pieces, or Sol LeWitt’s wall drawings with lines connecting architectural points. Here drawing’s longstanding association with spatial apperception and cognition is deployed in the service of a subtle form of institutional critique, which has more to do with delimitation, dissection and revelation than with accusation or judgement. Measuring holds a building’s ostensibly neutral features up to scrutiny, subjecting them to what Henriksen has called a kind of “architectural doubt.”

His recent series of works using woodchip wallpaper turn their attention to interior decoration, specifically a Bauhaus innovation that has since fallen out of favour. Designed to cover damaged walls, such wallpaper is now decidedly passé, its cheapness and expendability underscored by
becomes pure surface, an “infra-thin” residue of corporeality. Channer has remarked that “the most useful thing about drawing is that it’s flat,” and her sculptural works appropriate this flatness, often occurring in sheets or strips of fabric or aluminium. These flimsy forms drape, loop, coil and arch throughout the gallery, “dressing the architecture,” as Barry Schwabsky has put it. Rather than projecting the line into three-dimensional space, Channer utilizes the two-dimensionality of drawing in order to create dynamic, theatrical scenarios with decidedly unmonumental means.

Surface
One aspect of drawing that distinguishes it from painting is the necessary friction between the instrument of inscription and the grainy surface of the page. While paint can be smoothed over (or flung at) a surface, brittle materials like graphite and charcoal are forcefully abraded by the “tooth” of the paper. This emphasis on contact and attrition is central to the work of Anna Barriball, which presents drawing as a laborious, forensic grazing of the surface of things. These “things” are often liminal structures such as windows, doors, shutters, or a fireplace. Covered with paper, they are rubbed hard with the tip of a pencil or pen until individual strokes coalesce into a single weighty, metallic membrane. Linearity is subsumed by surface, as paper – conventionally the passive “ground” of drawing – becomes a dynamic, malleable object. For Untitled II, 2008, a sheet densely worked in ink was wrapped around the artist’s body, to create a crumpled entity rigid enough to be propped upright. Here, the materials and processes of drawing are pushed to their limit, resulting in a hybrid object that lurks in the interstitial corner of a room.

Dan Shaw-Town’s works are the products of an intensive process of rubbing, erasing, sanding, flattening, crumpling and folding. In contrast to Barriball’s reflective, metallic surfaces, his sheets are matte and flocked in appearance, with a voluptuous tactility heightened by their method of display. Untitled, 2010, hangs folded over a washing line, its considerable weight signalled by the strain it places on this support. One densely-layered sheet is folded over another, reiterating the processes of concealment and stratification inherent in the work’s making. In Shaw-Town’s works, the drawn mark is topological rather than perspectival – forgoing illusionistic depth in order to trace and transform the surface of the paper. With its furrows, folds.

Henriksen’s luxuriant, part-used rolls. Unravelling down the length of a wall to lie coiled on the floor, these sheets are covered in charcoal-dust, which gathers in the paper’s pitted surface. Like his measurement pieces, Henriksen’s wood-chip works are conditioned by the height of the rooms in which they are installed, while foregrounding walls and their coverings as topological structures that envelop their inhabitants.

Alice Channer is likewise concerned with sheets that encircle and enclose the body, albeit at a much closer proximity. Stretched Skin, 2011 is one of a series of works made by photocopying sections of a snakeskin-print trouser leg. The resultant fragments were then reassembled, scanned and digitally manipulated, distorting and distending the pattern still further. Explicitly synthetic yet latently reptilian, the image was finally traced by hand in ink and graphite. Like many of Channer’s works, Stretched Skin begins by approximating the human figure via the clothes that sheathe it, but this bodily scale is then cropped by the dimensions of the photocopier’s plate, reassembled on standard pieces of mass-produced paper, scanned and stretched by a computer programme, and reproduced with a digital printer. Repeatedly abstracted by technologies of reproduction, the body
and waxy deposits, that surface is methodically destroyed as the carrier of an image and offered up instead to tactile experience. If “drawing in space” privileges projection, weightlessness and emancipation, then Barriball and Shaw-Town stage an alternative encounter between drawing and sculpture – one characterised by proximity, gravity and a certain productive friction.

Slightness
Like many of the artists included in Drawing: Sculpture, Bojan Šarčević works in a diverse range of media including architectural interventions, collages, films and three-dimensional structures. The latter are fragile, intricate networks of twigs, cloth, brass and human hair, which echo the humble materials and provisional structures featured in Šarčević’s films. Despite their linearity, it is the insistent slightness of these structures that offers the most compelling parallel with drawing as a practice. For the speculative, unobtrusive qualities that once saw drawing sidelined now offer an attractive counterpoint to a spectacular and bombastic strain in twenty-first century sculpture. Here, drawing casts a lifeline to sculpture at a moment when its monumentality has been pushed to the point of exhaustion.

Following the heroic rhetoric that accompanied “drawing in space” in the 1920s, and the anxiety that attended the subsequent collapse of sculptural form in the late 1960s, the contemporary artists featured in Drawing: Sculpture negotiate the complex relationships that exist between the two practices without recourse to such hyperbolic narratives. For them, the multifarious qualities of drawing might be used to reinvigorate sculpture without the Modernist fear of cross-medial contamination, which now seems esoteric and somewhat quaint. What emerges is not necessarily a “post-medium condition” in which all specificity is lost to a catch-all term like “installation art,” but a situation in which divergent practices might be used to critically interrogate one another.

1 The phrase “post-medium condition” is taken from the book of the same name by Rosalind Krauss, in which she suggests that Conceptual art of the late 1960s and early 70s heralded the end of “the specific mediums – painting, sculpture, drawing”. I will return to Krauss’s argument in the conclusion of this essay. Rosalind Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, London, Thames and Hudson, 1999, p. 11.


4 Karen-Edis Barzman, The Florentine

5 Vasari, p. 206.


11 Greenberg, p. 145.


16 Jonathan Griffin, text to accompany Sara Barker solo presentation at Liste 17, Basel, June 2012.

17 On Enggan’s engagement with literature see Ciara Moloney, “Like a Cracked Kettle,” in Aleana Egan (At Intervals, While Turning), London, Drawing Room 2011.


19 Sandback wrote: “My work is not illusionistic in the normal sense of the word. It doesn’t refer away from itself to something that is isn’t present.” Fred Sandback, “Notes,” reprinted in Friedemann Malsch and Christiane Meyer-Stoll eds., Fred Sandback, Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2006.

20 Hesse stated: “I wanted to get to non art, non connotive, non anthropomorphic, non geometric, non, nothing...” Cited in Catherine de Zegher “Drawing as Binding/Bandage/Bondage or Eva Hesse Caught in the Triangle of Process/Content/Materiality” in Catherine de Zegher ed., Eva Hesse: Drawing, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2005, p. 105.


26 Shaw-Town has remarked: “A large part of my practice is concerned with creating a ‘surface.’ A physical and repetitive process of mark making, an entropic cycle of creating whilst, at the same time, erasing and ultimately changing. Once a new surface is made I always want to disrupt it again in some way, but this can lead to making a work with too much going on (visually). So then I have to back track. Most of the works went through a series of transformations before settling on their final appearance.” Amah-Rose McKnight-Adams, interview with Dan Shaw-Town, Dazed Digital, 2011, http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/9570/1/dan-shaw-town-at-liston.

27 For instance, the crumpled paper, hair, string, and spindly wooden models in the three films that make up The Breath-Taker is the Breath-Giver, 2009.

28 I am thinking particularly of the large-scale sculptures of Antony Gormley, Anish Kapoor, Jeff Koons and Richard Serra.

29 Krauss characterises the “post-medium condition” as “the international fashion of installation and intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalization of the image in the service of capital.” Krauss, p. 56.


Front cover – Dan Shaw-Town Untitled 2010 (detail) Graphite and spray enamel on paper with steel grommets, 127 × 96 cm Courtesy private collection, London

p.4 – Anna Barriball Untitled II 2008 Ink on paper, 239 × 66 × 22 cm Courtesy the artist & Frith Street Gallery, London

p.9 – Sara Barker representing a sketch 2012 Aluminium sheet, stainless steel round bar, various paints, 220 × 80 × 23 cm Courtesy the artist & mary mary, Glasgow

p.11 – Aleana Egan inside a sentence 2012 Steel, split pins, cardboard, tape, roofing felt, filler, paint, varnish, fabric, 196 × 80 × 97 cm Courtesy the artist & mary mary, Glasgow

p.12 – Alice Channer Stretched Skin 2011 Graphite and coloured pencil on hand marbled paper, 200 × 140 cm Courtesy the artist and The Approach, London

p.14 – Bojan Šarčević Untitled 2006 Silk, brass, 70 × 40 × 60 cm Courtesy private collection

Back cover – Knut Henrik Henriksen Untitled 2011 Woodchip wallpaper, charcoal-dust, variable dimensions Courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London


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