



*Drawing is both an act, and the product of an act'*

– John Eiderfield, Director of the Department of Drawings and curator of 'The Modern Drawing: 100 Works on Paper from the Museum of Modern Art', 1983.

Contemporary drawing has, in recent years, come into its own as an artform. Since the late 20th Century the role of drawing has slowly transformed from that of a precursory thinking process to that which is an end unto itself. As the definition of drawing continues to develop so does the range of stylistic and conceptual approaches, as artists use drawing to explore ideas such as space, language and narrative. As these definitions expand however, so too does the difficulty of finding those working outside objective or figurative traditions.

*Vis à Vis (face to face)* brings together the work of Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen, Yuria Okamura and Vincent Hawkins, three artists whose drawing practices are firmly based in the non-objective and display very different approaches to abstraction. Perhaps what is more common between these three artists is how they approach paper, the most traditional of drawing materials. Each artist uniquely treats paper as an entity in itself, highlighting the intimate relationship between process, surface and the viewer.

Such intimacy is evident in Yuria Okamura's work. Her treatment of paper is considered and meticulous, beyond the surface of the sheet and into the entire composition. Okamura's arrangements could be sacred, archaeological sites as seen from above, identifiable through subtle scored lines and grid formations. Her use of divine, symmetrical geometry draws the viewer toward, then endlessly around, her compositions and reflect her influences of diagrammatic mapping and spiritual geometry. Though her practice explores the metaphysical potential of abstraction, Okamura's sources still remain very much in nature, with her earthy tones and soft metallics stemming from the world around her.

Meticulousness is mirrored in the work of Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen. Whilst also interested in the natural world, Chen more specifically explores our sensory or auditory connection to it. Her approach to drawing, and her use of paper, is immersive and durational, using the surrounding natural environment to mould and sculpt the work. Her work *Spatial Malleables: Mountain, River, Bamboo* (2017) is from a recent series completed in China. By taking the paper into a bamboo forest or river, the material becomes subject to water, texture and humidity. Chen's movement is the active catalyst, using an intensive but meditative process to mark the surface as well as sculpt the form. These works are covered with impression and full of meaning, as the sites are carefully selected for their reference to Chen's Chinese heritage and the origins of paper itself.

By contrast, Hawkins' engagement with paper is steeped in a mix of fun, uncertainty and surrender. A fervent maker, Hawkins is primarily concerned with composition and colour, creating work that sits in the space between collage, print and drawing (of which he calls 'wall constructions' – or more cheekily, 'serving suggestions'). Hawkins often employs simple, organic shapes that are informed by poetry, literature and music. For the '*Number*' series Hawkins drew from his background in commercial textile printing to fold the paper in a certain arrangement before applying a solid colour over the surface, reminiscent of Matisse's view that colour shouldn't merely clothe a form, but be part of it. Once revealed, Hawkins allows the paper to unfold before deciding its final orientation, or as in *Number 4*, even facing it away. Hawkins appeals to a type of abstraction that is clean in execution but far from serious formalism, preferring to explore the possibilities of a material with a cheerful sense of play.

While contemporary drawing (and its non-objective constituents) has expanded into wider territory, paper has remained one of the primary materials employed by artists. John Eiderfield commented in his catalogue essay that 'drawing names space', and while he was referring to a line on sheet of paper, it would also be true of what we see in *Vis à Vis*. These artists move beyond paper as a surface in which a drawing lays upon, into that which contains not only an image but also process, whether that be the subtlety of scoring, the chance of a fold, or the full-bodied vigour of friction.

- C Watson, 2018