

Libro de Disegni

Galerie ISA is pleased to present *Libro de Disegni*, an exhibition of works on paper by **Ali Banisadr, Edouard Baribeaud, Louise Despont, Marcel Dzama, Olafur Eliasson, Idris Khan, Annie Morris, Chris Ofili and Radu Oreian** which focuses on drawings and on artists for whom draughtsmanship is an integral part of their practice.

The title for the show translates from Italian into English as: 'Book of Drawings'. The original *Libro* was a collection of drawings gathered and grouped by the Renaissance artist and writer, Giorgio Vasari, whilst writing his *Lives of the Artists*. By the time of his death, Vasari had amassed a collection of over 500 drawings by some of art history's most famous figures. Thanks to him, we know the extent of the skill and facility of these key Renaissance artists, but we also have insight into their minds and how they approached their practice through careful studies and hurried sketches.

Despite being the oldest means of communication, drawing has always been a fresh and immediate medium for artists to work in. The notion of what constitutes a drawing today has certainly evolved over the years. Whereas in Leonardo's time it may have been a charcoal sketch on parchment or carefully executed work in silver point, today it could be a kinetic device - such as Olafur Eliasson's kinetic drawing machine that autonomously sketches a series of drawings as it travels by train - or in the case of Marcel Dzama, instead of a drawing existing solely in the realm of the two dimensional, his detailed cast of drawn characters can traverse this plane into a three dimensional world of volume, courtesy of a diorama.

Drawing enables us to connect not only with the artist's hand, but with his thoughts and ideas, even dreams. Ali Banisadr is an abstract artist who purloins from both his Persian heritage and the Northern European Renaissance. Principally a painter, Banisadr's rhythmical technique also owes much to the fine brushwork and precise lines of the miniaturist. In this sense we could argue that the artist's practice is as much about line - the terrain of the draughtsman - as it is about colour or form. Edouard Baribeaud's is unashamedly graphic rather than painterly style. He likes to 'juxtapose the mundane with the mythical' and glides in medium between pen and ink, watercolour and gouache and in subject from Indian and Classical Greek mythologies to scenes more reminiscent of Dutch genre paintings and trompe l'oeil collage.

There is a strongly mathematical element to the work of Louise Despont, despite her intuitive process. Since the artist discovered the potential of working with pencil and architectural stencils on paper, she has allowed her drawings to grow in an almost organic manner, preferring to work on ledger paper with pre existing lines which lends structure and shape before she even begins, and allows her to work in an engaged but also quietly devotional state of mind. This contrasts with the more theatrical approach of Dzama who stages his subjects within various universes that hover between childhood fantasy, folk and fairy tales. Dzama though has always been adept at creating consistently believable worlds with their own distinct cast of protagonists born from his quick mind and free flowing hand.

Eliasson is known for his distinctive sculptures and large-scale installation art that employ elemental materials such as light, water and air temperature to create an all encompassing, immersive experience for the viewer. Though there is a strong cohesion between his

drawings - which are the genesis for his projects - and his impressive installations, this part of his oeuvre is far less familiar to his audience. It is no less fascinating, however, as the drawings enable the viewer to better understand the synesthetic, sensorial experience that plays such a key role in so many of the artist's works.

Idris Khan's meticulously detailed works involve a process of overlaying printed texts on paper to create mesmeric, geometric shapes. The texts are stamped but the words are so small and finely executed in rich, oil based ink that their surfaces are evocative of ancient scripts or schiacciato relief. Khan's texts are drawn from his own writings on philosophical and religious concepts, art history and contemporary concerns. There is a rhythmic, repetitive drive to his practice. The works are born out of a continuous flux of creating, disseminating and voiding until Khan arrives at what might be considered a pared down, essential image that is paradoxically new and unique yet achieved through repetition, erasure and the superimposition of multiple palimpsests.

Annie Morris revels in her joyous, densely pigmented sculptures, but she has always been fascinated by the line. Indeed the line underpins her practice - particularly in the form of free-flowing drawings. These often depict the fecund form of the female body, or mesmeric repeats of circular, face-like forms. The drawings recall a compelling lineage of artists from the giants of modernism like Matisse, to the quieter but no less powerful mark makings of Cy Twombly.

In common with Eliasson, Ofili is less known for his drawings - despite consistently producing these works on paper in addition to prints and watercolours - in parallel to his more familiar painting practice. The elegantly pared-down drawings serve to reinforce the decorative patois that is at the core of Ofili's work, especially as they are executed in a more straightforward manner, with what he describes as 'far simpler tools'.

Like Ofili, Banisadr and Baribeaud, Radu Oreian's work dances between mythology, art history and folklore. His elegant drawings exhibit a confidence of line and fineness of touch that conjure up references as diverse as Botticelli's drawings for Dante's inferno, Indian miniatures and Chinese dragons. Oreian loves the line but also the freedom of drawing, twining graphic pencil with enamel and even gold leaf to foray into the territory of the decorative, even the International Gothic.

Drawing is a sensitive but often also a searingly insightful medium of expression. This exhibition is, as its title suggests, a book of drawings - but perhaps more accurately, it is also a library of different and enticing visions within which the viewer can find windows into other worlds, and even disappear. It provides the opportunity to marvel at the skill and diversity of these talented artists, and to consider the power of the pencil and pen to still captivate the eye, excite or still the mind, amidst the onslaught of imagery that rains down on our contemporary landscape.

Jane Neal