

DOMOBAAL

In Wittgenstein's Game

The three artists presented in 'Maybe a Duck ... Maybe a Rabbit ...' might at first sight appear to operate in entirely separate areas of concern, coming as they do from three very particular points of departure. The inclusion of Jemima Burrill's short video-work, *Cleaner*, might seem especially exotic when placed among the accumulated works of Ansel Krut and Walter Swennen, whose contributions to this show are, in terms of the medium of drawing, uncontroversial. But whilst Krut and Swennen's approaches to drawing are physical, literal, "hands-on", Burrill's video offers a reframing of a commonplace domestic task, re-presenting it as being other than what one would normally expect it to be. One of these alternative readings is of domestic work as creative activity, of laboured removal as positive addition. Cleaning becomes drawing, allusively and directly. In *Cleaner* the protagonist's utilitarian progression through the house also operates as the itinerary of her artistic engagement, leaving a secret record - a hidden and yet "obvious" drawing - as evidence of her commitment to her work.

Burrill's video is a curious but productive place to begin from as regards a discussion of drawing. In the piece we are shown a young woman arriving at a smart London townhouse, entering it, then carrying out a series of semi-erotic actions within the guise of her official role as a cleaning lady. Before even passing through the entrance hall she has switched her casual street clothes for a worker's smock. Moving into the main body of the house she then affixes soft orange cloths to her bare feet and begins her job, starting with the floor, upon which the never-named woman performs a slowly-executed pattern of steps which can be read as both practical (since the floor gets cleaned), but also as a restrained but playful dance. With this action the scene is set for a consideration of the ambiguous line between work and pleasure, between what one commits oneself to in order to earn a living and one's own private interests or desires. This contrast is heightened toward the end of the video when the woman is preparing to leave the house, putting the dusters back in their proper place and picking up the money that (we assume) the house's occupant has left for her. An economic exchange of some sort is certainly involved but it is arguable that whilst the cleaner has indeed carried out the required task, she has simultaneously cheated her employer, since she has turned "their" time into hers, utilised it for her own personal, sexual pleasure. Work has become play, a small but notable subversion of the accepted norm.

Continuing through the house, the woman slides her body back and forth across the kitchen table, explicitly miming a sexual act; she rubs her bottom and back against the shiny surface of the fridge-freezer, slides her breasts and stomach along the edge of the kitchen work-surface, cleans the glass over a picture with her tongue, attends to the dust upon the mantelpiece via a slow sliding of her nose along its uppermost surface. Most extremely, since it involves the immersion of part of her body into the actual substance of the house, the woman washes the inside of the toilet bowl with her head, soaking in the process her hair, as can be clearly seen when she emerges from the bowl. The last activity in which she indulges involves polishing the long winding stair banister by straddling it and wriggling along it. Throughout all these near-comical yet somehow very businesslike activities a certain dryness of expression pervades. There are no obvious signs of pleasure upon the young lady's face, rather a matter-of-factness which is, given the strange scenes to which we are party, puzzling and restrained, a refusal of the eroticism that would appear to be implicit in the body's engagement with these edges, surfaces and impeccably mute materials of the house.

Yet these elaborate physical actions can be read in a third way, neither as work

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nor pleasure, but, as I have already intimated, as a form of drawing, which embodies both these qualities and more. On the one hand the woman's nimble slithering enacts a removal of accumulated dust, erases smudges, scratches, tracks and marks. On the other, she leaves upon the surfaces of the furnishings with which she engages the variegated traces of her body in motion, Through her thoroughly intimate attention to her job the house is not merely spruced up but is, in a literal and very physical sense, redrawn.

The quietly distinctive young woman draws a wage from her employer; she draws upon the privacy of her job in order to make this time her own, and she redraws the lines between normally distinct categories. Her movements within another's residence echo the complex bodily distensions that one may find in performance art or the process-based artworks of the 1960s and 1970s. The body of the woman becomes a kind of drawing machine, leaving its sensuous imprint throughout the building. One may well describe what transpires here as a "labour of love", a term which is also pertinent to the drawings of Krut and Swennen.

Krut is open to letting his images stand as significant, meaning-inducing objects in their own right. Although they are representative and therefore readable as pictures their fluid form places them between fixed, unambiguous representation; certainly one can recognise heads, bodies, rooms, tools, vehicles, situations, but the precise meaning of the image is left for the viewer to extrapolate. There may be more than one meaning "inserted" into the work, or a given picture might well simply operate as a trigger for interpretation, setting up a scene on which the viewer must actively labour in order to come to an acceptable understanding of what is taking place. The standpoint adopted by Krut is one of investigation, of speculation as to what bringing together different pictorial forms might evoke. Parts of human bodies float freely about or emerge unexpectedly from places where the rest of the body could not be hidden or stored; Where heads of flowers should be there are gigantic human eyeballs, legs materialise out of the lines from which they are drawn. The very act of picturing is, by this method of expansion of colour and line, itself pictured. One is reminded of Sigmund Freud's dual notion of condensation and displacement, the two-part process employed in dreams wherein different images are brought together into a third novel form bearing features of both sources, and in which significant items are also displaced or translated into other, sometimes more acceptable entities. The pushing together of diverse strands of ideas and images in Krut's drawings does not tame the imagery; rather the very collusion and collision of representations instigates a forcefulness that might well be lacking if the components of the drawings were left to go their separate ways. Connection brings a sometimes disturbing ambiguity to the work, and although Krut draws quite casually, offhandedly, as though just doodling to use up a moment or two of spare time, what emerges from this apparent ease is, on occasion, imagery at which one might well flinch. Memories of people and places are overlaid, washes of colour meet angled tracks of ink, spooky distensions enter and leave human outlines that are otherwise concisely contained. Various themes can be spotted throughout: Krut returns over and over to one he calls a "stupidhead", the bluntness of this label perfectly matching the folly of its form.

Another kind of bringing together comes about within the presentation of the drawings when they are placed in public. Krut's LA Diary is more a range of memory-pictures from a specific time and place than a diary as such, since the narrative potential of the series is not restricted to a fixed chronology, Krut being aware that different arrangements of the works will encourage multiple and perhaps contradictory interpretative results. This is to recognise that meaning is not fixed or trapped within the border of a single image but is the product of a reading across and between pictures and the varied formal codings they contain.

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To say that something is a scribble or a scrap is normally to criticise it as being incomplete or marginal. But Swennen's practice gives the lie to this nomenclature because in his work the scribble is a major force of effect. An everyday writing device such as a ballpoint pen becomes, in Swennen's hands, a tool for the making of intense, energetic drawings. He does not let the bluntness of the Biro curtail his inventiveness, instead apparently relishing the possibility of using this limited device against the grain of its own constraints. Juxtaposed with marks from this common pen are those formed from more overly artistic paints, crayons and inks. Established hierarchies of materials are ignored or rearranged, just as the objects Swennen depicts constitute their own "social relations" with whatever it is that they happen to be adjacent to. Crowns recur throughout, as do snakes, faces, jigsaw-puzzle pieces, hats and heads, crude scratchy buildings, and the occasional letter or free-floating word. These and other images may be neatly placed together or, as is more often the case, overlain, drawn over or mysteriously merged into neighbouring forms. Colours slip around, fine lines become intensities that threaten to depart the page, and everything militates towards the eventual realisation (from the position of the viewer) that even the most superficially disordered of these compact pictures is in fact highly structured. They're funny, convulsive, a little melancholic. Stars fall, propellers spin, whales swim in and out of shot, and any of this might well be backed by a wiring diagram or a speeding car. Or it might not.

There is a humdrum complexity to these riotous microcosms. They deserve (and can stand) a lot of looking, even if Swennen's subtleties sometimes imply that the image must be internalised all at once.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's famously ambivalent "duck-rabbit", as examined in his Philosophical Investigations of 1953, is a perfect cipher for the works in the present exhibition, which, like the image to which Wittgenstein attended, operate at the level of a frequent but productive flux, the thing you thought you saw suddenly becoming other, becoming something else. A few words at the end of Wittgenstein's preface are also to the point, though they must, in the immediate case, be applied to visual rather than writerly modes. "I should not like my writing", Wittgenstein remarked, "to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own."

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In Wittgenstein's Game was written for the publication to accompany the exhibition 'Maybe a Duck ... Maybe a Rabbit ...' with Jemima Burrill and Walter Swennen, at Wimbledon School of Art, curated by Ansel Krut, as part of the Drawing Fellowship 2005 - 2007