Ways of Seeing Drawings, 1797 to 2023

Hilton Als and Claire Gilman, eds., *Ways of Seeing: Writings on Drawings from the Jack Shear Collection* [*Drawing Papers,* 146, vol. 1]. New York: The Drawing Center, 2021. ISBN: 978-0-942324-42-6, 104 pp., 33 illustrations (all in color). $30.00

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The three-part presentation *Ways of Seeing: Three Takes on the Jack Shear Drawing Collection* at the Drawing Center, New York (2 October 2021–20 February 2022) imagined three alternative visions of drawing displays where connections between drawings could be formed outside of artistic biography, art-historical framework, and technical features. While the individual success rate of the approaches varied, their shared focus on external factors, including the grouping of drawings, the modification of space, and the wide genre of writings in response, spotlighted the extent to which drawing displays have yet to resolve the tension between individual sheets and the total effect of the installation. They also, in turn, underscored the continued primacy of exhibition as an interface between the public, the artist, the collector, and the critic, and they charted a starting point for a new branch of drawing connoisseurship.

The exhibition—a three-part take on the drawing collection of Jack Shear, the photographer, president of the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, and Kelly's widower—took its title from John Berger's seminal text *Ways of Seeing* (1972),[1] which seems to be a favored lens through which to organize multipart shows. Other examples include a series at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington (2006–9), that invited the artist John Baldessari and the collectors Giuseppe and Giovanna Panza to curate from the permanent collection;[2] and a suite of six exhibitions at the Birmingham Museum of Art (2018–present) that addresses such themes as games, trade, and portraiture. The installation at the Drawing Center offered three distinct meditations on Shear's eclectic and expansive drawing collection assembled over the course of the last decade. It was first interpreted by the collector himself, then by the sculptor Arlene Shechet, and finally, by the writer and curator Jarrett Earnest.[3] The installations were supplemented by a two-volume publication: the first featuring text by nine writers selected by the critic Hilton Als, and the second as a type of narrative checklist by Shear, Shechet, and Earnest. The installations avoided interpretive texts and chronological progression to shift to the external elements of installation, that in turn echoed late eighteenth-century concerns in seeking to democratize the appreciation of drawings. This multipart rumination on Shear's still-evolving drawing collection ultimately revealed a contemporary anxiety about the state of drawing connoisseurship. In response to that mandate, I will revisit the curatorial strategies of each iteration, examine how the presentation of certain sheets altered their reception, and how the installations sought to challenge the consensus regarding the audience for, and interpretation of, drawings—lessons integral to reimagining drawing exhibitions for the continuously evolving demands of the public.

The three iterations each featured an "anchor drawing" that signaled the philosophical and curatorial divergence between the displays. Shear's iteration opened with David Hockney's *Man Drawing* (1965), an ink drawing featuring a male figure—perhaps the artist himself—in the throes of mark-making against a wall, with blunt blotches of his pen competing for attention next to a thick pool of ink.[4] Grouping by variations of mark-making became a starting point for Shear, who abutted frames in irregular groupings. His multi-frame compositions (Fig. 1) were made by a group of assistants simultaneously arranging them on the walls, an approach Shear likened to

Figure 1

DANIEL TERNA

Installation view, *Ways of Seeing: Three Takes on the Jack Shear Drawing Collection, Take One: Jack Shear* (2 October–7 November 2021)

Courtesy of the Drawing Center, New York

how Henri Matisse made his late collages.[5] This manner of hanging is both personal and historical. It echoes the installation of art in Shear's home and has been his preferred mode of drawing presentation, as he adapted it for a display at the Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, TX (2021), and, more recently, at the David Nolan Gallery, New York (2023). The dense lattice of frames can also be read as an homage to the Salon hangs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as to the modern spirit of the artist's studio, as seen in Wolfgang Tillmans's self-curated show *Wolfgang Tillmans: To Look without Fear* held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2022–23), which also relied on serendipitous groupings of sheets seemingly independent of subject matter. Not coincidentally, Berger's *Ways of Seeing* was a guiding principle invoked by Tillmans himself and subsequent reviewers.[6] In the case of Shear, the installation initially felt claustrophobic, verging at times on a level of visual mania that seems entirely antithetical to the early history of drawing collections, in which sheets were jealously guarded in connoisseurial spaces, with each sheet intended for private contemplation.

The innovation, and consequently the discomfort, in Shear's approach lies in how the composition of the frames mimicked either the formal elements or the subject of the sheets. For example, a row of twelve drawings of female figures was justified along the top edge, while a row of male figures was lined up by the lower end as if to visualize the anatomical difference between the sexes. In others, frames were scattered like constellations on the walls, or installed in a four-leaf clover configuration. The effect extended the process of looking beyond the sheet and its neighbors, turning the secondary element of the frame into the primary. This ahistorical and acontextual grouping impacted individual drawings in varied ways. Adjoining Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson's *Hero and Leandre* (*c.* 1800)[7] next to Georges Seurat's *An Evening, Gravelines* (1890),[8] spotlighted the luminescence of the ocean horizon

Figure 2

JEAN-AUGUSTE-DOMINIQUE INGRES

Portrait of Alexis-René Le Go, 1836

Collection of Jack Shear

in the former that would otherwise be secondary to the robust figure grouping in the foreground. In other cases, it disserviced the sheet on view. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Portrait of Alexis René Le Go* (1836; Fig. 2)[9] was selected for all three iterations of the show. In Shear's version, it was hung between Walter Price's *Scarecrow* (2020)[10] and a group of sailors by Tom of Finland (1980)[11]—a juxtaposition that stressed the performative masculinity of Ingres's portrait of Le Go. This trio, however, was buried in the middle of a row of vigorous portrayals of male figures in higher contrast media that overpowered Ingres's delicate graphite rendering. The result perhaps emphasized a collective uneasiness over seeing Ingres's sheet removed from the spotlight.

If Shear's version turned drawing frames into relief sculptures, sculpture became drawing in Shechet's installation. Her anchor drawing was Giorgio Morandi's *Natura morta* (1959; Fig. 3),[12] from which Shechet borrowed colors and spatial cues. She divided the wall into registers, hand-painted with three shades inspired by Morandi's watercolor: a wide band of cream on top, a narrow middle band of sepia, and a blue-gray band at the bottom (Fig. 4). Moreover, she produced four hand-carved wooden benches to function as three-dimensional drawings, akin to linear perspective lines. In my view, the benches also poetically spoke to the drawings' material origin in charcoal and wood pulp, contrasting the density of their natural source against the lightness of their realization on paper. Shechet's display thus highlighted the fragile boundaries between drawing and other media, notably sculpture, and how a sculptural outlook can change the reception of a sheet.[13] This subdivision of space in turn converted the gallery into a type of landscape, whereby tracing the gallery horizon, that is, the colored borders, revealed unsettling relationships between works. For example, Shechet hung Ingres's *Le Go* so that the subject's eye level was even with the breasts of two female nudes in graphite by Gaston Lachaise[14] and George Grosz[15] bracketing it.[16] This choice comments on the male gaze inherent in drawings of the female body, revisiting Berger's assertion that "drawings reveal the process of their own making, their own looking."[17]

The third installation by Earnest returned to tradition, with evenly spaced frames, and his only intervention was in the wall colors: grayscale in the front gallery, and an Easter egg palette in the back. His anchor drawing, a diagrammatic graphite by the Swiss artist and healer Emma Kunz,[18] imbued the installation with an undercurrent of

Figure 3

GIORGIO MORANDI

Natura morta, 1959

Collection of Jack Shear (© 2023 Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York/SIAE, Rome)

chromotherapy, since Kunz saw her drawings as types of spiritual holograms or spaces of healing.[19] While the installation created a few fascinating connections that unfolded like a game of exquisite corpse (viz., placing Robert Gober's study of a sink[20] only three works away from Fragonard's *Orlando Furioso*[21]), the overall hang failed to channel the mysticism of Kunz's drawing practice. The Ingres, in this case, was tucked between two eighteenth-century variations on the male psyche: a robust *Hercules and Antaeus* by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (Fig. 5),[22] and the *Death of Ezekiel's Wife* by William Blake.[23] Unmoored from spatial alterations that reinforced his grouping of

Figure 4

DANIEL TERNA

Installation view, *Ways of Seeing: Three Takes on the Jack Shear Drawing Collection, Take Two: Arlene Shechet* (13 November–23 December 2021)

Courtesy of the Drawing Center, New York

Figure 5

GIOVANNI DOMENICO TIEPOLO

Hercules and Antaeus

Collection of Jack Shear

sheets, his curation seemed instead to follow the format of other exhibitions of drawing collections that eschewed chronological curation, such as the exhibition of the Richard and Mary L. Gray collection of drawings (Art Institute of Chicago and Morgan Library & Museum, 2020–22).[24]

Far more insightful is the first volume of the exhibition publication, which the organizers considered a fourth curatorial iteration.[25] Edited by Hilton Als and Claire Gilman, the volume features artists, poets, and writers such as Nick Mauss, Tracy K. Smith, and George Saunders exploring ways to respond to drawings from Shear's collection via the written word. The volume not only continues the conceit of contemporary counterparts such as the *Frick Diptychs* (2018–present) and Gagosian's *Picture Books* (2021–present), both of which pair living cultural figures' texts with art works, it also extends roots into the historical catalogues of the *Parti Pris* exhibition series organized by Régis Michel in the 1980s and '90s, in which film directors such as Peter Greenaway and philosophers such as Julia Kristeva were given

carte blanche to curate shows of drawings at the Louvre. Rarely do the writers in Als's edited volume directly address the formal elements or historical context of a sheet. Instead, an undercurrent of loss pervades the contributions, from Als's own account of a lapsed friendship *vis-à-vis* the act of drawing, to Ben Marcus's words on "zones of grief" invoked by a notational drawing by Jorinde Voigt,[26] to Clare Sestanovich's rumination on her brother's death, paired with Rashid Johnson's maelstrom of red ink on cotton rag.[27] These interdisciplinary writings echo Berger's own personal take on drawings, as he once wrote, "The first generic impulse to draw derives from the human need to search, to plot points, to place things and to place oneself."[28]

Just as Berger's *Ways of Seeing* combined visual essays and textual interpolations, the various takes on Shear's collection too rejected the traditional model of drawing exhibitions and, in turn, acknowledged the difficulty in translating the personal character of drawings into any display. This anxiety was, in fact, central to the very first iteration of a drawing-centric show: the 1797 display of drawings at the Louvre's Galerie d'Apollon. Contextualizing these two exhibitions staged 226 years apart reveals the stubborn persistence of concerns regarding the display of drawings. The 1797 show was one of the earliest instances of a multi-artist, century-spanning exhibition, bringing together drawings from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century and juxtaposing, for example, a craggy landscape by Albrecht Dürer[29] with a pastel portrait by Maurice Quentin de La Tour.[30] Just as Shear, Shechet, and Earnest intervened in the Drawing Center's galleries, so too did the organizers of the 1797 show alter the architectural space of the Galerie d'Apollon by widening the bays at the end of the space and installing mirrors to enhance the visitor's experience of drawings on view, particularly their experience of portraits and physiognomic drawings *vis-à-vis* their own reflections.[31] Moreover, two rows of drawings were intended to be hung around the entire perimeter of the Galerie d'Apollon to make a "line of drawings."[32] While this proposal went unrealized, this vision of an unbroken border connects with Shear's experimental adjoining of frames, while the interactivity of the mirrors preceded that of Shechet's benches. The uniting element is the desire to convert the exhibition space itself into a type of drawing. The ultimate intention of the 1797 Paris exhibition was to democratize drawing connoisseurship for the Revolutionary public accessing the newly opened Musée du Louvre, by embedding the act of looking at drawings and conceptually aligning it as a site-specific act. The multipart approach to Shear's collection dug into this same tension between the intimacy of drawing as a medium and the need to make drawings publicly legible through exhibitions. Ironically and tellingly, it aimed to reimagine drawing connoisseurship for the twenty-first century by returning to the original premise of the eighteenth century, quietly questioning the discipline's trajectory over more than 200 years.

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notes

1. The book consists of seven essays based on the 1972 BBC television series.
2. See Kristen Hileman and John Baldessari, *Ways of Seeing: John Baldessari Explores the Collection*, exh. cat., Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2006–7; and Evelyn C. Hankins and Giuseppe Panza, *Panza: The Panza Collection, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*, exh. cat., Washington, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2008–9.
3. The two "guest curators" were selected by Claire Gilman rather than by the collector himself (in conversation with the author, January 2021).
4. Oil on paper; 254 x 318 mm; sale, New York, Doyle, 15 November 2017, lot 97, repr. (in color); see *https://www.artsy.net/artwork/david-hockney-man-drawing*.

5. See Gilman et al. 2022, p. 17.

6. See Jeremy Atherton Lin, "Wolfgang Tillmans's Ways of Seeing," *Frieze Magazine*, 12 September 2022 (online at *https://www.frieze.com/article/wolfgang-tillmans-ways-seeing*).

7. Pen, brush, and brown ink, with brown wash and opaque white, on blue paper; 219 x 181 mm; sale, Paris, Millon & Associés, 19 June 2015, lot 324, repr. (in color); see *https://www.artprice.com/artist/11451/anne-louis-girodet/drawing-watercolor/9324038/hero-et-leandre*.

8. Conté crayon; 238 x 214 mm; sale, London, Sotheby's, 5 February 2014, lot 84, repr. (in color); see *https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2014/impressionist-modern-art-evening-sale-l14002/lot.84.html*.

9. Graphite; 302 x 222 mm; see *https://drawingcenter.org/exhibitions/ways-of-seeing/works/29*. Signed, dated, and inscribed at lower left, in pencil, *offert à son ami / Lego / Ingres Del. / Rome 1836*.

10. Pencil, gel pen, Scotch tape, burned paper, colored pencil, and Sharpie on Manila tagboard paper; 305 x 229 mm; see *https://drawingcenter.org/exhibitions/100-drawings-from-now/lightbox/0-0*.

11. Pencil; 305 x 225 mm; see *https://drawingcenter.org/exhibitions/ways-of-seeing/works/6*.

12. Watercolor; 235 x 171 mm; sale, Milan, Ambrosiana Casa D'Aste & Poleschi, 25 November 2010, lot 235; see *https://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Natura-Morta/6923FEFE8DC28594*. Signed at lower center, in pencil, *Morandi*.

13. This argument was recently and convincingly staged at the exhibition *Drawings by Sculptors* at Helena Anrather Gallery, New York (5 January–4 February 2023), where Shechet herself submitted a porcelain piece instead of a work on paper.

14. Pencil on paper; 597 x 237 mm; see Gilman et al. 2022, p. 56, repr.

15. Pencil; 592 x 237 mm; see ibid., p. 57, repr.

16. See ibid., p. 59.

17. See John Berger, *Berger on Drawing*, Cork, 2005, p. 17.

18. Pencil and colored pencil on graph paper; 1049 x 1000 mm; sale, Bern, Galerie Kornfeld, 16 September 2021, lot 381, repr.; see *https://www.kornfeld.ch/g365/d4102103810_Emma-Kunz-Werk-Nr-079.html*.

19. See Melissa Blanchflower et al., *Emma Kunz: Visionary Drawings*, London, 2019.

20. Pencil and colored pencil, on vellum; 305 x 229 mm; see Gilman et al. 2022, p. 85, repr.

21. Black chalk, with opaque and transparent watercolor; 403 x 260 mm; sale, New York, Christie's, 28 January 2021, lot 47, repr. (in color); see *https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/old-master-british-drawings-including-property-cornelia-bessie-estate/jean-honore-fragonard-grasse-1732-1806-paris-47/111824*.

22. Pen and gray and black ink, with gray wash, over black chalk; 215 x 145 mm; see *https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2019/old-master-drawings/giovanni-domenico-tiepolo-hercules-and-antaeus*. Signed at lower right, in black ink, *Dom Tiepolo*.

23. Pen and black ink, with black and gray washes, over pencil, with scratching out; 339 x 477 mm; sale, New York, Sotheby's, 27 January 2021, lot 88, repr. (in color); see *https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/old-master-drawings/the-death-of-ezekiels-wife*.

24. See Kevin Salatino et al., *Conversations in Drawing: Seven Centuries of Art from the Gray Collection*, exh. cat., Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, and New York, Morgan Library & Museum, 2020–21.

25. See Als and Gilman (eds.) 2021, p. 11.

26. Colored pencil, graphite, and ink; 610 x 460 mm; sale, Christie's, 2 March 2018, lot 1040, repr. (in color); see *https://onlineonly.christies.com/s/paper-online/jorinde-voigt-b-1977-1040/53404*.

27. Oil on cotton rag; 762 x 559 mm; see *https://drawingcenter.org/exhibitions/ways-of-seeing/works/4*.

28. See John Berger, *Bento's Sketchbook*, London, 2011, p. 150.

29. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 18579. Transparent and opaque watercolor, with pen and black ink; 223 x 222 mm; see Yveline Cantarel-Besson et al., *L'an V: Dessins des Grands Maîtres*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1988, p. 64, repr.; and *http://arts-graphiques.louvre.fr/detail/oeuvres/1/108533-Vue-du-val-dArco-dans-le-Tyrol-meridional#*.

30. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. 27612. Pastel on blue paper, mounted on a stretched canvas; 471 x 390 mm; see Cantarel-Besson et al. 1988, p. 80, repr.; and *http://arts-graphiques.louvre.fr/detail/oeuvres/1/213443-Portrait-de-Jean-Baptiste-Simeon-Chardin-peintre-1699-1779#*.

31. See Yveline Cantarel-Besson, *Musée du Louvre, janvier 1797–juin 1798: Procès-verbaux du conseil d'administration du "musée Central des Arts*," Paris, 1992, pp. 30–32.

32. See "La Ligne de dessins," in ibid, p. 30.