

## Elizabeth Gunter's opening speech of FINE LINES at Grand Provence on 30 September 2012.

Louise has just completed a practice-led PhD at the Centre for Visual Art, UKZN, and she submitted this body of work that we see here today as the praxis for her doctorate. She completed her Masters in Fine Art *cum laude* at the same institution in 2007. In addition, Louise has art teaching experience at high school, university and adult education levels. She is also an experienced facilitator, having worked in the organisational and development facilitation context. She was a founder member of DWEBA, an NGO that worked with rural craftswomen and developed a participatory training methodology using drawing as a central component. This methodology was published as a resource guide in 2001 entitled, "Drawing Our Lives".

To my mind notions of mimesis, transformation, difference, and becoming are central to the work on display. All these being rather weighty topics, I will focus on one aspect of mimesis that manifests so clearly in the labour of Louise's drawing, a process that is also obviously seminal to her art making.

In his book *Memoirs of the blind: The self-portrait and other ruins* (1993) Jacques Derrida explains the role of **sight** in mark making, or **trait**, as the **loss** of sight or as **blindness**. He does not imply that mark making is unmediated. The moment the drawing tool strikes the drawing surface, a conflation of multiple influences mediate in the irruption of mark. *Yet*, according to Derrida the origin of mark, or *trait*, is blind - because neither mark nor its mediation ever exists in visible form in the mind at the moment of irruption, nor does mark find its origin in the world. To quote Derrida:

Even if drawing is, as they say, mimetic, that is, reproductive, figurative, representative, even if the model is presently facing the artist, the **trait must proceed in the night**. It escapes the field of vision. Not only because it is *not yet visible*, but also because **it does not belong to the realm of the spectacle**, of spectacular objectivity - and so **that which it makes happen** or come [*advenir*] cannot in itself be mimetic (Derrida 1993: 45). Unquote

Ironically, then, the marks we make originate in blindness while they simultaneously trace, chart or track sight, our experience of the life-world, and the visible world. If their origin is in blindness, how can they mime? Even when the artist tries to faithfully record the visible world with absolute fidelity to reality, her marks irrupt as pure invention. One could possibly say that what all these marks mime is in fact the vast nothingness of a mute and blind netherworld, the invisible abyss of her unconscious that is the artist's domain only.

This notion becomes more understandable if we consider that the world out there did not expediently present Louise with the marks she produced on paper, board, or canvas, nor did her mind conveniently provide preconceived spectacle, readily laden and enriched with marks. No picture existed outside, or inside when she made these drawings and paintings. Astonishingly, there was nothing there, when pencil met paper. What is more, the artist engaged such nothingness, such blindness while she also engaged *in* it, a simultaneity that could be seen as a duality. It is not. It is, rather, a duel, a war of unification, two opponents, but one fight, violent and bloody, yet generative and prolific.

Such a duel, then, I cannot but imagine, yielded the *Becoming-series*. In Louise's work, the drawing process appears as a continuous confrontation that jointly defeats this dark nothingness by proposing visibility. In the process both her inner and outer worlds become visible. The duel seems to have irrupted along more such obstinate oppositions, always revealing the between world of her perception and constructs, turning the act of drawing into a unifying interface between inside and outside, a thin permeable membrane, palpable, visible, alive - always becoming.

I read in her art making processes a number of reciprocal yet contradictory occurrences: erasure becomes inscription becomes erasure, marking becomes unmarking becomes marking, appearance battles disappearance battles appearance, and figuration captures nothingness captures figuration. Accordingly, I read expressly in the *Becoming-series* such oppositions that are also very present in the entire body of work: a terrible silence that screams of imminent death; a quiet, even mute utterance that can anticipate only the violence of falling apart,

quietly, but certainly; a fertile feminine fecundity forever pushing against an empty, barren field of nothingness.

Ultimately, Louise's drawing drives a relentless and forceful becoming, constantly posing self-as-being against self-as-nothing, life against death. As such her mark making, her *trait* or trace occupies the wonder world of invention, fabrication, and illusion. These marks have never existed before, not out there, nor in here - they mark *becoming* always between the past and future, between legend and myth, between conjecture and construct, sense and nonsense, the visible and the invisible.

Louise Hall intuitively understands these dense, illogical, and obscure little encounters. She knows, whether we draw or not, that we as a result cannot really perceive reality as an unvarying phenomenon, constrictive with its edicts of fidelity. She refuses the formulae that ensure a repetitive and faithful mimesis. Hers is not a ritual echo of existing style languages that merely regurgitate legends. In her work we see no conformity to any canon or artist; no second-hand repertoire. Even if we can read in her work the pain and trauma of death, she poses the warm and bloody mess of life, the impossibility of predicting its flows. We see Louise - the multiplicity and complexity of her selves.

I must assert, then, that Louise's drawing process relates a fierce and fearless confrontation of her blindness, the nothingness of her sight, the hidden invisibilities of her mind and body that irrupt without precedent and without prefiguration *in*, and more importantly, durationally *through* her drawing process. What we see, therefore, is pure invention, the labour of this artist's abandonment of caution and conformity, a refusal to obey the narrow confines both of a single reality and of mere decorative copying. We see that which does not belong to 'the realm of spectacle', the nothingness of sight and self, each notation anticipating further sight as much as insight, notation that promises insight through the surprise and wonder of discovery.

Both the effort to capture the fleetingness of sight and the promise of insight create the force and flow of her drawing, finally enabling her to exceed even invention, and decisively affording us a glimpse of an artist's body-mind who asserts her presence by facing her absence, or rather, by giving her absence a face.

Louise, I congratulate you. Your work, quite simply, is powerful, violently tender, if I may say so.

I declare this exhibition open.