

Drawing Exchange

Lady Lucy and Kayle Brandon

including: Alice Forward, Anna Lucas, Andrew Mania & Daniel Rush, Animate, Aviv Kruglanski & Vahida Ramujkic, Brian Dawn Chalkley, Corey Orbisons, Pete Harrison + Emma Bush, François Marry, John Stark, Jessica Marlowe, Keira Rathbone, Goodiepal, Heath Bunting & Sarah Flint, Laura Oldfield Ford, Lady Stubbs, Marcia Farquhar & Mahali O'Hare, Patricia Jordan, Rebecca Swindell, Simon Webb and Tom Stubbs & Michael Smith.

For the past three years Artists Kayle Brandon and Lady Lucy have been collaborating on a series of drawing-led events, 'The Drawing Exchange'. The exchanges are rooted in a social dialogue where the process and efforts of drawing create a close community of participants sharing, investigating and experimenting with the drawn line. Exchanges have taken place in a variety of public locations from a scrap metal yard to a victorian water lift and a night in the forest. Each event has had its own unique subject matter and series of experimental drawing exercises initiated in response to the surrounding environment and the group of gathered participants. The Drawing Exchange set up situations where the amateur and the expert, the drawn and the drawer, merged and lost their definition. Individuals worked in a on a variety of different exercises either collaboratively on five or six man drawings, rapidly sketching their surroundings or using drawing to describe imaginative scenarios or concrete emotions. The participants of each event socialised through their shared experience of drawing, working together, sharing impressions, explaining their drawings, and building a sense of community through the experience of the exchange.

At the end of each exchange the participants are invited to collectively show their drawings enabling the group to see and assess their efforts, encouraging positive comments on the drawings they are most taken by. The group's viewing of drawings creates a sense of pride and achievement to the days efforts consolidating the sense of community which has been growing throughout the event. The event finishes with participants being invited to exchange their work. The structure of the exchange is very simple; if you like a drawing you can ask its drawer if you could have it, if they agree you present your own drawing in exchange, as a swap. The swap establishes a further connection between individuals and an intimate relationship between the participants. Shyly politely or often completely direct individuals strike up a conversation over their drawings. The relationships that form over the exchange process create an atmosphere of friendly encouragement and group camaraderie. Here, the notion of drawing extends out from a representation, description and exploration of form to create an intimate community of individuals who are sharing and swapping their efforts.

In an accumulation of their Drawing Exchange activity Lady Lucy and Kayle Brandon invited over twenty five artists to partake in a two week series of drawing workshops across the city of Bristol extending their singular events into a festival of drawing celebration. With artists from a range of different disciplines participating in the festival the structure of each workshop varied from individual to individual demonstrating a variety of different perspectives on drawing and an array of different uses for the drawn line: from day planners to portraits, to dream writing, using biro and pencil to thread and typewriters.

Hosted in public spaces and art venues throughout Bristol the drawing festival created a hub of activity in the city. Each workshop gathered a diverse audience of participants from fellow artists to interested passers creating a lively mix of individuals who willingly entered into discussion over their drawing activity.

The workshops followed the exchange's precedent of establishing a social platform for drawing-led exercise with individuals invited to talk about their perception of drawing and the workshops exercises igniting a continual dialogue on new ways to perceive, describe and communicate through the drawn line. The open dialogue in turn created a friendly and responsive group of previous strangers, with each new workshop forming its own community and the entire festival creating pockets of drawing communities across the city.

The accessibility and social focus of the events further offer up an alternative model for an educational workshop. With a focus on inclusive discussion the exchanges echo sentiments established with the Free University where the process of learning centred on an open framework of participation and discussion. A model which is seeing a resurgence in the Free School established in London and the Islington Mill Art Academy based in Manchester where free talks, events and workshops are hosted to encourage participation from a range of individuals and

ignite challenging and critical dialogue from the community of participants each of whom who are sharing knowledge and developing ideas. The drawing workshops are similarly communal groups of investigation and learning where drawing and artistic investigation take precedent in the communal exchange of conversations and line.

The open dialogue encouraged a loosening of preconceptions about drawing and created a confidence and freedom to the participant's activity. Anna Lucas noted after hosting her workshop in the Cube Cinema where the active scratching of pencils on carbon paper, was accompanied by a Leonard Cohen and Popul Vuh soundtrack and the surreal desert images of Werner Herzog on the screen,

"One man said to me afterwards that he had never done a drawing, and therefore would like to take his first drawing home with him, rather than leave it to the drawing pool. He must have been in his late forties I'd say. It was great to hear his comment about how much he had got from the event."

Patricia Vickers commenced her workshop with a talk about fear, the fear of form and our inability to capture it precisely through the drawn line. For Patricia such fear offers up an opportunity to negate our desire for detailed representation and enables us to focus upon the act of looking, and re-looking as if for the first time, feeling and perceiving a structure and texture. Vickers followed on from her discussion of fear to read a passage by Laurie Lee which extenuated her description of looking and perceiving as if for the first time, where the newness of our surroundings is overwhelming and confusing. Throughout the course of the morning participants in her workshop were asked to write a sentence on a large sheet of paper about their experiences of nature, memories from when they were very young, their first encounter with an element of nature or the animal kingdom, a heightened evocative and newly formed impression of the natural world. Written in pencil biro and charcoal the sentences formed a section of prose, building up with each new drawing activity. The finale of the workshop resulted in the reading of the text, with intimate recollections of memories and lasting first impressions of forms the mass of drawings displayed in front of the participants came alive with the evocative recollections of animal and plant life.

With exchanges happening at various venues across the city a hub space was formed in Spike Island's main gallery where a temporary 'House' of wooden framework became the centre of the festival. Drawings made throughout the course of the weeks were pinned onto the wooden structure, gradually covering the framework with paper that displayed the workings of each event from biro portraits, coloured animals, mind maps, to embroidered fabrics and still lives. The 'House' stood as a token of the multitude of interactions that had occurred throughout the two weeks, each paper a testament to a social encounter and the ever-growing community of drawers.

The finale of the festival saw the staging of a grand exchange where the wooden house adorned with drawings was the focus for a mass swap. Staring at the beginning of the weeks workshops Kayle Brandon and Lady Lucy orchestrated an open exchange and bartering system where even if, in the course of the swap, the individual you approached for their drawing was not so keen on what you had come up with in the workshop there was no room for a sense of negative critique but rather an opportunity for an alternative method of bartering. Exchanges of all kinds took place from pencils to rubbers a sandwich and an unforgettable dance off. With the final exchange taking on a performative quality of its own the drawings themselves took on a set of values centred not only upon their visual appearance but the charisma, humour and personality of their owners. Leaving the final exchange people were loaded with drawings or clutching a precious few, tokens of an exchange, a conversation and an interaction with another participant.

Laura Mansfield