

Following the Curves:
Throwing Curve Balls,
While Carving Out
Ever More Arcs

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Since most of the works in *Following the Line* feature female imagery, one wonders whether the curator, whose title literally veils this fact, has thrown us a curveball. What we soon realize is that Carol Jazzar has selected works by thirty international artists that are rooted in the physical act of drawing, whether on paper or printing plates. Most of these are original drawings, but several are animated videos or prints such as lithographs, monoprints and etchings. As we shall see, *Following the Line* is a fitting title given the capricious events featured in these works "drawn" from the collection of Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz.

Following the Line requests viewers to peer through curvy veneers of female features such as bellies, figures and hairdos to grasp each work's underlying marks. On one hand, Jazzar avoids the trap of becoming overly fixated on feminine experience, whether from the vantage of 1970s essentialism, 1980s anti-essentialism, 1990s reappraisal or 2000s reversal. After all, this co-ed party's median age is barely forty years old (b. 1971). Alternatively, inviting viewers to reflect upon this exhibition through each era's "feminist" lens would force people to field ever more curves.

Of the majority of drawings that depict female figures and visages, to really "follow the line," one must look past the female imagery to glimpse their characters' penchant for wildness, playfulness, freedom and ultimate unpredictability. We witness Tracey Emin's 'sleepwalker wandering off to parts unknown, Jiae Hwang's delicate portrait cast by pencil marks suspended in tension, Wangechi Mutu's tangle of female pubic hair and a reversed "E" that frustrates left-to-right reading, Ana Albertina Delgado's colossal hat covering a coital couple, and Klara Kristalova's unruly hairstyles befitting such characters' uncontrollable temperaments. In light of these works, Louise Bourgeois' and Jorge Pantoja's drawings of pregnant women inspire one to focus more on the infinite possibility of each baby's post-birth life, as compared to the womb's equanimity. By contrast, Alice Neel's image of a nursing giantess seems extremely calm, even though this child resembles an alert toddler more than an inactive newborn.

I find myself wondering about the ultimate fate of the pool victim lying frozen on Pantoja's diving board, the distressed explorers traipsing about Mel Kadel's landscapes, the frightened national guardsmen and bewildered protestors facing off in Lou Anne Colodny's scenes, the paradoxical characters inhabiting Christy Gast's secret hideout, the meddlesome gossipers etched into Nicola Tyson's memory, the nudist enduring the wilderness in Naomi Fisher's terrain, the seabird ensnared in Diana Shpungin's digital animation, the defenseless animals depicted in Dasha Shishkin's, Peggy Preheim's and Clare Rojas' anthropomorphic portraits. And what about the hapless characters trapped aboard William Cordova's merry-go-round and blimp or Beatriz Montecavaro's numerous spacechins? Who will

Following this "line" prompts me to reflect more upon contemporary dance/physical theater than traditional drawing. I am strangely compelled to recall characters dancing awkward, spasmodic and fidgety movements familiar to those suffering seizures, convulsions, tantrums or symptoms of Parkinson's disease.⁽¹⁾

The subjects of these drawings are active. They feel very much alive, though hardly "realistic." Like living beings, they seem uncontrollable, unpredictable, spontaneous, but most importantly "future-oriented." I find myself pondering these drawings; waiting for something to happen, rather than studying some representation of an event that has already taken place. On this level, *Following the Line* concerns time, specifically, the advancement of time and our particular place within chronological time.

Even works without explicit figuration generate their own happenings. They render movement, like spirited persons experiencing temper tantrums or molecules undergoing Brownian motion.⁽²⁾ Such impulsive figures/systems behave erratically and resist being fixed. They might be described as veering off the line, rather than conforming to it as expected (linearly). This "line" relates to events on the natural or physical plane as well, such as Julie Mehretu's swirling storms, Jen Stark's colorful magic-marker daubs, Joanne Greenbaum's intermingling, irregular grids, Jay Hines' gaseous storms, Shoshanna Weinberger's uncontrollable blobs, Raul Perdomo's spontaneous fission of quartz crystals and cut gemstones, Felice Grodin's sinuous layers created using imaginary mapping techniques, Karen Rifas' tornado-like

Tara Donovan's ink accretions that resemble chaotic webs, exploding nets or asymmetrical blobs.

Although some may consider drawing a specifically "feminine" medium, perhaps because it is vulnerable, fragile, temporal or immediate, I have always considered drawing akin to speech, whether impromptu or expository. In truth, drawings can either feel like an off-the-cuff remark or a well-executed address, more on par with a painting, which is like a worked and re-worked essay. Speech includes dialects, idioms and vernacular talk, while the written word is forced to conform to universalized standards of syntax and grammar. Most of the drawings exhibited in *Following the Line* seem off-the-cuff, which may explain why they leave so much to my imagination. Functioning like quickly-scrawled sketches, they appear to illuminate the artists' active thought processes. Indeed, many artists use drawing as a tool to loosen up their gesture, to empty their minds and to refresh imagery and uncover motifs that they might overlook otherwise. Of the works exhibited here that are preparatory drawings, it would be fun to see what works they eventually inspired.

If one pursues such curves to discover ever more arcs, as this essay recommends, one begins to glimpse how *Following the Line* not only circumvents overt female imagery, but it invites consideration of numerous overlaying themes, such as: impulsive subjects, unpredictable outcomes, future happenings, impromptu speeches, artists' thought processes and finally, preparatory drawings for who knows what! *Following the Line* seems to be just that, an endless line, propelling viewers on a voyage...

(1)

Notable dance/theatre artist Pina Bausch, of Tanztheater Wuppertal, pioneered the use of awkward, spasmodic movement over the years. Philadelphia dance companies Nichole Canuso Dance Company and Headlong Dance Theater have also recently investigated such new movement vocabularies in depth.

(2)

Brownian Motion is the presumably random moving of particles suspended in a fluid (liquid or gas) resulting from their bombardment by the fast-moving atoms or molecules in the gas or liquid. The term "Brownian motion" can also refer to the mathematical model used to describe such random movements, which is often called a particle theory. Named for biologist Robert Brown.