



Felicity Clear: Drawings Plans Projections

Butler Gallery, Kilkenny
Rory Prout

In *Drawings Plans Projections*, Felicity Clear presented a concise series of works combining linear structures, cast shadows, digital projection, and drawing. This latter term is certainly the central mode of the exhibition, and could arguably stand alone to describe any of the components of Clear's artworks. Divided thoughtfully through the Butler Gallery's four sequential rooms, these drawings (whether realised spatially, in pencil, or by projected light) repeatedly rendered a species of structure uniquely devised by the artist. Though informed by architectural models, these structures have jettisoned the repetition of modernist design and mobilize instead a vastly increased repertoire of angles. Horizontal or vertical lines enjoy no special status in Clear's many permutations of

reticulated models. Instead, a distortion of perspective takes precedence.

The gallery's first and second rooms contain two separate and distinct works that appear to be involved in a kind of exchange. The large drawing, *Nothing seems normal anymore*, is shown in the first room. Here, three sections of heavy paper almost entirely cover one wall, and combine to form the drawing. Clear draws her structures in varied tonal values. Precise, clean, and straight-lined, the work just about resists a reading as a unified, architectural diagram. The structures spill in a curve across the paper, overlaying and obstructing one another. They also mutually obstruct a single interpretation of perspective. Individually, they may be understood as legible, receding models, but in combination, they break down into an abstract, linear image.

In the following room, an installation titled *Here's the thing* appears like a startling progression of the previous work. On a wall corresponding to that which supports the drawing in room one, two similar sheets of paper roll down from the ceiling, but now continue past the skirting and extend out across the gallery floor. On that floor, and on the paper itself, Clear's models stand in three dimensions, constructed with fine wooden sticks. Studio lights cast their shadows on floor and paper alike. Those shadows share a space with the artist's pencil marks, and the two are not immediately distinguishable. The drawn structures are bolder than those in the previous example and offer more clarity in the way they mirror the tangible wooden models.

This installation seems to suggest that these wooden models inform the design of the other work in the exhibition. This impression is quickly complicated as the viewer progresses through the gallery, however. In Clear's animation, *Blueprint*, the artist's forms appear again, this time emerging frame by frame, along with their shadows, to rotate in an unexpectedly precise circle. This type of stop motion animation is created as a single drawing where the artist repeatedly erases and adds marks for every frame. The technique was pioneered by the South African artist William Kentridge, whose influence is certainly present here. Notable examples of Irish artists who have adopted and innovated on this strategy include David Begley, Eamon O'Kane and Alice Maher. Often made with a soft medium such as charcoal, the erasures are not perfect and every frame leaves its trace. These traces, like the cast shadows of Clear's real, wooden objects, resemble not just the shadows or footprints of those spatial structures in the normal way a shadow resembles

an object; the traces so closely resemble the objects that the two are not easily distinguished. While obviously taking cues from her previous engagement with architectural formations, Clear is also uncovering a subtle means of developing a compelling abstract vernacular of her own. However intuitive and handmade, Clear's wooden structures *are* designed; and that design is informed by the nature and behaviour of cast shadows and projected light. Each of Clear's several modes of drawing (traditional, spatial, animated, or projected) seem to inform the creation of another, in a process that refines the artist's aesthetics with each reiteration. The temptation to put some sequential or ontological logic to the artist's productions is repeatedly frustrated.

An object casts a shadow. That shadow is traced or mimicked to create a drawing, and that drawing is animated or projected. Yet the construction of those objects is clearly influenced by the perspectival distortions involved in casting shadows or projecting images. Clear's approach of closing this loop on the relationship between objects and their indexical signs is an intriguing strategy. It gives a sense of an open-ended proposition, of an artist still in the process of working out her ideas. The strength of this show was that it revealed that process for the viewer. In an installation, *To calculate the unforeseen*, a slide projection periodically throws images of the artist's drawings over another drawing made on a wall in

the gallery. In a darkened room these projections simultaneously illuminate and obscure the wall drawing itself. The two occasionally correspond; a slide of the wall drawing must have made it into the projector. Or it was used in the creation of the wall drawing.

Clear's attempt to translate her thinking process is a generous endeavour, and it is effective. A series of small works on one wall did manage to break the sequential nature of a show that otherwise emerged as one continuous, unfolding idea. These six drawings, made with pencil or pen on tracing paper, and titled *Plan 1*, *Plan 2*, etc, are also the only inclusion of colour in the exhibition – albeit a somewhat muted colour, thanks to the transparency of the paper. They do, however, maintain the sense of studio activity, of contingency, or a sense of work in progress that is so appealing about drawings in general, and this exhibition in particular. At its centre, this show is concerned with some of the more definitive characteristics of drawing. Paper, pencil, and the artist's gesture feature prominently, as well as linearity and structure. However, it is Clear's interest in drawing as a cognitive process, as a means to visually translate abstract ideas, that is most compelling.

Rory Prout is an artist currently completing an MA in Modern and Contemporary Art History, Theory and Criticism at UCC. *Felicity Clear: Drawings Plans Projections* was on view, 14 June - 27 July 2014.



Felicity Clear: *Here's the thing* (2014). Pencil on paper, wooden sticks, lighting. 500 x 270 cm, models variable dimensions. Image courtesy of the artist and Butler Gallery. Photo Roland Paschoff.