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In And Out Of Bounds **Constance Lowe**

My work has always been involved with familiar images and objects and the significance of the materials from which they're made. Several years ago, after finishing an exhaustive, multi-part installation project, I (re)turned to drawing with a desire for a more direct and contained working method. Using ink blots as a source, I discovered a way to accomplish this ambition while continuing with and condensing the forms and interests of my previous work. In these drawings the process, medium, and image reflect material and conceptual concerns with translucency, re-production, and the agency of color.

Once I decide on the shape and scale of a specific drawing, the image is developed using colored pencil on mylar film. This method is labor intensive to the point of excess, leaving furry, anonymous strokes as evidence of the hand but no clues as to how the image is constructed. I'm interested in the possibility that this lack of visible mechanics can make the image seem residual, left behind like a stain, or something that arrives to vision full blown like a photograph or a medical specimen. These are fabrications in two senses; the process of their making, and in their being 'made up' without an actual model in the physical world. They are placeless ("homeless") and a bit slippery. The conceptual choices are bound to specific methods and criteria from which the work evolves as a visual and material event, with a certain amount of disinterest in the concepts that initiated, surround, and inhabit it.

The ink blots provide the possibility of an infinite number of images as no blot is exactly like another. The activities of tracing, enlarging, reducing, combining, and fragmenting increase the possible available source material exponentially. This flexibility surpasses the conventional specificity of drawing making the images a part of a larger potential, an

inherent limitlessness in the work. Color is also subject to seemingly endless combinations and juxtapositions with innumerable color schemes available to work with any shape. The limits of a drawing are set by the effort demanded by the scale and re-productive process, and the number of waxy layers the surface is willing to accept. The ability to alter an image or its trajectory is also constrained by the medium since the surface will only allow so many additions and changes, and will not always permit absolute erasure. The evolution of these drawings is slow due to the elaborate method as well as the potential for error; well-intended impulses and misjudgments can undermine the successful resolution of a work.

From a distance, the features that reveal the drawings as hand-done are not visible and initial impressions might suggest that they are digitally created. This is a case of the hand mimicking technology rather than vice-versa. To create the initial blot image, ink spatters are pressed between a folded sheet of paper yielding a symmetrical shape. Sometimes each side -- each matching shape -- remains unattached and independent of its twin; sometimes the two sides are conjoined and sometimes they meld into a single image that resembles anatomical symmetry or other similar forms. As with both the singular human body and identical twins, the resemblance between the two sides is seen first, but sustained attention reveals slight differences in the contours on each side that contribute a significant, if subtle, visual and conceptual element to the work.

As each blot is the result of one or more foldings -- doublings -- each completed work is also the product of a series of re-productions, a series of "originals" and "copies". As the image is developed, the color on one side of the symmetrical shape must be copied on the other side, which is never an exact process. In addition, each work consists of literally two complete drawings (two velvety layers that hold the plastic surface between them) which are yet not complete without each other. The first drawing (which is usually designated the "back") proposes initial color

and form for the image. On the other side of the film, the second drawing (usually the “front” - the dominant twin) either re-produces the color of the first to reinforce it or uses the first color as an underpainting. This creates a new color from the combination of colors seen through the translucent plastic.

Fluctuating between absolute flatness and hints of modeled form, color constructs the image within the boundaries of a contour that doesn't function in the work without it. Although there is no special relationship between a particular color scheme and a particular shape, these decisions are far from arbitrary. I try to establish a sense of incidental coloration, overlapping notions of the “natural”, “unnatural”, and “artificial” to suggest the kind of color that might result from genetic patterns, natural selection, mutation, or hallucinatory states.

In my drawings, the invention of a color scheme and its re-production within a work present some technical difficulty. On a monitor, colors appear inherently luminous and pristine, distinguished from each other purely by optical appearance. The use of actual pigments and binders is a much stickier affair with varying physical properties, making the waxy translucent skin integral to the physical presence of my work. I initially apply color in a speculative and exploratory way. When that same color is copied on the other side (of the image or of the support) my enthusiasm towards bringing the image to realization is tempered by the tedium of having to repeat what I now already know and remember how I did it. And in the drawing process unruly bits of color keep escaping from the boundaries to which they are confined creating small annoying specks and smudges where they are not supposed to be.

Like clouds, stains, and birthmarks, the inkblot provokes an instinctual impulse to perceive identifiable images in otherwise abstract shapes. The practice of playing with blots and other formless stimuli has a long history as a child's game, a means of foretelling future events, and a provocation to the artistic, poetic, and spiritual imagination. Leonardo

described how figures could be perceived in cracks and damp patches on a wall. In the 19th century, poet/physician Justinus Kerner produced ink blots (klexographien) to stimulate his poetry, and Victor Hugo created drawings using various spilling and blotting techniques.

In 1921, Herman Rorschach published his methods using ink blots as a tool to provide an integrated pattern of a subject's total personality, forever linking the term "Rorschach" to ink blots. His test uses a complicated scoring system to assess a manifold of personality dimensions based on a subject's perceptions of 10 standardized blots. And contrary to popular belief, neither the Rorschach Test nor its subsequent variations rely on the subject's perception of content within the shapes first or alone.

To a limited extent, I am interested in the connection of my images with the Rorschach Test because it illustrates one of the ways in which my work can articulate complementary oppositions such as psychological and physical or internal and external. However, the most crucial way in which my work distinguishes itself from association with Rorschach is its emphasis on the pleasures of vision, the sensuality and direct experience of seeing/apprehending.

I am attracted to the notion that the ink blot hangs suspended between abstraction and a multitude of representations. This state of "in-betweenness" is mirrored in the physical translucency of the medium, hovering between opacity and transparency, making visible an imaginative state in which the images evade identity or category. Translucency is simultaneously a seeing through and seeing into; it both reveals and veils, and is both illuminating and murky. In the gap between abstraction and representation, drawing and object, dreaming and waking, of and out of this world, is room for something else entirely to occur and take on its own life.