

Who would be a selector?

Over the last ten years I have watched selectors picking a handful of drawings from the huge annual submission trying to justify in their own minds why they make the choices they do. In that time I have seen over 20,000 drawings run this gauntlet of submission and selection. This year has been no different to any of those other years except in one significant part. This time I crossed that fine line from someone who has been a facilitator in the process to someone who specifies particular interest through considered choice. The early rounds are daunting. Like drawing itself, it is all unrealised potential. Paradoxically our task here is to see drawing as limiting this freedom of response. We are looking for, not anything, but something. A focus.

Once you let the first drawing go out you immediately begin to establish some criteria that allow you to move on, hesitantly I move among an endlessly resourceful body of work, aware there are hopes attached to each. As this huge body of drawings shrinks and as I make my choices the margin for error seems more acute. We are not curating here but selecting. I have no sense of a whole show. I am in each drawing meeting the way a person thinks as they declare their interest and make it visible. Are they clear, focussed, generous, caring, sensitive? If they are any of these and more, then how, and if not, why not? Is the drawing predictable or inventive, does it confirm what we already know or does it challenge us? Who is there and what do you want? People emerged from their worlds and took shape in front of me. The room filled with their thoughts. I began to 'choose' drawings that revealed both something of the nature of drawing that interested me and also introduced me to the obsessive nature of an individual concerned enough to share their thoughts with me. I was attracted to meeting strangers.

I found moments in drawings that troubled me, not in subject but in the 'shifting' moments where concentration is lost. I was aware of myself searching for diamonds but looking for flaws. Where did the maker of a drawing let their vision slip? Did they hold their nerve? Was the language appropriate for the subject? Judgement in drawing, as in all things becomes critical towards the end. When and how do we leave something? I was searching for objects of consequence. I wanted to see another world revealed that could change mine. An encounter with a tiny sketchbook containing a huge silent boat arrived in my head with an enormous calm and carefully judged, but absent, music. It rests in the exhibition. It stays in my head. This little book is joined by drawings that at the time affected me in ways that similarly touched me.

Good drawings move in different ways through my world and it is this touch that I want. Sometimes they appropriately brush past almost unnoticed and sometimes they tug at my sleeve. Occasionally they shout, but mostly they just hold me for longer and with a greater sense of urgency.

I had a thought afterwards that however carefully I felt that I had proceeded I was actually in a china shop and that the objects which had remained intact when I decided to leave had been saved and put into this exhibition, but I think that is the nature of selection.

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