



**EMMA
COOP**
I LIVE
ANOTHER
LIFE



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COOP
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studio 1.1



DETAIL:
OUT OF MY BODY & OUT OF
MY MIND Telegraph Hill 1
Graphite on photographic print
2022

A process of drawing

Available among the varied content of Emma Coop's highly active Instagram account is a series of short video clips. These clips reveal something quite intimate about her drawing process. Closely framed sequences show the artist's hand holding a large chunky graphite stick, proceeding to variously prod, scuff, delicately dance or vigorously deposit marks over the paper surface. Although images of Coop's finished drawings are also available to view on the Instagram account, the relationship between the two is not immediately evident, especially in reproduction on a small digital screen. What is apparent though, is how the activity of drawing, as much as it might be to render into existence something that may constitute a discernible image, is principally one of *process*. This becomes particularly noticeable when Coop's drawings, are confronted in person as they take on a bodily dimension.

These are drawings that come with an intensity suggesting a lengthy duration of looking as well as mark-making. Emerging from a coalescing of heavily layered scrawls and delicate light touches, made across vast sheets of paper, are what appear to be ambiguous areas of dense foliage and undergrowth. These evocations of landscape arise from interactions with physical environments within one mile of Coop's home in South-East London. Implied is the documenting of what she has described as 'the desire to escape edges, things and constructs.' However, in any bid to avoid "the daily, conscious and confined" this is not a romantic escape to the country but something of the opposite. Growing up in inner-city Manchester, Coop developed an intuitive curiosity for an enchanted idea of 'nature', and she soon came to understand how experiencing a natural environment was something to be sought closer to home and on one's own terms.

With a further group of works Coop effectively obliterates substantial areas of colour photographs leaving selected elements of vegetation and the sky in their original photographic state. Exactly what has been as, it were, drawn out from the image is unclear, with only the occasional

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silhouetted hint of a rooftop providing clues. The physicality of the graphite slabs becomes something topographic in their own right, but what Coop achieves conceptually is to render redundant the one thing a photograph is meant to be: a measurable representation of what is recorded. Landscapes however, can never be 'true' as such. They are always the amalgamation of not only material things but the subjectives of perception and artistic traditions.

"Je vois par taches" 'I see in touches' Cezanne claimed. Coloured marks, dabs, stains. He could easily have meant, 'I see by making coloured marks'. And another artist could perhaps say the same about graphite. The relationship between touch and sight is key to how Coop understands what we might consider to be an experience of place in landscape. Touch is embodied in the gesture of the artist's hand and is inherent to the object quality of the marks. There is also the sensation of 'touch' felt in the experience of comprehension: first through the artist's method and then by the viewer encountering the artist's work. Space in Coop's landscapes is not a reaching into distance but a proximity of both space and time which we feel our way into through all our bodily senses and instinct.

It is worth considering what landscape geographer J.B. Jackson said about his chosen area of study. "[Landscape] refers to something which we think we understand: and yet to each of us it seems to mean something different." The resulting contentions are not helped by the term landscape having its origins not in the physical constituents of topography or built structures but in images of them. In other words, artistic interpretations. Our relationship to landscape is therefore generally cultural and conducted often as passive observers. There are, of course exceptions, although these may be defined in terms of physical extremes: of collective exploitation (agriculture, mining) or individual endurance (walking, climbing). The tendency though is to think of landscape as something other to ourselves: it is there to be encountered, negotiated, to be dealt with.

In Coop's nature there is no hierarchy, no specific here or there. Each smudge-cum-filament cedes to an overall totality of mark making and place making. Significantly she does not offer us any horizon encouraging us to falsely look beyond. As viewers of her work we are forced to encounter what is immediately in front of us. And the possibility of place making becomes important because we sense that this is,

A place
where
things may
or may not
happen or,
have
already
happened.

indeed, a situation that has significance. A place where things may or may not happen or, have already happened. Very little appears precious, and Coop's landscapes seem inherently unsettled.

The tenacity of observation is akin to Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 thriller *Blow Up* which is one of the artist's more favourite films. Set also in South-East London, the film's narrative so intriguingly expressed in its cinematography, is both a roving camera and protagonist's eye scanning over the rustling leaves of an urban park, building up as it does so towards a suspense generated out of apparently nothing. A precarious balance between absence and presence, process and image, bodily action and intellect, contingency and control, has been front of stage in what is usually considered the history of western modern art, enacted by its sparring characters of abstraction and figuration. The questions that Coop may provoke with her work are not essentially new. Yet, they continue to hold currency, particularly for artists who ask of their art and of themselves such questions almost every day.

What is it that compels someone to amass dark monochromatic marks on a flat and generally white receptive surface..? This question is not asked in the context of strict cultural value or self-conscious artistic endeavour. Rather something more inexplicable, intuitive and material. Not necessarily as a means of representation, regardless of reference points picked up along the way, but something more experiential, that tests a range of your faculties, keeping them in check and in balance. Given how, in the wider scheme of things, there could be more immediately useful things to do with our time and energy, at its most fundamental level, the purpose and appeal of such an activity, even after centuries of art historical refinement, remains a rather tantalising imponderable. And herein, one might suggest, lies one of the true enduring qualities of making art. Rather than any calculated gain made possible with a resulting image, perhaps it is through the visceral delights (and frustrations) of a relative absurdity that worthwhile artistic endeavour is formed? Surely it is much more interesting when we don't know. After all isn't this really why we do something: the attempt to find out?

The relationship between touch and sight is key to how Coop understands what we might consider to be an experience of place in landscape.

Andrew Cross



Facing page:
AFTER THE NIGHT
Graphite on paper roll
170 x 270cm+
2022





OUT OF MY BODY
& OUT OF MY MIND
Left to right:
Dunoon Road 1, 2 & 3
Gowlett Street 1
Telegraph Hill 1
Rope Street 1

Graphite on
photographic print
49 x 34cm
2022





Facing page:
COME CLOSER
Graphite on paper roll
150 x 220cm+
2020





REMEMBERING
HOW TO FEEL
Graphite on paper
113 x 141cm
2021



THROWING IT
ALL AWAY
Graphite on paper
96 x 113cm
2022





I LOOK INTO
YOUR EYES
Graphite on paper
101 x 122cm X12
2021/ 2022

I LIVE ANOTHER LIFE
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Emma Coop

Photography:

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