

Sarah Gillespie - Notes On Drawing:

I make paintings, drawings and engravings that aspire to a quality the Japanese call *Hosomi*. *Hosomi* describes an emotional delicacy, a determination to slight not even the most trivial, to understand the beauty of just anything. The practice requires an emptying of the self, a stepping aside, a degree of modesty in order to make of oneself something more like a mirror, or *lens*, the better to reflect the subtler depths of beauty to which we are so often blind.

Nicholas of Cusa put it another way with his prayer – *Ubi cumque que me verto ades*. (Wheresoever I look you are there.)

In recent years I have chosen to work almost exclusively in black and white. No one can deny the quick win and emotional power of colour but I felt increasingly dazzled by it, overwhelmed even, especially in this 24/7 technicolour age. By renouncing colour for a while I have found I can access a quieter level of looking, appreciating detail and qualities of light and life that might perhaps otherwise missed.

A long-standing interest in Buddhist and Taoist thinking has led me to appreciate the profound beauty of drawing: Drawing, the ancient elegance of black mark on white paper, is a near perfect translation of the Chinese cosmology that has all life – the ten thousand things – continually burgeoning forth, becoming present and falling back into Wu-Wei, the emptiness, or absence from which all things come forth again.

There is in a drawing only mark and no-mark. Presence and absence. This 'absence' is no lack or void, rather the white of the paper is a pregnant emptiness. Every mark appears as a presence emerging from that emptiness and every mark comes to an end, fading back into no-mark. The paper is all *potential, possibility – other*. In the unmarked areas of paper I find a respite from 'myself', my marks, my decisions, and therein precisely lies its beauty. The absences allow the rest of life, the ten thousand things – and that, of course, includes anyone looking at the drawing - to *presence* itself in the work.

If you push me for symbolism; the dialogue between paper and mark, black and white echoes the conversation we must re-start with the more-than-human world. Drawing is, as John Berger knew, a conversation. Oil painting has come to feel, to me at least, more like a monologue. There is just too much of the artist in an oil painting – the canvas smothered in his or her marks – a drawing, by contrast speaks of another, gentler, more generous, perhaps more curious way of experiencing the world.

A note on source:

All my work is drawn from the land, sea and animals immediately around my home in Devon. I walk and draw and relish the constant revisiting.

If you pushed me for influences I would give three. Holbein for his plainness and commitment to looking, Seurat for his beautiful drawings and Agnes Martin for her silence.

Sarah Gillespie January, 2017