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Art on Demand 6.2

JANAEE GARTLY



ART ON DEMAND 6.2

*TIME IS DRAWING ON ME,
I AM DRAWING ON TIME*

Time bears its mark on each of us, records its will on our bodies, and deposits itself in our minds. The experience of time can be centering: a way to know what is real, what is believable. But experiences of trauma can also profoundly affect the way we experience time, both as individuals and as societies. Artists who engage in autobiographical work around experiences of trauma face serious challenges because of this, and also because the work is by nature deeply personal. To bear yourself, your experiences, and your memories is an act of generosity and trust between artist and viewer.

In her most recent body of work, emerging artist Janae Gartly invites the viewer into her own lived reality in a way that allows us to wrestle with our

of the presence of her whole body. As someone without sight might feel another person's features, the artist has haptically recorded the feeling of her memories as a way to look at the past with an increased sense of clarity. The dark smears and smudges of these haptic charcoal rememberings evoke within the viewer a sense of unsettlement through both their visceral appearance, and by virtue of their ambiguous state which appears to be either dissolving or in a process of formation.

Drawing has been practiced throughout history and is a very human way of recording our surroundings. This act of documentation, storytelling, and expression allows us to make sense of time and come to terms with experience, even if it cannot be fully represented through the practice of drawing. In the introductory essay of *Drawing Now*, Simon Downs notes that "if we deny sight

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experiences of trauma, loss, and dissociation. Upon entering the gallery space, visitors encounter an arrangement of small-scale graphite drawings, framed collages that combine text, found materials, and representational drawings, as well as large-scale, abstract, minimalist charcoal works; the last of these are rendered both on vellum and directly across the walls themselves. The artist conceives of the charcoal works as recordings of her own memories, with the traces of her fingerprints functioning as a synecdoche

as a means of making reference, we can only access understanding at the point of making the mark, drawing the drawing. . . [W]e understand drawing as conjecture at the point of perception and at the point of remembering, for one can only appraise a memory once it is represented (drawn)".¹ Drawing does not need to rely on literal perception; mark-making is not only the record of observation but can be a highly conceptual process through which one attempts to make sense of the nonrepresentational. Art that engages with

trauma often touches us, without necessarily fully communicating the nuances of personal experience.²

Gartly uses the mark-making of drawing to trace shadows as a way to track moments, record events, and calm the self. Shadows themselves are a natural keeper of time: their movement allows one to notice how time passes. Gartly captures shadow patterns in graphite or oil paint, creating compositions that actively engage in the mapping of moments, recording the presence of something other than self.

The performance of wall drawing also connects to ancient traditions and forms of storytelling. Telling stories is a part of what makes us human and it is how we save pieces of our lived experience. The raw, expressive quality of Gartly's work communicates a story about what it means to be a living body in a world with sorrow, pain, and scars. The active and encroaching capacity of past trauma seems to seep into surrounding spaces, and its wounds leave permanent marks.

In Gartly's collage work she incorporates text that refers to grounding exercises used in counseling psychology, as a way to lead the viewer through coping techniques for those struggling with dissociation. The works ask questions such as "What are five things you can see? What are two things you can smell?" to return the viewer to an awareness of their own embodied experience. Gartly explains that "the exercises focus on mindful attentiveness to the body and what sensations can be felt or focused on to bring you back to your body."

Through this body of work Gartly invites us to enter this space, learn about self and other, process wounds together, and remember what has been, what is, and what can be. Through embodiment, representation, tracking, tracing, and illustration, she tells a story that extends an invitation to be still, to hear, and to be heard.

1. Simon Downs, *Drawing Now: Between The Lines of Contemporary Art*, p. xii

2. Jill Bennett, *Empathetic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, p. 7

Janae Gartly is an emerging artist currently based in Langley, British Columbia, having grown up primarily in Abbotsford. She is working on a BA in Art and Design with Honours from Trinity Western University with the goal of eventually pursuing an MFA in Art and Design at Emily Carr University. She is interested in identification of self, memory formation and loss, found objects as a source of viewer self-recognition, and modes of storytelling through making. While Gartly is increasingly moving towards an installation based practice, she also experiments in performance, video, and more traditional media.



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Image credits: Cover: *Untitled (portrait)*, (detail), 2019, graphite on vellum, 10 x 10 in. Inside left: *Untitled (to touch a ghost I)*, (detail), 2019, graphite on vellum, 36 x 24 in. Images courtesy of the artist.

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