Drawing - Mappa Mundi: Drawing to the Extent of the Body

Object: Drawing

Place of origin: London (drawn)

Date: 1984 (drawn)

Artist/Maker: Connearn, David, born 1952 (artist)

Materials and Techniques: Rotring pen

Museum number: E.402-2010

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

David Connearn (b.1952) trained in London at Camberwell and the Slade School of Art. He has exhibited widely in the UK and abroad, winning the prestigious Jerwood Prize in 2000 and participating in the group show Drawing Breath: 10 years of the Jerwood Prize at Wimbledon College of Art in 2006. He has work in the British Museum and the British Council collection. Originally a sculptor, for the last twenty years Connearn has concentrated solely on his drawing practice.

Early in his career Connearn realised that the highly principled drawing method he learned at the Slade could be applied to non-figurative drawing. He sought to produce non-expressive works for which he developed an uncompromising method - one that in itself is an exploration of drawing practice. He begins by drawing a line at the top of a sheet of paper, as straight as possible, although it inevitably records minor tremors of the artist's hand. The next line, drawn closely underneath, is an attempt to replicate this line, small imperfections and all, and will also necessarily introduce its own imperfection; and so on down the sheet. Even with this exacting method, the drawings record some degrees of variation. The way in which the paper absorbs the ink is affected by the humidity of a particular day or hour, by the slightly varying speeds at which the lines are drawn, and other uncontrollable factors. Connearn uses Rotring pens in order deliberately to minimize the expressive qualities of the lines.

Connearn generally prefers to practice on a large scale in order to pace the work, to avoid the temptation of hurrying to completion; one of his large drawings can take longer than a month to execute. A similar integrity and dedication is reflected in his preoccupations, which have been essentially constant throughout his career: his body of work demonstrates his tendency to delve ever deeper into a single theme rather than to diversify. For instance, he has made a series of 'invisible' drawings, in which lines would be drawn, then erased; or lines blind embossed on a sheet of paper with an empty pen; or lines drawn without any white space left between them; or lines drawn with white ink on white paper. In another ongoing series, one drawing is made with a thick nib, the next with a slightly thinner nib, and so on over five works.

The drawing's title Mappa Mundi refers obliquely to a human span (cf. Leonardo's Vitruvian man), as well as the world-map shape of the drawing. Connearn worked by standing close to the sheet in a marked, unchanging place, then drawing lines from left to right to the furthest reaches of his arm span, working from the top to the bottom of the sheet. As a result of this self-imposed physical constraint, the lines are more controlled in the central areas, and less so towards the edges - testimony to the ungovernable forces which Connearn's work subtly investigates.

Although non-figurative, the lines create their own suggestive textures, recalling wrinkles, folds and ripples. It is a compellingly beautiful object, and one which richly repays close attention.

Descriptive line

David Connearn, Mappa Mundi: Drawing to the Extent of the Body, 1984, pen and ink drawing

Physical description

Very large drawing composed of horizontal lines, narrow at the top and bottom and wider towards the middle, forming a circular shape.

Dimensions

Height: 225 cm, Width: 183 cm, Height: 232 cm frame dimensions, Width: 190 cm frame dimensions, Depth: 9.5 cm frame dimensions, Weight: 60 kg approx.

Museum number

E.402-2010

Object history note

Purchased from the artist, April 2010

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1157543/mappa-mundi-drawing-to-the-drawing-connearn-david/