



C H I N E S E   W H I S P E R S



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Nicola Brown

Muamer Cajic

Maria Kontis

Li Wenmin

Toshiko Oiyama

Amanda Robins

Deborah Wilkinson

## INTERNATIONAL DRAWING RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The exhibition *Chinese Whispers* has been mounted as part of *Drawing Connections*, a celebration of drawing throughout Sydney during September 2006, and initiated by the International Drawing Research Institute (IDRI).

IDRI is a consortium of three art schools created to advance research into and through the discipline of drawing. It explores and promotes the seminal role of drawing within art, design and architecture and – by extension – interdisciplinary visual discourse across any or all of the disciplines of higher education.

The Institute comprises its three founding members, The College of Fine Arts, The University of New South Wales, The Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China, and the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland. Other institutions, organisations, or individuals may participate on specific projects, through the agency of one of the founding members.

Since its inauguration in 2000, IDRI has advanced drawing research through conferences, colloquiums, publications, studio-based workshops, master classes, exchanges of staff and students, collaborative research projects, and exhibitions.

[www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/research/idri](http://www.cofa.unsw.edu.au/research/idri)  
<http://drawingconnections.info>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The International Drawing Research Institute would like to thank all the artists for participating in the exhibition, Nicola Brown, Muamer Cajic, Maria Kontis, Li Wenmin, Toshiko Oiyama, Amanda Robins and Deborah Wilkinson.

Further thanks go to the Director of Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Nick Waterlow, curators, Annabel Pegus and Rilka Oakley, as well as all IDG staff and catalogue designer Sally Robinson. It is important to acknowledge the enthusiasm and continued support for the drawing discipline, from Professor Ian Howard, Dean of the College of Fine Arts.

*Chinese Whispers* 31 August – 30 September 2006

Curator Michael Esson

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(INSIDE FRONT COVER) Toshiko Oiyama *Solstice* (detail) 2006  
charcoal on paper 70 x 100 cm

(INSIDE BACK COVER) Li Wenmin *Crab in shower, 30-09-04* (detail) 2004  
charcoal and pen on paper 225 x 55 cm

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**T**he received experience and knowledge of drawing, whether formal or not, is like the children's game of *Chinese Whispers*, where that which is handed on, changes, develops and transforms through both understanding and misinterpretation. So drawing, and recent drawing education has evolved with the lapse of the 60s and 70s having to be bridged and re-invented. Without these disruptions, the educational process can lead to dogma, whereas, like *Chinese Whispers* the process remains plastic and evolves through necessity and imagination.

I have never thought of *Chinese Whispers* as having negative connotations, but rather the game acknowledges the diversity and subtlety of the Chinese language, where tonal variation can completely change the meaning. This barely audible transfer of information is therefore easily confused and corrupted through the cumulative effects of mistakes and misunderstanding. The precision and relatively unambiguous meaning of 'the spoken word' contrasts with the transitional qualities of drawing, that are open ended and susceptible to complex interpretations. Drawing no longer embodies moral and aesthetic certainty, indeed if it ever did. We do not subscribe to the idea that drawing is a human corollary of divine creative activity, however in a secular and technological society there still persists the idea that drawing can at least aspire to retaining some sense of visual truth. Priorities are constantly changing within the visual arts – no longer is there agreement on what may be regarded as fundamental. Drawing is resistant to definition; attitudes to drawing are in a state of flux, and where the focus changes, there are dynamic reconstructions constantly taking place. *Chinese Whispers* seems an entirely appropriate metaphor for this drawing process, and for the development of contemporary drawing practice.

Drawing is the source and result of a passionate creative response to the world, the origin of radical thought given birth by finding equivalents in line and mark.

The College of Fine Arts has always maintained a strong commitment to drawing. It has been COFA's intent, not to be prescriptive, and not to teach students how to draw, but to teach them how to learn to draw, and to see drawing within a wider artistic and cultural context. Individual lecturers and courses reflected a range of personal drawing philosophies, so important to the college's aim of developing a pluralist approach. In recent years courses have been designed to meet the challenge of changing needs. Drawing supports many disciplines within the college and forms the basis of a general visual awareness. There are increased options for many students, with those interested being increasingly able to explore and manipulate graphic potential with the aid of new technologies, however the drawings in this exhibition exist within what might be regarded as the traditional boundaries of drawing – works with pencil or charcoal on paper. There is no need to challenge materials or methods, as working with these conventions allows for the focus to be personal histories, issues of identity and their own conceptual concerns.

*Chinese Whispers* is an exhibition by recent MFA and Phd graduates from COFA who focused upon drawing as their primary means of expression. These artists, Nicola Brown, Muamer Cajic, Maria Kontis, Li Wenmin, Toshiko Oiyama, Amanda Robins and Deborah Wilkinson, all demonstrate the variety of intellectual and creative inquiry encouraged within the college. They have differing educational and cultural backgrounds, some have previously studied at other institutions; others have gone on to further their studies elsewhere, thereby invigorating their drawing process, and at the same time extending the notion of *Chinese Whispers*. These artists have produced compelling works of originality that are underpinned by strong conceptual frameworks. Each has a unique creative voice – *it is better to whisper with your own voice rather than shout with another's*.

**Michael Esson**

Director, International Drawing Research Institute



Amanda Robins installation view of the exhibition *What Lies Beneath* at the New Tin Sheds Gallery in Sydney, March, 2006

NICOLA BROWN

I take good and honourable soldiers. I take them whole. I march forth to debunk; I graciously win as they surrender. All that once was his and of him, becomes all that is mine and of me. All that I am is at once, all I have ever aimed to be. I am what I desired; I parade it, just so. I loll about in 'my' new decency. I top up my comfort by transfusing extra mannish blood. Throughout these coups, I ever re-position visual and textual self images.

Of critical importance to my mission is to become a man worthy, honourable, and forthright. I am fascinated by a possibility for a countenance of subliminal 'goodness'. Though the response to soldiers is far from universal my interest is in one myth, that is, when soldiers are selfless and loyal: the real men.

So it is I stand tall, ready for inspection.

The images and objects chosen for display in *Chinese Whispers* are extracts from a large body of work titled '*Confidence man: replicate the ideal*'. They are an impostor posing or the mascot.



Nicola Brown *Skulking* (detail) 2003 pencil on paper 23 x 31 cm

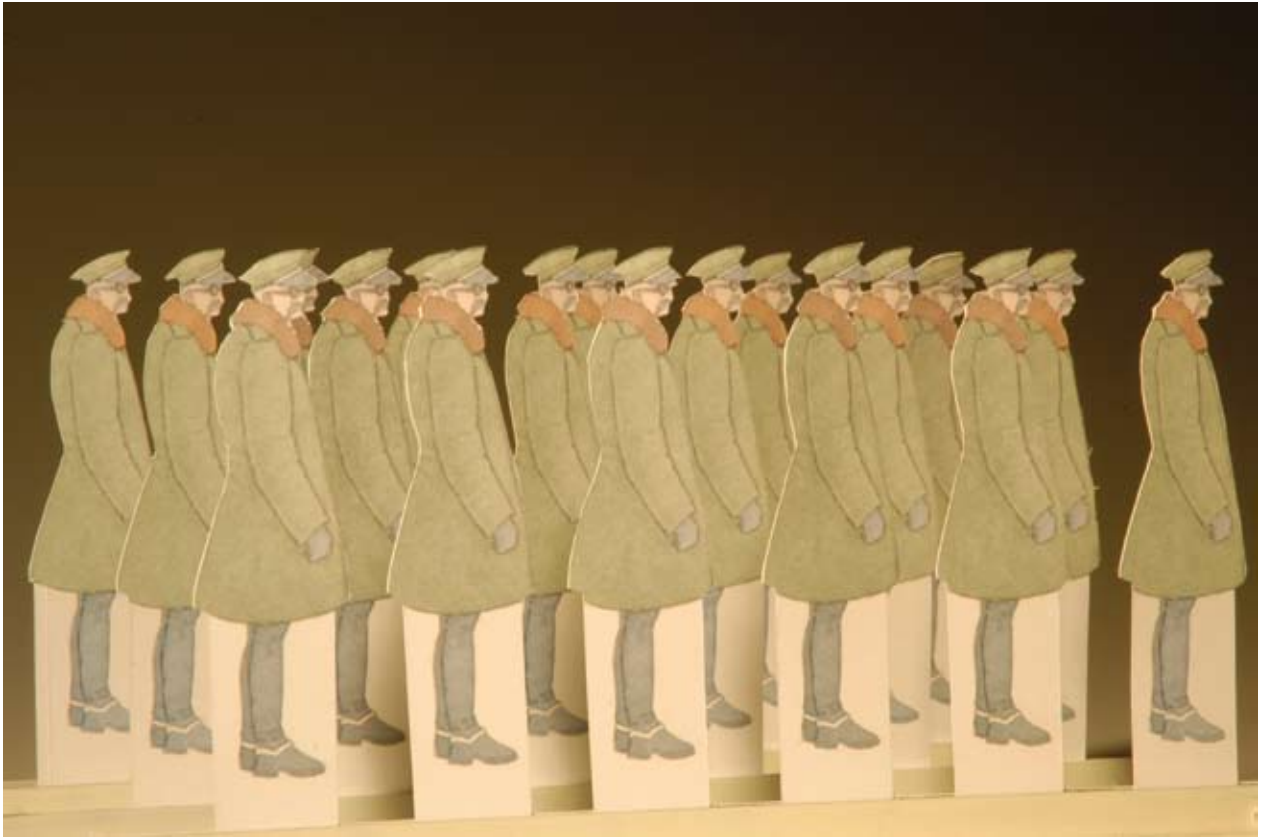


Nicola Brown *Bros* 2003 pencil on paper 23 x 31 cm



Nicola Brown *Dawn Walk* 2003 pencil on paper 18 x 26 cm





Nicola Brown *Fur* 2003 printed paper, aluminium, nylon 8 x 24 x 24 cm



Nicola Brown *About face* 2003 printed paper, aluminium, nylon 10 x 52 x 40 cm

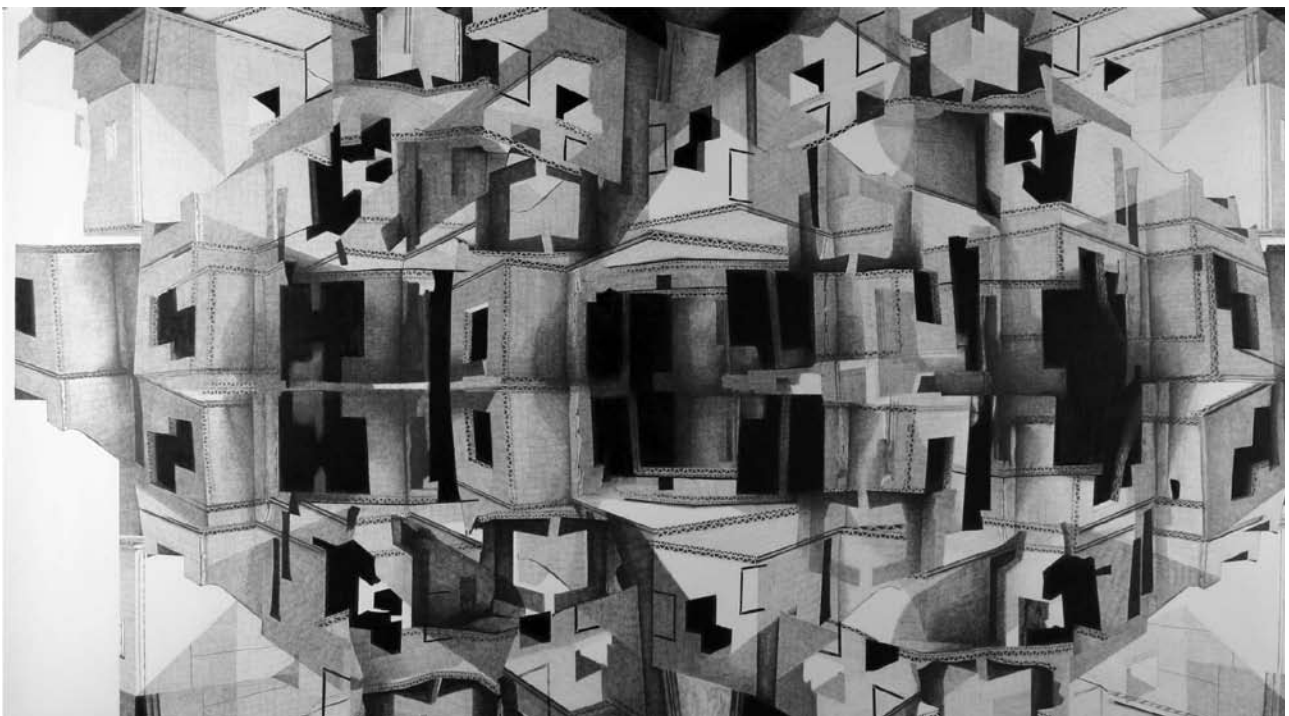
MUAMER CAJIC

**T**his work was made in the past two years as the part of my MFA at the College of Fine Arts exploring the issue of imposed displacement following the war in Bosnia. It represents a personal attempt at delineating the changing state of physical and emotional separation.

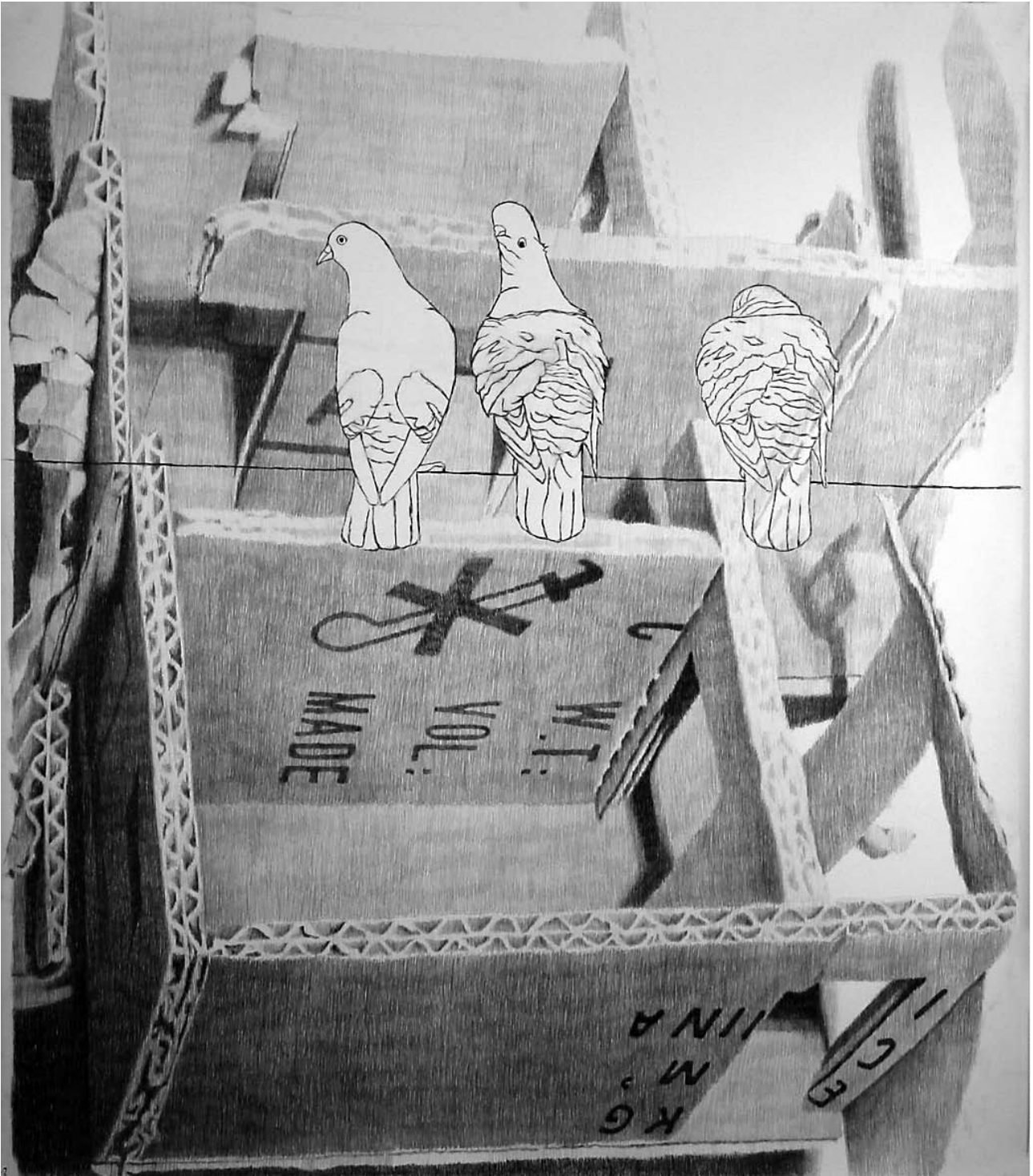
I am greatly interested in qualities of space and place devoid of human presence. This fascination with places and events of the past has been an integral source for my image making. In my approach to dealing with such issues I have employed a variety of visual devices and processes. Model construction, digital manipulation and drawing were integral parts of my working methodology.

Drawing in particular stayed a dominant part of the working method because it offered a close connection to all parts of the image making. The nature of my drawing style made this relationship even more prominent. Composing large scale images out of small marks made this an emotional as well as a physical investment. The painstaking composing of images at times felt much like a botanical drawing – each undulation and texture was important.

I choose to draw in a way that demands my constant attention at every stage of the process hoping that the emotional connection with the subject matter is continuously prolonged.



Muamer Cajic *Untitled 2* 2005-2006 pencil on paper 114 x 190 cm



Muamer Cajic *Untitled 4* 2005-2006 pencil on paper 141 x 122 cm



Muamer Cajic *Untitled 6* 2006 colour pencil on paper 120 x 141 cm





Muamer Cajic *Untitled 1* 2005-2006 pencil on paper 114 x 149 cm

I remember reading a comment by Peter Biziou, the cinematographer of *The Truman Show*, who says he heightened the colour of certain images and digitally created a larger moon. This reality enhancement contributed to the slightly hyper-real sense of Truman's artificial universe – a photographic universe which is more real than real or as they say in *Total Recall* "more human than human". My drawings look black and white. But I do not use a single black on white paper to create a grey-scale image like a photocopier. I use a severely reduced colour palette. The blacks and whites and greys are mixed. Some are cool, some are warm. I work on a very warm grey paper. A shadow might need some ochre. A highlight might need a hint of cobalt. In some of the beach drawings, I drew the sand with a lot of ochre in the grey. The grey surface the photograph rests on is cooler. This not only heightens the contrast between the photograph and the surface, it makes the sand more sandy. The source photograph is black and white but the drawing returns some of the sandy colour to the sand. This is my own version of photo-shop or 'touching up' the photograph.

Lately I have been taking photographs of tourists at Bondi Beach. I arrange and rearrange them on my table. Occasionally I see something that could be interesting. Something I never saw on the day. (Shades of Antonioni's *Blow Up*?) A glimpse of some drama playing out... Each snapshot is photographed and re-photographed in different light, at different angles, in focus and out of focus, over-exposed and under-exposed. When I draw I work between these reference photographs and the actual snapshot. The drawing is not a copy of one particular photograph. Sometimes the drawing no longer resembles the original snapshot – figures are added, altered or removed. But the final drawing looks like a copy of a snapshot. Susan Sontag says that a photograph is a misrepresentation of reality. Thus, my drawings may be conceived as a misrepresentation of a misrepresentation.

Gilles Deleuze has discussed the significance of critical 'mediators' which provide an impetus for creation – a creation which occurs in a series. In this sense, I would suggest that my own creative processes work in series – moving from photographs, to images of photographs, to drawings and back again.

Photography acts as my primary mediator. It is the series in which my artistic practice flourishes. My work with photography, my work alongside photographs, particular memories, looks and touches, gives me access to other worlds. And these are most certainly *not* 'other worlds' with which I 'exchange' or 'trade'. Creative interaction is not about exchange – it's about giving or taking. My art, maybe *any* art, travels a non-economical circuit of gift/theft which is entirely outside fashionable ideas about 'globalisation' or harmonious 'international relations'.



Maria Kontis *Spread out across the world* 2006 pastel on velvet paper 56 x 76.5 cm



Maria Kontis *He does not remember this day* (Panel 1) 2002 pastel on paper 56 x 76.5 cm





Maria Kontis *He does not remember this day* (Panel 2) 2002 pastel on paper 56 x 76.5 cm

LI WENMIN

**S**ome significant differences and changes in my life in Australia, which are determined by two different cultures – my Chinese background vs. Western reality, have provided the broadened and fresh vision into my art practice. I see my life as a linear journey, made up of many points, in different time and space, facing diverse scenes, causing various emotions, and creating distinct relationships with the world. Since all experiences take place in time and space, the two categories provide a comprehensive framework, in which my thoughts have a place to occur and develop. According to Malpas, A.E. “the life of mind is given form in the places and space in which human beings dwell and those places themselves shape and influence human memories, feelings and thoughts. In this way, the space of inner and outer – of mind and world – are transformed one into the other as inner space is externalised and outer space brought within”. My choice of interior as my subject is based on this perception. The interior depicted is my real living environment – my living room, my kitchen, my bathroom, and my bedroom. They reflect my inner world, the space where my mind is and the personal and private activities occur.

Every piece of my work is a single moment, an individual point making up the whole of my journey. The whole body of my work represents the period of my stay in Australia, and my life experiences within. In my work, the viewers also experience the multi-perspective space in which objects are depicted from various angles. The viewers' eyes are automatically led by these objects that have expanded their territory to the surrounding space. The positive-negative space becomes the breathable and walkable space where the viewers' eyes start their journey, shifting back and forth between these objects. I have turned to the space of everyday life in order to explore its shifting physical, social and psychological dimensions. This is where I would locate my work in relation to Contemporary Art, where the relationship between the inner and outer world, between private and public, between art and everyday, are also the key issues. My works are my responses and attitudes towards the world, that is, my pursuit for harmony between Chinese and Western cultures, between modernity and traditions, and for the ultimate “unity of Heaven and Man”. My life journey in Australia has provided a chance for me to rethink my cultural background from a different point of view. The experiences have also enriched my understanding of the world and life. Since I have finished this part of journey, a new and continuous route is already expanding ahead. My exploration of life is carrying on and the journey continues.



Li Wenmin *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* 2005 charcoal on paper 40 x 420 cm



Li Wenmin *Mid-September, 2005* 2005 mixed media on paper 250 x 345 cm

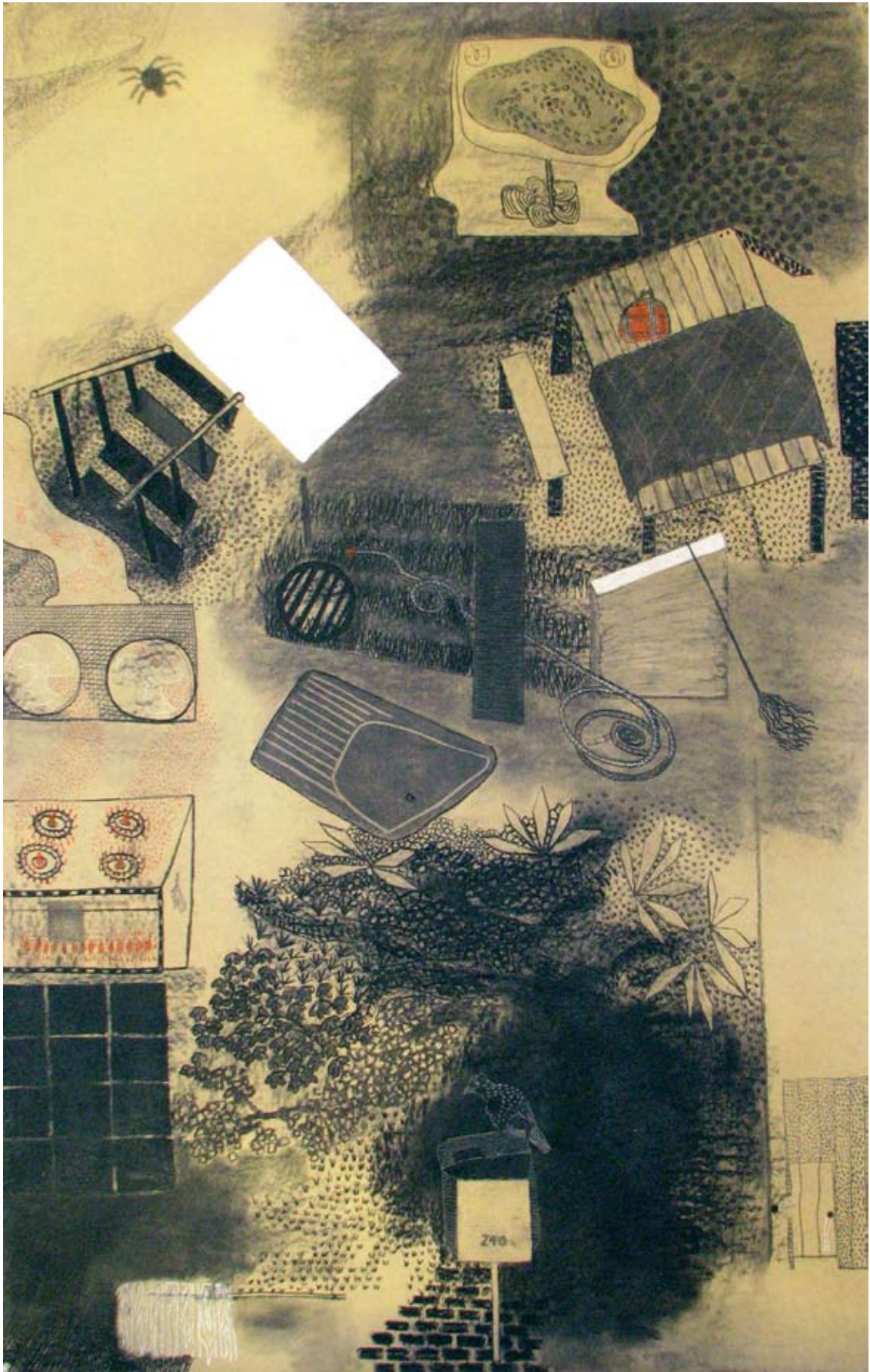






Li Wenmin *Fridge*, 11-07-05 2005 charcoal and pen on paper 225 x 110 cm





Li Wenmin *Mail box*, 04-06 2006 mixed media on paper 250 x 115 cm

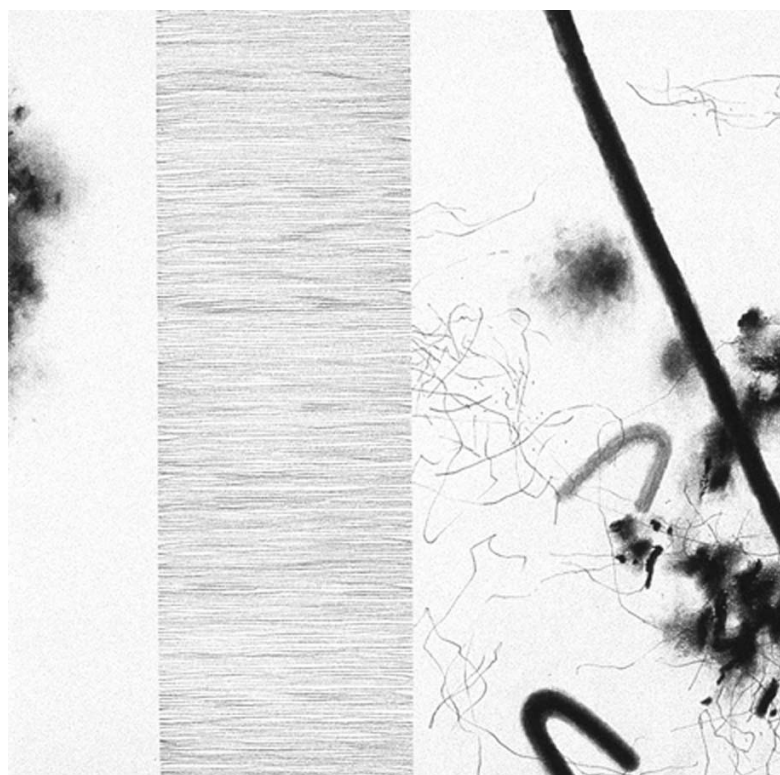
TOSHIKO OIYAMA

**M**y drawings in this exhibition come from my MFA project. The project is an exploration of the concept of *mujo* – transience of all things. A Buddhist tenet, this deep sense of impermanence forms a strong undercurrent of pre-modern Japanese culture. The research is done through visual analysis of the *affect* (as defined by Deleuze and Guattari) I experience on reading haiku poetry by Basho, the noted 17<sup>th</sup> century haiku master. His work is acknowledged as one of the pinnacles of Japanese literature, and is considered to be imbued with a profound sense of *mujo*.

Basho developed and refined the three techniques of haiku to perfection, which are disjunction, juxtaposition and the sense of here-and-now. To give a concrete structure to the visual exploration of an abstract concept *mujo*, I employ these techniques for developing three distinct groups of work. The medium used for all is an assemblage of multiple drawings on paper. The meaning and sense of transience are sought through the shifting characteristics of each drawing caused by their relationship to the neighbouring drawings, and through the dynamics of each assemblage as a whole.

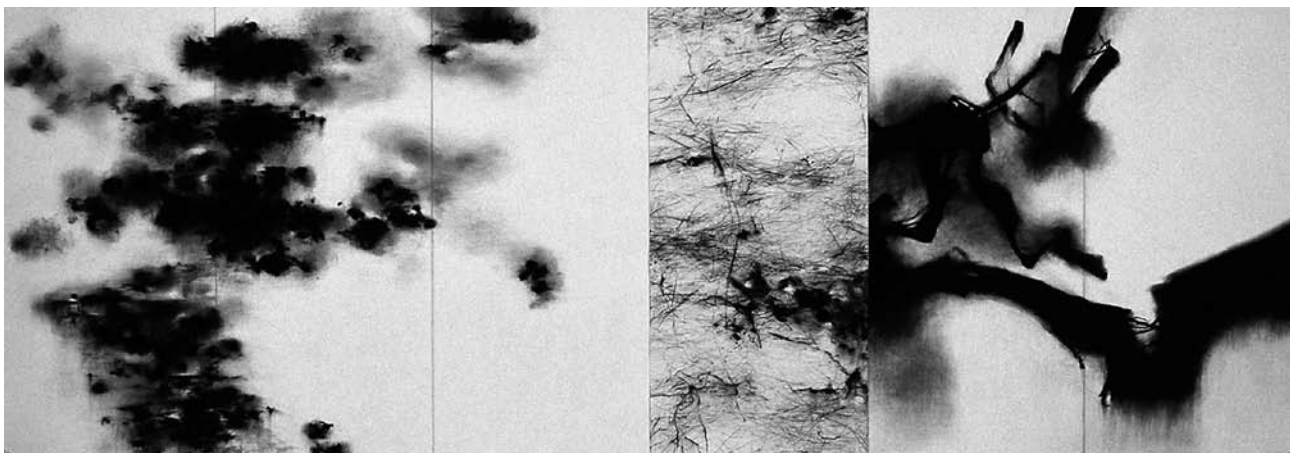
Of the three techniques mentioned, disjunction is the one used for this group of work. The drawings take a form of large diptyches, recalling the traditional Japanese folding screens with truncated images. The truncated images compel a viewer to examine them closely and complete them beyond the picture boundary in her/his imagination. When placed side by side, the images respond to each other, creating the tension and ambiguity I seek. For this project I found Tawaraya Sotatsu (from 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan) and Cy Twombly particularly inspiring, with the sense of ever-changing space and time evident in their art.

The exploration is carried out from the philosophical rather than religious perspective. It reveals interesting parallels between Zen Buddhism and Deleuze & Guattari's concepts of 'becoming' and 'rhizome', interpreted in the context of contemporary drawing practice.



Toshiko Oiyama *North of the Star* 2005 charcoal and ink on paper 70 x 200 cm



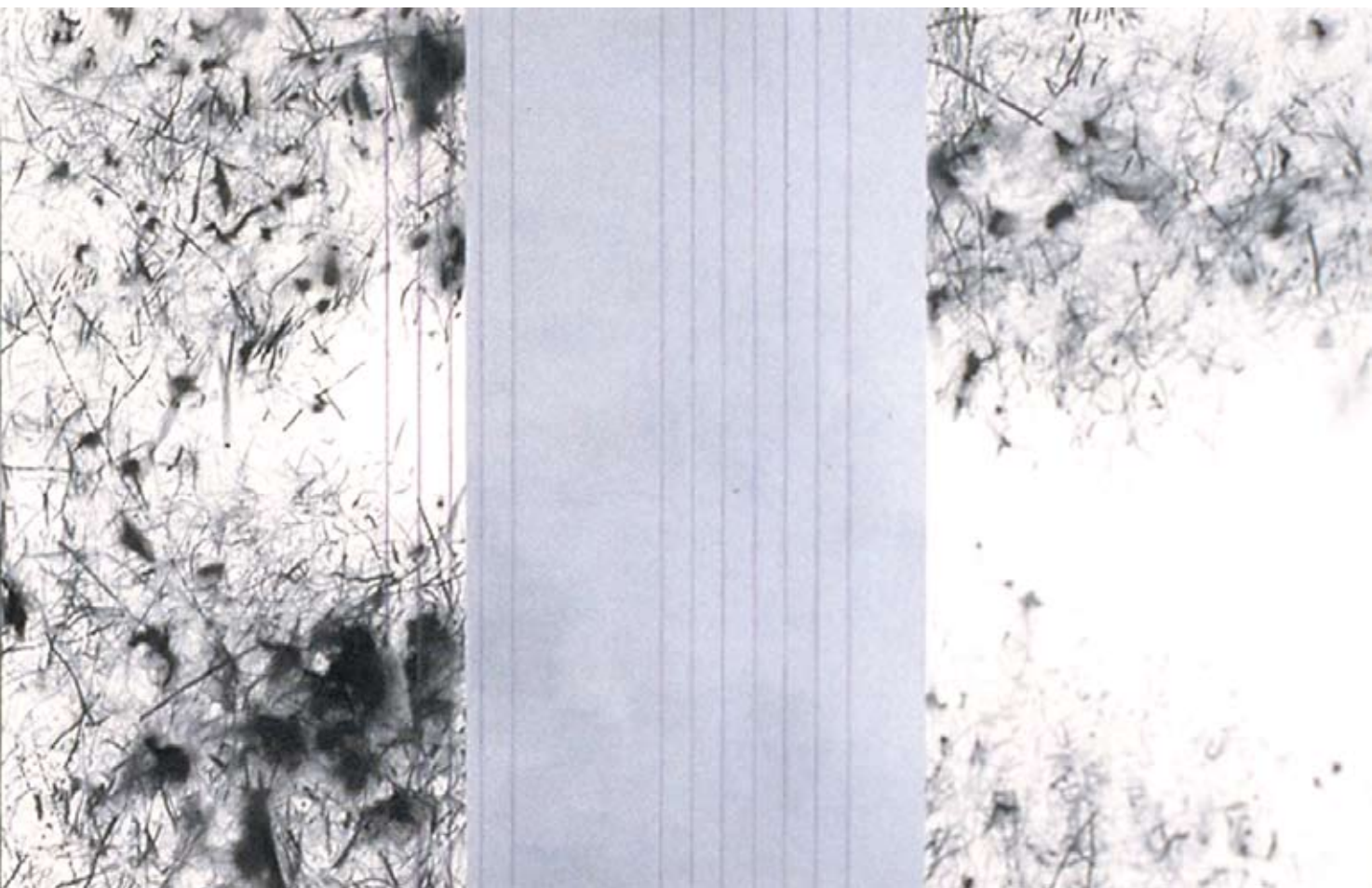


Toshiko Oiyama *South of the Cross* 2004 charcoal on paper 70 x 200 cm



Toshiko Oiyama *East of the Sun* 2004 charcoal on paper 70 x 220 cm



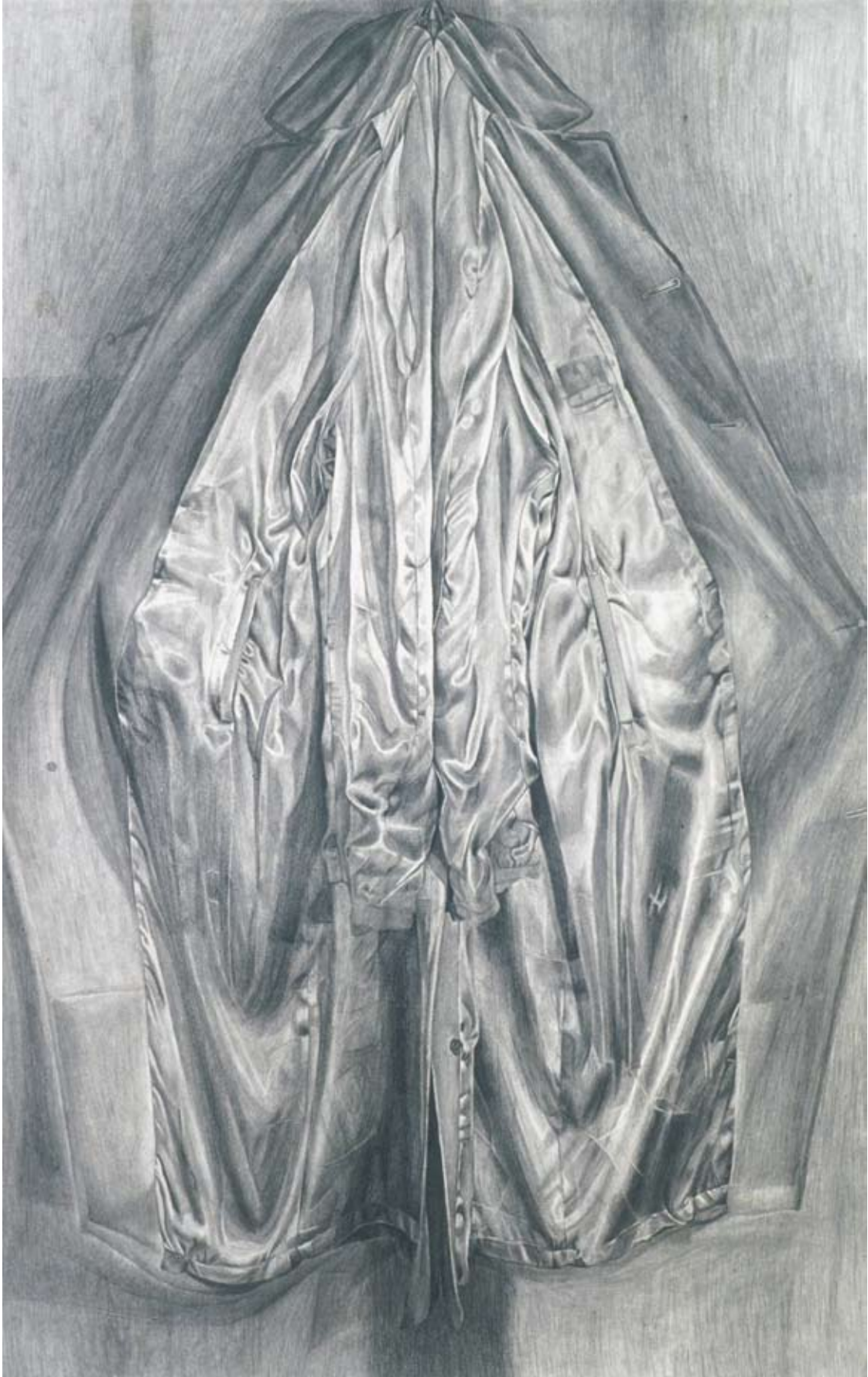


AMANDA ROBINS

**O**ver the last five years, my practice has revolved around an interest in drapery, garments and fabric. The objects I use stimulate a journey into my own psyche and become a meditation on the nature of materiality, time and process. They enable me to engage intensively with the act of painting, drawing and observing in an extended and immersive way.

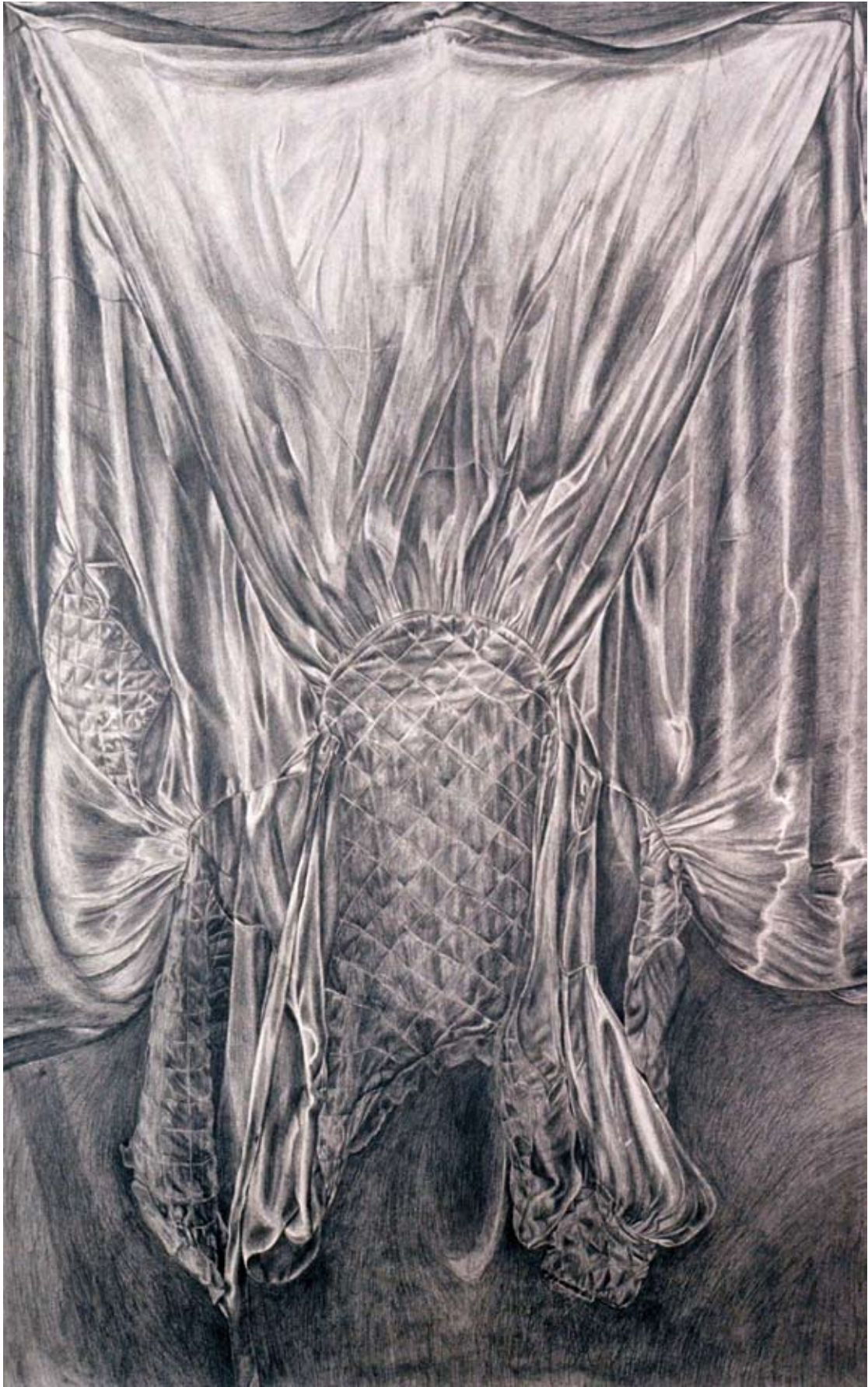
The garments I have used are mainly highly structured vintage coats. I am interested in the detail of their construction and the way they can be made to stand in for the absent body. Most of these large works investigate the interior of the coats as they hang on the wall manipulated and pinned by me, with the sleeves turned inside out. The coats have their own history and presence as second-hand garments which influences the reading of the form. The smell, the creases, the texture and surface, the wear and tear and the imperfections, are an important part of what interests me. The physical proximity of the object is absolutely integral to the process. The works refer to the existing history of the garments, but also to the living reality of my body. The natural set – the creases and folds, becomes like a residue of the people who have worn the coat before me. They are like discarded skins, holding the memories of bodily presence.

The coats are a kind of exploration of the inside of the body: When I investigate the inside of the coat, I can feel the slippery internal structure. What lies beneath is infinitely more interesting, broadcasting the narrative of construction, of manufacture – the vulnerability implicit in materiality. I am there to give an equal commitment to its existence, to examine it as a kind of gift, an acknowledgement. It always alludes to the body – to the interior of the body with its shiny palpating masses, the sea of the viscera.



Amanda Robins *Tudor Rose* 2004 graphite and pencil on arches watercolour paper 178 x 115 cm





Amanda Robins *Ice-blue dressing gown* 2004 graphite and pencil on arches watercolour paper 178 x 115 cm





Amanda Robins *Oxfam Dress II* 2004 graphite and pencil on arches watercolour paper 180 x 115 cm

DEBORAH WILKINSON

**M**y drawings over the years have had a diary-like feel as I attempt to record life's experiences as I see and feel them around me. Each drawing is like a page from a diary, a thought, a moment in time. One that may be reflected upon and developed, or left as it is.

I am interested in the every day. The everyday and universal complexities involved in living, and of dying. Of relationships and our communications. But also, importantly, our emotional investment in these. I ask of myself, and others "How do you feel about death and dying? What do you understand of emotions? How do they contribute to our relationships and communication and why is it that our attempts at these are, at times, so inept?" Essentially what it means to be human.

For me, drawing is the most immediate response to sensation. More immediate than cognition and certainly more immediate than language. Trying to create a visual equivalent to sensation and emotions, I find I am contemplating marks as metaphors. The body language of mark making. I wonder, what does an emotion look like? How do you summarise the largess of life into form? The meaning of death into colour? Reduce the complexity of relationships, simplify the chaos of communication with charcoal and a rubber?

How do you draw understanding and non-understanding with line and shade?

Inherent in all aspects of living and dying is a pull between opposing forces. A counterbalance weighted with apparent contradictions. This dynamic moves us physically and emotionally between presence and absence, internal and external, verbal and non-verbal, resilience and frailty. A coming and going.

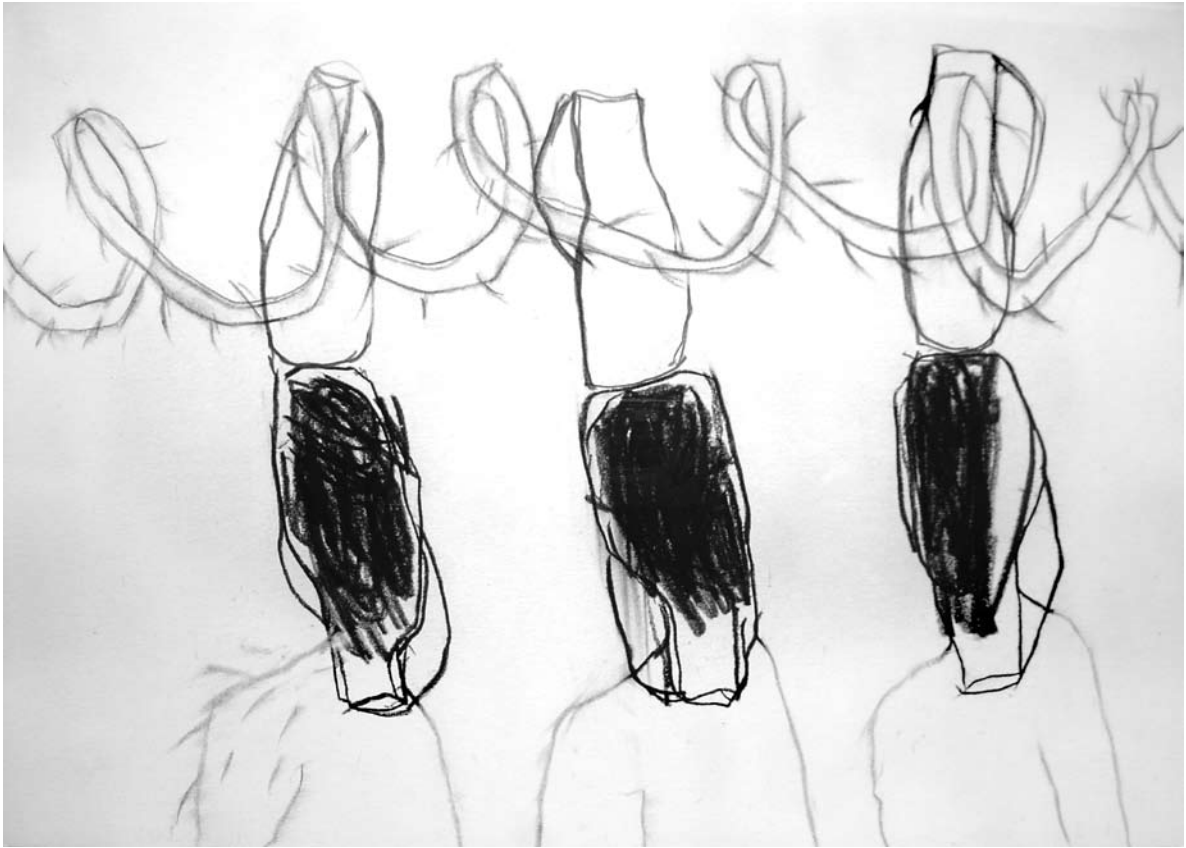
This contract between complementary forces and elements is also reflected in the process of drawing. The spark that a tension of opposites creates relies on the interplay between space and form, areas that are worked and unworked, similar or dissimilar marks, tone and colours. Between description and abstraction, the conscious and unconscious, the known and the unknown.

This group of drawings is about my coming and my going.





Deborah Wilkinson *Coming and Going* 2000-2006 mixed media 42 x 29.7 cm

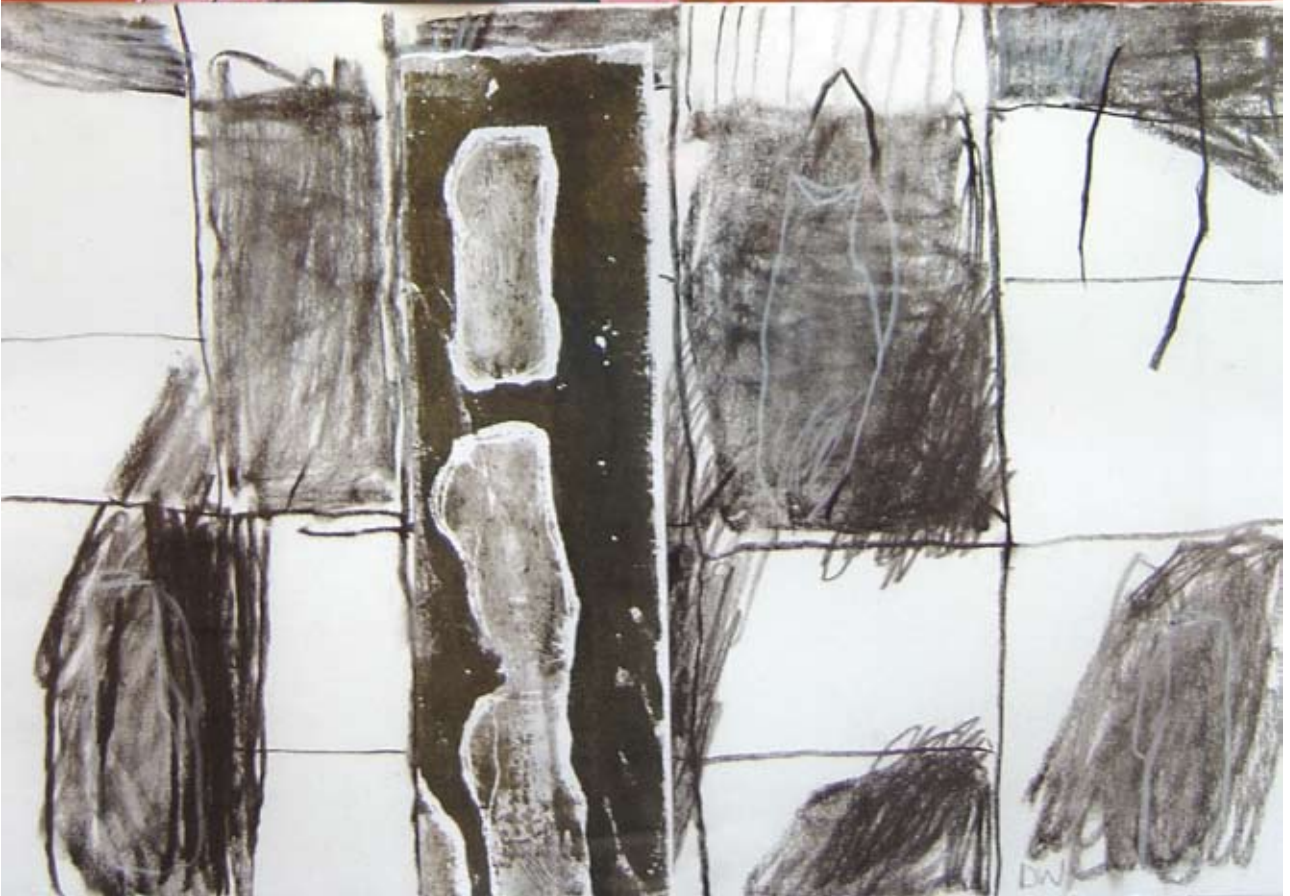


Deborah Wilkinson *Coming and Going* 2000-2006 mixed media 21 x 29.7 cm



Deborah Wilkinson *Coming and Going* 2000-2006 mixed media 21 x 29.7 cm





Deborah Wilkinson *Coming and Going* 2000-2006 mixed media 42 x 29.7 cm

## BIOGRAPHIES

### NICOLA BROWN born 1961

Nicola Brown is an Australian PhD candidate at the University of Western Sydney in the School of Communication Arts. She was awarded a Bachelor of Fine Art by the National Art School in 2000 with a Master of Art and Master of Fine Art being awarded by the College of Fine Arts UNSW in 2001 and 2003, respectively. Whilst enrolled at COFA Brown won the Olsen Drawing Prize, The Jenny Birt Scholarship and extended her residency at the Cité Internationale des Artes, Paris. She has been exhibiting in Sydney since 1996. The same year, *Patent leather shoes* was selected to hang in the *Sulman Prize* at the Art Gallery of NSW and in 2004 she was represented in *New Australian Art* at the Queensland University of Technology Museum. She has presented both academic and visual work at conferences throughout England and Australia.

### MUAMER CAJIC born 1977

Muamer Cajic has worked in painting, installation and drawing. His ongoing concerns are with the state of imposed displacement following the war in Bosnia, memory, space, place and pigeons. Cajic has had a small selection of exhibitions since 2002 including *Solitude*, Sydney 2006, *Emerging*, Gosford 2005, *Nine Dragon Heads*, South Korea 2004, *Wynne Prize*, Sydney 2004, *EO 2*, Gosford Regional Gallery 2004, *The House*, Casula Powerhouse 2003. He has a Master of Fine Art from the College of Fine Arts UNSW, 2006. Cajic currently lives and works in Gosford, NSW.

### MARIA KONTIS born 1969

Maria Kontis commenced a Master of Fine Art at the College of Fine Arts UNSW in 2001 and later completed her degree at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London. In 2003 she was awarded the Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. In 2002 Kontis completed a residency at the Cité Internationale des Artes, Paris, awarded by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In the same year she received a Skills and Arts Development Grant from the Australia Council for the Arts. She exhibits regularly in Australia, Germany and the UK. Recent exhibitions include *RE-STAGE* The Arts Gallery, London, 2006, *Punkt und Linie, Fläche und Raum*, Overbeck Gesellschaft, Lübeck, 2005, *The Grey Voice: Contemporary Australian Drawing*, Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney, 2005, *In Erster Linie...*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 2004-2005 and *Australian Culture Now*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004. Kontis currently lives and works in London.

### LI WENMIN born 1973

Li Wenmin was born in China and is currently living and working in Sydney. She obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Luxun Academy of Fine Art and travelled widely around China, working with groups of artists. Li's desire to explore the world and her need to expand her experiences and observation of herself, led her to Australia where she has been studying at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney, graduating with a Master of Art and a Master of Fine Arts from the UNSW. Currently a PhD candidate in drawing at COFA, she tutors and lectures at COFA. Li's works are in the collection of the Luxun Academy of Fine Art and have been exhibited internationally in Australia, China, Japan and UK. She also participated and presented her research at *The*

*3rd International Drawing Conference*, Sydney 2005 and *The International Drawing Symposium* held in the Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, UK 2006. In Australia her works have been selected and exhibited in different art prizes and group shows. Solo exhibitions were held at Kudos Gallery in 2005 and Wallspace Gallery in 2006.

### TOSHIKO OIYAMA born 1947

Toshiko Oiyama grew up in Japan and then moved to the United States. There, as was her plan, she obtained a bachelor's degree in visual communication. But unlike the plan, which was to go back to Japan after four years of study, she started moving about. For over twenty five years Oiyama lived and worked as a graphic designer/art director in the United States, Holland, Indonesia, Singapore and New Zealand. After this full career in applied art, Oiyama decided to switch to fine art, and came to COFA in 2001. She completed the Master of Art and Master of Fine Arts programmes, and has commenced a PhD.

About her career as an artist she comments, 'So far I have made a modest collection of the usual residencies, scholarships and prizes. At first the switch from design was a little awkward, but now I enjoy calling upon all my varied experiences from around the world for my art practice.'

### AMANDA ROBINS born 1961

Amanda Robins is an artist and academic specialising in painting and drawing. Her current work is based on drapery and garments and uses the play of light on fabric as a base for complex, intricate and sumptuous works. In 2006, she completed a PhD at the College of Fine Arts UNSW as a Post Graduate Award Scholar. She has exhibited continuously since completing a BFA at Monash and an MFA at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne and is regularly included in prestigious exhibitions such as the *Dobell Prize for Drawing* (AGNSW) and the *Jacarandah Drawing Award*. Her most recent solo exhibition *What Lies Beneath* opened in March at the new Tin Sheds Gallery in Sydney. She has recently moved to Adelaide to take up a position as Studio Head of Painting and Drawing at the South Australian School of Art in the University of South Australia. Robins gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Arches paper manufacturers.

### DEBORAH WILKINSON born 1958

Deborah Wilkinson graduated in 1980 with a BSc (UNSW), and then with a Post Graduate Diploma of Physiotherapy (CCHS) in 1981. Ten years of clinical practise and teaching followed, both in Australia and the United Kingdom. Interested mainly in neurological rehabilitation, she specialised in the assessment and treatment of spinal cord injuries at Royal North Shore Hospital's Spinal Injuries Unit where she was head of department for five years. Wilkinson commenced studies at the College of Fine Arts part-time in 1997, graduating with an MFA in 2003. Her work has been selected for the *Sir John Sulman and Portia Geach Memorial Art Prize* exhibitions and she has participated in numerous group shows. She was invited to contribute to *Lines of Investigation* exhibiting at COFA and the Glasgow School of Art and in *Destination Drawing*, both initiatives of the International Drawing Research Institute. She is a member of The Print Circle.









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