

‘DRAW YOUR OWN’ (an exhibition of paintings and drawings inspired by an allotment)

The inspiration for this body of work came partly from the exhibition ‘Modern Nature’¹ which took its title from the diaries of artist and filmmaker Derek Jarman and which demonstrated that plants and vegetables as subjects can offer much more than botanical drawings or still life paintings.

Drawing, like gardening, can be therapeutic. They both create space for thinking. Derek Jarman, for whom cultivating his garden was a form of escapism and therapy, was not alone in finding solace in the soil.

Ellsworth Kelly refers to his ‘search for essential form’ in his ‘contour drawings’ where the line traces the outer edge of a shape with no interior shading and comments that ‘Since birth we get accustomed to seeing and thinking at the same time. But I think that if you turn off the mind and look at things only with your eyes ultimately everything becomes abstract’².

It began as a light-hearted daily drawing exercise of whatever vegetable had been picked that day and evolved into a reflection on the intersection of art and life. The close and intense observation uncovers the essence of the object.

As the body of work developed the parallels between drawing or painting and cultivation of a vegetable plot became more and more apparent.

The paintings are made on previously painted surfaces which had been rejected. On allotments gardeners rarely use new materials but rather re-use whatever they can lay their hand on. The paintings are executed quickly in a manner that allows no revision or correction. Each line must justify itself. The reverence which gardeners feel for the produce grown is hinted at in the six small, icon-like paintings.

The large drawing ‘Rotation’ is made on four canvases reflecting the four sections of the allotment which are rotated each year.

‘The answer lies in the soil (plot 12)’ draws on planning layouts made over twenty years. Each layer contributes to the depth and richness of any one moment in a continuous cycle.

With thanks to Cavespace for hosting the exhibition and to Jennifer Hodgson and Danny Rolph for their insightful critique and encouragement.

Maggie Learmonth March 2020

¹ ‘Modern Nature’ 2 May – 7 July 2-19 at the Drawing Room London SE17
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² ‘Drawn from nature: the plant lithographs of Ellsworth Kelly’ Richard Axsom
(Yale University Press)