

Interview with Dryden Goodwin for Interalia Magazine.

Richard Bright: Can we begin by putting your work into context, and talk about drawing. William Coldstream, whose approach to depiction was of a measured, direct observation, once remarked "I lose interest unless I let myself be ruled by what I see". Your approach is different, it's more to do about how the mind processes what the eye sees, involving imagination and the how the circumstances at the time affect the process of looking. Would that be a fair comment?

Dryden Goodwin: I'm interested in attempting to decode the world, the places I move through and the people I encounter within it. As an artist I might use drawing, or work with a camera or collect sound. I'm also fascinated in how people from other disciplines approach the process of looking and interpret what they're looking at. How they also build or intuit a wider picture from what might be hidden or out of sight. I'm intrigued in how as human beings we create tools and methodologies to allow us to look at different scales, for different reasons and for different things, allowing us to try and address questions fundamental to being human beings. How sometimes human beings manage to transcend the limitations of the tools and materials that are being used, to reveal more than can be seen. The flip side of this is the fallibility of looking, how the intention behind what we're looking for, can shape or even restrict what we see, and the role of the imagination in this, the influence of our emotional and psychological state on what and who we're looking at, sometimes clouding and other times allowing us to see further and deeper.

RB: How did your time drawing in a life studio feed into your work with video, which engages with time as well as line?

DG: A sense of the speculative nature of looking, and recording what you think you see, how everything is never still. Although you might have the desire to try and hold or capture something, it keeps changing. That there is a privilege in looking intensely at someone and an ever shifting balance between the subjective and objective. The life room felt at times under laboratory conditions, and with this, the potential to investigate, to look in very focused ways, adopting different systems, like tuning into specific frequencies. Then becoming completely lost and overwhelmed, I like the idea of switching between being hyper conscious of the elements at play and then completely involved and immersed. It's possible to form a kind of fragmented composite of an experience, while looking at someone or something or somewhere. As an antidote to the life room, I'm fascinated with this idea of being in situations which are beyond your control and trying to find ways and means to engage with that, not only with what you see, but also with what you feel or what you experience in a more holistic way. I'm interested in different approaches to looking at the world. That sense of trying to find a way of decoding or articulating beyond what you see with your eyes - translating what you might feel with your body or with your emotions. It's great and terrifying to be out of your depth and move into uncharted territory.

RB: You have consistently focused on the human figure and the portrait form. Why?

DG: It's the relationship between an individual set against a backdrop, a figure against a ground. It might be a physical one, a patient within a hospital, a passenger within an airport or a stranger within the city, or within my latest film, *Unseen: the Lives of Looking* it becomes multi-faceted. Working alongside and observing with my camera and through drawing, three visionary individuals, I hoped to reveal the empathy and dexterity of an eye surgeon, working with the fundamentals of vision itself and the fragility of the human eye; then the quest of a NASA planetary explorer to contribute to the decoding of the cosmos, attempting to find evidence of life on Mar, searching for a mirror of ourselves out in the great expanse; and the scrutiny, of the British government, by a

leading human rights lawyer, in extraordinary rendition, drone attack and mass surveillance cases. There's a recurring relationship to scale and proportion, the stakes are all so high for each of these professionals. Each has a dual relationship to looking, what they're looking at, the subjects they're engaging with, but also the tools and the sensibility they bring to their practice. I feel by focusing on the details of their working lives the panoramic backdrops are always somehow implied. I like the idea that making a portrait in itself, or a drawing or study of an individual is always in relationship to a much larger whole, how you can document things specific to an individual that have a potential to resonate and reveal something about the wider context or universal metaphysical concerns and desires.

RB: The nature of portraiture is to show, or reveal, the interior from depiction of the exterior. In a sense, you're showing yourself as well. Would that be a fair comment?

DG: My work stems from a fascination with others, a desire and hope to make discoveries about the world, how to navigate it, through reflecting on the perspectives of others. But, inevitability through these processes you're not hidden. There is a power I think in the process of one person observing another, how you can become deeply engaged and even changed by another - through observing them from a distance, without their knowledge or from close to, sitting in their company, drawing them, photographing or filming them, talking with them. The balance of this interplay is always really important, sometimes my presence is explicit, because maybe you can hear us interacting or see my hand drawing. That interplay of what a person is doing and how I'm observing them is really important. It influences how a person might look at or listen to a piece of work. There are parallels between how you might draw someone's face and how you might try to figure out the world. A schematic incompleteness with moments of connection, how one detail seems to relate to another at a certain moment. New inputs and connections come faster when you're observing someone else, a process of constant review and trying to figure things out. Watching someone work, watching someone try and make sense of the world, looking at how other people look, is a way of trying to grasp hold of the very act of looking in itself; the nature of portraiture is fundamentally a conversation, a dialogue.

RB: *'Unseen: The Lives of Looking'*, combines live action and original soundtrack with drawing and animated intervention. Can you say something about this and what its aims are?

DG: With this new film the guiding principle was to look at a number of individuals who have a very distinctive relationship to looking themselves. I held a notion of a kind of kinship of looking at the forefront of my mind when creating the film and exhibition, a kind of shared pursuit in looking at things closely, where the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity is so intertwined. I had the huge privilege of having the trust of three professionals, international eye surgeon Prof Sir Peng Tee Khaw, NASA scientist Prof Sanjeev Gupta, and leading British human rights lawyer Rosa Curling, on this journey of discovery, as I drew and observed their most intense and intimate working practices; in so doing it was revealed how huge the role of imaginative looking is in all of our disciplines. There's empathy everywhere in each of our sense of looking, looking so closely that you almost become the thing that you're looking at, whether that's the rocks on Mars or whether it's the client that you're representing or the patient that you're operating on, or the person that you're drawing or filming. There was a potential within the long-form essay film, of opening up further a sensation of panoramic expanse, an interplay of the many different ways of working, a slow release, where I would use drawing, animation, live action footage, sound recordings of our conversations and with my own musical motifs as the tools of my searching.

RB: That has a direct correspondence to how we see. Neuroscience has shown that we tend to fill in gaps when we're looking, we're not seeing the whole picture, our imaginations, our brains are filling in the pieces to what we think is the whole picture.

DG: As the editing progressed, I became excited by the interrelationships that started to resonate between what each said and the images I collected and drawings I drew in each environment. Sir Peng Tee Khaw talks about that idea, as you've just described, that we fill in the gaps; we tend to think we see things in a certain way, but that isn't necessarily the case. Professor Gupta also talked about the idea that your eyes can play tricks on you and that you have to be suspicious about what you see. For example, the 19th century theories of the canals on Mars, that were dispelled by Maunder, when he demonstrated through drawing how the imagination created lines between dots and that was what was happening in terms of the telescope readings of the surface of Mars at that time, that they were literally imagining the connections between dots and seeing straight canals which didn't in reality exist. This is so resonant for the processes of drawing from observation, in fact, when I look at someone's face I realise that I'm actively trying to find the interrelationship between the different parts. A kind of triangulation across open space from one point to another, to evolve an implication of the whole. That fact, that it's out of reach, can accentuate the desire to try to describe something.

Even the idea of making a drawing and the desire to imply the back of someone's head as you're drawing the front, you somehow materialise a sense of it on the page through imagining it. There's a relationship to what the eye surgeon is doing in surgery, that sense of seeing through touch or a sense of touch within the seeing, how he delicately manoeuvres and intervenes with the eye. Between the surgeon and the delicate eye tissue there is 'feedback'. My 'feedback' might be to do with the pressure of the pencil on the page or how I move the lens; for the planetary explorer, due to the immense distances involved, it means he can't touch what he's looking at, but with the incredibly detailed images sent back his understanding is equally as haptic as to the qualities of the rocks, even his sense of touch exaggerated, precisely because he can't be there. There are other senses of touch in what the human rights lawyer is dealing with, the 'big touch' of the governmental looking, how we're being monitored, how we're manipulated in a way, how drones are remotely guided to Pakistan on our behalf, or people extraordinarily rendered in Libya. She's a kind of agent, pulling at the surface, a thorn in the side of the government, trying to draw them to account, to open the wall up.

RB: The context of sound in the film is very important. Can you say something about this?

DG: I collected wild sounds from the environments the film moves through, my studio, the city, the eye clinic, the operating theatre, the library, the laboratory, the Jurassic Coast, the Royal Observatory, outside the Royal Courts of Justice and Supreme Court, the office, the print studio and a room where I'm drawing and filming my father and son as they draw me. Peppered throughout the film are the words of the three people that I'm documenting from our conversations as I watched them work, but there is this other space, an emotional internalised space. I wanted the soundtrack to draw out the film's emotional charge, with the musical elements I composed intertwined with these contextualising layers. My approach to the soundtrack was rather like touching the page on and off with the pencil, or zooming in and out with the camera, there's a similar push and pull with the sound. At certain points you hear the sound of me breathing or scratching on the surface of the paper with the pencil, at other points we're totally absorbed in the sounds of the three lookers working in their workplaces, then the music might shift the viewer into a reflective space. I like this idea of being in a state of immersion, of being lost in the audio visual, and at other points where you're pulled back to the reality of the situation, again a dance between objectivity and subjectivity.

The potential of that oscillation excites me within the 90 minutes structure of the journey of the film.

RB: And with your father and your son you have the aspect of time within the time of the film.

DG: The last scene in the film, when I am drawing my dad and my son and filming them as they draw me, it feels powerful this triangle that's set up. And yes it's also how you orientate or navigate yourself in terms of time and history. Just sitting and watching my dad draw when I was a boy, and the pleasure of that, and the magic space that it created. It was a key influence on me, as to how something is formulated in front of your eyes, and learning through looking. And the last image of my son, who was 10 years old at the time, with my dad who is now in his late seventies, and the idea of looking at his face, the nuances over so much time, they directly reflect upon you, because they're your family and you see yourself within them and a part of them. In a way you're looking for that recognition in the way you look at others, friends, people you've just met, total strangers, you're trying to recognise something about yourself. That what's happening on Mars. This alien landscape, we're looking at Mars and trying to see a reflection of ourselves in some form looking back through time and across space.

RB: What is 'Unseen' in the film?

DG: I'm excited to focus on specific individuals, environments and activities and through these processes point towards and grapple with something that feels even larger. I hope that opens up an active space of imagination for the viewer, in that we don't see the whole picture. We know that, for example, there's so much more in the universe or in any society or of any individual for that matter, than we are able to see at the moment. We know that 96% of the universe is Dark Matter, it's there, but under the radar, but we know that it's there. There's a sort of poetry in the inadequacy of any medium to fully render its subject. I love the idea that it somehow unpicks itself and it reveals its own inadequacies. But still the desire to look for more and more. For me there's so much in what is not seen distilled within the activities of the individuals in the film, trying to bring to light things that are in the darkness, to probe into the shadowy spaces of the universe or the inner sanctums of governmental workings, to strive to retain the light, to rescue vision from the grasp of the encroaching darkness or to render a likeness in graphite or video, a pin point of light, a momentary connection between one individual and another.