



HEALTH IN ME , 1 min , 13.12.2018

Alina Popa, Health in Me, 1 min, 13.12.2018, courtesy of the artist & Florin Flueraș

## ... Line as Thought, Lines as Universe ...

February 19 – April 25, 2021

... *Line as Thought, Lines as Universe* ... is an exhibition examining contemporary drawing practices in comparison with some pioneers of abstract drawing from the past several decades. The exhibition concept was first inspired by drawings made by the late Romanian artist, Alina Popa. During an illness and leading up to her death in 2019, Alina Popa produced an incredible body of drawings that profoundly depicted her experience. The other exhibited drawings in the exhibition veer into various conceptual and expressive directions, exploring the potential that drawing as an art form presents for depicting the inexpressible and the intangible, as well as circumnavigating ideas, space and the unknown in visual form, and ultimately testing the limits of language and thought.

Artists: William Anastasi, Nina Canell, Carlfriedrich Claus, Attila Csörgő, Christoph Fink, Habima Fuchs, Nikolaus Gansterer & Alex Arteaga, Monika Grzymala, Karel Malich, Isabel Nolan, Morgan O'Hara, Alina Popa, Stuart Sherman.

Curated by Séamus Kealy & Nikolaus Gansterer.

Along with the exhibition a catalogue will be published end of April. With texts by Ann Cotten, Nikolaus Gansterer, Séamus Kealy, and Klaus Speidel.

23 April, 6pm

Finissage of the exhibition with artist talk & catalogue launch.

## Introduction by Séamus Kealy

In 2019 I met Nikolaus Gansterer and we agreed to curate a group exhibition of drawing together. From the earliest conception of this exhibition, uncertainty has been at the core. This is the heart and very nature of the work of the participating artists, where in a splendid array of approaches, each artist takes on notions of uncertainty, the unknowable and the inexplicable via the practise of drawing. We also see gestures of drawing that grapple with depicting what is undepictable, such as movements through time and space, or the “agency of rain,” for example. With these fleeting notions flitting in and out of much of the artwork, it is also thus all the more relevant that we quietly commence this exhibition after a full year of global uncertainty, which is ongoing and casts a general spell of uncertainty over all of our lives. It is unnecessary to spell out this collectively-shared uncertainty, nor the great losses we have experienced, but at the same time, this backdrop to the exhibition has become all the more tangible. That said, it was never the intention of this exhibition to nestle up conceptually with the likes of a pandemic. Our inclination was to resist any notion of the pandemic or its related crises neither interfering with nor impacting upon the content of this exhibition. Today I realize that any resistance is futile, but instead it may be best to let this backdrop just *be*, for there is nothing much one can do about it. Time will tell, as they say. In any case, some of the exhibited work enters into difficult emotional, existential and psychological terrain, not unlike the terrain we have all shared recently. That said, I hope that the drawings in this exhibition not only instill wonder in our visitors but also spark some collective hope.

The idea for this exhibition commenced two years ago, before I met Nikolaus. In early 2019 I received an email from the artist Declan Clarke, who informed me that the Romanian artist Alina Popa had died. It was her 37<sup>th</sup> birthday when she slipped into unconsciousness and never again awoke. She had been long struggling with cancer. I had met Alina about ten years before on a curatorial research trip to Bucharest. I remembered her and her partner, Irina Gheorghe, who had founded The Bureau of Melodramatic Research, but also both had parallel individual artistic activities. After I replied to Declan to send my condolences, he sent me a link to scans of drawings that Alina had done, as well as a text she had written, in her final months. He wrote, “Alina was doing some beautiful drawings before she died. Her right arm atrophied and she was no longer able to hold a pen, so she used her left hand. They’re very sad, and full of fear and the terrible, terrible pain she was enduring. It makes me think how generous artists are, always working, even when their pen hand dies. What they leave behind in their work is something that can be really timeless. Up to and including the time when we are ill and dying, we’ll be able to find solace in these drawings - and that’s a wonderful gift from her.” Alina had made 248 drawings in small sketchbooks, each an expression of her suffering, her thoughts, her condition, her spirituality, her thoughts, her sensations. Below each of these beautiful abstract scribbles, she wrote a small caption, such as “Pain and Sensation around Tumor,” or “Distribution of Attention to Sensations,” each with the date of completion. These drawings were so moving, that I decided to see about exhibiting them. Sometime had to pass however and later I was in touch with Alina’s surviving partner Florin Flueraș, who generously agreed to lending us the drawings in the future.

Later that year I saw the work of Nikolaus Gansterer in Crone Gallery, Vienna. When first entering the exhibition, one encountered a wall installation of drawings, carefully arranged almost like a table of elements, with white drawings on black, reminiscent of blackboard diagrams, as well as swirling abstract compositions on various materials, alongside small sculptures on shelves over an incomplete wall of pink. Everything was arranged with great care. Small framed photos of his hand drawing

punctuated the wall in between different scaled drawings that each echoed abstract figurations or lines of “hypotheses” that seemed to re-appear in different formations. A vitrine with a “collection of found lines (Paris)” sat quietly before the installation. I was struck by this work, especially the sense of searching and questioning within the very act of drawing that he engaged with. There appeared to be a number of open-ended questions circulating through the body of work, and the artist appeared comfortable that there were no clear answers to these questions. I was touched by this sense of the artist’s acceptance of incompleteness at the heart of his work. A few moments later, I was introduced to Nikolaus. To this day, I value our conversations together not only in developing this exhibition together, but also on more personal matters.

The exhibition concept arose after connecting the dots, so to speak, between my experience of Alina’s work and that of Nikolaus’ work. I then invited Nikolaus to help me develop the exhibition further, as his expertise in this area of drawing was needed. He graciously accepted. Much of the work, we soon decided, would be abstract or semi-abstract in appearance, but altogether the work should flit in and out of contact with notions of incomprehensibility, the unknowable, and the inexplicable. We saw much of the work hovering between a kind of axis of science and mathematics and an axis of spirituality, not quite resting at either pole. I had also, somewhat naively, been researching theories of probability and crossovers between physics and mathematics: Frank Ramsey, Wittgenstein, Alan Turing even. I had no idea then if these associations would have any relevance or relationship. But this sense of uncertainty, as a curatorial impulse as much as an artistic one in the works represented in the exhibition, binds the project together, as much as it has bound the represented works together.

Nikolaus and I divided the curatorial role, where Nikolaus was able to contribute to a selection of the more “pioneering” artists as well as a few of his contemporaries, and I was keen on showing not only Alina’s work, but a few others whose work I had been following the last several years. Early on, Nikolaus and I had been, perhaps jokingly, speculating on including mathematical drawings in the form of chalkboards adjacent to other references in the form of artists’ work. At one moment, there was the idea to include drawing from AI, but that we dismissed together, as it seemed to veer away from the central premises a bit too mechanically (at least for now). We thought also about including some examples from pioneers of exploratory abstract drawing, whether Joseph Beuys, Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz or William Anastasis. As it turned out, we were able to secure some work by Anastasis, and we eventually compiled a list of artists whose work would help solidify some of the raw notions above, at least by virtue of their relationship to categories of the unknown and intangible. Some of the work enters into territories of expanded drawing, others are more directly expressive, others almost cartographic, others within systems made by the artists, much of it abstract. Other work becomes sculptural, and may at times involve non-human drawing, but everything in the exhibition is, in one way or another, a form of drawing.

There are two audio-tours that accompany the exhibition, one in German by Nikolaus, and one in English, by me. We are also developing a publication, to be launched in late April, which will feature texts by myself, Nikolaus, Ann Cotten, and Klaus Speidel. This brochure is the first discursive step in addressing the exhibition, and we look forward to producing the next elements over the coming weeks.

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For further information please get in touch with:

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Hours Exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7pm

Hours Café Buk e Kryp: Tue-Sat 10am-10pm