

Dena Ashbolt: Video Drawing

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Joseph Banks invited Sydney Parkinson to travel on Cook's voyage of discovery to Australia because he could draw. Being a botanical illustrator, Parkinson's value was his ability to record highly detailed information about the strange and exotic plants that Banks discovered. These flowers and leaves are minor details of the grand vistas; the mountains, rivers, islands and beaches that the Endeavour visited, but they can still call us in very close to things, and by their power of suggestion, places, that are both ordinary and exotic.

More recently photography has replaced this documentary role of drawing with its marvelous ability to instantaneously collect images of great detail. However, a camera is a machine which collects only one glimpse at a time, whereas drawing, which is painstaking and time-consuming gathers different information. Drawings like Parkinson's gather thousands of glimpses and many careful looks.

This accumulation of human looking can draw us into an image or experience in ways that a photograph can't. In traditional drawings like Parkinson's each mark or element has been seen and made at a different moment, but comes together as an understandable whole, enticing us with the tangible presence of the artist. This is what Dena Ashbolt's video drawings do. Paradoxically, by returning to the camera, but using a moving image, Ashbolt is able to extend this capacity of drawing. In these video works, the time it takes to look becomes very evident.

As Goethe wrote 'The present moment is a powerful goddess'.¹ These video drawings, by claiming the importance of the present moment of looking, allow us to be present to particular moments in unique ways. The detail is not the perfect rendering of botanical illustration but renders the oddness of the way that parts of perfect moments jut up against each other in unexpected ways.

Like Parkinson's flowers, Ashbolt's moments are rare but ordinary. The simplicity of a café, or a car or a train becomes something special when it is observed with attention. These works invite us to occupy and explore that strange and wonderful place that exists between looking and being seen.

¹ Johannes Goethe quoted in Paul Davies About Time, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996 .p65