

MELANIE BERGER

PLAYGROUND

(...) "Abstraction also starts with the real. It is not disconnected from the way you look at things. There is always a heaven, a certain quality of light, or a vibration that surround you and that may no longer be visible, but which do find their way into the construction." It is that subtle state, that wafer-thin membrane between what you see and what you suspect, between what jumps out at you and what it elicits that makes Mélanie Berger's work such an overwhelming experience. The drawings by the French artist who moved to Brussels a year and a half ago, make tangles of lines and layers glow like skin. Skin that trembles, begs to be touched, turns away, tautens, and reveals wrinkles, scars, and birthmarks. A life in lines, features, swipes, depths, and erasures that fluctuates between the fundamental emotions in a human life and the urge to reign them in, to swaddle them in soft sobriety.

It is difficult not to be affected by Mélanie Berger's drawings. They continue to draw themselves as you look at them, only to unravel and move in a different direction, like a dialogue driven by the generous, forgiving act that produced it in the first place. "I realised very quickly, while I was still studying, that drawing is the only medium that allowed me to be where I wanted to be: as though in a kind of reticence, a place where I could embrace uncertainty in a way, where I didn't have to scream to make myself heard. I could do that in drawing because drawing is also about erasing." Mélanie Berger's practice is based on the interaction between appearing and disappearing. She uses her pencils to create stifling compositions in various colours, only to return to them and remove the layers with a rubber. "It is a constant movement on the border between creating and decreating. I enjoy the ability to be engaged in an activity that vacillates and goes back and forth between speaking and erasing what has been spoken. Things can be expressed more accurately and correctly in this dynamic. Despite the fact that it is laborious work – adding a shade to the drawing that is then completely erased again – I do derive meaning from these completely contradictory actions."

This layered interplay of lines reveals and conceals, constructs and deconstructs, and thus encapsulates its process, its act of creation...and time itself. "I am especially interested in preserving the underlying traces and making the process shine through. My work is the result of that research, the attempt to find the border where a drawing is an image, but also a field that is as open as possible and allows you to feel what happened before it got to that stage. For a brief time, I made animated films based on my drawings, which at that time were still forms that transformed, and I made the films precisely to document this process. But it was too confining because I was not able to translate the layers into the films. I wanted to detach myself from representation so that the image became more of a journey, through stories and strata, rather than an object."

Text by Kurt Snoekx

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