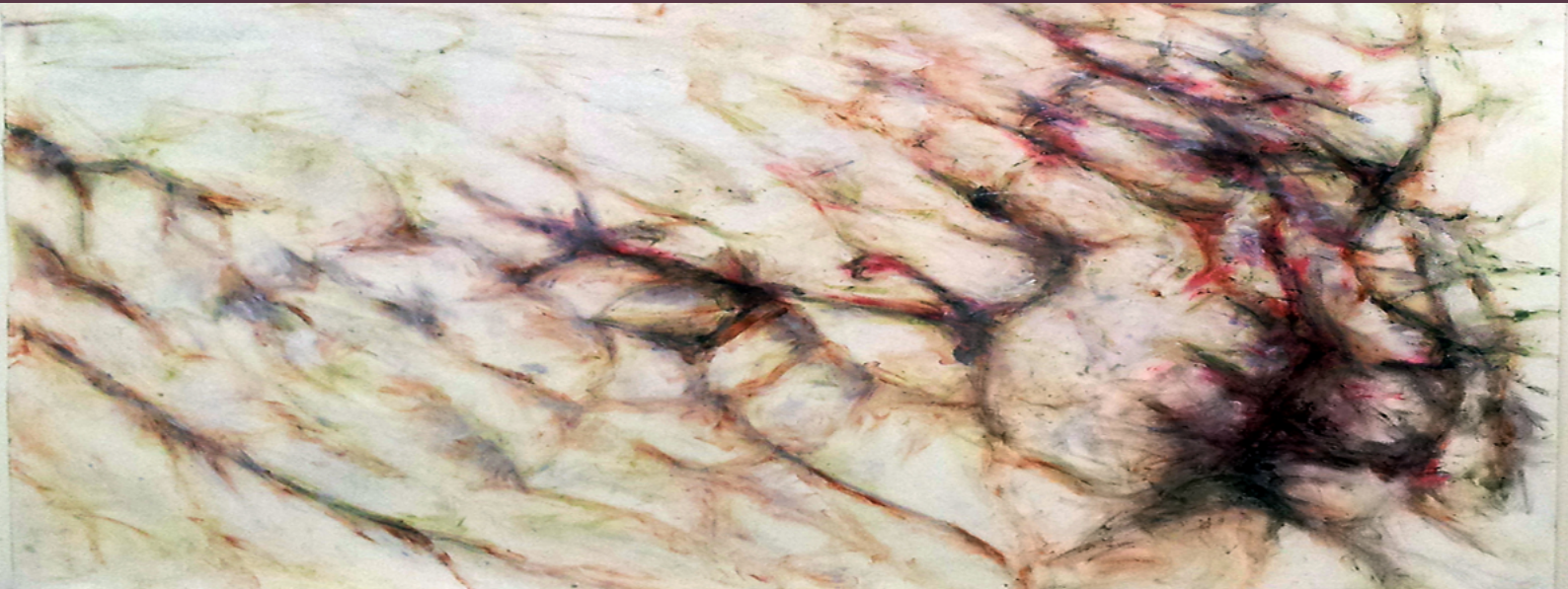


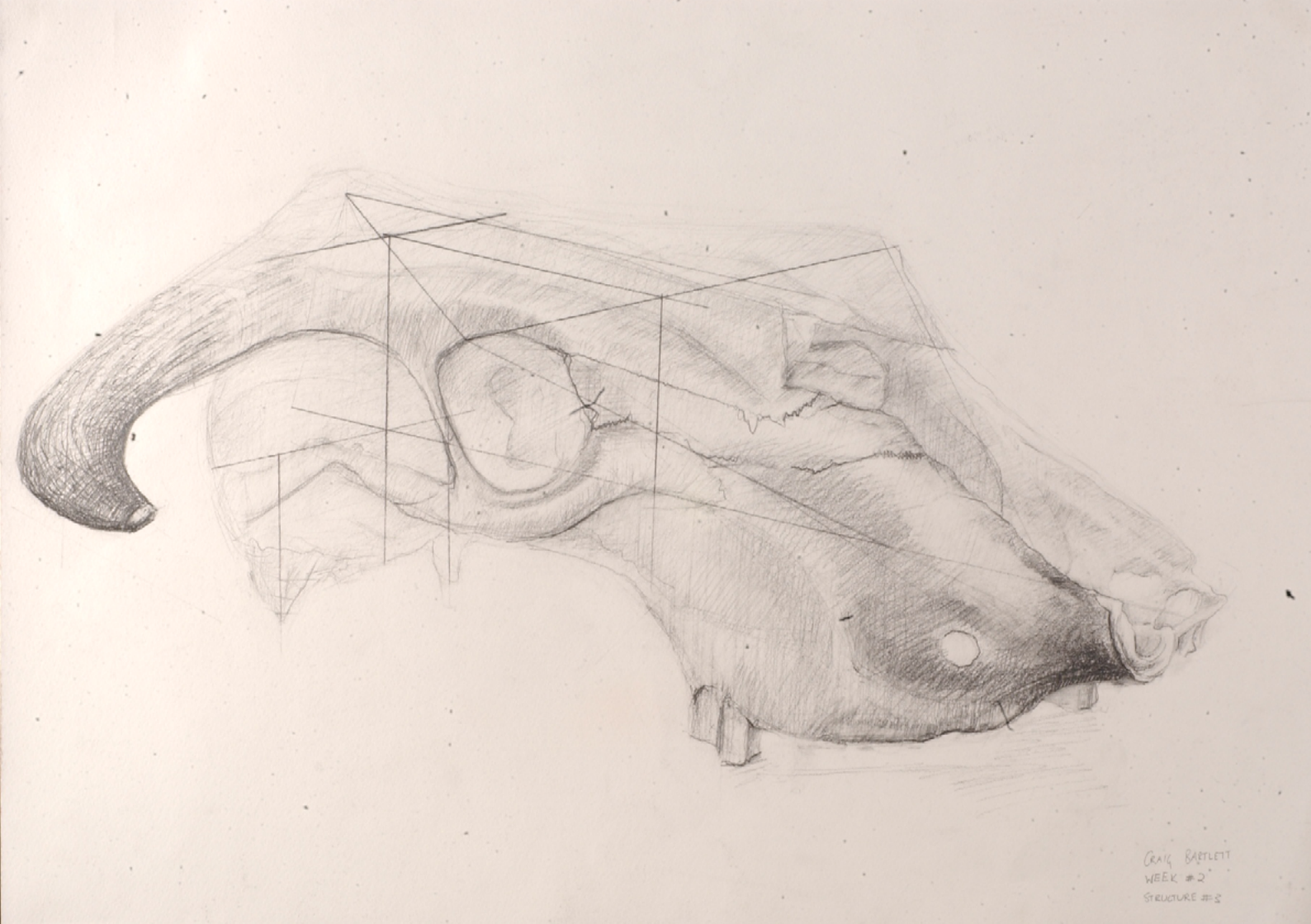
The Department of Visual Art - *Drawing as Thinking*





Introduction - David Paton

One element of our program which has always caused a stir of interest at the end of year student exhibitions - for both our 3rd year diploma students as well as our 4th year degree students - is the presence of Drawing. Many visitors, including lay-persons, visiting academics as well as artists, comment on the potency and visual power of many of the drawings. This potency and power comes from a vigorous commitment to drawing as an independent discipline to the end of the 3rd year of study: something for which the Department of Visual Art is unapologetic. While many of our sister institutions have side-lined Drawing, we continue to focus on the concept of *Drawing as Thinking*, a process through which concepts and ideas are refined and matured. From 1st year, where basic visual literacies are developed, an understanding of how to translate a three-dimensional (in-depth) world onto a two-dimensional (flat) surface with confidence is vital. This understanding is bolstered by knowledge of 'equivalences' i.e. rendering something in another medium, and 'phrasing' in which a spatially nuanced rendering is compellingly drawn. We have found that the slow development of content alongside the advancement of technical excellence at 2nd year level, explodes in 3rd year, delivering some of the most confident, competent and visually powerful drawing being produced in tertiary institutions today. We don't, however only draw in Drawing. In both 2nd and 3rd year, the students prepare TED Talk-like presentations on a wealth of subjects which range from "*Plato's Cave*" to the "*Higgs Boson Particle*" and we find that this expansive engagement with diverse topics which demand to be integrated, in some way, into current thinking and practice, helps to liberate a set of powerfully reactive and responsive Drawings. In the words of drawing Lecturer Jaco van den Heever: "*After what I have been privy to in teaching drawing at competitive institutions in recent times, I salute your department's incredible work*". This compendium of student drawings from 1st to 4th year is a brief taste of the process through which students go, through which they grow and mature. Confidence in technical, conceptual and responsive processes of Drawing has stood firm in the face of great national and international hostility, and we believe that through *Drawing as Thinking*, our students have indeed got something relevant to say. (2013).





1st year Drawing

begins with observational transference of 3-dimensional phenomena onto a 2-dimensional surface; understanding structure, rendering, equivalences, phrasing for spatial nuance and trusting one's eye.

From simple objects to the human form in space, the 1st year module builds technical and mark-making confidence across a range of materials and substrates. Students understand the page surface as either illusionistic or symbolic and what these differences mean.





By the end of first year a student will be able to draw a compelling figure in a variety of contexts. Such figures will depict an understanding of correct figure-ground relationships as well as a sensitive understanding of what it means to objectify the human figure.

Students begin to understand that drawing a figure in space is to confront the human condition in all its complexity.





2nd Year drawing:

Whereas a first year student, no matter what wonderful marks they might have received for Matric in Art, soon understands that they have, in fact, never drawn before, never *really* drawn, never *really* looked with blade-like observation, and that their poor references, plagiarised from media sources are in fact insulting to their own eye and ability to generate their own subjects, second year Drawing demands these attitudes and skills along with the stomach to try again and again and again in pursuit of that which is worthy of exhibiting.

This is the year when a student is expected to be able to draw anything correctly, and if it is not, to do it again until it is!

If Renaissance apprentices produced thousands of drawings before the master condescended to allow them to paint an angel's face (20th to the left of the Madonna, where mistakes would be less noticeable!) then a 2nd year student must be very confident if they think they are going to get it right, 1st time!

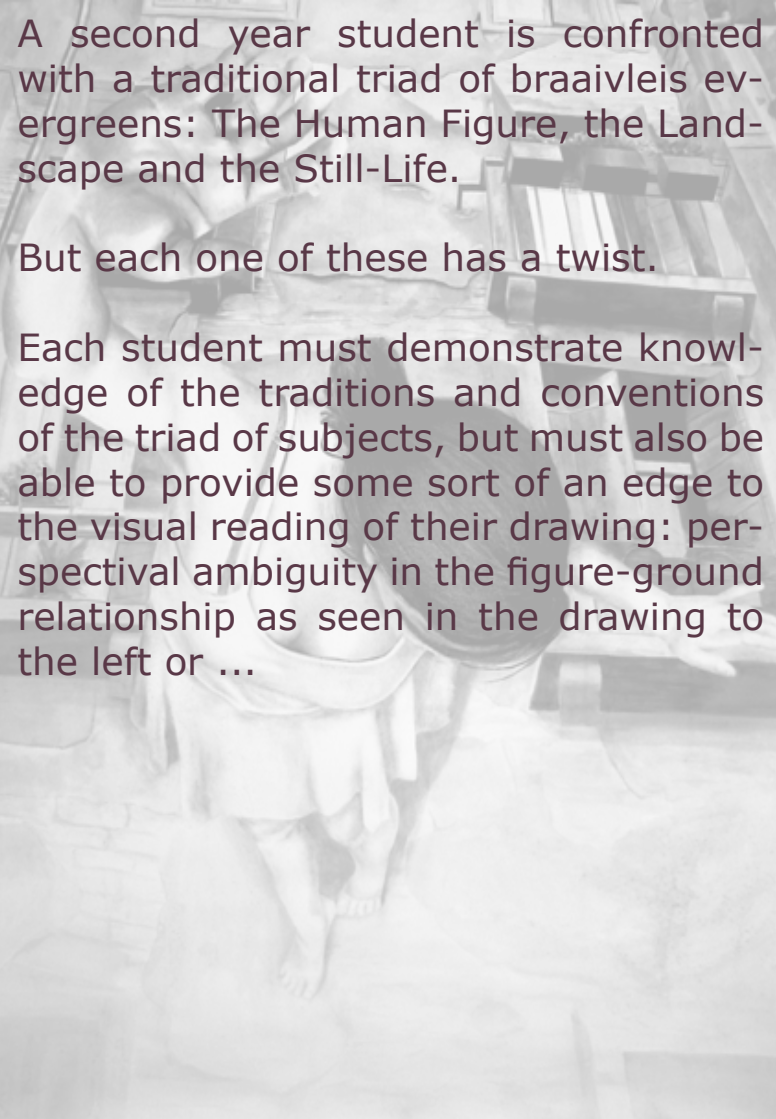




A second year student is confronted with a traditional triad of braaivleis evergreens: The Human Figure, the Landscape and the Still-Life.

But each one of these has a twist.

Each student must demonstrate knowledge of the traditions and conventions of the triad of subjects, but must also be able to provide some sort of an edge to the visual reading of their drawing: perspectival ambiguity in the figure-ground relationship as seen in the drawing to the left or ...



... a re-representation of temporal-spatial concerns in landscape as can be seen from these three very different approaches to the concept of 'landscape'.

Material relationships for conceptual notions of what 'landscape' might constitute, become important at this point.

It is this learning and knowledge which must be grafted into everything a student does in the Department this year.





The third project in the triad demands a grappling with highly coloured and patterned cloth against the seemingly mundane black, white and grey objects.

The objects must hold their own while the composition must be equally interesting or ambiguous.

The circular composition to the right seems to support both the form as well as the meaning of the objects draw.





Students have to read - *all the time!* And one of the following books must be read and responded to in the June vacation:

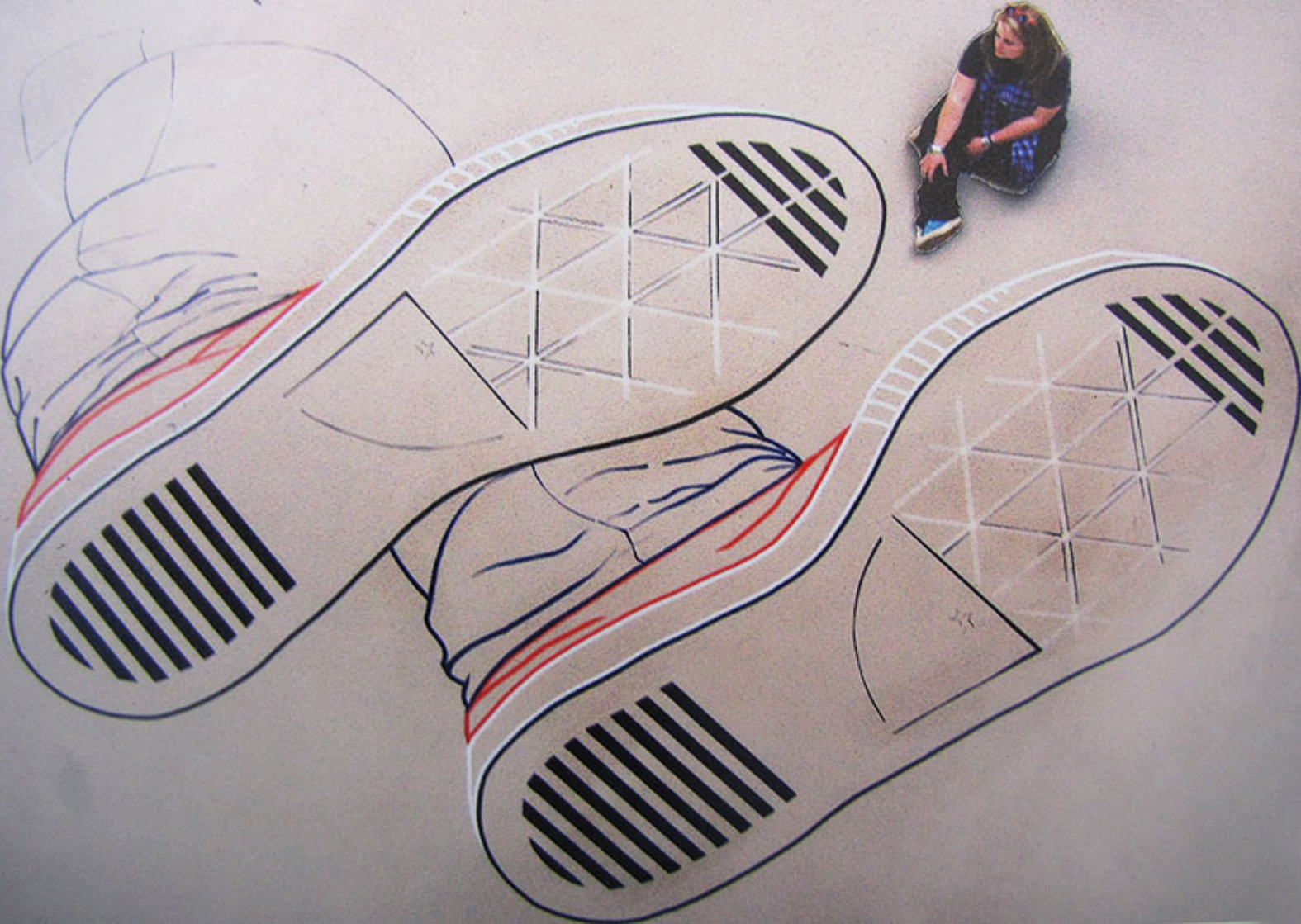
1. *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy – India
2. *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Gabriel García Márquez – Colombia
3. *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini – Afghanistan
4. *Fugitive Pieces*, Anne Michaels – Canada
5. *Waiting for the Barbarians* OR *Disgrace*, J. M. Coetzee – South Africa
6. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer – USA

7. *The Sheltering Sky*, Paul Bowles – USA / Morocco

8. *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe – Nigeria.

This is often the start of a love for the relationship between images & texts which will often reappear in later years.







In the second semester students draw with tape, but the drawing must relate to 'tapeness': stickiness, insulation, masking, bias-binding, Velcro, video you name it - BUT the content of the drawing MUST relate directly to the type of tape used. If the drawing could have been done in any other material or medium and it would look just the same then the drawing is a failure!

This is followed by a typographic drawing in which the word and the image of the word conjoin. Take away the marks and the text collapses; take away the text and the drawing collapses.

Students have fun finding and choosing suitable words - words which have a visually dynamic connection to the manner in which they are drawn.

The difficulty comes in pulling the idea off in the final drawing!

At the end of the year, students choose a theme, subject, imagery, substrate and drawing media which they think might be suitable for maturation in 3rd year.

They are now utterly responsible to the visual research, organisation, completion and exhibition of their own work!









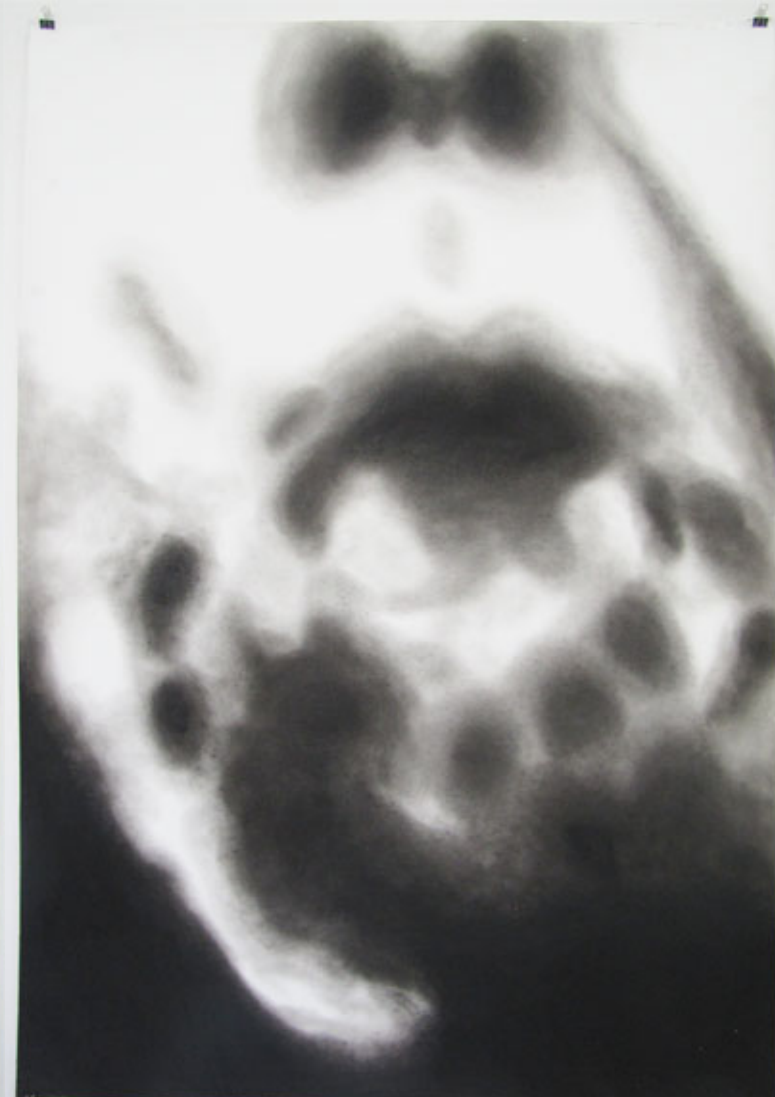
In third year, students undergo what we call “Blood-letting Week” - which actually lasts for two weeks - and in which the students ‘bleed’ ideas and work in response to a vast range of inputs, exercises, promptings, directives, coercions, project briefs and unusual and challenging stimuli. The students make drawings and book-objects in response to this multiple and complex set of inputs. By the end of Blood-letting Week, a student will have produced in excess of 30 drawings and these, along with the verbal and critical inputs also received along the way, attempt to position the student in terms of a way forward. As the year progresses, so the student is expected to become more and more self-generative and responsible for his or her ideas, preparation and Drawings.

The 1st semester Drawings are “written off” in June and the student’s final Drawing exhibition consist only of what is done in the 2nd half of the year. This places emphasis on confident, well-resourced ideas, excellent time-management and a tenacious focus. These Drawings are always related to what the student is doing in their elective major (Painting, Printmaking, Sculpture, Photography, Videography, Installation or combinations of these) and often the Drawings and work for the elective become one coherent exhibition of work.

Our 2nd semester TED Talk-like sessions expand the students’ horizons and ideas, some of which have direct bearing on their output.

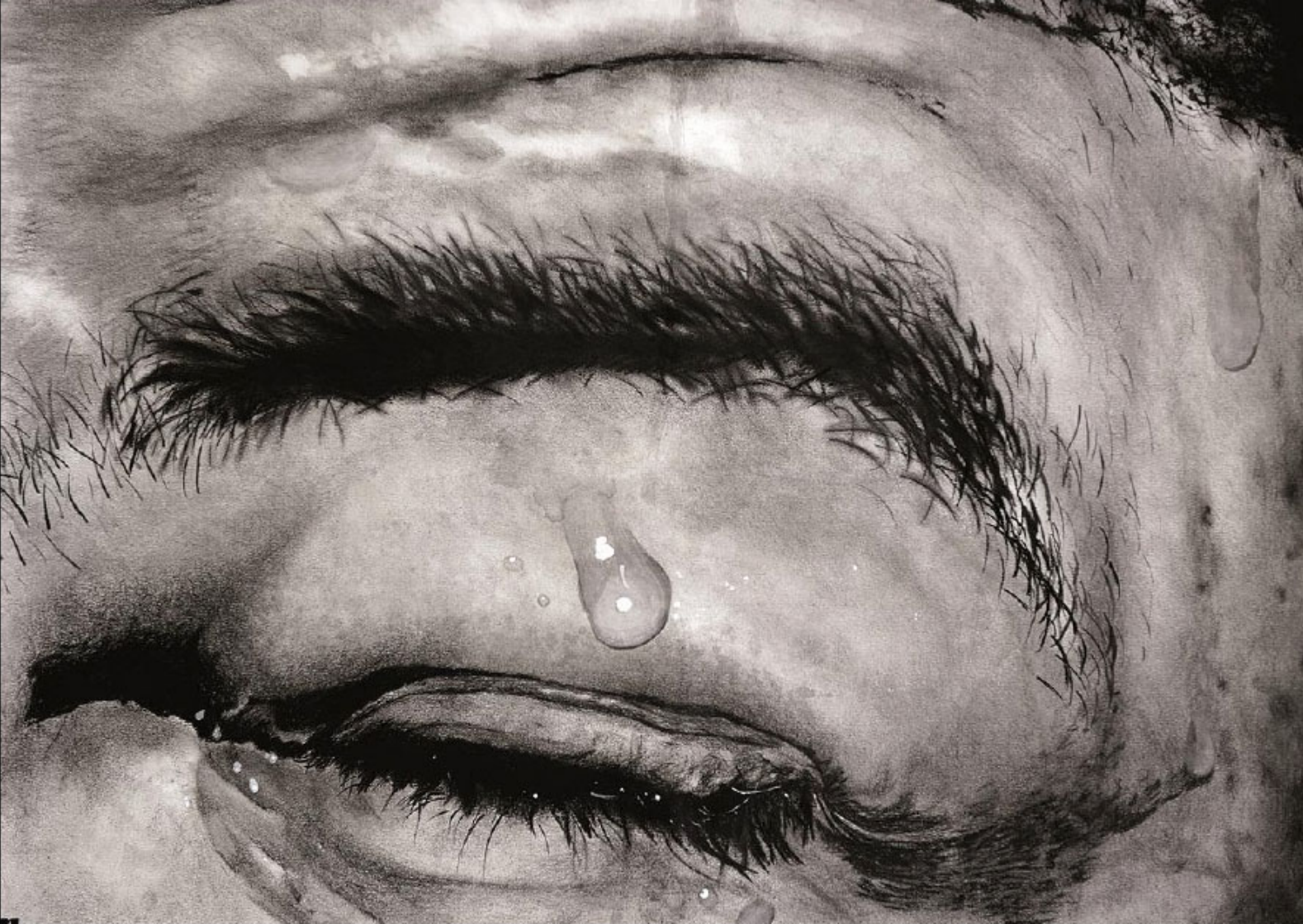
These pages show some of our students’ more successful responses to Drawing at senior level.















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