

Curator's gallery talk with Amy L. Powell

A Question of Emphasis: Louise Fishman Drawing

Friday, September 24, 2021 2:00pm in KAM's East Gallery

Amy L. Powell: Hi, everyone, thanks for joining. We'll go ahead and get started. If you don't already have a stool for sitting, please feel free, they're just here. We'll be in this space together, probably for about 40 minutes or so, with some conversation afterwards. By all means grab a seat and make yourself comfortable. I'm Amy Powell, I'm curator of modern contemporary art here at Krannert Art Museum. It's my absolute pleasure and honor to welcome you to *A Question of Emphasis: Louise Fishman Drawing*.

I'm going to begin with our land acknowledgment. Krannert Art Museum, as part of the University of Illinois, stands on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. These lands were the traditional territory of these Indigenous Nations prior to their forced removal, and they continue to carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity today.

As part of a land-grant institution dedicated to promoting the critical power of art of the past and present, Krannert Art Museum has a responsibility to acknowledge the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this university over the last 150 years. We also recognize the particular role that images have played in this history. Using our collections, programming, and collaborative relationships, we seek to address and reflect on these histories and the role that the U of I continues to play in shaping them.

Thank you everyone for coming, for being here at two o'clock on a Friday afternoon. I want to thank in particular our distinguished guests. Martha Macks-Kahn and Peter Kahn are here from Baltimore. I'm so glad that you are here. One of Louise's gallerists and dear friends. As well Lori Chaikin, Louise's cousin. And of course, Ingrid Nyeboe, Louise's spouse. This exhibition was Ingrid's idea [laughter].

The really terrific paintings retrospective of Louise Fishman's work that Helaine Posner had organized for the Neuberger Museum had happened [in 2016], and I had tried to...maybe we could host it here given that Louise Fishman was an alum of the University of Illinois. The timing didn't quite work out and by great coincidence and fate and determination this project came together with Louise and Ingrid. From my first visit with them, drawers upon drawers started coming open to reveal works on paper, and they asserted that Louise's works on paper haven't had the attention they deserve. And here we are years later. So beyond just the idea, but also access to works, making sure that everything got photographed, that we could even have a beautiful catalogue in the midst of a pandemic, is all due to Ingrid, so thank you so much. It's such an honor to have all of you here visiting.

This was to be a conversation between me and Louise. It will not be, and we'll talk about already the space that some of the work holds for grief and mourning. Louise Fishman passed away on July 26. And I also wanted to invoke as well, kind of the conjuring power of art. It moves us, it takes us places, so maybe today if we let it, we might do some conjuring here in the space.

I've titled the exhibition overview that I'll discuss today "Queer Uses of Abstraction." I'm going to spend the time unpacking what that means for Louise's work, what it does, where it takes us, and how the exhibition seeks to frame mostly her works on paper but a lot of techniques and ideas, and kind of attachments in Louise's work.

And I thought I would start, not with a work on paper, but with this extraordinary canvas *Blonde Ambition* from 1995. Louise is an abstract painter, has been for decades and decades, found a home in abstraction both as a method and process but also as a history. Really devoted to the history of painting. This work is from 1995 and I love to use it to set up her interests and her process. Louise was a physical painter. This canvas matches the reach of her arms, you can tell its sense of physicality by her reach, of the gesture across this work. But she is very keen here to use the particular tools of

abstract painting and to make them do things. Putting them to use. And that is the gesture. If the historical movement of abstract expressionism is associated with anything, one of those things is the gesture of the hand over the canvas, here scraped and trowled and move-mented; it has such a sense of dynamic movement. And also the grid. There is a grid in this painting that is not...I was going to say it's not straight—it's definitely not straight [laughter]—it is bending, it is made to flex. So if the gray and the dark tones provide kind of background, this hyper white where she's mixed different substances into the paint to make it move and to make it settle over top of that gray. So, the tools, the most prominent tools of abstract painting: the gesture and the grid, she is making her own, very much in this work.

And she makes them her own as well in its title and in its references. *Blonde Ambition*, 1995, was Madonna's concert tour of the same name that year. Madonna in *Blonde Ambition* is reviving—talk about conjuring—is reviving Marilyn Monroe, another of the artist's great loves, and so attaching her gestures, her expressionist style to these women. I wanted to start here with the queer uses of abstraction to bring us into the word *queer*, not only for lesbian identity and content, but for what Louise is doing, how she is using these prominent tools of abstract painting to give us other stories of the history of painting. Not just inserting herself, not just updating a kind of history of painting, but really fundamentally using and doing things with abstraction, the grid, and the gesture.

So that's *Blonde Ambition*. It shares a wall with these beautiful drawings of horses, and actually of...on the left here, I think in real life these may be three inches tall of lacquer legs collected from 10th–11th century China [*Untitled*, 1995]. Louise had a really nice collection of her own art, and interests and attachment in the world, including Chinese scholar's rocks, and various artifacts from China. This is one reason to do a drawings show. Because Louise is known for these grand gestures, these incredible paintings, but once we start looking at her works on paper there's so much going on.

And not just as a kind of, you know, more intimate or domestic gesture, because you can see she's still working big in these drawings. So, talking about Louise's form is never separate from her stories. If she were here, she would tell us how much she loved horses, her dreams about horses, her collections of horses. And also, when I asked her about the drawing here on the left of the lacquer legs, she tells me about their box that she kept them in, coated in silk, this precious object that she holds in the house. All about textures and attachments that she's building her world through her collections and what she surrounds herself with. The horse is referenced elsewhere in the galleries. I think probably just here in this gallery [indicates gallery 6]. There's a really nice small notebook where each page is showing a different horse or these lacquer legs over and over and over [No title (Red notebook/horse), 1994–1997]. So, this is an artist who definitely used drawings not as studies for her paintings, but as kind of meaningful works in their own right, to try out a particular form over and over, to think about her relationship to the objects she surrounded herself with, and to think about her relationship with gesture and grid.

So *Blonde Ambition* and these untitled horse drawings are here because they were made the same year, but I also quite loved this juxtaposition of the kind of grand gesture masterful painting, if you will, and the small, with what she keeps close to home.

The exhibition surveys five decades of Louise's drawing practice, and it's organized by process.

Partly because we can see how certain processes develop over time and are consistent in her work. So right now, we're sitting in the gallery called "curves," which I assure you is quite dramatic after you go through the exhibition and came from grids into curves. So in the gallery just over here [indicates gallery 3], you can see how she's dividing a picture plane and organizing through the grid. And then coming into curves, you can see how she's also training her arm to do something different, which is to use the curve as a structural element. It's quite dramatic.

So, for instance, on this wall, there are curved works from the 1980s, including a really stellar beautiful drawing [*Untitled*, 1985], and then another from 2016 [*Untitled*, 2016]. So we can see how she's using consistent processes over time, changing them over time throughout the exhibition. That's one example in curves. But I also wanted to organize the show according to process in order to focus on what she's doing, what she's enacting. Her use of process points us to making and to building and to generating. And to making the world where not only we can belong but where we can thrive.

So Louise is someone who was always dedicated to the practice of painting as a discipline and as a way to live. It's quite important for a lesbian feminist artist, right. Excluded from canons of painting, she moved from Illinois to New York and trying to find her way. So I think the exhibition is quite, or her work is quite instructive in terms of how we make our own pathways in really established disciplines. So I wanted to start here. And I'm going to ask everybody to turn around and we're going to go to the bather over there.

Thanks everybody.

Another reason I wanted to do a works on paper retrospective...I think this was one of the very first drawings that I probably saw the first day I visited Louise's archive just adjacent to her studio in New York. This is a drawing of Paul Cézanne's *Bather* [*Untitled*, 1980]. Paul Cézanne, the post-impressionist artist who is so renowned, rightly so, for his attention to paint, his expressive application of marks, of color, of gesture. To also depict the same things over and over, his obsessions with a mountain, a landscape, and with these bather figures. Louise grew up in Philadelphia. Her mother and her paternal aunt were both artists. The Barnes Foundation, going there was absolutely a prominent form of her education. So she would have seen Cézanne's bathers there, at the Barnes. This is a different one, a solo figure. The painting Louise is referencing here is owned by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, where Louise

was living when she made this drawing. If you go to MoMA's database and look it up, you will see this figure.

This is a charcoal drawing of the central bather. A lot kind of matches up with the painting, you can see how Louise is really paying attention to how Cézanne puts marks onto the page, not always, and actually hardly as continuous marks but as smaller marks that make up a larger whole. So she's really paying attention to his use of form. But in 1980, and around the early 1980s, she was also making a lot of self-portraits and drawings. There's one canvas, actually that's called *Portrait of Myself as a Man* [1983]. So, there are these gender fluid elements as well to Louise's process, to her thinking about, what did it mean—especially in 1980, right on the heels of a lot of her activism in the women's movement, which I'll talk about a little bit. A lot of that work is in this gallery here [indicates gallery 2]. What does it mean to construct a self? And to do that through painting and through drawing. But: let's look to history. Here's Cézanne. We're going to manipulate on that image and make it more like me. And try to think about herself through Cézanne.

So, 1977, just prior to making this drawing, Louise had written this excellent essay that I recommend to people all the time called "How I Do It: Cautionary Advice from a Lesbian Painter." There was a really terrific journal of feminist art and artists called *Heresies* and the third issue of the journal focused solely on lesbian art and artists. Louise was a member of the editorial collective for that issue. The piece of hers that's published in *Heresies* is actually on view in the exhibition, as well [*It's Good to Have Limits*, 1977]. But in this essay, "How I Do It: Cautionary Advice from a Lesbian Painter," she wrote:

Try not to cut whole bodies of work out of your vision unless you've looked at them and studied them thoroughly. Don't stop looking at El Greco because he's not Jewish, or Chardin because he's not an abstract painter, or Matisse because he's not a lesbian. By all means, look at Agnes Martin and Georgia O'Keeffe and Eva Hesse, but don't forget Cezanne, Manet,

and Giotto. If good painting is what you want to do, then good painting is what you must look at. Take what you want and leave the dreck.

I love this for many reasons, mostly because of the disappointment that Matisse was not a lesbian [laughter]. But here is another queer use of abstraction, right, we're making, Louise is making her world, she's writing herself into the history of art, she's looking at the history of art and telling it differently through her own experience her own lens and making her world, essentially.

So, in this exhibition I was really keen to focus on her use of process, her working out of gesture and grid and transfer and form over time as a way of making. And not just a sense of self making in the form of biographical statements. But as a way to kind of open up for us to attach, you know, how do we make our own places in the world, whether that's in a discipline, or wherever that might be, it's quite inspiring. So, Cézanne's *Bather*. It's an untitled drawing, but this is a bather. I did ask a whole group of undergraduate painting majors the other day, okay, "who is this everybody?" Nobody knew that this is referencing Cézanne! I don't know how important Cézanne necessarily is in art history surveys these days but one would think.

That's my set up for the exhibition. Because we are such a sizable group, we're not going to walk around all of the galleries in the show. But what I'd like to do is walk us through mentally, the rest of the exhibition. And then that way when we're finished I hope you'll spend some time and I hope you'll come back and see how these ideas that I've talked about kind of unfold in the rest of the galleries as well. So we're right smack in the middle of the show, as I mentioned, we're in the process room called "curves." Louise also made this terrific... There are only three paintings on canvas in the exhibition, this is another one that's called *Drawing* [2015]. I said, "Louise why did you call it *Drawing*, and she said, 'because it looks like a drawing'." [laughter]. Okay, "don't overthink it" is what I said to myself.

So, there are several different ways of making marks in this painting, whether she has rolled something across the canvas. Her well-trained arm making a circle. Also, painting with her fingers. You can see her marks on the canvas. So always very physical, and especially in the last twenty years such a confidence to leave bare canvas and not have everything completely covered. Always thinking about the edges and the canvas, the full picture plane as a whole. There's a lot of confidence in that, in that bare background too.

When you come into the exhibition the very first room is dedicated to a process I've called "transfers." There's so much evidence of contact and touch in Louise's work. Even some... when we looked at *Blonde Ambition*, of trowels or things scraping the painting and moving it away. But she would let the pages of a book dry against one another. She would apply a huge piece of tracing paper to a wet painting, and then pull the tracing paper away. And then the tracing paper or paper towel—there aren't any paper towels in the exhibition but I assure you that I saw them in her studio. And then that would become a work in its own right. She might continue working on it. So these instances of almost chance, her interest in chance mark making and then finishing them so there's a few of those on view in that adjacent gallery.

Also a drawing she made of her hands, almost a rubbing [*Untitled*, 1991]. Someone described it almost like an icon, in that next room. There are some prints in there as well that she made with her mother's printing plates [*Gertie and Louise*, 2005]. Louise's earliest memories of making drawings and being in an art class are with her mother at the Print Club in Philadelphia. And so later on, she wound up having some printing plates from her mother and made her own prints from those, are also in this first room of the exhibition. So all of this evidence of contact and transfer between substances, between materials, between generations kind of start the exhibition. The implication there I hope is that we might also be contacted, touched, affected by this work. We start to read about her biography, we start to read about her influences in that room, so that's transfers.

And then in this gallery here [indicates gallery 2] is a lot of work that kind of teaches us how to see what Louise was doing, some of which she's pretty well known for. The *Angry Women* are in that room. There are five in the exhibition, and there are thirty in their original entirety.

And these are acrylic paintings on paper where Louise has called out a woman: herself "ANGRY LOUISE SERIOUS RAGE" that was the first one she made. ANGRY PAULA for the gallerist Paula Cooper. ANGRY JOAN. There are at least three painters probably there, Joan Thorne, Joan Mitchell, and Joan Snyder.

Audience member: Joan Jonas?

ALP: I don't think so. But this is part of the work of these is that they're only first names. So Joan Jonas is absolutely embraced and implied in the "Joan" in this work. ANGRY YVONNE for Yvonne Rainer. And she started making "the angries," as one of her friends calls them, because she...it's 1973. She's just been in the Whitney Biennial; she's noticing what artists get attention and who doesn't. She's struggling with belonging in the women's movement as a lesbian, so lots of issues of belonging. And she started to make these for friends and then they became an artwork in themselves. They are an incredible archive of women artists. They're each very different as well. I think one thing we're seeing too is how she has always challenged herself to make different marks and to stretch what she's doing to the edges of a canvas or to a resolution and once it stops interesting her, once a particular process stops feeling challenging, she moves onto something else. She's incredibly innovative, confident, sort of always moving forward in that regard.

There's a lot happening in that room, so I encourage you to spend some time in there, looking and reading and learning how to see her work.

And then the back section of the exhibition is "grids." The grid is always present, or often present in Louise's work, as this shape-shifting structure. She was pretty traditionally trained as a painter at the Tyler School of Art, then outside of Philadelphia.

where, she told me that she was fairly certain that the teachers she had there were trained and educated in Bauhaus approaches to the picture plane. So the grid is a tool to measure, divide, push, and recede one's attention in abstract painting. And she's totally playing with it throughout her career, and that back gallery really focuses on the grid.

There's a terrific object lesson in scale, that I really love, in that gallery. Another major work on canvas is in that gallery called *Bel Canto* [2014]. Super colorful, implied grid, kind of underlaid underneath the colorful painting that emerges sometimes. You can tell where Louise has applied tape and pulled it away from the canvas. And it's quite sizable, it's larger than *Drawing*, just on the other side of the wall from *Blonde Ambition*. And then on the other side of that same "grids" gallery is a 10 x 10-inch grid, a drawing on paper called [A Grogger for Eva and Agnes](#) [1992]. And it looks like a kind of...it's definitely drawn by hand, it's not rigid, it's not mechanical, and it looks very clearly as though it's referencing that Eva and Agnes. Eva being Eva Hesse—Louise's drawing looks like a perfect homage to Eva Hesse's work. And also Agnes being Agnes Martin. The painter most associated as a minimalist painter who made hand-drawn grids on canvas and paper. Louise had gone to visit Agnes Martin in New Mexico in the early 1990s, and really returned to the grid after that visit, as a meditative practice, and as a way to continue making work. Those two grids—the small drawing and *Bel Canto*—together have an incredible play of scale.

A lot of folks I've been taking through have really commented on how much work is in the exhibition. I think once you spend some time and also see how fundamentally different each gallery is, that this is really merited.

In the back corner gallery [gallery 5] is a whole series of oil and wax drawings on paper from 1976. For a brief time, Louise was artist in residence and taught at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She tells this story where she thought she would have a studio and she would still be making these paintings on circles of wood that she had been making at the time. But she didn't really have a studio, she just had a studio

apartment, so she started making works on paper. The paper is quite big, though, so it was more about a thickness than it was the size, and tools. You can tell in that space how she's, again, working out a central problem of form, over and over, and over time. Where there's a shape with all of these facets, different colors, different elements of gesture, that shape-shifts and moves and takes on different colors in that space. Once that shape reached the edges of the paper, she stopped and moved onto something else. And actually recommitted to painting. I think she had been really thinking architecturally, sculpturally about her work. And in fact that's one of the first things she shared with me about her drawings, that they're quite sculptural, quite three-dimensional. And you really get a sense of that textured dynamic in that back room, in a process I called "flat folds." So everything in that space looks like it's folded, three-dimensional but it's actually her working the paint on paper.

Around that time, while she's in Chicago, she sat for this incredible series of video interviews called "On Art and Artists." Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield were collaborators in Chicago. They founded Video Data Bank, if you're familiar with collections and exhibitions of media art, Video Data Bank is a cathedral of these collections. [In this interview](#) she talks about the series of works on paper that's on view in the same gallery, she talks about her confidence and her identity and role as an artist. But it's also quite formally interesting. Lyn Blumenthal was an experimental filmmaker. It's about an hour long. There's a live feedback monitor behind Louise the entire time. So sometimes the camera focuses on Louise's face, just like a detail of her face, then it will pan out, then it will focus on the feedback monitor, then it will go to the image in the feedback monitor, and focus on that feedback monitor, and then come out. Very much like Andy Warhol, if you will. It has this...incredible relationship to biography. It really complicates how we might know an artist or know their process by playing with the frame. I love it so much, and I do hope you'll spend time with it because not only will we get to hear Louise's voice, but it's a chance to learn more about her process. And also to honor another artists' work in the exhibition too, Blumenthal and Horsfield as video artists.

And here these last two galleries [galleries 6 and 7] have this broad but I think useful focus on “expressions.” These are works where a particular gesture, or Louise’s attention to gesture or to calligraphic mark-making feature very much. In one interview she described how she would say about herself that she always thought she was an expressionist painter. She loved not just Cézanne but Chaim Soutine, Philip Guston, Joan Mitchell...painters who really brought a lot of expressiveness to their marks. There’s an overabundance of expression in these two rooms. In particular, I’d point you to a group of drawings from 2001 that Louise made after seeing the Twin Towers fall from her studio in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York, she put the paper on the floor and completely deconstructed and reconstructed her relationship to gesture. And again, they’re quite different from one another in color and gesture, how the paint moves across the page.

Ingrid’s book is in this room as well [*Ingrid*, 2013]. What I haven’t told you about yet are the painted leporello books that are in a lot of the galleries as you move through, corresponding with different processes. There are some in “transfers” where she would let the pages of the book dry against each other, so you can tell where they’ve touched. Some in “grids” where you can tell she’s using grids to even organize an unfolding book, etcetera. She was an artist who was very interested in a given structure, and in innovating on that structure. I’ve already talked about the grid in that way. Paintings on corrugated paper, sketches on grid paper, and then these books, which now Moleskine makes them, initially she got them from a seller in Chinatown. They close, these books, but once you open them, the pages unfold and unfold like an accordion, and they’re named after a character in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* who collected lists of women [laughter]. So then that becomes a structure, not just the page of the book that opens but also these folded creased pages, over time, so you can see her playing with those. Her first one, she made after this monumental trip to New Mexico where she met, went to Agnes Martin’s studio, sat with her, and saw her work. And it’s called *Book 1* [1992], and it’s back in the “grids” room. These books, as Louise understood them...a Buddhist practice was very important to her. They were quite meditative, they would have almost been like a passport that an artist would have taken...or a pilgrim would have taken

along the path of the Buddha to get stamps to where the Buddha would have been. So not just their use as an object, but also her drawing out of the grid is quite meditative in that first book. And then she expands that practice throughout the rest of her career. Especially, starting in 2011, when she and Ingrid first went to Venice. She's mixing her own colors in egg tempera to achieve this brilliant color quite inspired by Venetian architectural details: floors, doorknobs, walls. So you'll see a lot of those books throughout the exhibition as well.

And then, maybe the last thing I wanted to say is how much... There are a few moments certainly, this work holds so much room for mourning and for grief. Certain books in particular, not just *Book I* that I just mentioned, but also *Book of Abuse* [1993–94], was a book that Louise had made for a lover and friend, Bertha Harris, that's in this back room where you can see its grids, its completely blacked out pages, rips and tears, and staples. You can see the influence of John Cage and his practice of burning drawings or bringing different materials to bear in his works on paper, you can see this. In her homages to other women, in her attachments or maybe a particular text, expresses disappointment or sadness. There is such an intensity of feeling that was already in the work. Some of these works hold space for that grief, and with Louise's passing in late July... I'm so interested in how those spaces are still held and how we look and interpret the rest of the work, too.

After Louise's death, the only change I made to the exhibition in terms of its layout was the self-portrait that's right by the exit [No title (Self-portrait), 1981]. I think if she were here with us today, it might be here [indicates space next to *Untitled*, 1980] with our friend the bather, or somewhere else, but that was probably the gesture that wound up happening.

So, I wanted to close with an attention to how grief is already in this work, how Louise incorporated her life's experiences in her commitments and recommitments to painting throughout her painting practice, certainly and absolutely her works on paper. And also

tremendous resilience and change and how devoted, dedicated, confident she was, as an artist and painter. And so I hope you'll notice those moments as well.

And so with that, I'll ask if you have any questions or if there's something you wanted me to talk about that I haven't talked about—this was kind of a really quick run through of the exhibition.

Audience member: I was wondering if you could speak a little bit about this piece right here about the “working class Jewish artist”?

ALP: Yes! You're referring to, some of you can probably even see it, the drawing is just here [No title (This is working class Jewish lesbian art. In case you didn't already know), 1973]. I actually put it there so that it would be in view of this room. Like when I saw the bather, when I saw this one, I was smitten, blown over, so excited. This is a sketch that was in her archive. It's from 1973, it doesn't have a title, but at the top, it says “this is working class Jewish lesbian art in case you didn't already know.” So that's what we put on the label. At the time she was pretty obsessed with circles for a few different reasons. She was really trying to work out her relationship to the grid. And what happens when you put a grid on a circle. How does a circle problematize or kind of mesh with the grid as a complicated formal proposition. She was also reading a lot of Carl Jung's theories on the mandala and the circle as a symbol of wholeness for self. So then the circle becomes a kind of diagram that she can dissect. And then, this was also a time when, she's dating a lot of really terrific writers, and she is trying to... I said “a lot!” [laughter] She was dating a few... some writers! And so there was kind of moment in the early 70s where she's incorporating almost journal writing into her drawings. It didn't hold up, she wound up kind of separating journaling from artistic process. But there's a few instances of that here.

So she's labeling it. “This line is too weak.” “This is being scared!” So you can see her pushing herself. I love this because it really melds her attention to form and her attention to life. These are inextricable things. They're really bound up within one

another in that painting and drawing, that making work was a form of living and thriving and commitment, and so all her feeling is there. Yeah?

Audience member: Do you know whether the words were for herself or for an audience? Because if I read it as being for an audience it almost feels a little playful and tongue-in-check, also slightly defiant...but if it were for herself, it would read a little different.

ALP: I would invite Ingrid or Martha to respond to that.

Martha Macks-Kahn: You know, Louise was very much a part of the women's rights movement and the gay rights movement and so a lot of it had to do with exploring the self and consciousness-raising. That was part of it, and part of the journal writing, I think came from that feminist way. You know, people didn't talk about things. Women weren't supposed to mention certain things. And so, when she was expressing things that, you just wouldn't say that in public, right? So I think it also has something to do with the time frame of the work.

ALP: And I love this question too because what is said or written for the self versus what is shared. Louise is such a great storyteller about her own work so you might wind up asking a question about a particular mark or what I would always think was a formalist question and then we're talking about, you know, her trip to Poland and her trip to the camps, and we're in, you know, some of the deepest trauma, kind of, all of a sudden, you know. And then she would come back out, so she was very excellent at weaving life experience and storytelling and this kind of self perspective with how she talks about her work, and this is an early instance of that.

Martha Macks-Kahn: I really loved the way you've chosen the different topics because you can really see her consistency because it's not chronological. What is the date on this painting? [*Drawing*]. 2015. So you see, the drawing, and it's so impressive, the consistency of her drawing that she did all along. And there's something about drawing

that is sensual, the paper being like skin in a way. You feel the fragility, but there's so much strength in what she's doing. I think she's done that really all through her life. I'm asking you what you think: the drawings... somehow she was able to keep that skin coming back through the paper. I find that her later paintings like *Drawing*, her paintings there was kind of a freedom that was more like drawing. Some things that you talked about, you can just do a bunch and you're not so invested you just throw away. Whereas painting it's more of an investment. You've got this canvas, it's more expensive. I wonder in looking at all the drawings, you saw so many, do you think that somehow the drawings predicted where her later work would go?

ALP: No. I mean, I think she, and Ingrid can support this too, but I think she figured out that later work on the canvas. There are some, and she would sometimes in the studio as you know would have a piece of paper tacked up, so it wasn't, and maybe go to work on that and go to the canvas, and, but I really feel like her, especially in leaving some of the bare canvas really developed through a series of paintings, from probably at least 2017 to the present.

Ingrid Nyeboe: If you look, and this exhibit really gives you a chance, that her marking on paper was very different from her marking on a canvas. You can see it once you put time in, there's definitely a difference. That's a material that she's...I think her painting practice opened up in the last twelve, fifteen years. I think she became...she was always daring, but she just dared herself even more, and it was interesting to see. I twice saw her work. Actually creating work in the studio. I would never go in unless she invited me. But all of a sudden there was like something in her being that shifted that allowed me to sit through actually one hour of her just working. And the concentration was really intense. But there was something in her movement, in her physical movement, that was very liberated. And I don't think that exists before the late 1990s.

MMK: But do you think she had more feeling with drawing?

IN: I don't think so. And I would tend to disagree that drawing because the material is less costly that you can sort of junk it. I think her mentality about art material, it was sort of precious to her, it wasn't something that she would say, that wouldn't work. Because she would keep things. She always worked on two or three different things in the studio, two or three different paintings, she would find something in the hallway that somebody had thrown, she would drag into the studio. It would somehow become part of the process. But she was not somebody who let go of her work.

ALP: That's part of the impetus and organization of the exhibition is this play between major and minor. The drawings have such meaning in their own right, and not being studies for canvas, except, when I spoke with her about curves, when I was finally writing the exhibition text, I needed a better handle on curves, why curves? And I think out of anything, especially from the early 1980s, training your hand to make a curved mark was really related to the [Golem painting that's in the Jewish Museum's collection](#). So when she's really thinking about Jewish heritage and wanting to make a painting of the Golem, that had to only be a curve, she was explaining to me. So she did use some works on paper to lead up to that painting, but they weren't...other than that gesture and that form, there's no direct relationship. And so yeah, I wanted to, especially in exhibitions of drawings by major painters, it's always like, you know, here's Jasper Johns's targets! He was also thinking about targets on paper! Right, it's sort of like in support of the bigger thing, but she had, there was a remarkable kind of consistency of the practice between canvas and works on paper and different things happening in works on paper than happening on canvas, and so to at least try to eliminate some of that.

MMK: I do see very separate qualities in the works on paper, and it really comes across in the way you've curated the show.

IN: Yes, very much.

ALP: Does anybody else have questions? Is there anything else we want to bring into the room?

MMK: Was it hard to choose? To select the drawings?

ALP: Yes.

MMK: Tell us about it.

ALP: So it was probably three or four kind of day-long visits to the archive and lots of cell phone photos and also hearing her stories. Some things also came from more of the ephemera or archive boxes: the journals or different things. Going through everything. And I was just so...I think I was toggling between, like a dynamite powerhouse work. Yes, this is easy to select, the central drawing just here behind Ingrid for instance [*Untitled*, 1985] like, okay that could be on the cover of the book, we're definitely taking those things. And then, it was a play between that kind of major gesture and more subtle moments and how those things, react against each other. So in the grids room there's a really beautiful, almost without any differentials in graphite and tone in the graphite, but it makes you look kind of closer [*Untitled*, 1983]. So I was thinking a lot about like an outwardly bold gesture and framing those with more subtle works.

And then, yeah, I mean there's a whole other. There's at least a whole other one or two exhibitions among the drawings. I think another curator would have, you know depending on our perspectives, what folks bring to it. There's a lot of richness in the selection. I also wound up, if something's very similar. You know when she's working on a similar idea in multiple pieces, there was a lot of selection there. And even then, Ingrid put in one of her favorites in that back room. It showed up, and we're like "what's this? It's not on the checklist!" [laughter] And Ingrid's like "yeah, I sent it. You're putting it in the show" and I said okay, great.

Audience member: Which one is that?

ALP: What's it called, Ingrid? It's the penultimate work on that back wall. It's a very simple square divided into different sections, but I forget what it's called [*Solid Story*, 1976]. So yeah, selection was really fun.

IN: It went surprisingly fast.

ALP: And also there was a lot of. I mean there are paper towels or other instances of tracing paper that she would apply to a wet painting and peel away like I was saying with these transfers and they're quite delicate. So even though they were affecting and beautiful I didn't want to try to frame them or try to ship them put them into circulation towards the exhibition.

Audience member: Are they signed?

ALP: Yes, even the paper towels are signed.

IN: There are some drawings that are not signed. Three to four paintings from last year and this year that are not signed. She would use her initials "LF" and the year.

ALP: The other parting gift was, the last work on paper I saw in the studio before the pandemic but this would have been 2018, or no, 2019. Is this beautiful yellow and silver, just in this adjacent room [*Untitled*, 2018]. And my picture of it in the studio was a certain way. And so, that comes from the framer in Chicago and I'm like well, it's framed upside down, it's not hinged at the bottom, we have to take it out. And Tim Fox, our really wonderful Installation Manager calls me from the basement, he says "you need to come look at the back of this thing" He got it unframed and she had signed it, dated, it written "top". Crossed it all out. Turned it around since I was in the studio. So I call Ingrid and I'm like "my documentation in the studio is this other way." And she's said that Louise did that all the time, don't worry about that. I felt like it was a parting gift.

MMK: In her studio, she had an easel that turns. She could work on paintings from upside down, turn them. I don't know if she often decided later on to change...

IN: Not very often. There were incidents when she would look at something and say no, that's not right. But most of the time she would have signed at the time of creation. But there are paintings where she started on that easel and then left it, came back and realized, oh, I have to turn it.

MMK: It was part of her working process.

IN: Her way of working was to work and then leave it, often sleep on it, sometimes in the studio. [inaudible] and sometimes she would turn them right back.

ALP: I'll point you to Ingrid's book again, just here around the corner, where in the leporello books Louise would let them dry, let a page dry before turning it and doing the next one, turning it and doing the next one. So they often look like distinctive vignettes within a larger object, but the book that she made for Ingrid she did in one sitting. It looks much more like an object, you can see how it unfolds on the paper. And it has Ingrid's hair in it. So it's quite an intimate, beautiful object, just here on the other side of this wall, so be sure that you notice that, too.

My hope is that, I mean, this is obviously a solo exhibition. We honor Louise and her process in her work. My hope too is that by looking at Louise's work in this way kind of opens a frame onto the history of abstract painting, you know, to really contend with Louise's work means we have to tell different stories about who is centered and, and how those things structure around each other so even though it's partly too why it was organized by process and not chronological. There is a ton of biography in this work but artist's biography isn't the only way to come through this. So my hope is that this speaks to a larger conversations around

queer abstraction, larger conversations around the history of abstract painting, which Louise was absolutely doing.

And with that I'll thank you. [applause]