

DRAW Space acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation upon whose ancestral lands our ARI now stands. We pay respect to the Elders both past, present and emerging, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these places.

## Tania Lou Smith / MOVING FREELY

Thursday 6 July – Sunday 30 July 2023

### ROOM SHEET

Left to right

#### *Moving Freely 1 – 4*

79 cm x 112 cm. Giclee inkjet prints on archival paper. 2023.

Works available as edition of 8 + 1AP. \$1750 each.

#### *Untitled (Running)*

HD Video, 57 sec, no sound.

Works available as edition of 8 + 1AP. POA.

Audio described and close captioned version available at:

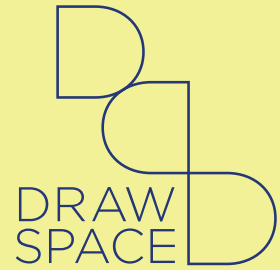
<https://vimeo.com/tanialousmith/runad>

#### *Untitled (Wetlands drawings) 1 – 9*

28 cm x 42 cm. Giclee inkjet prints on archival paper. 2023.

Works available as edition of 8 + 1AP. \$250 each.

Sales enquiries to [tanialousmith@gmail.com](mailto:tanialousmith@gmail.com)



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### EXHIBITION ESSAY

In *Untitled (running)* Tania Lou Smith has found another way to make work about the endless, draining cycles of labour associated with motherhood while also offering some apparent breathing space. A woman runs through the landscape, trailing a long piece of black fabric behind her. She is barefoot, evoking a visceral feeling of touch as her feet strike both urban and rural landscapes. She never reaches a destination, running through the same landscapes again and again, not once arriving at an ending.

Is she running towards a goal or away from a chore? Is there a destination in mind or is she mindlessly escaping? Is there joy in the physical exertion of running or is it simply labour, traversing the terrain? These unresolved tensions in Smith's work are a representation of the push/pull nature of parenting, especially parenting while also trying to have an art practice.

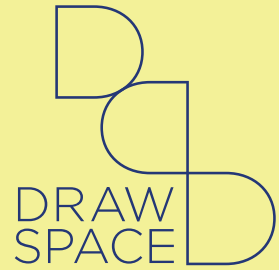
This is not an ode to the joy of running. There is no feeling of freedom, timelessness or elation. Instead, whether you read Smith as running to or running from, this is labour endlessly repeated, exhausting and unrewarding. There is a sense of urgency to her motion, jobs unfinished, time closing in without any prospect of relief, finality or closure. Her black dress is far from the sleek running gear of the exercise world, it is a practical working garment, designed to take a mother into all her various spaces.

The long trailing piece of material is drawn out behind Smith by the friction of the surfaces it covers. In the tradition of Robert Long's *A line made by walking* (1967) the fabric draws a line behind her, visible both as the piece of fabric and as the trace it leaves behind. What does this line do, what does it tell us? It can be read as analogous to the line left on Smith's life and spirit by the burden carried, the weight, responsibilities and tasks of motherhood. It is not a decorative line, drawn for pleasure, rather it is dragged through the landscape, over grass and cement, wet and dry. No doubt there is a corresponding mark left on the fabric.

To make *Untitled (running)* Smith adopted a new mode of filming into her practice. At the time she was making *Untitled (running)* Smith was caring for both her pre-school child and her elderly mother. With no childcare available she co-opted the services of her partner to act as simultaneous filmmaker and child minder. He took tracking shots from either a car with the child in the back seat or from a camera mounted on the child's pram. Thus can motherhood permeate all aspects of an artist's life.

For Smith the tracking shot is also reminiscent of early cinematic chase scenes; silent cinema has always been a key stylistic influence in her work. Other influences she cites include Sturtevant's *Finite Infinite* (2010) where the "unresolved, repetitious narrative left the viewer feeling exhausted and catching their breath"<sup>[1]</sup> and that influence can be clearly felt in *Untitled (running)*. The other influence Smith mentions is Takeshi Kitano's film *Dolls* where two of the characters spend the film connected by a rope of plaited red fabric. Smith's use of her black fabric evokes both the closeness of the child attached by the metaphorical apron strings and the distance forced on us all by the fabric masks we wore during the Covid pandemic. Once again there is a tension between dual elements that leave the viewer to weave their own way through the experience of watching *Untitled (running)*.

[1] Artist's own words



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### CURATOR'S NOTES

#### **A duration between two points**

DRAW Space, a platform dedicated to experimental drawing and new drawing research, is collaborating with Tania Lou Smith to produce the exhibition *Moving Freely*. The collaboration began with a curatorial provocation prompting Smith to explore the ways in which her practice as a performance artist, might be drawing. This provocation allows Smith to develop a new body of work by reconsidering the nature of both performance and drawing. For DRAW Space, it initiates a conversation around the idea of movement as drawing.

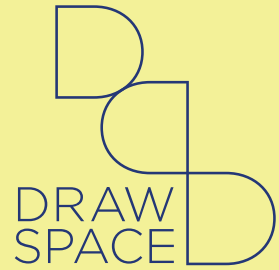
To draw is to make a mark, to push a pencil forward on the page, but also to move forward in time, it is both spatial and temporal. Drawing is a simple pleasure, a fundamental act of communication and much like breathing, thinking, and moving, the capacity to draw is universal. At the core of drawing is the line, which can be perceived as the duration between two points. Tim Ingold, social anthropologist and self-proclaimed enthusiast of lines, suggests leading life is in itself, a form of drawing.[1] That is, to move through space and time along an unfolding and unknowable trajectory, is to draw.

The idea for this exhibition came from seeing Smith's earlier works, *Untitled (pusher)* 2020, a video of Smith pushing a pram around an empty amphitheatre; and *Untitled (walking)* 2017, a close-up video of Smith in high heels navigating sand dunes, fences and desks.[2] In these, and Smith's serial photographic works, there is a clear sense of line. They show Smith dragging, pushing or struggling, sometimes her movement is hurried and clumsy, at other times laboured and stilted. The presence of props; a pram; a large bag; or unwieldy fabric — amplifies the exertion of Smith's body. Each image expresses a kind of struggle, allowing Smith to reflect on the experience of being at once a woman, mother, and worker. For example, it is easy to connect with the image of the mother with her head buried in a stroller.



*Untitled (pram variations) #1*, photograph, 2020

*Continues over*



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Her outfit expresses proficiency and confidence, but her slumped body reveals her true state. These works, blending elements of vaudeville and feminist inquiry, showcase Smith using her body's comedic potential to challenge cultural binaries and explore important autobiographical themes.

The body in Smith's earlier works marks out a bold composition against a graphic, often urban context. These are empty places waiting for something to happen and Smith is that something. With her relaxed or clumsy movements, Smith demarcates a space for playful transgression, where expressions of femaleness and femininity are subtly intimated. The bold colours, comedic pose of the figure-in-context and the graphic nature of the images belie the work's political and psychological content – the labour involved in being a woman, artist, worker, partner, mother. With a deft touch, Smith layers the aesthetic and the comically haphazard with weightier autobiographical themes.

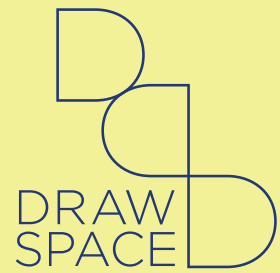
In her new work, *Moving Freely*, Smith is running. Using video footage and still images, she captures her movements through the lanes, backstreets, car parks, and parklands of Naarm, Melbourne. The running is incessant, devoid of conclusion or commencement – it simply persists. Smith's perpetual exertion mirrors an aspect of our contemporary condition – an existence held in an endless cycle aptly described by contemporary theorists as suspended or wasted time. [3]

[1] Tim Ingold, *The life of lines*, New York, Routledge, 2015, 118.

[2] <http://www.tanielousmith.com/news/archives/01-2020>  
and <http://www.tanielousmith.com/news/archives/01-2018>

[3] Boris Groys, *Comrades of Time*, e-flux, #11, December 2009.

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