

BILL WOODROW RICHARD DEACON

WE THOUGHT ABOUT IT A LOT,
AND OTHER SHARED DRAWINGS

Exhibition Guide

15 September — 21 November 2021
First Floor Galleries

"Your first feeling is that to change something is to destroy it, so we had to alter the way we thought, because we weren't destroying it, we were making an addition, and also giving the other person something new to think about. This was the start of work going to places where we wouldn't have gone as individuals." Bill Woodrow

British artists Bill Woodrow (b.1948) and Richard Deacon (b.1949) have been making works together since 1990. At that time, both artists had earned international reputations as sculptors associated with 'New British Sculpture'. Hence, their focus exchange has been sculptural – sometimes in bronze, sometimes in glass, and assemblages of various materials and found objects. On this occasion they reveal their "shared drawings" for the first time, resulting from a process of back-and-forth exchange during 2019-2020.

The drawings, passed between Woodrow and Deacon a number of times, have a distinct spontaneity and inventiveness. The artists surprise and respond to each other; sometimes sharing the same space, at other times working independently. Ostensibly two dimensional, these new works become layered through a range of techniques including collage, frottage and drawing in pencil or pen and ink. Figurative motifs – often animals - are combined with abstract configurations leading to aesthetic results that are edgily compelling. By working in this way, Woodrow and Deacon are continually absorbing, re-energising each other and reviewing their own artistic practices.

The authorship of individual contributions is deliberately not revealed, as Woodrow explains:

"... we agreed not to say which bits had been made by which person. People were very adamant that they knew, but, by and large, they were wrong. Richard is predominantly an artist who works in the abstract. My work is generally figurative in some form or other, and what has been interesting is the way that the figurative and abstract, without saying who does what, have come together and produced this sort of third area. And as an exercise it does influence and come back into your own work. Working in a team expands your vocabulary and so now you have extra things you can use."

IKON



1. DON'T FENCE ME IN (2019)
Ink, paper. 210 x 150 cm

The lone figure of the stag is key to this exhibition that reveals a concern for and admiration of the natural environment. Intent on limiting their use of materials, Woodrow and Deacon started the process of drawing with a roll of paper (left over from a previous project), which they cut into sheets. Whilst the sizes differ, they each fit the table in Woodrow's studio; the space they shared in February 2019. Alternating between the table and the wall, they worked on two to three drawings simultaneously.



2. I CAN'T STAND THE RAIN (2019)
Paint, collage, ink, paper. 150 x 185 cm

Here we see the colourful interplay of paint, collage and ink that covers the entire surface. It was late in the process that the artists decided the drawing's orientation. The final decision is always the work's title, which is often derived from a music track: here a song originally recorded by Ann Peebles in 1973. The title gives the drawings a cultural mood or atmosphere, reminiscent of their time as students at St Martin's School of Art, London, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and their time as studio holders in the ACME studio block on Acre Lane, Brixton, in the late 1970s.



3. WE THOUGHT ABOUT IT A LOT [SPEAK TO ME PRETTY] (2019)
Natural dye, graphite, paper. 210 x 150 cm

The title of the exhibition is taken from this work, which includes drawings of hands, spelling out the words in sign language. This highlights the communication between Woodrow and Deacon that is both practical and meaningful. When sharing the studio, they work on the drawings independently, whilst discussing certain possibilities, such as when a work is finished. In the introductory essay to the book, *Bill Woodrow & Richard Deacon, A Democratic Process* (2021), writer and curator, Jon Wood states: "*Sometimes this [dialogue] is spoken and conversational, but more often it is silent and based on more intuitive, artistic exchanges.*"

4. RUNNING BEAR (2020)
Graphite, ink, paint, paper. 150 x 150 cm



5. RADIO ON (2020)
Collage, fabric, ink, paint, paper. 210 x 150 cm

The wood grain, seen in *RUNNING BEAR* (2020), carries in to concentric circles in this work, overlaid with angular shapes and strips of fabric that resembles graph paper. Both artists struggle to throw objects and materials away, which they see as having potential use or value. However, they increasingly feel the need to edit their ideas, taking a more measured approach in their combined work.



6. SHAFT (2020)
Paint, collage, ink, paper. 150 x 150 cm

Many of the drawings contain the artists' corrections. However, some drawings are cut up and used within other drawings. This is the case with *SHAFT* (2020), which shares collaged motifs with *SHROUD* (2020). Between the two works is 'a third drawing' that reveals the artists' 'shared' process of making. As Woodrow observes: *"Shared is a very good word. It is the most honest description of the work. It doesn't mean fifty-fifty all the time, right down the middle. It could be eighty-twenty or ninety-ten, but even when it is that, it is an openly shared work."*



7. IT'S ALL OVER NOW (2020)
Graphite, ink, natural dye, paper. 220 x 150 cm

For both artists, the act of drawing has always been a rewarding experience. For Woodrow, it initially offered a way of owning something he could not afford e.g. a motorbike. However, it became an increasingly experimental exercise, as Jon Wood observes: *"They are very 'mixed media' to use a term that came into its own in the 1970s when the artists were starting off. Most employ collage, with cut-out paper and fabric, alongside more familiar art materials such as ink, paint, graphite, wax crayon and oil stick and we find more surprising constituents such as coffee and natural dyes, such as oak gall, sloe berries and red wine."* The artists derive pleasure from drawing and will do it automatically e.g. drawing on a steamed-up mirror. Drawing exists as a thing in itself; distinct from their respective sculptural practices.

8. WORKING IN A COAL MINE (2019)
Oil stick, ink, paint, graphite, paper. 210 x 150 cm



9. *SHROUD* (2020)

Paint, oil stick, graphite, fabric, collage, paper. 160 x 150 cm

The work contains a constellation of contrasting bold, graphic shapes realised in paint, oil stick and graphite. A piece of fabric, imprinted with the iconic portrait of Che Guevara, is pasted in the bottom corner. Cut from a t-shirt, worn at art school in the early 1970s, there is an irony to the image of the Marxist revolutionary that became capitalist branding. The inclusion of a counterculture symbol also raises the question of authorship and authenticity integral to Woodrow and Deacon's shared work. Through their shared practice, the artists let go of their own artistic identities, attached to their signatory styles, allowing the choice of materials and processes of making to define them.

10. *DOWN DOWN DOWN* (2020)

Oil stick, paint, graphite, paper. 226 x 112 cm



11. *EACH #1-10* (2020)

Ink, collage, paper. 56 x 76 cm

The series of ten smaller drawings, titled *EACH* (2020), was created for their Ikon exhibition during the COVID-19 lockdown. Unable to share a studio space, Deacon and Woodrow worked on them separately, taking turns to deliver the drawings to each other. The drawings contain found materials, including a metallic tray, a map of Moldova and advertisements from the *Los Angeles Times*. Conceived as a comic strip, they poke fun at consumer culture e.g. the duck, the gun and the cutlery.

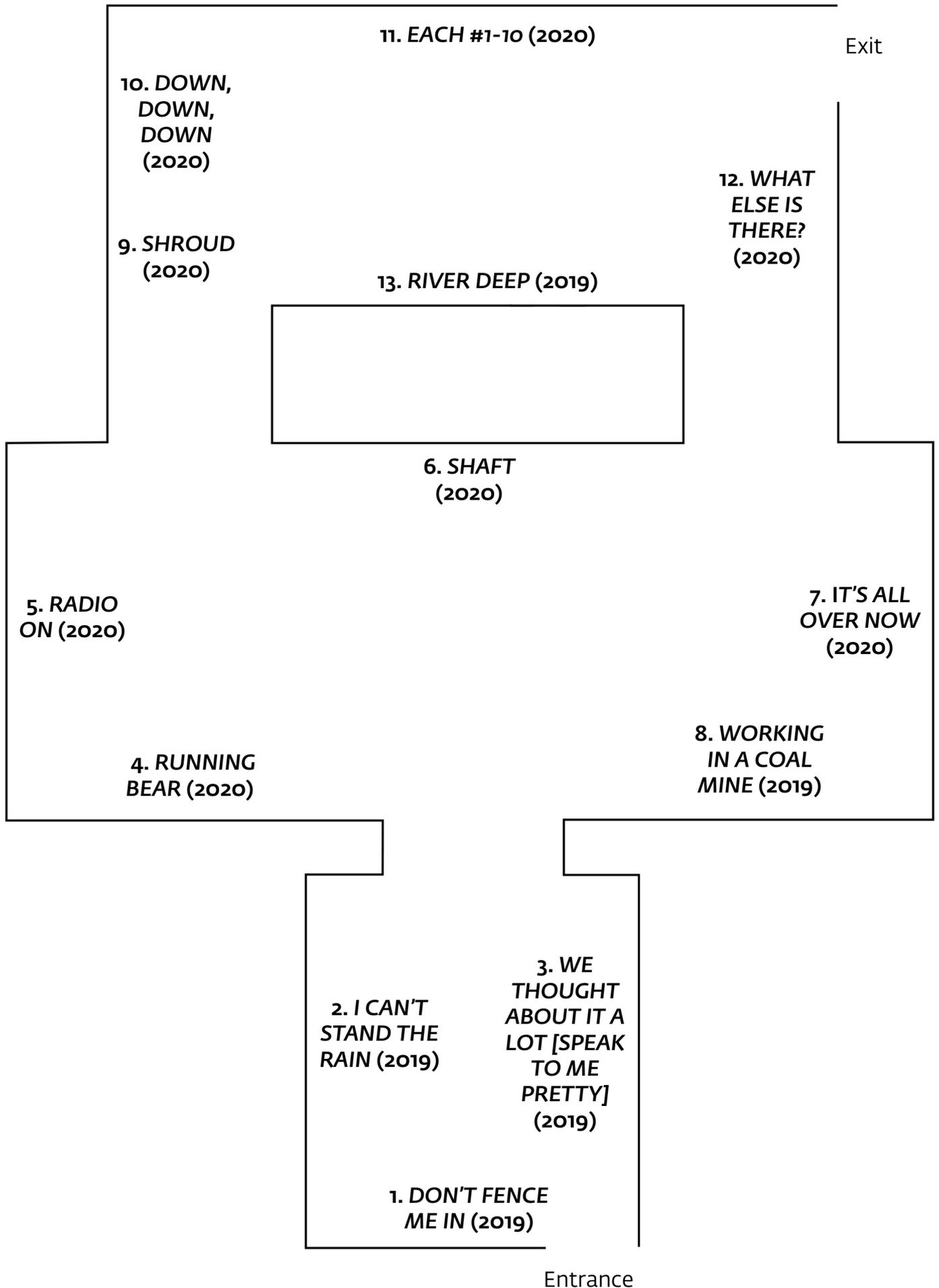
12. *WHAT ELSE IS THERE?* (2020)

Paint, natural dye, collage, paper. 150 x 150 cm

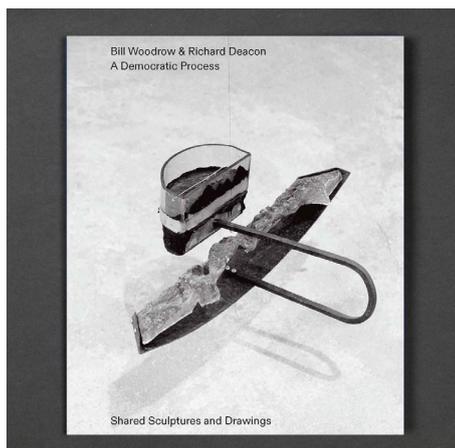
13. *RIVER DEEP* (2019)

Ink, oil stick, paint, paper. 210 x 150 cm

First Floor



Exhibition catalogue



This new book provides a rich visual account of works by Bill Woodrow and Richard Deacon, showing new and original photographs of them individually and in their exhibition contexts. It also includes studio photographs, images of the preview cards they have designed for exhibitions over the years and reproduces one of their earlier fax exchanges. The publication features an introductory essay by art historian and curator Jon Wood.

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