

RAW SOMA

Gisèle Bonin's drawings are done with a clinician's eye. Her graphic treatment of them comes from a strict observation of reality: fragments of the human body are stripped of their identity. Yet, and this is the mystery behind her work, the more stubbornly she digs away at this reality, the fewer certainties there are. When her relentless pencil draws sagging flesh and deep wrinkles in meticulous detail, it is the question of beauty that comes to the fore. When the red crayon becomes less precise, more sweeping, allowing a human thorax to well slowly up from the paper, then the notion of engaging the soul is engaged.

What is remarkable in Gisèle Bonin's attitude is that centuries of life drawing have not led to any demotivation on her part. Her quest for raw reality has induced a stance that is diametrically opposed to any visceral expressionist form. By submitting to the discipline of technique, she obviates the temptation of grandiloquence.

By skewing the way we look at her work, she gives us a sense that her drawings place society's pretentious, illusory hedonism in jeopardy.

Her subject is truth. Just as it is. No gloss.

Her naturalist's hypersensitive accuracy suggests that if beauty is 'skin deep' — the grain of the skin being the equivocal sign of the body — then any truth can be told, or drawn, whether that truth is a blemish, a wart, a vein or a furrow.

So speaks nature. So speaks the body.

An irrefragable reminder that in the beginning there was ... ageing. Over time skin wrinkles, withers, thickens, hardens, weathers, toughens.

The outer layer decays.

We will die.

But Gisèle Bonin is not after certainties, she prefers the torment of the undefined.

Gradually, her divisions of the anatomy — nipple, knee, neck, pubis —, that narrate the body in its various states, have mutated into 'views of the spirit'.

A hint of breast just skimmed by red crayon shows that desire is possible.

More, the indefinite stretch of an unascertainable swell quickens those depths where disquiet lies far down.

It is understandable that the loss of representation, or the way it retreats into the *ultra-thin*¹, frees up a barely legible space, in which memory (that is *mined* even '*carmined*') of gestures calls into question the ultimate meaning of things. The spectacle of the body is mentally veiled. A geomorphic slippage has led us to the heart of a *red desert*². We feel "the eyes dissolving into the scarlet lakes of paper"³.

Silence has been laid like red dust.

We'll die later. With no bloodshed.

Francis Limérat 2009

1 cf. Marcel Duchamp

2 cf. Michelangelo Antonioni

3 Gisèle Bonin, *Working Notes*