



Peter Doig, *Untitled*, (1 of 7 works), oil on paper (14 x 9 1/4 in. each), 2008. Courtesy of Michael Werner Gallery, New York and Berlin

SERIES DRAWINGS

at Michael Werner Gallery, New York

by Lyra Kilston

In Peter Doig's seven, lovely, untitled oil-on-paper drawings, a woman in roller skates is shown in a series of figure studies and close-ups. The woman's face, large and loosely rendered, is centered in one drawing, while her statuesque figure skates with a light grace through several others, rendered breezily in Doig's characteristically saturated hues of deep greens, acidic yellows, and dusky violets. Seeing the seven drawings shown together, one can see how Doig grappled with his subject, trying one view and then another, allowing us to witness how drawing can work out visual thinking over time.

"Series Drawings" presents seventeen miniature exhibitions of this sort, by an equal number of mostly European, heavyweight male artists. Seriality, of course, is usually ascribed to a strain of minimalism that sought to replicate the exactitude of mass production. The term series, here, is used loosely, with some of the arrangements made by the artists themselves and others aligned by the curator. In the context of these primarily figurative artists—many of whom pioneered painting's reaction against minimalism's frosty virtues some thirty-five years ago—the organization of evolving forms is seized by a decidedly more lusty and spontaneous group of hands.

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This sense of the impromptu was evident across a range of works, from those that appeared “finished,” like *Espagnole*, the late-1920s wispy watercolor portraits of Spanish women by Francis Picabia, to those that read as studio-bound, private, and preparatory, as in the quick erotic studies by André Derain. Per Kirkeby’s contributions, consisting of loose, overlapping scrawls in gray crayon and gouache were even titled *Untitled (sketchbook page)* (2001). Most of the seventeen artists, with the exception of Beuys, Broodthaers, and the young American sculptor Aaron Curry (an odd inclusion among these hoary giants), are known primarily for their paintings, so one couldn’t help but see the drawings as preparations for something larger. Despite the gallery’s claims that this exhibition was explicitly not comprised of sketches, it was tempting to consider the question, as kind of bastardized Zen koan: What do paintings look like before they are paintings?

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