

# SAURIAS FROM SAMOS BROKE A SWEAT BEFORE HE FINISHED DRAWING THE ENTIRE SHADOW OF A HORSE.

— Viktor Čech

According to many antique legends about the origin of art, drawing was invented by a certain Saurias from Samos when he drew the shadow of a horse projected onto the wall by the sun. This was at least claimed by the early Christian philosopher Athenagoras.<sup>1</sup> This tale can serve us as a message about certain characteristics of drawing which started becoming more prominent in the modern era. A drawing is not merely a creation that is left behind on paper, a drawing is also a process of its conception, a set of circumstances connected to it, as well as the author himself at the given moment in time.

Jiří Franta and David Böhm,  
Drawing 7 from the series  
Nearly nothing is complete  
2010. Karlin Studios, Praha.  
photo: Hana

„We've let digger to override  
the simple drawing, with  
a brush attached to its arm.“

<sup>1</sup> „The drawing was invented by Saurias of Samos, upon accidentally etching out a Horse from his Shadow in the Sun.“ See The Apologeticks of the learned Athenian Philosopher Athenagoras ..., by David Humpreys. Printed by Geo. James, for Richard Smith at Bishop Beveridge's Head in Pater-Noster-Row. London 1714, p. 173







The physical state of the drawer and the physical aspects of the drawing – although being realized as an activity on a surface, nevertheless being created in time and space – came to the forefront predominantly in relation to the development of performance approaches in art in the second half of the 20th century. Their forerunners can surely be found in even earlier works. The acknowledgement itself of the fact that a given drawing is an outcome of a certain effort and process, as can be observed primarily in the drafts beginning in the Mannerism and Baroque eras, emphasizes its position as track events. The second matter, however, is explicitly involving drawing into the process, where the latter is a significant outcome by itself. In this text, I would like to discuss several such strategies visible in contemporary art. One of them being the transfer of the act of drawing from a person through a mechanical extension, and another a direct involvement of the whole body into the act of drawing. An important

role also plays another thing. At the moment when a motion is transferred from a two-dimensional space on paper onto the three dimensions of a body or instrument, there comes a possibility of understanding this activity as a dance of somehow related series of coordinated movements. If the concept of choreography also means the creation of movement with the help of a written record, then the opposite process occurs during this activity, where drawing becomes the consequence of a movement.

### **The body and its mechanical extension**

During the last phase of his production in the 40's and 50's of the 20th century, Henri Matisse became fond of a long rod on which he secured a brush or a charcoal as his tool. Being in a fragile state of health, it not only enabled him to draw large formats from his bed or chair but it also fundamentally defined the character of some of his later



Jiří Franta and David Böhml,  
After Matisse, 2010  
photo: Jiří Franta

works. The generous gesture of long strokes became especially useful primarily in the series of his large-format drawings of *Acrobats* from the years 1951-52 in which the dimensions and abstracted depiction of human bodies emphasized the physicality of the drawing process itself. Yet, the used technique did not require any major physical involvement from the author, and therefore not even an act of performance which we are familiar with from the action paintings of the much younger Jackson Pollock from the same time period. The mechanical transfer of the gesture provided by the help of the line of the straight rod rather increased even the gentlest motion. Though, Matisse was well aware of this very performance aspect of this work, as is well proven by his frequently mentioned saying that “drawing is like a gesture of expression with the advantage of durability.” The difference which is felt here as opposed to the mentioned action paintings and the direct performative involvement of the author’s body is the mechanical extension that created a kind of apparatus that translated the distant position of the artist into a bold physical gesture for the audience. Besides this, the second part of Matisse’s works which involved a cutting-out technique also took advantage of this distant position created through the insertion of a simple mechanical tool.

In the current artistic situation, the Czech artistic duo Jiří Franta and David Böhm have approached similar strategies. The authors have been immersed in the production of their own drawings for a long time and from multiple positions. Many of them express exactly that moment of creating a mechanical transfer between the drawer and the drawing. However, unlike with Henry Matisse, it is usually not a tool that aims to facilitate the drawing process but quite to the contrary an obstruction which comes into it as a more important factor than the steered gesture of the author. The process itself becomes more

important here since it does not have to be the authors’ mere gesture of performance but also a situation prepared by them that continues its life by itself. The authors came to this extreme conclusion after they had released a number of balloons with suspended pencils into the skies. Here, the drawing is becoming becomes independent from the drawer, as well as the process independent of the cause and effect. Instead of Matisse and his drawing, the only thing that remained was the rod between them. The human body is something that can be the impetus of the act but despite of all of its involved energy no longer holds the operation quite under its control. This is not merely a conceptual argument but also a direct mechanical scanning of certain fundamental aspects of drawing mediums, with which there is often an associated denial or negation. The authors paraphrased the bond of their own works to the works of the French master in their own drawing performance where they portrayed him as drawing with that very rod. Another common motive of Jiří Franta and David Böhm’s production is working with a line even outside of the commonly understood drawing format of works on paper. This could be a “drawing” using a small excavator and an instructed driver, or using a motorcycle’s tire prints on a white surface. In their understanding, the creation of large-scale drawings has shifted from a physical act standpoint to a level of using common technologies of our civilization. Where Matisse’s device was the body’s obedient helper, here these devices act as independent entities, alternating their form based on the conceptualized grid decided upon by the authors. As was previously mentioned, the outcome here is not a conceptual argument nor a performative moment but rather a play of the post-conceptual ambivalence of forms and ideas. Although a situation where a mechanical extension is placed between a body and a drawing can point to the technological reality of our society, it can, however, simultaneously be

emphasizing the tool's lasting physicality due to its distance from the virtuality and physicality of the entire creation process.

### **Drawing of a body, drawing with a body**

One of the areas of creation into which the relationship between the body and drawing came to the forefront was the environment of the American, so-called postmodern dance of the 60's and 70's. Dancing and drawing share a connection since at least the beginnings of the systematic efforts of capturing dance in a type of a recording and entry system. Although the development of motion visualization as a path-producing trajectory or as a record of a series on a given axis of aligned positions and actions has come closer to that of a record of characters, nevertheless, practically at every turning point where dance as such was being newly defined, we can find new attempts based on expression, using lines and drawings. This was also the case during the time of defining classical ballet during the 17th century in France, in the time of modernism while creating figures such as Rudolf von Laban, as well as during the aforementioned era of the 60's and 70's. Probably the most famous creation of that postmodern dance sphere that is still being developed until today is that of Trisha Brown who arrived from trials of different types of conceptualized forms of recording choreography with the help of visual systems all the way up to the direct involvement of the author's body into the drawing process. Her large-scale drawings are realized in a horizontal position. and the controlled work of the body that the author uses is a somewhat direct recording of the choreography onto the surface.

A somewhat older dancer and choreographer, Anna Halprin who is active on the west coast of the United States linked drawing and dance in a different way. Her

perception of working with drawing and dance has an almost therapeutic character. Her drawn "self-portraits" serve as tools for self-analysis by parts through the reconstruction of her body, which then becomes realized through dance. The relationship of the drawn and the body is in this case based on the visualization and self-awareness of each of the individual organs and limbs through their subjective interpretation. Similar to a dancer who always reconstructs his dancing body through his self-projection into a given role, Anna Halprin is also reconstructing a body, nevertheless a body based on the personal identity of the person who is himself creating this self-portrait. The field of the artwork and the expression of the body in space are linked on the basis of imagination which is clearly also very important in the field of dance.

Also Anna Halprin's student and another dominant American figure of the post-modern dance, Simone Forti belonged to the personas standing at the boundaries between the fields of dance and visual arts. This is evidenced by not only their own artworks but also the level of cooperation and mutual influence with Robert Morris, her husband at that time. Her drawings are primarily parts of the production process in the areas of preparation and research. They are a conjunction of drafted signs of bodies in choreographed situations and the depiction of their abstracted principles. They therefore fall into the same category as the drafts and prepared drawings of visual artists who feel connected to some of her works that resemble installation art, as well as perhaps her drafts scrutinizing the specificity of animal movements. The graphic similarity of these drawings that consist of loose long strokes already points to the presence of the physical gesture and work of the author who is almost always lamenting the question of physical motion.

The insight into the fairly narrow field of artworks that was happening on the level of



intermedial overlaps rooted in the creative spirit of the 60's has provided us with some essential aspects of the relationship between drawing and the body and its possibilities. Drawing can become a level with which the body is directly physically involved or with which it creates a form of communication, or by contrast it could also mean a connection of visual imagination between the creative realization of the drawing and the projection onto its own physicality. The most common, of course, is the third path where both aspects exist in mutual convergence, aiming to for a performative entrance of the physical expression into the creative medium.

## The drawer's sweat

Saurias from Samos from the story of the Apology of Athenagoras could have come across any of the mentioned situations during his first drawing. His act was a performative gesture already in its legendary and symbolic meaning. The action of the hand creating a line hereby expressed a concrete physical and visual situation, and at the same time through its scale demanded intensive bodily involvement. This is probably where I feel the specific value of this legend, pointing to the discussed topics. The aim of this text was to show the extent to which the physical state of the body and its movement or the motion and gestures in general are connected to drawings. Not only a dancer can break a sweat, but also a drawer can.

Ann Halprin dancing with self-portrait drawing. Source: Wittmann, Ursula Schorn and Ronit Land, Anna Halprin, Dance-Process-Form, Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2014

