





Susie Pratt interviews cover artist Ruth Thomas-Edmond

- Susie Pratt: The ideas for your drawings must develop a lot faster than your ability to produce them. Would you ever use an assistant to draw your patterns?

- Ruth Thomas-Edmond: This seems like a practical idea. I can see that it works well for some artists. I feel resistant to the idea I think this is because of the obsessive nature of my work. In my drawing the details and intricacies of the process become very important to me. An assistant would have to be guided by my will and I don't think I would like being in that role, who I might become.

My work is very much tied to the everyday and describes the operations and practices that make lives function. It's about elements that work together to a point where they define each other so I don't want my practice to evolve into something out of line with how I think of my life.

- Susie: Robert Hooke, a seventeenth century natural philosopher, felt that nature should be captured by "a sincere hand and a faithful eye to examine and to record the things themselves as they appear", where as Doris Lessing writes that "fiction is the best truth". Could you elaborate on the relationship your patterns have to everyday life?

- Ruth: [laughs] It's funny that you mention her, I have always been a big fan of Doris Lessing's fiction and sci-fi.

I guess without fiction large networks – systems of trade and exchange that operate throughout our society – often come to be talked about as if they are 'objective' or described in the kind of definitive language of history books. When the reality of them in practice is that they are always at the mercy of the everyday... If there is bad weather, if someone's child gets sick... these small events have a butterfly effect on the big picture. Trade for example, seen in this way as multi-leveled and complex, can't be explained by a 'faithful eye', by a single perspective. My drawings try and depict a vast number of small elements that form the whole, each small element mutating during the process of drawing like the transformations that occur everyday.

- Susie: The butterfly effect of everyday activities is something that Hazel Henderson, the economist I was talking about, is also really interested in with regards to economics. Like the example you mention about a sick child, a sick child needs someone to look after it, a parent. Henderson refers to this 'everyday' unpaid productive work as The Love Economy – a 'currency' that supports the more acknowledged money economy (the private and public sectors which are the areas usually measured by economists). Because the Love Economy is non-monetised it is frequently invisible and doesn't appear on balance sheets. Without acknowledgement and visualisation this area of 'support' can be taken for granted and not given the value it deserves.

I imagine it would be hard to accurately record the Love Economy, much like the difficulty in representing the forms of interaction you speak of. I think these actions regularly need more than Hooke's sincere hand and faithful eye to record them. They need fiction to be the adhesive that temporarily lets us glimpse trade/interaction as a static whole so we can see paths of interaction with their presents, possible pasts, and possible futures all on display. And yet because we know the image is fiction we can acknowledge that the tidy static whole is a workable illusion.¹

- Ruth: It's nice the way you assume that we acknowledge how fiction works and accept 'workable illusions' as an intuitive thing. When one calls a form of communication an artwork people often get scared of it, but when one calls it fiction then everyone can access it because everyone can tell a story.

I had a work on sale in a gallery and there was a guy that was interested in it, but left. He came back a few minutes later and said that he lived in a mud brick house when he was growing up and that my drawing looked like mud bricks – that was his conceptual reason for now being able to buy it. So he bought it and left.

¹ References to interview with Hazel Henderson, 'Hazel Henderson on global markets' in Bruce Mau, Jennifer Leonard and the Institute without Boundaries, *Massive Change*. (Phaidon Press Limited: London, 2004) 136-7

