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EMPATHY IN AN AGE OF MEDIATION

There is a sense of inevitability in Morgan O'Hara's work. These drawings need to exist, both as the finest examples of an increasingly rare approach to the visual arts and as particularly acute mirror images of contemporary culture. This apparent paradox unfolds in multiple variations: a quality of timelessness contained in real-time, performative drawing; a humble practice, revealing profound complexity upon careful observation; an exhaustive body of work, yet the work of a highly sophisticated editor; universal, yet incredibly personal.

In an age dominated by the abundance of media images, video recording and instant digital photography, we find ourselves more and more dependent on media in order to legitimize our experience of the world. It is almost as if we need to view what happens around us through a digital recorder in order to believe things are really "there", in order to believe others do exist. O'Hara's work is proof that a warmer way of connecting with the world around us is possible and desirable. Her work remains prophetic in its ambition to document human activity. Where O'Hara's work and contemporary media syndromes differ dramatically is in their process and purpose.

Morgan O'Hara engages with her objects of study following an essential principle of empathy, impossible to replicate when recording human activity through the

eye of a camera. Unlike the asymmetrical relationship dictated by contemporary digital technology, O'Hara's *LIVE TRANSMISSIONS* establish first and foremost a communion between the maker and the creator, between the observer and the observed. Rather than distancing herself from what she represents in order to sum up its essence, O'Hara chooses to become what she represents, somewhere between instinct and intellect, but definitely beyond both of these. In this process, she becomes the filter, the wise editor of human knowledge revealed in human practice, a creature engaged in a concentrated yet relaxed state of being in which she contemplates movement in real time, fully focused, fully alert, oblivious to herself.

O'Hara's work is based on the ambition of mapping every movement around us, in full knowledge that the resulting archive will never be fully completed. Her drawings, precious documents as they are, are not the end result of the process of empathy described above, but rather the means for that process to take place. Once the LIVE TRANSMISSION has ceased, the drawing becomes its evidence. This is why these drawings are so charged with energy: they tell the story of transformation, of one being becoming the other. And this is why Morgan O'Hara's drawings, despite constituting a gigantic archive of human activity and movement, do not extinguish themselves in this taxonomical vocation. They are all the same exact act of empathy in endlessly renewed contexts. Each gesture acquires new meanings every time it is enacted.

There is a sense of inevitability in Morgan O'Hara's work, an urgency contained in her need to render human activity in such delicate, complex, exhaustive, beautiful ways. That we are invited to contemplate such expressive, insightful renditions in an era saturated with instant mediation is more than a reason for joy: it is a much-needed opportunity to re-learn the art of seeing.

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