

I began the day wanting to bring into convergence three activities of being—what I'd seen, what I'd read, and what I'd drawn—and to say about these acts how they made lines in the world that ran alongside other lines, and how all these lines together made environments of the earth, where I could put my body and you could put yours, and these would be lines always entwined because there was little if anything you could say or make without calling forth other lines, and this was how you knew you were where you were and the ground was worth cultivating and that there was life beneath the ground. I spent a long time looking into each of the acts of how I'd been in the world, how I'd conveyed that I'd been there and I found all these overlapping currents and found that each of the acts divided into further acts like the acts of writing and making narrative, which divided into acts of building and afforestation, which then led to sex and led to reading and wandering. I had found in drawing a way to think my hand was the core; the shape my hand made was the core, and I knew when I was saying narrative that I wasn't limiting it to some event happening inside fiction, but rather was trying to get at an energy, a light that threaded all my acts of reading and writing and drawing and seeing into a day then days.

RENEE GLADMAN THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES
September 6 – October 16, 2022 Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

RENEE GLADMAN

THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES

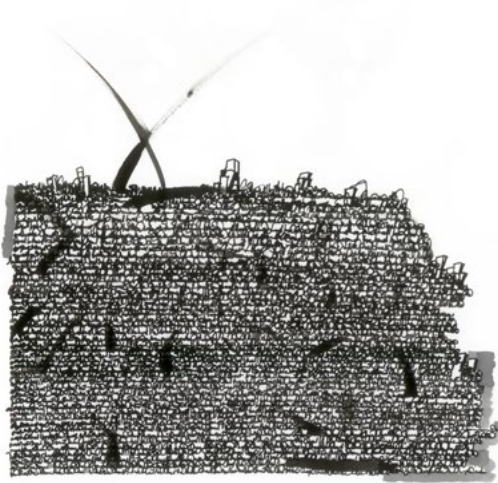
When Renee Gladman began drawing in 2006 it was initially a practice she undertook between writing projects: a way she “could write without writing.”¹ Already known, and recognized, for cross-genre experimentation within writing, Gladman found in drawing a way to feel through the syntactical preconditions for language. Drawing was “language with its skin pulled back.”² In the body of work published as *Prose Architectures* (2017), Gladman further inserts the performance of the artist’s body as it moves through the act of writing, drawing, and feeling both real and phantasmatic space. As the author-artist herself suggests, “You’ll see buildings emerge, cities emerge. And these are all ways to create a visual picture but it’s also a way to think about writing at a nervous system level.”³

Rather than focus on depicting or representing an external world, Gladman has developed a practice that attempts to present an interior space. The works on view in *THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES* arise from that space, building outwards from a point originating as much from Gladman’s experience of being and moving through the worlds she creates as from the boundaries interior to the page itself. The results are images, but not ones that necessarily adhere to the obligations of representation nor abstraction. Their lack of conformity with the conventions of pictorial space creates another kind of volume, a temporal space, a feeling of future.

Records of movement through space are the basic thresholds for something to qualify as drawing. Gladman’s mark-making includes and exceeds this basis: sketched lines build areas of density sometimes with ladders or passageways between them, circles appear at times positioned above a landscape suggesting multiple moons and at other times marking space like an element in a chart. Some marks suggest movements that are loose and gestural, others mechanically reproduce the appearance of apportioned lines of text that, despite looking like sentence cannot, in fact, be “read.” Her marks rarely approach the edges of the paper. Though she leaves a margin, her lines are not limited by them—broad gestures and repeating motifs connect drawings to each other across the gallery.

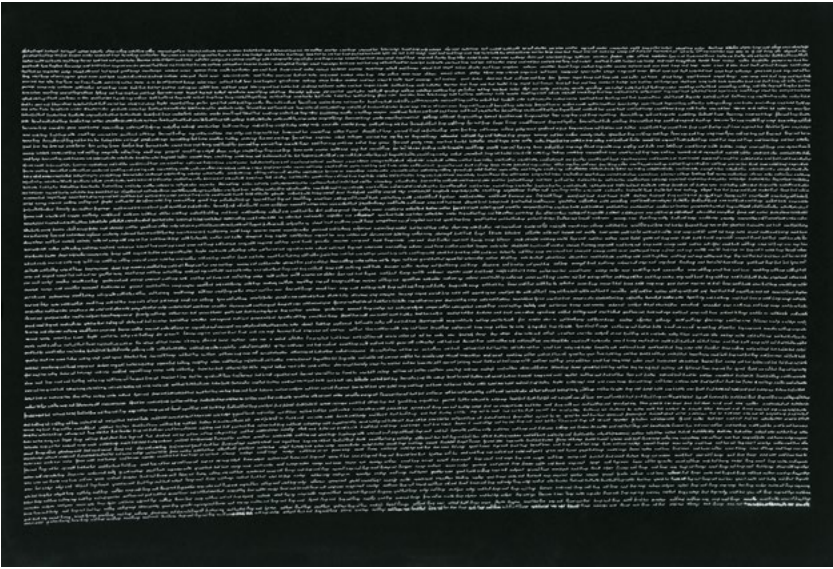
In a recent publication, *Plans for Sentences* (2022), passages of prose are presented opposite drawings, page for page. The relationship between the drawings and the writing is more than correlative—and certainly not representation—but rather an attempt to press both image and text to exceed an illustrative function. For this publication, the drawings came first and were made directly after those in *Prose Architectures*, though they were published

five years later. Rather than existing in between writing projects, drawing had begun to generate sentences, integrating directly into Gladman's writing. In this case, drawings were the *plans for sentences* which arrived only years later.



Renee Gladman, *Paragraph no. 9*, 2020, ink and gouache on paper, 22 x 30 inches, Courtesy of the Artist.

The causal or temporal relationship between drawings and writings in Gladman's work further emphasizes the relationships among them she has set up throughout her practice. As already described above, some of her marks look like writing or point towards writing, imitating an image of language. This is most evident in her paragraph drawings. In *Paragraph no. 9* (2020), what looks like written lines form a dense solid on the page upon which some small buildings stand. Dense black lines of ink interrupt the written lines like underground fissures which seem to erupt out of the shape. Within this one work, writing forms the ground for living, or at least for building upon, and drawing moves through both writing and life.



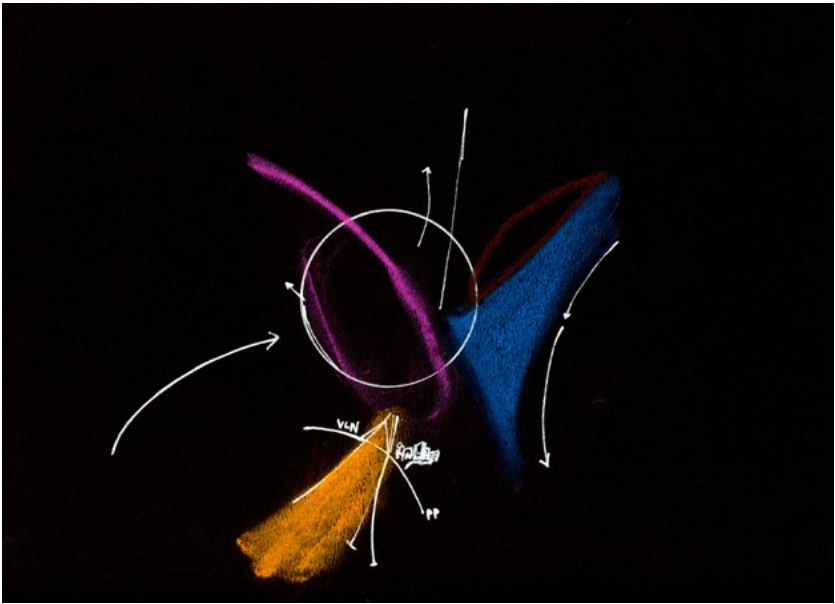
Renee Gladman, *Prose*, 2019, pigment on paper, 30 x 44 inches, Courtesy of the Artist.

In a larger work simply titled, *Prose* (2019), the entirety of Gladman's mark-making is in "written" lines, constituting a large body of text in white pigment on black paper. Of all the works included in *THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES*, *Prose* is the most reductive—no other recognizable forms are present other than those which we associate with forms of writing—the margin and the written line. Gladman's *Prose* reads as an assertion that the written line, seen here building sentences and a paragraph, is also the drawing line. Images can be comprised of writing's structures alone and the graphic lines of drawing can develop syntax. The drawings can dream of sentences.

Many of the drawings in *THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES* are on black paper, which is a physical and metaphoric ground and becomes the backdrop against which her marks are seen. Fred Moten refers to it as, "The background: that nonrepresentational capacity that lets all representation take place."⁴ In *Slowly We Have the Feeling: Scores*, a grouping of 20 small drawings on black paper, gradients of pastels fade in and out of the background. Gladman points to their latency for musical performance by naming them, "scores." Lines that emerge from blackness describe emanations that point towards future realizations, broad horizontalities that extend beyond the edges of the drawings, the pages, the frames.

Over the years Gladman has experimented with adding more color to her mark-making, and with drawing at a larger scale, moving up from ~9"×12" to as large as 30"×44". As her drawings increase in size they lose their direct

relationship to the printed pages of a book and, by association, are abstracted from reading. Viewing them framed in the gallery, we look across space at them, rather than down as at the pages of a book.⁵ Yet, Gladman's larger works still conjure a reading space. They call to the viewer, create a desire to be read, and simultaneously defer that desire, resolving back to image. Though there is overlap between reading text and viewing art, often these processes are thought of as separate, or their conjunction goes so unconsidered as to immediately collapse. Gladman's drawings generously offer possibilities at the edge of these definitions, allowing us to view language and/or read art, or maybe possibilities where the verb, itself, becomes irrelevant.



From Renee Gladman, *Slowly We Have the Feeling: Scores*, 2019–2022, grid of twenty drawings, pastel and pigment on paper, Courtesy of the Artist.

The space of our awareness of a syntactical interior is the space of Renee Gladman's work. *THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES*, her first solo exhibition, is an opportunity to see her drawings in a three-dimensional space, to travel the edge of drawing, writing, language, and the lines between. The drawings are the dreams of sentences. The drawings will dream of sentences. The space of this dreaming is in some place adjacent to both drawings and sentences, and its becoming allows for the composition of new structures building worlds, the undifferentiated possibilities of living, of futurity, of life itself.

NOTES

- 1 “Renee Gladman’s ‘Plans for Sentences.’” *LARB Radio Hour from Los Angeles Review of Books*, 10 June 2022, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/av/renee-gladmans-plans-for-sentences/>.
- 2 Gladman, Renee. *Prose Architectures*. Wave Books, 2017, p. XI.
- 3 “Renee Gladman’s ‘Plan for Sentences.’” *LARB Radio Hour*.
- 4 Moten, Fred. “Anindex,” in Renee Gladman, *One Long Black Sentence* Image Text Ithaca Press, 2020.
- 5 Selections from Gladman’s three publications of drawings to date, *Prose Architectures* (2017), *One Long Black Sentence* (2020), and *Plans for Sentences* (2022), are included in *THE DREAMS OF SENTENCES*. These drawings are installed unframed in vitrines, preserving the originally intended physical viewing relationship between a reader and the pages of a book.

CHECKLIST

BAY ONE

1. Renee Gladman

Untitled (yellow, burnt yellow)

2022

Ink and pastel on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

2. Renee Gladman

Prose

2019

Pigment on paper

30 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

3. Renee Gladman

Untitled (black moon)

2021

Ink, gouache, and graphite on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

4. Renee Gladman

Prose Architectures (bridges)

2022

Ink on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

5. Renee Gladman

Untitled (city study: moons, bridges)

2022

Gouache and graphite on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

BAY TWO

1. Renee Gladman

Untitled (blur)

2022

Ink, gouache, and acrylic on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

2. Renee Gladman

Prose Architectures (towers)

2020

Ink on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

3. Renee Gladman

Untitled (green moon)

2020

Ink, pastel and graphite on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

4. Renee Gladman

Paragraph no.9

2020

Ink and gouache on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

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BAY THREE

1. Renee Gladman

Slowly We Have the Feeling: Scores

2019 - 2022

Grid of 20

Pastel and pigment on paper

Courtesy of the Artist

2. Renee Gladman

Whatchamacall #6

2019

Pigment and gouache on paper

11.75 x 8.50 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

3. Renee Gladman

Whatchamacall #7

2019

Pigment and pastel on paper

12 x 9 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

4. Renee Gladman

Whatchamacall #8

2019

Pigment and gouache on paper

11.75 x 8.50 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

5. Renee Gladman

Whatchamacall #9

2019

Pigment and pastel on paper

11.75 x 8.50 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

6. Renee Gladman

Untitled (pink moon, yellow rim)

2021

Pigment and pastel on paper

22 x 30 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

BACK BAY

1. Renee Gladman

Untitled (page, interior yellow)

2021

Gouache, pigment, acrylic, and pastel on paper

30 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

2. Renee Gladman

Untitled (moon math)

2022

Pigment, oil, and pastel on paper

30 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

3. Renee Gladman

Untitled (black city)

2022

Oil, pastel, pigment on paper

30 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

4. Renee Gladman

Space Question Vector

2021

Acrylic and pigment on paper

30 x 44 inches

Courtesy of the Artist

Renee Gladman

(b. Atlanta, Georgia, 1971)

Renee Gladman is a writer and artist preoccupied with crossings, thresholds, and geographies as they play out at the intersections of poetry, prose, drawing, and architecture. Her visual work regards the drawing space as a kind of laboratory for thinking about writing: how writing emerges from the body, how narrative moves and takes shape below the semantic level. She is the author of three collections of drawing-writing—*Prose Architectures* (2017), *One Long Black Sentence* (2020), and *Plans for Sentences* (2022)—as well as many works of fiction, essay, and poetry, including *Calamities* and the *Ravicka* series. Gladman has been awarded fellowships, artist grants, and residencies from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard, the Foundation for Contemporary Arts, the Lannan Foundation, and the Kunst-Werke Institute for Contemporary Art (Berlin), and is a 2021 Windham-Campbell Prize winner in fiction.

RELATED EVENTS

Opening Reception

Tuesday, September 13, 2022 at 4:30PM

Curator talk at 5pm

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Reading by Renee Gladman

Tuesday, September 27, 2022 at 4:30PM

Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery

Cover image:

Excerpt from Renee Gladman, "Untitled (Environments)," *e-flux Journal*, Issue #92, June 2018.

Curated by Benjamin Chaffee. Art installation by Paul Theriault and exhibition management by Rosemary Lennox. Special thanks to Renee Gladman, Rani Arbo, Andrew Chatfield, John Elmore, Joshua Lubin-Levy, Samantha Topol, and Danielle Vogel. The exhibition and related events are co-sponsored by Writing at Wesleyan.