

Lutz Bacher

October 22, 2014–January 25, 2015

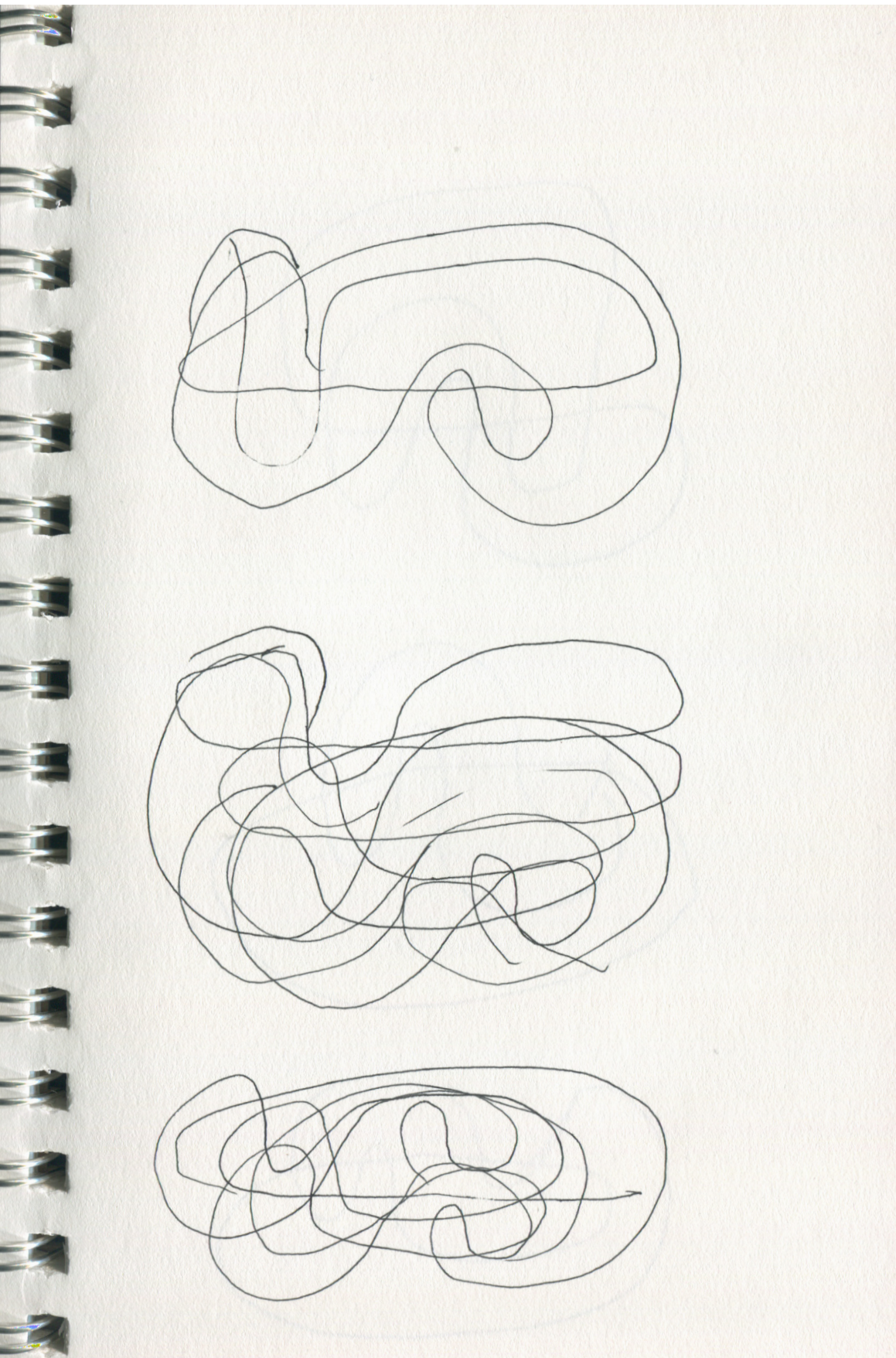


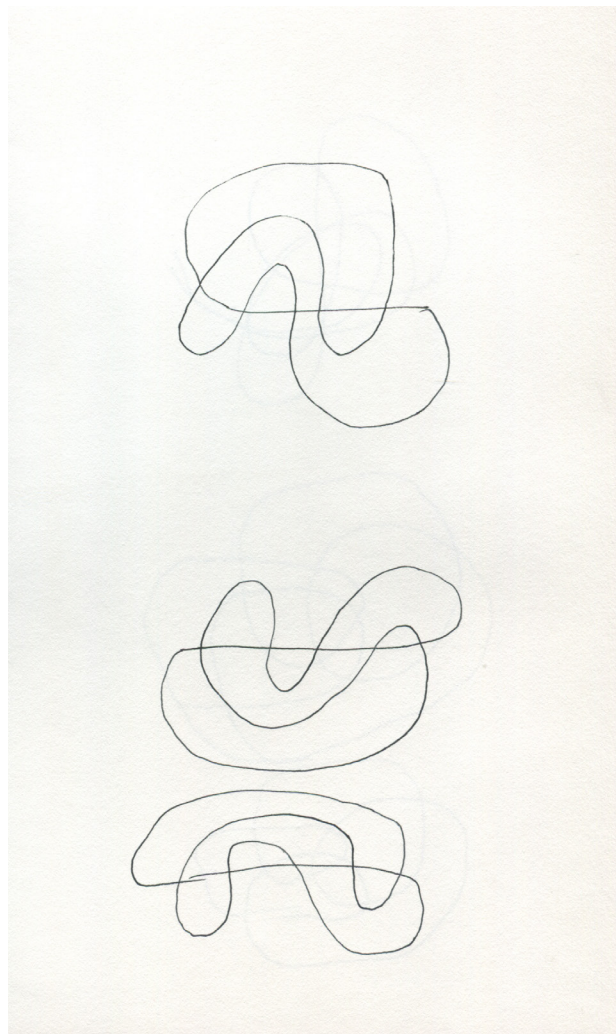
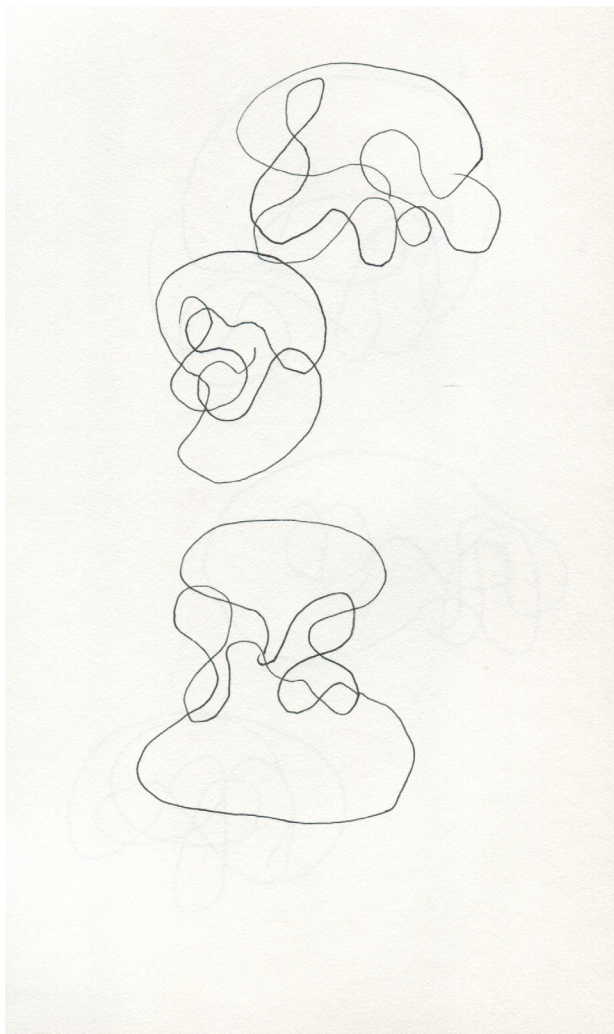
How Will I Find You, 2014 (detail). Images courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

For her exhibition at the Aspen Art Museum, Lutz Bacher presents her Aspen drawings, a series of drawings recently uncovered from her archive and which she produced in Aspen in June of 2010. In addition to these drawings, the exhibition includes a new installation comprising a monumental pile of plaster molds. Both bodies of work evoke Bacher's interest in articulating surface and volume while expanding her interest in converging seemingly disparate entities in unexpected ways.

$1.1 \frac{3}{4} \rightarrow$
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knots
 21 June 2010
 Aspen \rightarrow





Above and previous: *Knots*, 2010. Images courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

How Will I Find You?

Heidi Zuckerman in Conversation with Lutz Bacher (October 7, 2014)

Heidi Zuckerman

The last time we met, we were in your apartment in Manhattan, but today, we're sitting in your studio in Dumbo right across the river. I've been familiar with your work for a really long time and originally showed some of your pieces in 1996 in the second show I ever curated.

For this exhibition, you had initially thought to show a project that would be based, generally speaking, on your exhibition at the ICA in London, which had a lot of elements—including sand, a capsule, an architectural element, and a projection on Plexiglas. I had some slight trepidation about bringing sand into our brand-new building, but we agreed to do it.

Lutz Bacher

Oh, that's interesting to hear...

HZ

Full disclosure. But then I got an email from Alex Zachary at Greene Naftali gallery saying that you had found these drawings in your archive that were made in Aspen.

The way it was communicated was as though you had forgotten about them—there was some element of discovery—and you wanted to show these drawings as well as a sculptural installation in the center of the room.

LB

It began with me acquiring a huge pile of plaster molds and casts from a tractor-trailer company down in New Jersey. It presented a huge logistical problem. I thought about just showing that in Aspen, but there was something about this single gesture that didn't seem right to me. Then, just before I finally decided to go down to

investigate—I hadn't ever seen this huge pile of plaster molds and casts...

HZ

You hadn't seen it in person?

LB

No, I had only seen images. Cole Root, a young man who also works at Greene Naftali, was down there looking at things for another artist and saw this huge pile over twenty feet long and sent me images. It's a lot. It's even hard to envision from the image—it fills an entire tractor-trailer truck.

I have a strange relationship with that kind of thing. In grief, a few years ago, I went through a whole manic episode of acquiring and moving around gigantic amounts of stuff, and having these people working for me who were constantly in motion.

Anyway, just before I was about to go to New Jersey to look at the pile, I was in my archive looking for something. There was a bin of different drawings in there, and behind a sketchbook of knot drawings I'd done in Hawaii in 2002, I found another sketchbook that had "Aspen, 21 June, 2010" written on the front of it. I don't really remember making these drawings, but it was during a really difficult, dark time. I was in Aspen visiting my husband, who was whirling around the world doing his own research and also managing all these other things. I was there making these drawings, apparently, which were not like the drawings from Hawaii several years before—they had this other quality.

So anyway, we went down to New Jersey two days later. It was ninety-five degrees in this huge field and we were dealing with this massive amount of stuff that can only be moved one by one, it's like moving all these different-shaped bricks. We had a long van and some C-bins. It was an ordeal—we were hot, tired, and hungry. We only filled three C-bins, and that didn't even make a real dent. As we were driving back in the van, I thought about abandoning the whole thing.

It didn't cost a million dollars. It's fine. Let it go. But then I realized these things have some special metonymical relation to the Aspen drawings. It's the smallness of the drawings, the way they're struggling to be anything, along with the nature of these casts and molds, which aren't anything either. They're all these kitsch kinds of things, which is very pathetic and sweet, and everything is white—there's all this positive and negative space, neither one has quite been resolved.

HZ

They're both in process, it seems.

LB

Yes. They're not really about what they seem to be about. Or they are, but it's because of the failure or the breakage. And I realized that this was how I would deal with this Aspen show.

There were pragmatics, too. Like the tractor-trailer company had originally jacked up the pile of casts and dumped it out in the field, and then they had to put it back on the truck and move it again. There's a fair amount of that going on, but there is also the drawing, mold-making, and plaster—ancient art forms that come together here.

Furthermore, the show that I've been working on for Greene Naftali, opening in April 2015, began with these other two drawing projects: "The Box," which includes forty-some, very small drawings; and "Spud," which has nine drawings of this very simple, brutal figure that I did an animation of where he stands upright and then walks off. One floor is based on the former and is more about abstraction, structure, and the horizontal/vertical planes; the other floor is based on the latter and more about the figure. So this Aspen show is very different.

HZ

That's what I was thinking, too. Looking at the works, including the knot drawings, and the discarding of these plaster casts, it seems very much about the movement of the hand. The whole

thing feels very psychologically charged, so it's interesting to hear about these interpersonal associations of both time and space, and references to your own evolution.

I was actually in Aspen when you were there, but you weren't there for anything to do with me or the art world.

LB

No, there are these science institutes and my husband was probably there discussing gravity waves or something.

HZ

The Center for Physics?

LB

Right, that's what it would be, but he was an astronomer. He had come there from the Netherlands and I was checking up on him because he was going through an intense time and I was concerned and uncertain. The drawings reflect this.

HZ

Like wayfinding.

LB

Yes. Like you're literally trying to find your way in the drawing. Each Aspen drawing being like a searching line that doesn't know where it's going. It's not a knowing drawing, it's finding out where it's going as it's going.

What happens between the earlier Hawaii drawings, where you can see my facility, compared with these Aspen drawings is that you can see some disability occurring. It's like a wayfinding line, but it's not actively trying to be expressive.

HZ

It's self-navigating, through repetition and movement.

LB

Right, it's not about displaying your facility.

HZ

No, it's about being in the moment and trying to figure out where you are.

LB

But you're not consciously doing this.

HZ

No, it's an instinctive thing.

I bend paperclips, for example. I never notice when I'm doing it, but when I'm thinking or on the phone, I'll unconsciously bend paperclips into these little shapes. I always end up tossing them. Someone was in my office and pointed it out. But some of those shapes and that form and gesture and effort reminded me of your knot drawings.

LB

It's the continuous line. Something from your body and your psyche gets relayed into this material.

HZ

There's a continuity between them, but each one's different.

LB

Yes, and they would be different from different periods. In your case, it's like doodling, whereas I was directly doing this.

HZ

How did it work? Did you do one a day?

LB

No, when I make drawings, it's all one after another. The Aspen drawings have this other thing going on, but they were all done in one sitting. You can even see where I give up at one point and then start again. There is a moment where it's like a completely broken-down sequence, and there's usually more than one on a page. It's not like I'm showcasing...

HZ

There's nothing precious about them.

LB

There isn't, but then they are also incredibly precious...

HZ

Yes, because of their size and the gentleness of the ink line. Do you think they're revealing?

LB

They're probably revealing in the way that people describe my work as being very intimate, and yet they are also very distant. They are art, there isn't any literal, biographical explanation. It becomes this abstract, yet very moving depiction of some personal tragedy somehow, in a very small kernel-like form, but which could be anybody's. Deleuze talks about that on Proust. It's like the pain gets transmuted—it's not always pain, but it's thrilling that you can do that. Although I also wonder why you can't just go all the way to the end of the pain.

I make art because it's not clear that I can really do anything about the situation—it's not even that conscious; it's just what I can do when I can't do anything else.

HZ

That's one of the powers of art.

LB

Right, and the bureaucratic part of any of these tragedies or life changes is like the wound that never gets cauterized; it's an ongoing aggravation.

HZ

It's hard to navigate through your emotions, too. I was talking with someone recently about how relative truth actually doesn't exist, because it's in constant flux. Something that you think to be true today, like an emotion or feeling, isn't tangible and so you can say that it doesn't

exist. But when you're feeling those emotions, you can't really tell yourself that it's a relative truth and to ignore them. Art can help as a way of navigating through some of those emotions.

LB

In the last four or five years, I've questioned my continuing to transmute through art and then not ultimately deal. The personal or bureaucratic can be intractable, but the art is always something I can do something with or about. It is all transmuted, but it's not a literal trading on the personal, biographical.

HZ

Which is less interesting to me. I'm much more interested in abstract notions of expression.

LB

But what is abstract expression? I have a card that Yvonne Rainer gave to somebody and then I got it from them that says there's no such thing as abstract art. Which is true, but abstraction, or an idea of abstraction, makes it so that these things aren't literally bound by a single meaning.

It goes back to the relative truth thing. You can still say those drawings aren't actually anything—they're not even knots, let alone drawings. They don't have to be any one thing. That's part of what we gain from abstraction.

HZ

And that's what we gain from art?

LB

Yes, and what we gain from art. We also know that language and images don't really mean anything fixed either. A word needs to be defined by other words: its meaning is based on its context. You get one image and there are more images, it's an endless chain. But, at the same time, at certain moments, certain things do have certain meanings.

HZ

To certain people.

LB

Right. People will have their own reading, identification, projection, or not. They may have a much more specific relationship to knots, for example.

One of the other directors at Greene Naftali, Vera Alemani, her father was a Lacanian psychoanalyst, and she did her thesis on knots. Lacan was very involved with knots, but I haven't really re-examined any of that. It's more like a feeling. These knots have a feeling.

HZ

How do you think it will be to have the drawings in Aspen again?

LB

I think it's going to be a good thing. And not even in a cathartic way. Like I said, they have this relation to these other things I'm working on. That's what you can do with art. It's not about therapy, it's about this other thing that we can all, in the universe, in the personal and the cosmic sense, bring and engage with.

Exhibition Checklist

Knots 2010

29 drawings; ink on paper
8½ x 5 in (21.6 x 12.7 cm) each

How Will I Find You 2014

Plaster
Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist and Greene
Naftali, New York

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