



HANNELINE
RØGEBERG

DOUBLE
BLIND

A stack of paper, ink, and two pens sit on the table.
I look at a photo pinned to the wall in front of me, and
with a pen in each hand start making two simultaneous
blind contour drawings.

My right hand is wobbly and makes smaller movements
than my left. Rather than moving in parallel it prefers to
flip and mirror.

There is no composing, no agenda, no available attention
to scan for descriptors. I notice when a pen moves off
paper and move it back, and after a while each hand
grows a sense of its allotted radius.
Lines are meandering, distracted, forceful, or stuttering
depending on mood and day, and stop
When the ink runs out.
They could be graphs of my particular wiring.

The shape is squarish and domed and I follow its contour.
Proportions go unchecked and it grows larval and childlike.
When I stop, I briefly see Mussolini's Continuous Profile,
an infant Darth Vader.

The photo has a time stamp and indicator arrows pointing
to before and after.

The after will not be the same as before.
Left to habit I will scramble to restore the before, to revisit
and see again,
ponder possible rebuttals and resist moving on.
But I am here in the present—tense!—of my eye-hand
coordination.
I keep the focus incremental, with no room for naming or
identifying,
defending against the lure of level scales and solved
equations,
against the impulse to find a neutralizing reaction to the
action,
against settling a score, playing the score that has been
scored into the reflexes.

The right hand is a parallel witness
mirroring back to the left a less arrogant version.

Not much from the source photo is nameable in either
drawing, but bits of staggered angles and directional
marks suggest orientation
and tip the drawing toward specificity

Do I capture anything?
Something sits in the gutter between intent and result.

—Hanneline Røgeberg

**Interference: Hanneline Røgeberg's
History Painting**

Faye Hirsh

That things are "status quo" is the catastrophe.
-Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

Hanneline Røgeberg has for many years practiced a species of interference. She returns to a few loaded subjects year after year, news or surveillance photographs of historically significant sites of upheaval or resistance. Deploying various methods of re-presenting them to herself and her viewers, Røgeberg slows or interrupts their decipherability. "I start with an event or conflict," she told the artist Robert Bordo, "and that is the legible field I paint to complicate. The conflict is a snag on my consciousness that won't let go."¹ Gripped by an intent to foil her own considerable mimetic skills, themselves a baffle to understanding, as she sees it, she redirects her energy toward a more abstract, embodied physicality of form and execution. She might, for example, block the scene with a foreground barrier, frequently the image of a fur pelt that, once upon a time, she had rendered in loving detail. Now, pressed into the picture plane, the pelt becomes strokes or splatters of paint barely constituting the original shape, through and around which we peer to decipher what lies behind and beyond. Blotting and smudging her surfaces by imprinting one canvas onto another prepared with the scene, she works up the new, less legible composite.

I rely on paint to trip up my acquired readiness for a subject. The new marks might change a canvas from spatial into a wall of matter. It may remain inert – just stuff, or the shock of spatial collapse may restore an intimacy with the subject that reiterations

have blunted – now it is right up against me!
It might also change the sensory register I'd otherwise filter it through, and make itself known via movement or tactility, rather than sight.²

Recently, while keeping her eyes fixed on the news, Røgeberg has begun drawing her scenes blind with both hands, picking out salient features and leaving others behind, depending on what she notices in the moment, as much psychological response as observation. It is as though best, most natural skills—her adroit brushwork, sure-handedness, and careful control of a largely penumbral palette, suffused with cool Northern light—constitute traits that must be thwarted in order to see. In each of her exercises, she undermines mastery with the unexpected. As she told Siri Hustvedt in 2010, "Facility is beside the point if it just confirms what I am prepared to see."

Røgeberg is in many respects a history painter, but one who understands that the object of her consideration must be jolted somehow from its original presentation in order to create meaning in the present.

I would want to revisit some conflict – my tidy version of it – and explain it to myself, hoping that skill would smooth over the unresolved parts. They didn't, and the slow, private manifestation of various bodies close up against me made the categorical assignments impossible to maintain. Instead it implicated me in every joint and crease. The subject happened where technique failed to protect me.³

With Walter Benjamin, Røgeberg understands that the "status quo," in her case a straight representation, is not acceptable. "For the materialist historian," wrote Benjamin, in an argument against mastery, "every epoch with which he occupies himself is only prehistory for the epoch he himself must live in. And so, for him, there can be no appearance of repetition in history, since

precisely those moments in the course of history which matter most to him ... become moments of the present day and change their specific character according to the catastrophic or triumphant nature of that day." For Røgeberg, the purpose is to reactivate events in order to encourage engagement—if nothing else, to provoke a long, close look. There can be no depiction that attempts faithful replication, for that would be a betrayal of art's potential to situate events in the living, breathing body of the artist, where its very formulation transforms it utterly. The dislocation must be made visible. "Progress," wrote Benjamin, "has its seat not in the continuity of elapsing time, but in its interferences—where the truly new makes itself felt for the first time, with the sobriety of dawn."⁴

Two of the scenes Røgeberg often treats are nearly contemporaneous, from 2011, sourced in her two homes: New York City and Oslo. (Living throughout her career in both the U.S. and Norway, Røgeberg has always navigated the near-and-far of the expatriate, and perhaps the inherent longing of such a position makes its way into the more expressive elements of her work, in which we experience a kind of intimate distantiation.) These are images of the Occupy Movement in Zuccotti Park in lower



Feral drop Kick II (detail), 2016
Intaglio, monochrome
18 x 24 inches

Manhattan, an encampment that Røgeberg repeatedly visited, and a crater blown out by a fertilizer car bomb that a far-right terrorist set off in front of the Government Quarters in Oslo, Norway. (Notoriously, the killer then headed to a Labor Party youth camp on Utøya, where he shot dead 69 participants). Both took place in 2011 but continue to resonate as time passes: on the one hand, as Occupy Sandy in the form of First Aid in the storm's aftermath in 2012, and in the heady choreography of the Black Lives Matter movement; and, on the other, copycat gunmen in Christchurch, New Zealand; El Paso, Texas; and Bærum, Norway (and possibly, Buffalo, New York, in 2022). To these, Røgeberg has added aerial views of the 44th and 45th U.S. Presidential Inaugurations in a 2019 series of paintings titled "*zerosandones*." Sometimes a "scene" takes the form of a figure, disrupted like the cityscapes—such as Delacroix's *Liberty*, with her distinctive triumphant gesture made barely legible, a gesture whose inflection may flip polarity from one iteration to the next.⁵ "9th of February to 24th of October" from 2014 is from Akershus Fortress in Oslo, where her grandfather, a member of the Norwegian resistance, was shot by the German forces in the last days of the World War II occupation, and where Vidkun Quisling, whose name became synonymous with traitor, was executed by a Norwegian firing squad months later. We can imagine our histories began long before we were born then, for example in the "catastrophe" of a grandfather's death. Røgeberg shakes the continuity of this history, by creating a disrupted view that is the present-day.

Røgeberg's latest series, with the punning title "Double Blind," comprises a set of drawings and monotypes which, as she gazes at her sources, she executes blindly, with her two unwatched hands creating abstracted views facing one another, a Rorschach with damaged symmetry.⁶ A variation on the gesture drawing, situated, as she wrote, in the "present tense of my eye-hand coordination," the exercise is meant to find something that lies "in the gutter between intent and result."⁵ In these works, we peer at

the abstracted tangle of lines, recognizing that shapes and configurations on the two sides echo one another but are unable to make them match. Unless we already know the source, it is likewise difficult to reconcile the drawing with the source image. Indeed, the emotional valence of the works lies partly in the failure of representation to cohere tidily.

In the case of Zucotti Park, Røgeberg's process is not unlike that of the protesters, who created a "living megaphone" wherein they relayed through the crowd the words of speakers who did not then need microphones or megaphones, which were illegal. The words thus became more fully a part of the bodies of the protesters who uttered and re-uttered them, as a collective, understanding them actively and yet with the particularity—the voice, the inflection—of the individual. Similarly, we feel the events Røgeberg depicts via her body, in the stuttering lines and occasional blots, an "enunciation" proceeding, as she would argue, through empathy. The very process involves coping with physical



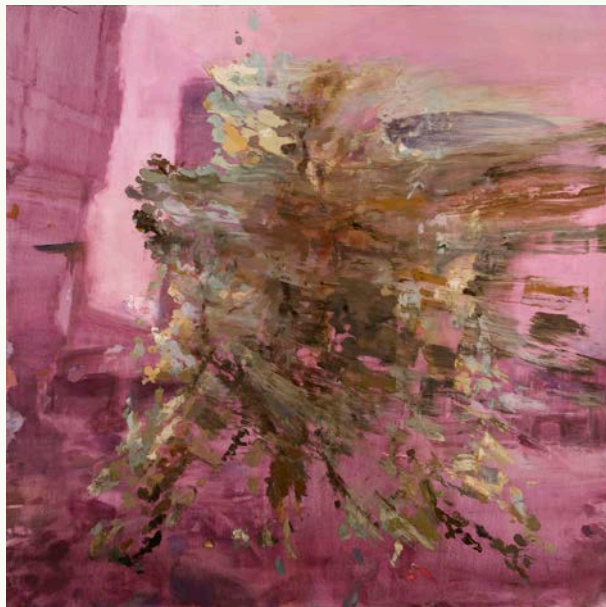
Colorado rabbit, 2013
Oil on linen
16 x 14 inches

inadequacy. She is left-handed, so the left side in the ink drawings is often larger and more assured than the right, an equation that is flipped in the monotypes, subject to the reversal of the matrix. The whole endeavor accepts inherent failure, a relinquishing of control, as the drawing registers a spasmodic-looking response. Yet the action is redeemed as a wholly new image. We sense in its provisionality that another try will bring with it a different image trailing within itself different traces of the inspiring event, an ongoing forensic action that can bring no resolution. "I think my painting happened when I became aware of repeating what I was trying to avoid," she has said.⁷

Among Røgeberg's interferences are the fur pelts of various animals that she began painting around 2010. At first they were recognizable as such, hides of a reindeer, rabbit or sheep that occupied the front picture plane and nearly the entirety of the frame—some closely observed, lush with texture, as in *Big White* (2010) or *Colorado Rabbit* (2013), others more abstract, as in *Big Brown* (2010), more like a giant stain or blot. However altered in each treatment, the basic shape of the pelt, an absent body with truncated arms and legs, recurs, and once we understand the syntax, we are able to see it. Some of the works are quite large, more than eight feet at their biggest dimension, placing the pelt—whether whole or fragmented—in direct confrontation with a viewer, both larger than life and human scale. Having migrated to the foreground of the historical scenes, the painted pelts are aggressively pressed into the surface from another canvas as a baffle—a representation increasingly removed from its source. Here blotchy, elsewhere smeared and seemingly flying across our view like an agitated specter (*Rebound Extrovert*, 2013, for example), the degraded pelts allow us to see only the periphery of what lies behind and beneath, faint and blurry as a Gerhard Richter landscape, something the eye must excavate. Røgeberg has told me that she sometimes intends her intervention with these pelts as a kind of

protective gesture, covering the Zuccotti demonstration, for example, like a blanket—tenderly. Though often large, her paintings project an air of discretion, enforcing a kind of politeness, even respectfulness, toward what we are “witnessing.” Yet the surfaces are in real turmoil, sometimes thick with blotted paint and active brushwork, a materialization of the empathic response of the maker, and, by extension, the viewer.

Røgeberg’s interest in slowing an easy read has found a natural outlet in printmaking, where reversal of form and compression of space can be exploited for purposes of disruption, even as she indulges the fluidity of her hand. Working at 10 Grand Press with master printer Marina Ancona over the past six years, Røgeberg has created series of works in intaglio and monotype. Significantly, she began in 2016 with a series based loosely on soccer kicks in which two disembodied human legs enter the image from left and right and then are more or less interrupted by the familiar pelt shape, which has here become an animal-like form being “kicked” across and through the



Rebound Extrovert, 2013
Oil on canvas
8 x 7 feet

picture plane like a weird ball, but functioning as a giant splatter that lends the image a violent undertone: truly the “dispersed affect of the pelt,” as the painter Bordo described it.⁸ Røgeberg recognized that monotype, with its sensuous, slippery gestures resembling a child’s finger-painting, can effectively convey a feeling of immediacy, even intimacy, despite its final operation at a remove from the direct hand of the artist: it is at once near and far, Røgeberg’s version of home.

The most recent series of monotypes carries the unbalanced symmetry of the earlier paired legs much further, allowing the imperfect left-right mirroring of those blind-drawn sites to unfold as if before our eyes in a welter of marks that can range from the brutal, staccato debris of the bomb site to ribbonny trails raking the ink of an aerial shot. A long, sinuous line opens into the vast, barren distances of a drone view of Ukraine. A moody, luminous ground, printed in the subtle inks that are Ancona’s specialty, brings the earth to the surface like mud, at once asserting and deflecting the dissociative technology of modern warfare. Figures materialize only to unravel in the nervous colored tangles that constitute them, and rational perspective comes undone. In this, the monotypes accomplish, for a time, the ongoing task that Røgeberg has set herself over more than a decade: to allow her, and the viewer, to glimpse with physical certitude the manmade ruins of history. Ever provisional, such understanding must be the way to move forward.

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1. Hanneline Røgeberg, “Studio Conversation with Robert Bordo,” in *Hanneline Røgeberg: Never Odd or Even* (New York: Blackston Gallery, 2013), n.p.
 2. “Hanneline Røgeberg in Conversation with Siri Hustvedt,” *ACNE Paper*, Spring 2010.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Benjamin quotes are from Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McCaughrin, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).
 5. Glenn Ligon, *Off the Bone*, (New York: Blackston Gallery, 2015).
 6. Hanneline Røgeberg, “Double Blind,” 2022, unpublished essay.
 7. Hustvedt and Røgeberg.
 8. Røgeberg, “Studio Conversation with Robert Bordo.”

List of Works

Cover <i>Double Blind #7589, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches, 2022	PP. 18–19 <i>Double Blind #7577, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 34–35 <i>Double Blind #7589, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 50–51 <i>Double Blind #4196, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
End pages <i>Double Blind #7586, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches, 2022	PP. 20–21 <i>Double Blind #7580, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 36–37 <i>Double Blind #7573, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 52–53 <i>Double Blind #7566, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
PP. 8–9 <i>Double Blind #4163, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 22–23 <i>Double Blind #4184, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 38–39 <i>Double Blind #4179, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 54–55 <i>Double Blind #7575, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
PP. 10–11 <i>Double Blind #4166, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 24–25 <i>Double Blind #4161, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 40–41 <i>Double Blind #4182, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 56–57 <i>Double Blind #7568, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
PP. 12–13 <i>Double Blind #4188, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 26–27 <i>Double Blind #4195, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 42–43 <i>Double Blind #4180, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 58–59 <i>Double Blind #7584, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
PP. 14–15 <i>Double Blind #4157, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 28–29 <i>Double Blind #7595, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 44–45 <i>Double Blind #4185, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 60–61 <i>Double Blind #7572, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
PP. 16–17 <i>Double Blind #7569, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 30–31 <i>Double Blind #7578, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 46–47 <i>Double Blind #4187, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 62–63 <i>Double Blind #7598, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches
	PP. 32–33 <i>Double Blind #7593, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 48–49 <i>Double Blind #7556, 2022</i> Ink on paper 18 x 24 inches	PP. 64–65 <i>Double Blind #4203, 2022</i> India ink on paper 18 x 24 inches

PP. 66–67
Double Blind #4204, 2022
India ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 68–69
Double Blind #7591, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 70–71
Double Blind #7592, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 72–73
Double Blind #4213, 2022
India ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 74–75
Double Blind #7570, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 76–77
Double Blind #7588, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 78–79
Double Blind #7585, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 80–81
Double Blind #7587, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

PP. 82–83
Double Blind #7574, 2022
Ink on paper
18 x 24 inches

HANNELINE RØGEBERG thanks

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