



Drawing and Visualisation Research

BRIEF THOUGHTS ON DRAWING AS REVELATION

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Revelation, which indicates the act of *revealing* knowledge, or the process by which what is *not* known becomes so, offers an understanding of knowledge creation that could stretch convention and recalibrate drawing as a creative discipline. In my own practice, I continue to explore how drawing might serve to reveal, and aim to gain insight into what type of knowledge creation it implies.

To speak of revelation can be tricky, as the word tends to conjure images of telling visions, prophecy and spiritual transformation; its close ties to the religious and apocalyptic are perhaps its own cross to bear. And though I do not want to dismiss these connotations (they are not entirely unrelated), I am more interested in an understanding of revelation as a self-contained process within the individual, and not as a result of some supernatural being.

The type of drawing that I am interested in vetting to this point, builds off of the Surrealist trending of psychic automatism as a viable artistic act. In my opinion, their method effectively moved drawing from a technical endeavor back towards a state of autonomy. I say “back” to imply that the former is not necessarily endemic to the human condition. And autonomy, in the sense that the marks did not necessarily have to give form to something but could exist in their own right as expressive and relational elements.

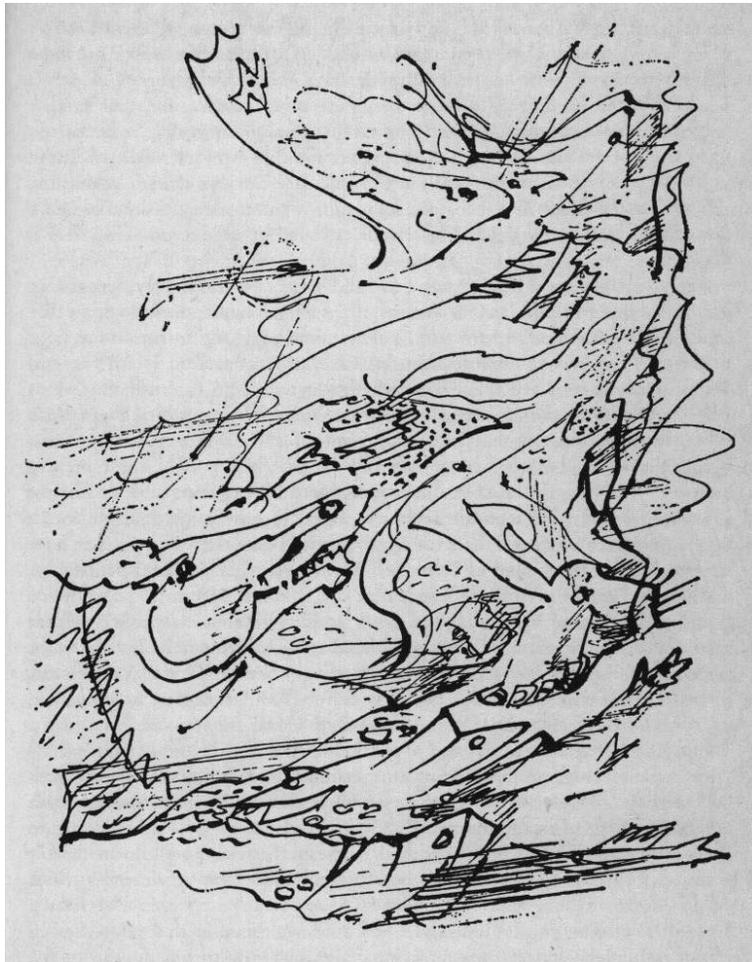
Automatic drawing as practiced by the Surrealists is the first instance that I recognize, of the artist seeking revelatory knowledge through the drawn surface. By eschewing preconception in favor of a spontaneous rendering culled from the depths of the mind, Surrealist artists devised a new approach to image making, highlighting its psychological aspects. And while this radical rethinking takes second stage to the movement’s popular association with the dream state, it is the idea of personal revelation as expressed through creative output, that serves as a defining principle of André Breton’s *First Surrealist Manifesto*¹ of 1924.

In it, the author offers an evocative plea to his contemporaries towards a reevaluation of their relationship to thought, saying: “[if] the depths of our minds conceal strange forces capable of augmenting or conquering those on the surface, it is in our greatest interest to capture them; first to capture them and later to submit them, should the occasion arise, to the control of reason”. And while Breton’s first foray into this hide-and-go-seek of the mind involved the written word, his cohort André Masson and others transcribed it visually in a way that I believe should be called revelatory. More so, Breton himself explains that such acts of automatism are capable of producing “revelation[s] of a certain number of premises and facts generally no less objective than any others”.

1 <http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic235120.files/BretonManifesto.pdf>

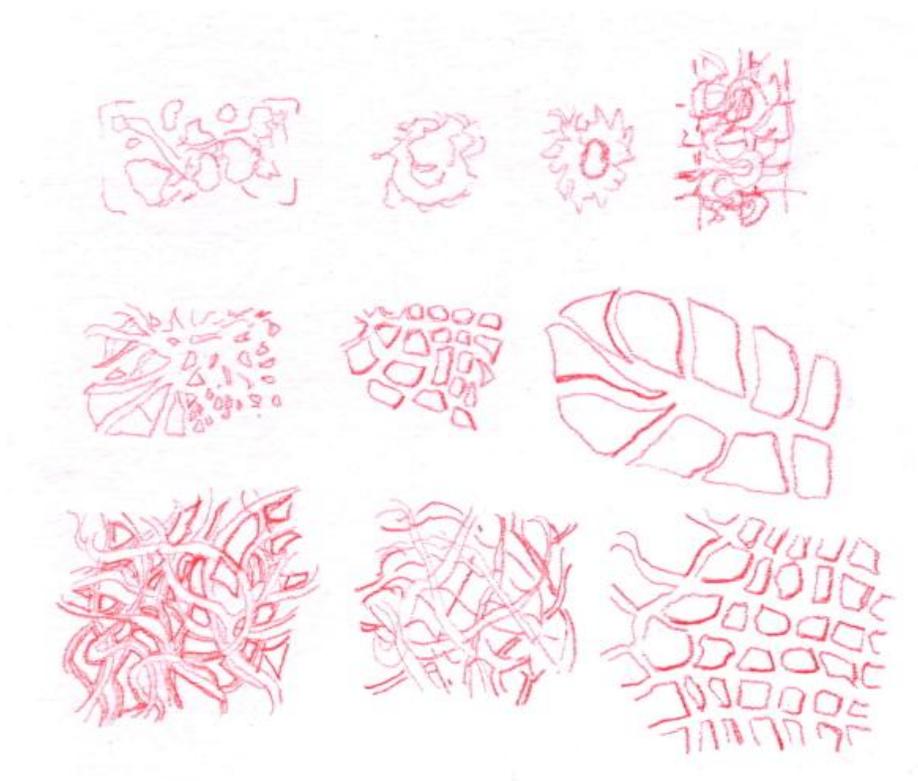


ANDRÉ MASSON, AUTOMATIC DRAWING. INK ON PAPER, 1924.



ANDRÉ MASSON, AUTOMATIC DRAWING. INK ON PAPER, 1924.

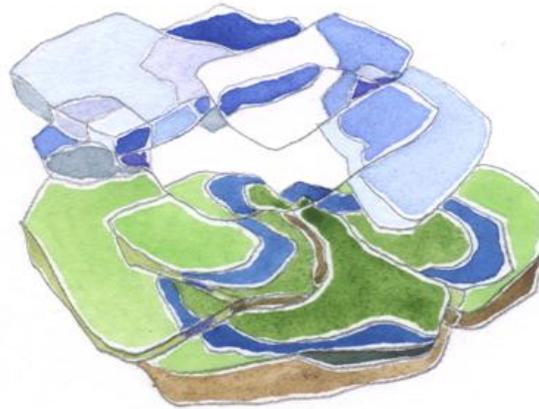
My interest in Surrealist Automatism was furthered after the chance to work with John F. Simon, Jr., a contemporary artist well-known for his early adoption of the computer into his practice. Despite his often high-tech projects, Simon partakes in a daily drawing practice² that yields what he calls *Divination Drawings*. Though his use of ‘divination’ can lead to the assumption that perhaps the hand of God is at work, it bears mentioning that “to divine”, while colloquially implicit of spirituality and godly intervention, can simply mean “to discover by intuition or insight”³.



JOHN F. SIMON, JR, DIVINATION DRAWING. MIXED-MEDIA ON PAPER, 1999-ONGOING.

² <http://www.iclock.com>

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/divine>



JOHN F. SIMON, JR, DIVINATION DRAWING. MIXED-MEDIA ON PAPER, 1999-ONGOING.

The artist's dedication to the process is unquestionable; he has been producing these drawings for the past twelve years. On his website⁴, Simon explains his endeavor as follows:

Divination drawing pairs improvisational drawing with rationalized writing as a method of discovering layered meanings in thoughts. In other words, I make a drawing and then I write down what I think it's about and the whole package tells me something about where my head is.

In Simon's own words, he describes this daily drawing practice as "the core practice for all [of his] creative activity". And in reading his brief description of his working method and also how he believes it functions, it is clear that for Simon, something is being revealed.

Simon's commitment in this capacity, and the significant contribution of the Surrealists in justifiably altering the course of image making, led to my own adoption of a similar approach to drawing. My daily practice builds off of theirs, except that I emphatically resist submitting my images to reason as Breton might have me do. Nor do I try to apply a

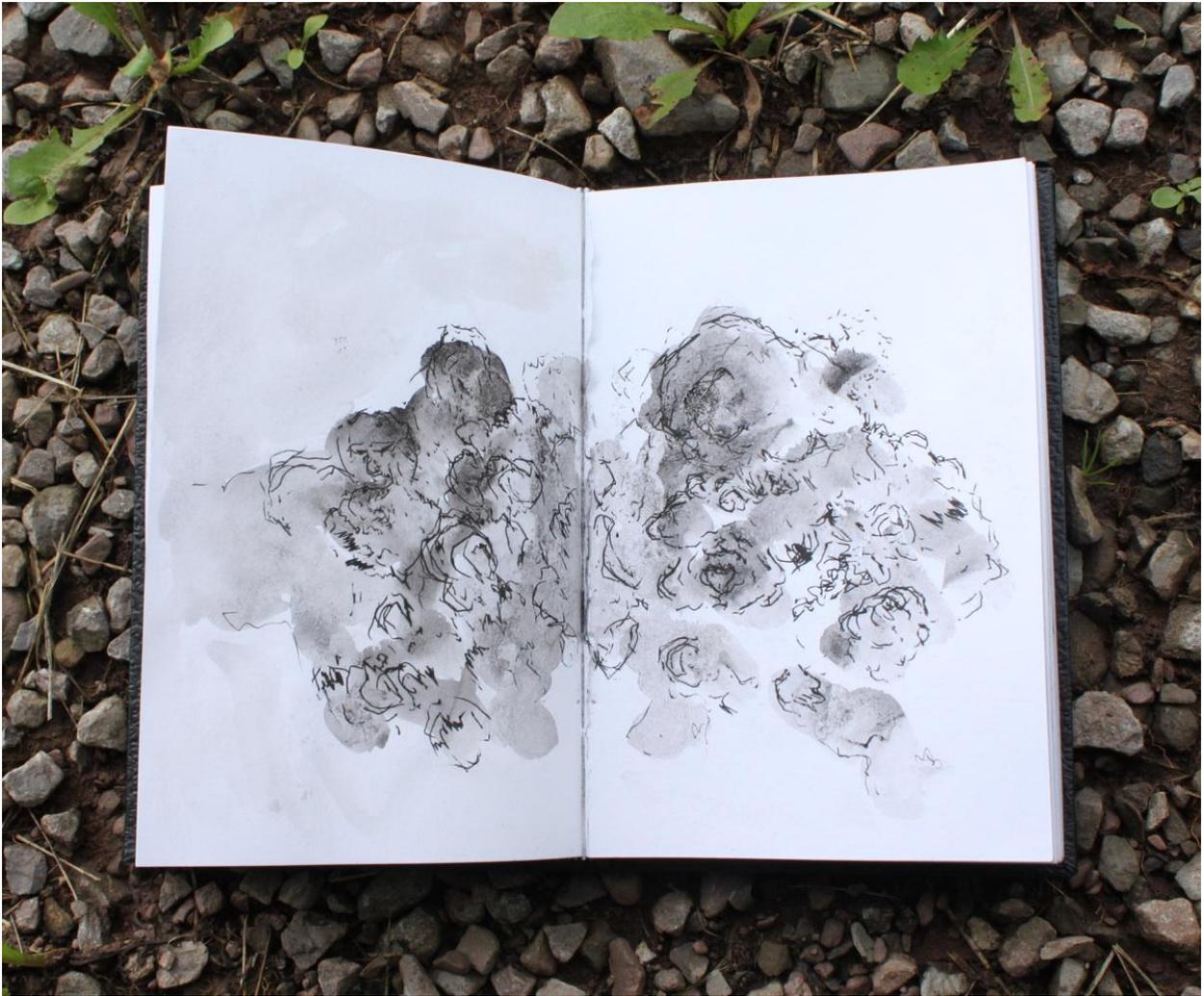
⁴ <http://iclock.com/about/about.html>

rationale to effectively read the resulting images like Simon does. I want to think that knowledge is being revealed each time my pen hits the paper, and that the resulting image is confirmation that I have learned.

I want to push myself to allow drawing to function as knowledge on its own. That is, I turn to drawing as an act of revelation that incorporates something into *what I know* in a way that need not (and maybe cannot) be described. I have yet to figure out what this “something” is. But the desire to and my pursuit, have repositioned drawing for me not only as artistic endeavour, but as a way to understand and navigate the world. Deciding to use drawing as an alternative way to think, just as Breton inferred almost a century ago has been invaluable. And that is something I would like you to know.



JASON KASS, DAILY-PRACTICE DRAWING. MIXED-MEDIA ON PAPER, ONGOING.



JASON KASS, DAILY-PRACTICE DRAWING. MIXED-MEDIA ON PAPER, ONGOING.