

Rose Davey and Sarah Kate Wilson

The Double Interview

This issue of Ambit has been co-edited by artists Rose Davey and Sarah Kate Wilson. As an introduction, they interviewed one another in April 2020 during lockdown.

Sarah Kate Wilson: Rose, this looks like a pin board filled with images of artists' works, I can see a work by you and your hospital bracelet from Baby James. How did the pin board begin and what are the rules (if any)?

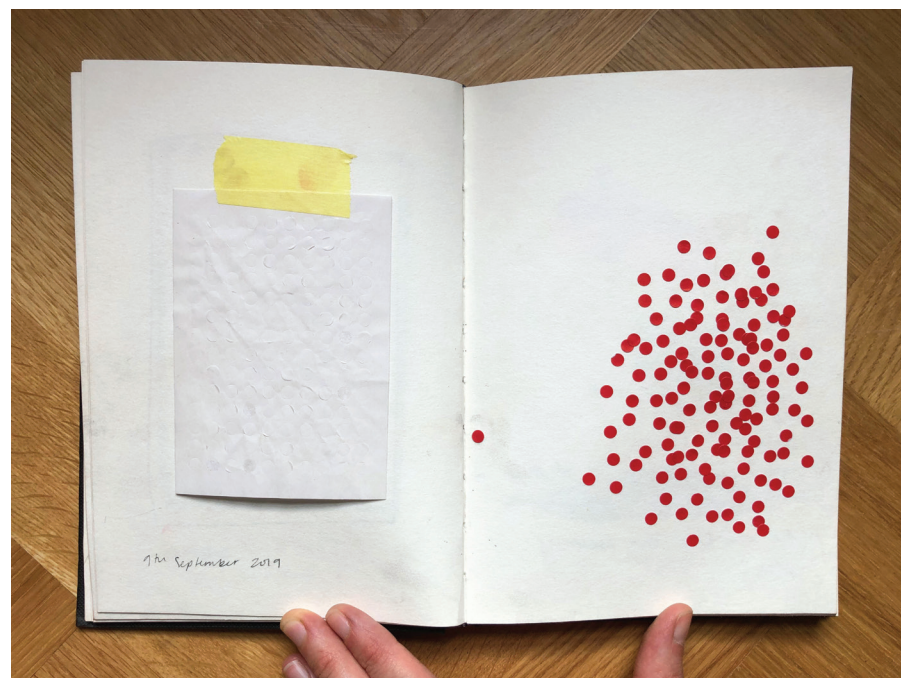
Rose Davey: The pin board started in April 2013 when I moved studio. It began with pages from Vogue (a Chanel advert of beautifully placed products around a dressing table, and an image of the male model David Gandy), some of my drawings, and two Lichtenstein postcards from the show at the Tate in 2013. More postcards purchased from shows and museum collections followed. Nothing is removed, and all remains underneath. The pink tile is a sample from our bathroom, designed when my son was a few months old. Somehow his birth label made its way into the studio and onto the tile. I guess there was a feeling or even a pressure that he should be present in this space; solely inhabited by myself, ideas and intentions. Perhaps the tile is the equivalent to the family photo on the office desk?

Sarah Kate: If the studio were on fire, and you had the chance to save one thing from the fire what would you save from it and why?

Rose: Sketchbooks. All or any of them. No one has ever really seen or 'read' them, but they contain my most valuable work. I use them like an encyclopedia, looking up ideas for reference and reminding myself of past information that can solve current visual dilemmas.

Sarah Kate: When I saw the image of your sketchbooks on a shelf with mugs, a tin of coffee and Kit Kats piled on them, it felt disrespectful. What's that about?





Rose: I think it's more about laziness and bad organization! My sketchbooks give me confidence and reassurance in my pursuit. In a funny way I think the pin board is more of a charade, or a 'front', whereas the sketchbooks are the real deal. They show the slog and the time it takes to have faith in an idea. Many of my paintings are made years after their concept is formed in a sketchbook.

Sarah Kate: I love this page from your sketch book (left). Why did you select this page to show me? I LOVE it – please can I have it lol xxx

Rose: This sketchbook is my most recent and is the one I currently have with me at home in isolation during the Covid Crisis. The page with dots arose from a studio situation where I didn't know what to do, so I looked to material for inspiration. I found a packet of red dots and transferred one sheet from their backing to the page of the sketchbook, with a mind to complete the task and not to make 'art'. The most conscious manoeuvre was to tape the backing to the page and add the date. This is something I often do; it feels like a signature.

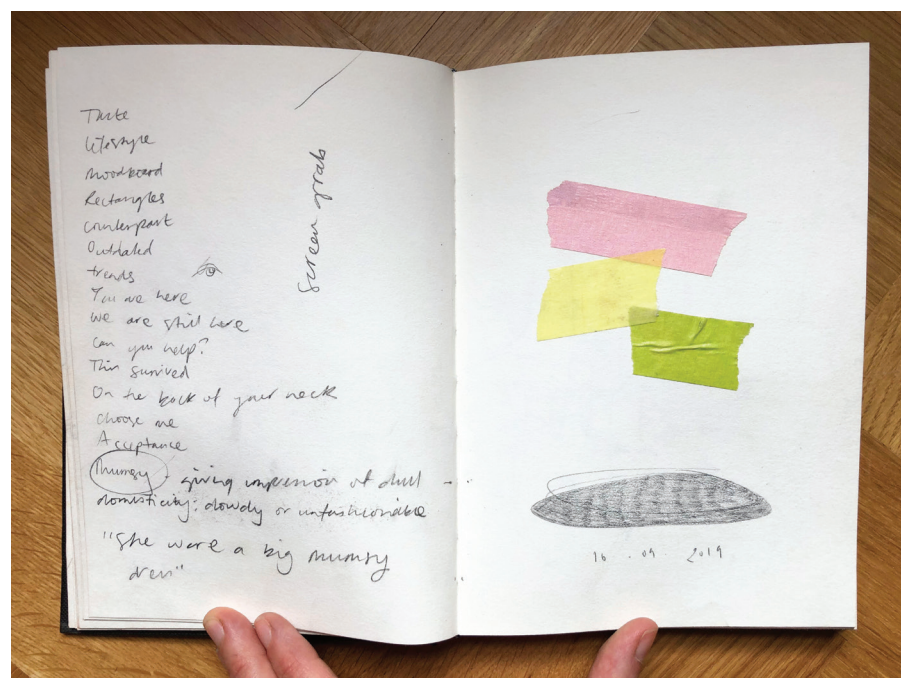
Sarah Kate: Some of your paintings and drawings have dates. When did you begin to date drawings and paintings and was this conscious?

Rose: From when I was 10 or 11 I used to write "This is now!!!" in sketchbooks, notebooks and school books. I was obsessed with trying to capture the present; the moment, and always thinking in terms of "This time last week I was..."

Every time I do something in my sketchbook the first page will be marked with the date so I know the days when the action occurred. Drawing the date also makes very useful marks when balancing composition. All the sketchbook images included here feature the date for that reason. The date is an equally conceptual and formal device.

Sarah Kate: Is that a tiny drawing of an eye next to where it says 'trends'?

Rose: Yes. I have drawn eyes since I can remember, always the left eye. I don't know why.





Rose Davey (b.1984 London) studied Art History and Fine Art at Edinburgh College of Art and Edinburgh University (2002-07) and MFA painting at Slade School of Fine Art, UCL (2008-10). Recent exhibitions include: *Conversations in Colour*, Cooke Latham Gallery, London (2020); *Studio Works: Slade2Sing*, The Studio at Thomson, Singapore (2019); *The Painting Parade*, Glasgow (2019) and *The Nomenclature of Colours*, Slade Research Centre, London (2019). She delivers annual art history lectures to Slade Graduate Painting students and recently presented *LOCKDOWN LECTURES* during the corona pandemic. More at www.rosedavey.co.uk @rosedaveyartist.

Rose Davey
Selection of studio drawings, May 2018

Rose Davey: The work you make often feels as though it has jumped out of a bin, containing the aftermath of a birthday party. How does one material find another?

Sarah Kate Wilson: The work is definitely polyamorous. Often I have no idea how things are made, I find the experience of making to be an out of body experience. When I made *Zumba* in 2014, I made it 24 hours before the show. I had an idea that shaking a piece of silver sequin encrusted fabric under fast strobing lights would make the fabric look like silver liquid. Luckily it did. Things are made fast, or without realising that I am making them.

Rose: It feels like anything goes. But do you work to a logic? Is there a common goal of visual pursuit you follow? Or do you have a conceptual target?

Sarah Kate: It changes from work to work. I am always thinking about dismantling hierarchies, between ideas, materials, people, value judgements.

Rose: Rainbows have continued to appear in various guises over the years. What is it about the colour combination or natural phenomenon that sustains your interest?

Sarah Kate: Rainbows only appear when the correct weather and viewing conditions align, which is rare. This event is magical really. I love them because people cannot own rainbows, they are free, and available to all. They appear in the sky, a space we cannot touch. They can be huge and span mountain ranges, they 'exist' only for a short while. Rainbows appear in most cultures. In Greek mythology, Iris is a rainbow goddess, she is unusual because she is both a goddess of the sky and the sea. She is often referred to as a messenger because she links the heavens with earth. Also, she has gold wings. In terms of colour, white light is split when it passes through raindrops. This splitting enables us to see a whole spectrum of colour, even ultraviolet and infra-red light are present in rainbows (sadly we cannot see these colours with the naked eye). So really it is not about one colour being more important than another, they are all present all of the time, but only 'appear' momentarily when the correct conditions align. For the most recent iteration of *Show - Off* (2020) I staged a performance titled *An Event* (right). Using rainbow sticks (made of metal and glass), water spritz bottles and a large theatrical spotlight. Six performers worked together to try to manifest small rainbows in front of a seated audience.



Sarah Kate Wilson with Piper Haywood and Toby O'Connor, performed in tandem by Musarc
Rainbows (Paris, 2017) with 'Beata Viscera Iridis acc.'
DO DISTURB festival, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2017
Duration variable



Sarah Kate Wilson
An Event, 2020
Water, spritz bottles, glass prisms, metal sticks, tape, sound (of white noise), theatrical spotlight (manually operated) and six performers
Duration variable



Above: Sarah Kate Wilson
Hiding Place (detail), 2020
 India Ink, water-soluble crayon, acrylic paint on paper
 29.7 x 21 cm

Next page: Sarah Kate Wilson
Zumba, 2014
 Silver sequined fabric, strobe lights, two performers
Zumba being aired over the radio, on Drivetime Underground in 2016
 Drivetime Underground - devised, produced, presented by Neil Luck
 Broadcast by Resonance FM 104.4FM
 In partnership with Sound and Music Composer-Curator scheme

Rose: I am intrigued by the drawing element that has recently emerged within your practice. The butterfly drawings are very tight and deliberate, whereas other works appears to employ more chance. Why are you making them?

Sarah Kate: They are actually made with a strong dose of chance. To make the drawings I am building up layers of marks using wax, crayon, and india inks, scraping the work back to the layer underneath, washing the paper and building up the layers again. I am obsessed with the *Caligo eurilochus* butterfly. When under attack they open their wings to reveal 2 large spot markings, which look like the eyes of an owl. So the butterfly can startle predators by 'appearing' as a bird of prey. The reason I am making them is because I am devising a performance on the subject of animal mimicry. This performance will require sets, costumes and performers, so whilst in lockdown (due to Covid-19) I am using drawing as a way to think about these ideas, but also as a place to pour out thoughts. I don't see chance and deliberate actions sitting at opposite ends of the spectrum, I allow chance into my work, deliberately. Even with performance, which is probably the strictest and 'tightest' way I work, i.e. with a score, an audience, costume, site, I want an element of improvisation, or happy accident.

Rose: I love the comic strip and speech bubble that contains the words "Maybe I took it all too seriously, after all, it's only paint..." I think 'seriousness' is relevant to your work because the materials you use are not very 'serious', whereas I think your intention is deeply serious. Do you aim to make work that might cause the viewer to question whether or not to take it seriously?

Sarah Kate: That comic strip is from the UCL collection (see p.96). It is so funny because it rings so true. It is only paint, it is only art, but we make work because we would go insane if we didn't, but in many ways it is a ridiculous thing to do, maybe we are insane in continuing to make?

Once people look at my work, I hope they understand it is not wholly serious or wholly flippant or totally sad or 100% comical. It is a sliding scale and in many ways reflects the viewer's mood at the time of viewing, which will be different from day to day.



Sarah Kate Wilson (b.1982, Grand Cayman, Caribbean) studied MFA painting at Slade School of Fine Art, UCL (2008-10) and received a PHD at the University of Leeds (2017). Her thesis was titled: *Durational Painting; Gifting, Grafting, Hosting, Collaborating*. Wilson has had solo exhibitions at Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, California (2015) the University of Leeds (2017) and Baltic 39, Newcastle (2016). In collaboration with choral ensemble MUSARC, she has staged large scale painting performances at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (2018), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2017) and the Museum of London (2017). Recently she undertook a residency at the Bauhaus, Dessau. Following this, she staged performances at the brand new Bauhaus Museum with her Painting students from Camberwell College of Arts, UAL where she is a Senior Lecturer. See more at www.sarahkatewilson.com

Rose and Sarah Kate are co-directors of *Show - Off*, formally known as artist collective *LeandaKateLouise*.