

Double Take:

A Conversation with Clare Grafik

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This interview between Clare Grafik, Head of Exhibitions at The Photographers' Gallery, and José Neves reflects on the conception, curatorial framework, and legacy of *Double Take: Drawing and Photography* (2016), a dual-site exhibition presented by The Photographers' Gallery and Drawing Room in London. The conversation examines how the exhibition brought together historical and contemporary practices to reconsider the relationship between drawing and photography through questions of surface, materiality, gesture, labour, authorship, and chance. Grafik discusses the exhibition's focus on the photograph as a physical object, the role of inscription and mark-making, and the ways in which both media were destabilised through processes involving repetition, bodily movement, and partial loss of control. The interview also addresses the parallel exhibition at Drawing Room, the inclusion of moving image and computational practices, and the role of *Loose Associations*, The Photographers' Gallery's in-house journal, in extending the exhibition's concerns into digital culture and contemporary forms of drawing.

THIS CONVERSATION between Clare Grafik, Head of Exhibitions at The Photographers' Gallery, and José Neves, the Gallery's Assistant Curator, reflects on the development, themes, and legacy of *Double Take: Drawing and Photography* (2016). The exhibition brought together historical and contemporary works that re-examined the relationship between drawing and photography — from surface and materiality to questions of authorship, labour, and the creative potential of chance.

Double Take was a dual-site exhibition presented by The Photographers' Gallery and Drawing Room in London. Drawing Room — founded in 2002 — is the UK's leading non-profit gallery dedicated to contemporary drawing. The Photographers' Gallery, established in 1971, is one of the world's most influential centres for photography, offering a diverse program of exhibitions, education, and public events.

Alongside the exhibition, The Photographers' Gallery created *Loose Associations*, its in-house journal designed as a companion to the Gallery's programme. Each issue examined themes related to the exhibitions, providing broader associative insights for readers. For *Double Take*, the journal expanded the discussion into digital culture, gesture, mark-making, and computational forms of drawing



Figure 1: Installation view of *Double Take: Drawing and Photography*, 2016
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Conversation

José Neves: Clare, I'd like to begin with how *Double Take* first came about. It seems an intuitive pairing — drawing and photography — but not one that exhibitions often explore directly. What initially prompted you to bring the two media together?

Clare Grafik: The idea evolved gradually. I'd just completed two exhibitions — one on the photographic object, another on collage — and both kept returning me to photography's surface: what sits on it, what lies underneath, what projects outward. The Czech artist Jan Svoboda was central to the curatorial process; his work made me think about the photograph as a physical object, with depth and tension. Around the same time, I encountered Běla Kolářová's photographs of hair, which made me think differently about line — about what a line even means in a photographic context. Svoboda's preoccupation with "the photograph within the photograph" lingered as well.

Alongside this, I was in conversation with the Drawing Room, who had been working with artists exploring drawing's relationship to photography—not just photorealism, but drawings that mimic or question photographic logic. Because both our institutions are medium-specific, presenting parallel exhibitions felt appropriate. It allowed us to challenge assumptions about what drawing and photography "are", and to see how those definitions shift when the two come into dialogue.

José: In *Loose Associations*, you mention Talbot's difficulty with drawing and his invention of photography through that frustration. Was that origin story part of your thinking for the exhibition?

Clare: It was conceptually present, but it was not a direct influence. *Loose Associations* let us explore themes around line, inscription and materiality more broadly. Talbot inevitably came up in my essay, particularly because of his early experiments. Those gestures collapse drawing, shadow and object into a single act. We didn't include historical work in the exhibition because we didn't want to do a survey, but that early, tactile, camera-less approach resonated strongly with the show's concerns. I was also thinking about material parallels: silver in photographic paper, graphite in drawing. Two different chemistries of inscription. Two ways of marking a surface. Those ideas quietly threaded their way through the project.

José: Materiality clearly became central to the show.

Clare: Definitely. Every artist in the exhibition engages the surface — photographic or drawn — as an active site. Paul Chiappe's work was perhaps the most figurative, yet even he interrogated the photograph as an object, producing uncanny, highly detailed redrawings of small found images.

Other works explored handwriting and inscription. Nancy Hellebrand's images of handwriting track the changes in her mother's script as Alzheimer's progressed, so the mark becomes a record of presence and memory. And Jolana Havelková's *First Time Skating*, which appears on the cover of *Loose Associations*, captures unconscious marks made on ice by skaters' blades. They're literally drawings produced by movement, recorded through photography.

Across these works — and others featured on the Gallery’s ‘Media Wall’, including the screen-based pieces by Nicholas O’Brien, Jesse McLean and the Scandinavian Institute of Computational Vandalism (SICV) — the question of relinquishing control emerged strongly. Whether through physical contact, serial repetition, chance, or bodily movement, the artists pushed both drawing and photography into spaces where direct agency is somewhat lost, and the mark becomes something that happens as much as something that’s made.



Figure 2: Installation view of *Double Take: Drawing and Photography*, 2016
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José: That theme of losing control seems central in the show. Drawing and photography are often framed as precise or intentional acts. But here, both seem to loosen their grip.

Clare: Exactly. That looseness was one of the most critical parts of the show. Drawing is often described as the most direct expression of thought — the line travelling from the mind through the hand to the page. Photography, by contrast, is seen as an instant capture of something outside oneself. But in *Double Take*, drawing became mechanical, repetitive, sometimes labour-intensive; and photography became slow, tactile, occasionally awkward. As you mentioned, much of the work could potentially be seen as almost anti-photographic in its labour — the opposite of the quick capture. Time becomes a material. Gesture becomes unstable or partial.

José: How did this dialogue expand when the exhibition opened simultaneously at Drawing Room? Was there a concern in exploring the impact of photography upon drawing?

Clare: Drawing Room's selection leaned toward artists using drawing as a cognitive or investigative process — Dove Allouche, Matt Saunders, Margarita Gluzberg, Tacita Dean, Thomas Zimmer, Josh Brand. They introduced questions about observation, interpretation and the unseen. Taken together, the two exhibitions loosened boundaries between drawing and photography. Visitors moving between the spaces could sense drawing becoming photographic and photography becoming drawn. It created a kind of permeability that destabilised medium-specific definitions.

José: And you opened the exhibition with Moholy-Nagy.

Clare: Yes. Moholy-Nagy's photograms didn't feel like a historical weight — they felt like an opening gesture. His work represents the moment when photography frees itself from representation and embraces experimentation, abstraction, and chance. And his sense of scale — one-to-one — had a strong relationship to some of the contemporary works such as Anna Barriball's graphite rubbings. It was a way of anchoring things conceptually without slipping into a historical narrative.



Figure 3: Installation view of *Double Take: Drawing and Photography*, 2016
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José: The *Loose Associations* issue also included essays by Nicolas Malevé and Sam Mercer that take drawing into computational territory.

Clare: Yes, and that turned out to be a very productive extension. The digital exhibition outside the gallery space on the ground floor, Media Wall — acted almost like a prologue, foregrounding line, contour and algorithmic marks. Malevé's essay explored how machines read contour, breaking the drawn line into data. Sam Mercer, meanwhile, was thinking about contouring in online culture — the YouTube tutorials, the mapping of the face, the way drawing becomes an act of reshaping one's image.

José: The Kardashian effect.

Clare: (laughs) Exactly. It's funny to think of it now because contouring is everywhere; it's almost naturalised. But at the time, it was emerging. And Sam's essay made clear how contouring is a form of drawing — one that exists between visibility and invisibility, surface and depth, something applied but also layered. Those ideas of layering, vanishing lines, the play between front and behind the plane, connect unexpectedly well to the material, tactile work in the exhibition.

José: While researching the exhibition, I started thinking about the idea of the "sketch". In drawing, the sketch is a recognised category — unfinished, exploratory. But photography doesn't really have that.

Clare: That's true. And interestingly, many works in *Double Take* had a sketch-like quality. Not in the sense of being incomplete or provisional, but in the sense of being part of an ongoing thought process. Most of the artists were working in series, and we showed only fragments of those series. Nothing felt like a conclusion. Even the pieces that appear fully formed retain this fragility, this sense of something still unfolding. In a way, the lack of control — allowing movement or material to intervene — adds to that precarity.

José: Photography historically doesn't sit comfortably with the unfinished. Even the Polaroid, which was sometimes used as a preparatory tool, has a kind of finality. It crystallises something. But the works in *Double Take* resist that. They behave more like sketches — open, searching, part of a process rather than the endpoint of one. Another aspect is the use of moving image in the exhibition. One of the works involved Freud's hand, and a line tracing his gesture...

Clare: Yes, that was Pierre Bismuth's *Following the Right Hand of Sigmund Freud*. It was one of the few moving-image works in the exhibition. You watch Freud gesturing as he talks, and Bismuth overlays a line that tracks the movement of Freud's hand. It creates this double action: the physical movement in the documentary footage, and the drawn gesture appearing on top of it. You end up with a window onto

the world — Freud talking — and another window onto unconscious gesture, turned into a line.

That piece also opened up questions about the relationship between still and moving image. With moving image, gesture becomes perceptible through motion, which connects directly to drawing. Even though photography and film are both light projected on a surface, movement changes how we perceive the line. And in the context of the exhibition, it highlighted how gesture — controlled or uncontrolled — threads through everything.

José: And thinking back, are there things you would add or change today?

Clare: There's always more you could include. Many works, especially from the more historical side, could have expanded the discussion. However, compact group shows require a leap of faith. You can only hint at bigger ideas. In a larger exhibition, some of the more complex themes — digital gesture, materiality, surface — could have been made clearer. Honestly, the main reason you might not organise a show like this today is audience-related. It's harder to persuade people to visit exhibitions that focus on conceptual discussions. What's also interesting is that there have been many exhibitions about painting and photography, but far fewer about drawing and photography. Perhaps because drawing is often still perceived as preparatory or unfinished, while photography is seen as complete. But *Double Take* showed that both media can operate in that space of uncertainty, of open gesture.

José: Thank you, Clare.

Clare: Thank you, José.

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