

## A pencil line through space

Control and its loss is an ongoing tension in Kelly Best's drawings, watercolours, mural works and architectural-scale installations. Specifically the artist's work questions the control exerted by the drawing of a line, from the point of view of both drawer and viewer. A 2015 floor work titled *Counter* is typical in this fashion. Throughout two galleries, on the grey lino tiled floor, the artist meticulously mapped out a path and supplementary sections in blue pencil (perhaps the pencil being the artist's most frequent tool). Against the flooring the markings were faint, easily missed perhaps (hiding of course being a form of control too), and for those that did notice this subtle demarcation, the work raised the quandary of whether one should follow the path and walk on and over the work, or whether it should be treated with the usual look-don't-touch reverence given to art. Whatever the visitor's eventual decision, the artist, through her work, had supervised and disrupted their path through the exhibition space. Yet by the nature of Best's choice of material the artist also relinquishes her own creative power, as the ephemeral work gets trodden on, worn away, and slowly destroyed.

In this previous architectural intervention and others since, Best invokes Carl Andre's sense of 'sculpture as place'. 'Place', the American sculptor wrote in 1968, was 'an area within an environment which has been altered in such a way as to make the general environment more conspicuous.' Best will often play with perspective to heighten the viewer's awareness of their interaction within the given environment. From one specific angle, the pencil on wall work *Between 590 and 610* for example, takes the form of an orange triangle marked out across the three black walls of an alcove-like space. Shift one's point of view however – take a step to the left or two to the right – and this geometrical illusion is broken, revealing the actual drawn disparate elements. Likewise the two geometric

abstract forms that feature throughout *Fractions*, a series of nine pencil on board works – originally exhibited in Best’s 2016 solo show, *All Walls are Interrupted* at Plymouth Arts Centre – seem identical in size when viewed from the optimum, side-on, perspective. Consider the work head-on however and we realise that this is merely another trick of perspective and these pencil-drawn shapes are in fact successively larger on each sheet, with each sheet hung closer together than the previous. Both these works instil in the viewer an awareness of their own physicality and movement through space, and amplifies one’s sensitivity to not only how we approach the art object, but also the spatial context that it is installed within.

Among the works Best exhibits at Oriol Davies, are a pair of 220cm-high steel sculptures and *Frame*, a vast screen of watercolour on paper drawings. Both can be classed as interventions in the architecture and, fundamentally, as ‘sculpture as place’. The floor works, in which several lengths of metal have been welded into two identical quadrilateral forms (one installed flipped and of inverse orientation to the other), act as framing devices, creating specific points-of-view within the gallery space. (In this manner the works are a three-dimensional materialisation of *Project X*, a work in which the artist, scalpel in hand, carved out a basic sculptural form from the surface of a photographic image of a park, similarly dividing and delimiting the space). The work on paper – hundreds of sheets, each featuring vibrant water-coloured zigzags in various shades of blue, red and black, suspended on wire mid-way through the exhibition space – sits within the lineage of mid-twentieth century decorative design, Op Art and Lyrical Abstraction that Best repeatedly returns to in her paper or board work. Yet while the artist’s use of parallel lines, geometric abstraction and repetition of mark making, might formally recall figures such as Bridget Riley or Piero Dorazio, Best’s work is fundamentally born of a desire to mark out and experiment with space. Other pencil works have

an internal geometric logic to them (and may indeed be born through the artist's imposition of a rule – 'all the geometric variations possible using just three lines' for example – in their production) while the watercolours typically take the form of an infinite vortex of rectangles painted one inside the other. The pencil, or brush, in Best's hands has a territorializing function, as it covers a virgin surface, claiming it as the author's own: brought together as a practice, Best expresses primarily architectural, not painterly or illustrative, concerns.

*Oliver Basciano*