

I scissored into slender strips the wings of butterflies first one wing then the other sometimes for a change the two abreast

Samuel Beckett, *How It Is*

How do you read a palm? Taking the hand's line as the glyphs of an obscure script, the palmist is an exegete: their reading, rather than simply relaying, makes meaning. Assigning significance to the common features of our palm's prints, assuming then that these encode a message, with their interpretation the palm reader construes sense—constructs it. The palm's marks make a double prescription; they, or maybe just their reading, precede and intervene in the present.

Facing Mathilde Heu's series of drawn palms—slivers of her right hand; her fingers, wrist, the ball of her thumb cropped by the white of the page—figured from one angle and then another and another, I try to think about what's revealed in this reiteration. Heu isn't, I think, looking to them for meaning (not that they'd yield it), isn't searching for something in them, isn't "digging" towards some profundity. Instead—and this seems to me a common move in her practice—she trains in on the small, the close at hand, and then returns to it, aware of each approach's contingency, its glancing of significance. Her interest is as much in the texture of these surfaces as it is in the affects of attention—what happens, what's felt, when you return and repeat, through the hours spent in detail?

Forms appear, she writes of the process of drawing the palms: wings, leaves, flints. The same might be said of *Que faire?* Using a laser scanner, Heu produced a 3D rendering of a walnut, and then translated this scan into a drawing five metres across. Forms appear, yes, but as quickly disappear, and to commit these to words—to say this palm looks like a wing, this nutshell like a rock face, a churning sea—feels banal, like reciting a dream upon waking. Which seems the point: Heu is less interested in analogy, in drawing equivalences, than in those moments when we lose the sense of what we're looking at, when we're overwhelmed by what things could be.

With a recent sculptural work like *Epicentre*, a tilted steel cube that requires we kneel—bringing us to our knees—and touch its surface so as to throw sounds into our heads, the effect achieved feels similar: rather than shooting for the astonishment traditionally attributed to sublimity, Heu's emphasis is on indeterminacy—using immersion to unsettle orientation, to upset, to dance between, scales.

Drawing has often been defined by critics as always preliminary, always provisional. Jean-Luc Nancy begins *The Pleasure of Drawing* by describing it as 'the opening of form'—that is, the beginning of form, the point from which we depart, as well as its breaking apart, its dehiscence.¹ Drawing doesn't close, doesn't contain; it 'records the unfolding of an event, not the fixed reality of an object'.² This seems an apt description of Heu's practice, one which is transitive, relational, always moving-toward- or coming-into-presence, even when sculptural. Take the breathing, illuminated line drawn through three dimensions that is *Parcae*. Named after the goddesses who spin, measure, and cut our fates, it sketches, in one long stroke, a life's unspooling.

The palms she's drawn also move towards the material in a series she's since moulded in ceramic. Palm-prints on the inside, they fold in on themselves, clutching for and holding nothing. From without, they're amorphous if organic-seeming, more like mouths or molluscs. Theirs is an almost-form; their grip on meaning is relaxed, and in this way they seem a figure for how Heu's focus on the slight doesn't attempt to make sense of the ungraspable, but queries what we're hoping for when we reach for meaning.

Kit Webb

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Pleasure in Drawing* [2009], trans. Philip Armstrong (Fordham University Press, 2013): 1.

2. Brian Dillon, 'On the Elements of Drawing', in *The end of the line: attitudes in drawing* (Hayward Publishing, 2009): 9.

Mathilde Heu

A dance of scale

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Assembly Point
49 Staffordshire Street
London SE15 5TJ