

Lilli Carré



On the Secret Movement and Matter of Images

Michelle Puetz

The temporal movement that historically has distinguished cinema—the art of moving pictures—from other art forms is based on an illusion, a trickery of sorts: still photographic moments, seen at a rate of twenty-four images per second, are animated into sequences that create the perception of seamless movement. These images remain in motion, maintaining the illusion of continuous time and space projected onto the screen, unless disaster intervenes. Who can forget the shock of being in the theater and seeing the results of a projector malfunction—one frame seized and frozen in the projector gate, a suspended image from the world we had given ourselves over to, now melting and burning on screen?

It is easy to ignore the origins of cinema and animation in still photography, if only because the stillness that marks their beginning is a single step in their becoming. Animators are acutely conscious of the series of fragmented stills that, when projected, create the illusion of cinematic movement. It is impossible not to be aware of the space between these arrested images, a space that, in the service of realism, animators strive to eliminate through the gradual breakdown of a given movement into its various progressive stages. Canadian filmmaker Norman McLaren famously defined animation as “movements which are drawn, rather than drawings which are moved,” finding these transitional spaces between the frames to be the most essential aspect of the medium.¹

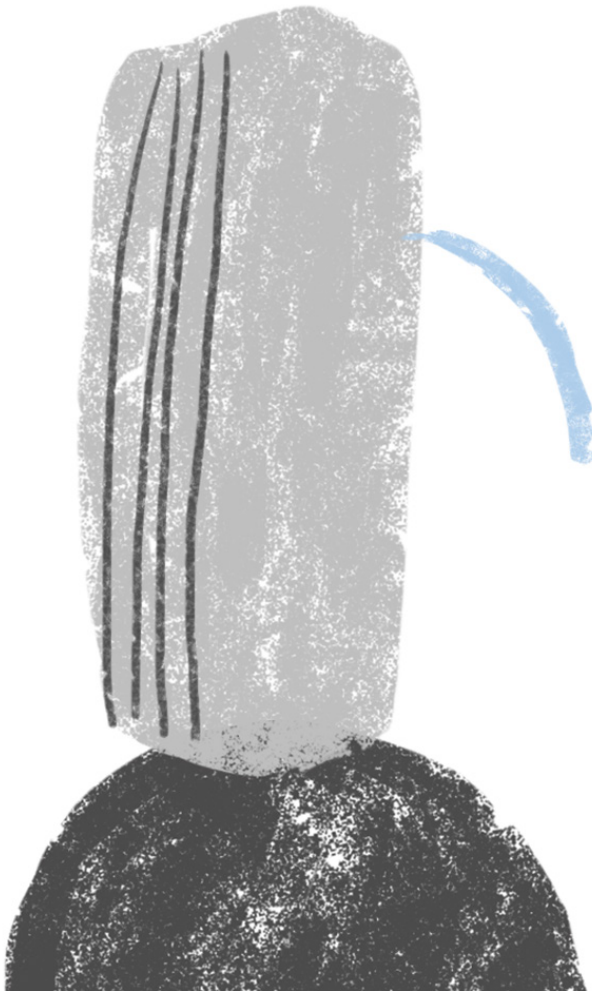
This gap—manifested in the space between the still frames that comprise an animated film or the “gutter space” that exists between the panels of a comic—provides the foundation for Lilli Carré’s most recent body of work. Perhaps best known for her short, haunting experimental animations and wide range of published graphic narratives and small-press comics, Carré is deeply invested in exploring the potential of this gap—the empty space—that characterizes these mediums. For *BMO Harris Bank Chicago Works: Lilli Carré*, the artist’s first solo museum exhibition, Carré explores the temporal and spatial gaps that exist between objects and images—spaces defined both by change and absence—and showcases new directions in her creative practice, including her first sculptural work. An artist who simultaneously works with a wide range of materials, Carré moves among media such as comics, animation, printmaking, artists’ books, sound, painting, and drawing in order to explore the unique qualities inherent to each discipline and, more importantly, to uncover the essential elements that unite them.

¹ Norman McLaren, quoted in Donald McWilliams, *Norman McLaren: On the Creative Process* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1991), 105.

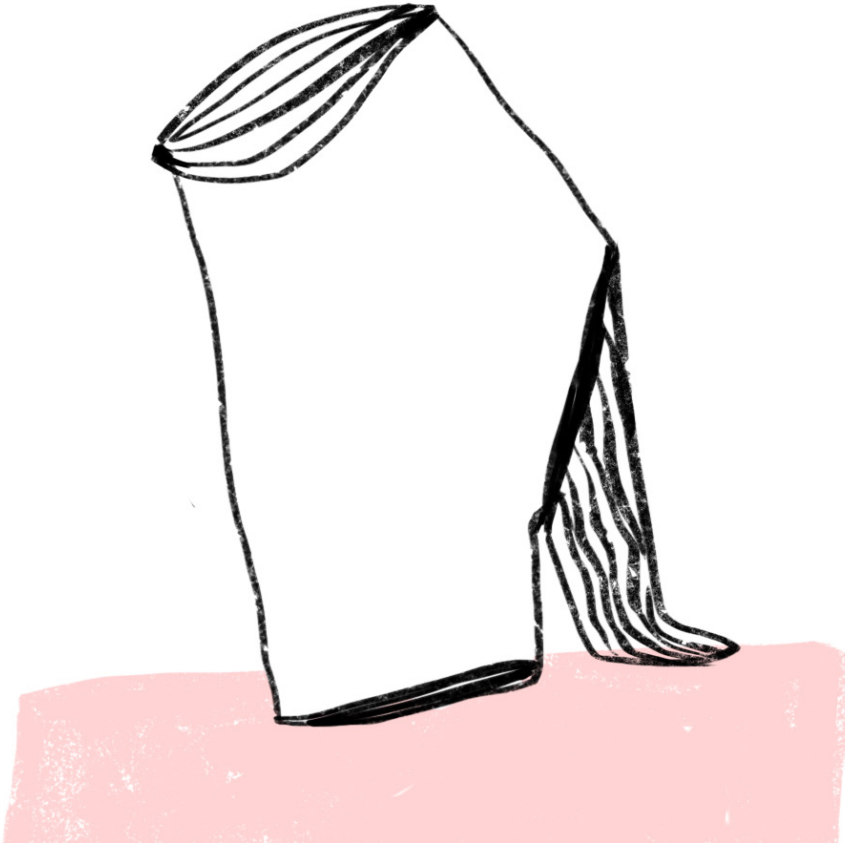


In Carré's 2012 series *Debris Drawings*, she illustrates frantic jumbles of fragmented remains halted in what can be interpreted as either a frozen instant of transformation, or one of chaotic dissolution. These renderings of arrested momentum depict a static moment—time extracted from a narrative that we are only privy to in remnants of possibility, or what Carré describes as the “decay and reformation of a person and all of their things, precariously clustered as a portrait.” Abstracted shapes, architectural elements, trivial objects, and glimpses of body parts are collected together and resolidified into masses that resemble human figures formed from the detritus of everyday life. The *Debris Drawings* not only point to Carré's interest in the in-between moments of transition and becoming, but also allude to a very human tendency to seek out figures in abstraction.

Lilli Carré
Debris Hank, 2012
Ink wash on paper
8 × 10 in. (20.3 × 25.4 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Western Exhibitions, Chicago



Movement between abstraction and figuration is at the heart of Carré's new video installation, *The Negotiation*, in which two looped animations projected on opposite walls of the gallery depict forms that continuously shift in relation to one another. Each image undergoes a metamorphosis as the shapes slip between allusions to the human figure and gradually transition into abstraction. Looping at slightly offset times, the two animations line up and react to one another in different combinations over the course of the piece. The two perpetually transforming images, and Carré's delicate use of sound, envelop the viewer in a conversational space between the two projections. Carré encourages viewers to physically occupy the empty space between the two animations and to play an active role in creating connections between their ever-evolving relationships.



In this exhibition, Carré explores gaps and in-between spaces in various contexts ranging from the physical space viewers occupy between the two animations in *The Negotiation*, to the measured difference between the inert frames of an animation displayed in sequence and their transformation into movement in *One Second (Eucalyptus)* and *One Second (She was)*, the narrative space that develops when two sculptures are placed side by side, and the resonant space between these sculptures and the drawings that accompany them. Carré is interested in the various ways in which the exhibition can be “read” sequentially—a concern that reflects her work in comics. Presenting moments of time as fragments, comics allow the reader to progress through a series of panels sequentially, while also allowing the reader to step outside of that temporal progression—to see them

all at once. In other words, comics allow us to follow sequences and narrative progressions, and also to move outside of time and “back up” into space.

Expanding on these ideas, *One Second (Eucalyptus)* and *One Second (She was)* are displayed in two concurrent forms: looped animations on view in the Susman Lounge and, on an adjacent wall, the two sets of twelve drawings that Carré used to generate the animations. The individual frames are hung in sequence and allow the viewer to both experience the drawings as a composite and to compare the singular frames to their moving counterpart—effectively demystifying the process of animation and providing an opportunity to see the work both in space and in time. For Carré, one of the most exciting aspects of this working method is that she is able to focus exclusively on the composition of each of the individual frames as she works on the motion and evolution of the drawings. Yet, as she describes, “there is always an element of surprise when it comes to seeing the final work. No amount of familiarity can dampen this moment—seeing the lines turn into a living, breathing image when animated, or recognizing the object being pulled out of the hot kiln as something entirely different than what went in. There is a real magic to that.”²

Never satisfied with sticking to one style or form of expression, Carré began working with ceramics in November 2012. Excited to learn a new technique and to be able to work more intuitively and directly with her hands, she discovered that working with clay allowed her to follow the temperament and limitations of the material in a way that directly connected to recent animation projects. For example, in pieces like *One Second (Eucalyptus)* and *One Second (She was)*, she released a certain amount of control over the composition of the work and gave in, as it were, to the natural progression of the moving images. As Carré explains:

I improvise with my animation in this exhibition, but generally speaking, with drawing and comics I know what I want to render, and I can translate that intention to my hand and to the page. With ceramics, there is some fighting back from the clay—it wants to cave in, to explode, to crack, to shrink, to harden before I am ready. It has an active say in its final form and, as such, allows for a conversation between my hands and the form.³

***Conversations in Held Poses*, much like Carré’s work in comics, animation, and drawing, explores narrative and the development of character (whether figurative or abstracted) through sequence. Displayed in grouped pairings, the sculptures are seemingly engaged in conversation with one another—as well as with the accompanying works on paper seen throughout the gallery. Carré is interested in the sense of time that is created when two similar objects are placed side by side, and describes the space both between these sculptures and the resonant two-dimensional drawings as being as much a part of the work as the art objects themselves. With *Conversations in Held Poses*,**

² Lilli Carré, personal communication with the author, October 23, 2013.

³ Lilli Carré, personal communication with the author, September 9, 2013.



this interstitial space possesses a kind of life force, perhaps representing the coexistence of before and after; we experience the presence of the pieces in relationship to one another just as we fill up the absence in between them with our own narratives.

Carré's vision, whether expressed through animation, graphic narratives, sculpture, or illustration, reflects a deeply empathetic worldview. Carré's unique power as a storyteller emerges from her restrained depictions of all-too-human moments of extreme tenderness and failure, which are never just sweet or dark, humorous or sad. Mortality is at the center of all of her work—a poignant revelation given Carré's foundation as an animator. While all of the works in this exhibition reflect correspondences, shifting perspectives, and states of being, it is in the act of animation itself—one in which still forms are given a life, endowed with a soul, *de anima*—where we discover the true force of Carré's practice.⁴ The in-between spaces that are threaded through all of the works in this exhibition reveal traces of vitality—gaps that we are left to fill with our own imagination. To return to the title of this essay, taken from Antonin Artaud's treatise "Witchcraft and the Cinema," Carré's artistry is embedded in a deeply cinematic project—one in which we are privy to a few fleeting glimpses of the secret movement and matter of images.⁵

4 *De Anima* (On the Soul) is Aristotle's treatise on the nature of living things; see Tom Gunning, "The Ghost in the Machine: Animated Pictures at the Haunted Hotel of Early Cinema," *Living Pictures* 1, no. 1 (2001): 3–17.
5 Antonin Artaud, "Witchcraft and the Cinema," in *Collected Works of Antonin Artaud*, vol. 3, trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder and Boyars, 1972), 65.

Chicago Works 08

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Lilli Carré was born in 1983 in Los Angeles and currently lives and works in Chicago. She received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2006. Carré was included in the *New Chicago Comics* 2011 exhibition at MCA Chicago, and her work has been featured in local, national, and international exhibitions. Her animated films have been included in the Sundance and Edinburgh International Film Festivals, the Ann Arbor Film Festival, and the Animator Festival in Poznan, Poland, among others, and Carré is the cofounder of Eyeworks Festival of Experimental Animation. Carré's books of comics include *The Lagoon*, *Nine Ways to Disappear*, and the critically acclaimed collection *Heads or Tails*, published by Fantagraphics Books. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Believer Magazine*, *Best American Nonrequired Reading*, and three volumes of *Best American Comics*.

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Cover: Lilli Carré
Conversations in Held Poses,
2013
Glazed ceramic
6 × 6 × 6 in. (15.2 ×
15.2 × 15.2 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and
Western Exhibitions, Chicago

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