

LOVE RULES OK

The work of Megan Calver by Susie David

Before you go in you notice the glass doors have been very thinly white washed as if to slightly obscure the exhibition inside. Shops do this when they're doing something inside that they don't want you to see, but here it is only a faint wash - a veil, which has broken in places into a delicate filigree. You can see through, but you have to really look. You are invited to 'declare your love' by drawing on the glass. There is a heart, names, initials and a few random marks. Megan Calver likes them: "they are a sort of love message too". Everything here is a token, a message, of love.



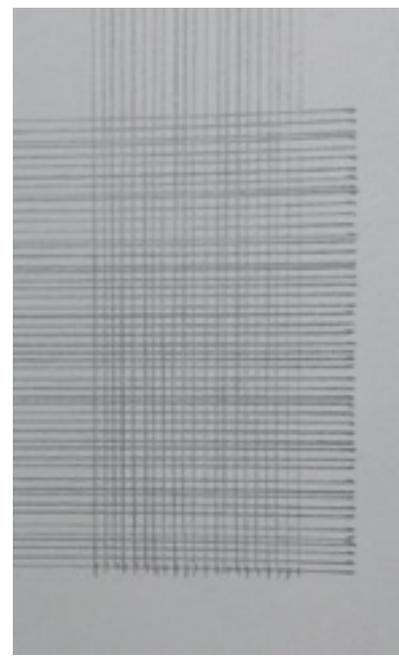
There is a twig that had been dropped by two pigeons whilst being passed from beak to beak, now it is held by the beaks of two clothes pegs as it hovers still in the air, poking out of the wall as if the story continues out of sight on the other side.

Three measuring rules, or rulers, given to her by her grandfather, her father and her daughter initiated these process-based investigations in which Calver began by exploring the rulers' functions and how they demanded to be used - she had to discover their set of 'rules'. She says of this first stage: "I began by wanting to touch every calibration that my grandfather and father would have touched, using repetition and copying to keep an emotional response in check." Her grandfather died some twenty odd years ago. Her father is becoming very frail. Her daughter has moved away for her work.

So the drawing of the lines with a fine mechanical pencil began - each repeated reverentially and tenderly, carried out according to the ruler's increments and capabilities in order to draw lines or grids.

Calver talks about the oddness of using Skype to communicate with her daughter. Her daughter, a writer, had given her a rolling ruler that is designed to help draw lines parallel to one another. She explains: "The conceit is that I'd make these lines for her to write on, but they're too tight. Maybe I'm talking too much and she can't get a word in edgeways?" Perhaps the drawing implies the between-the-lines-writing that could be done, or perhaps the lines speak of closing the distance between them.

On a piece of marker paper using the ruler from her mathematician father, Calver attempted to make a premium piece of graph paper by following the guides. She glances askance at her graph paper: "It's laughing at me". After the first attempt she went to visit her father and she realised she had to do it again: "it was too hard. The line needed to be lighter. The emotion was affecting the weight of the pencil". For in amongst all this repetition, strict line-following, rule abiding and regimented line drawing, there is a softness she is



searching for. She is hoping for something other to show through.

On one sheet of A4 paper a pair of inverted commas have been drawn in very fine repeated pencil lines, so that each curve is slightly shifted from the next and two arcs of crescents result. These have been reversed slightly obliquely on the other side of the paper and they ghost through. The edges of the paper curl up slightly encouraging you to lift the page and see the other side. These are empty inverted commas and Calver suggests they can't find the words, they are potential, they are at a loss for words.



A painting by her grandfather, a carpenter by trade, is perched on top of a small step ladder topped with flesh-pink felt - which makes a subliminal link to Beuys' restorative felt and fat. The felt softens the utilitarian nature of the step ladder and makes it a gentle perch for this precious object. The painting is further protected by being shrouded in tracing paper, which may be lifted to see beneath. The protection may be from any harsh gazes that casually ricochet around an art school (where this exhibition is housed). There are signs that a ruler was used in the painting's making. On a nearby wall there are two pieces of A4 black-edged card upon which seemingly inconsequential parts of the painting, a patch of water say, where the light hits, have been transferred with the most delicate of fragile, shaking lines. This pale knotted tracery dances off-centre on each sheet. They are achingly exquisite. "These are beautiful" says Calver "to stop people in their tracks - to make them look".

Looking at her works is always rewarding. Many are made whilst attempting apparently impossible tasks, and a further performative element involves endurance, in the spirit of Bergson's *durée*, rather than *duress*. She remembers her grandmother in

cafés, and the way she would save her paper serviette, smoothing it out to be re-used later, sometimes offering it to her grand-daughter as a hanky (another love token). In homage Calver set about exploring this gesture by repeatedly crumpling up and smoothing out a single paper serviette over a period of 24 hours. For display, the serviette's three layers have been carefully peeled apart, a form of emotional dissection, and each then draped over its own cut-glass cutlery rest, which animate the scene with motes of light glinting in the facets. All three mounds lie on a plain Ikea trestle table covered neatly with the same pale flesh-pink felt as before. The tissue paper is so worn, so smoothed, ...so loved! at first sight it could be the most delicate lace, it could have been made, or tatted, by her grandmother. Each see-through and delicate ply lies there in its fragile, vulnerable state, exposed to gusts of wind or an over-curious viewer's clumsy touch.



Focussed on simple repetitive tasks arising from specific sets of tools and apparatus given as love tokens, Calver searches for closeness. It became evident to me that each of the many lines in the exhibition is attempting to span the distance between the artist and her loved ones, to calibrate and to celebrate emotion. This strategy is not a *measure* of love but a marking of its increments, through the time and the distance that has accrued between. In a world that seems too hard, too governed by rules, the artist works through these rules in order to arrive at the inverse, softness of emotion. This journey, through the dictates of apparatus and routine, is a form of longing, that hopes to arrive through her love to *their* love, on the other side.



For, in all these works, you can see through and catch glimpses of things behind or on the other side - through the door, the paper, the tracing paper, the serviette. Although all these works are left vulnerable, with no frames or display cases, nevertheless they appear cocooned from the harsh world: by the wash on the windows, the cut-glass rests, the sheets of tracing paper, and the cushioning felt. Calver laments: "There is so much horrific stuff going on in the world".

She moves a thin white carpenter's folding rule from one wall to another, trying several times to prop it between the wall and the slippery floor where small orange adhesive spots have been placed to mark potential places of rest. "Does love rule? I don't know" she sighs wistfully. The spots give just the merest hint of purchase, enough to hold the ruler as it curves like a cupid's bow about to spring.

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Process drawings generated from familial objects

Megan Calver

22 September - 3 October 2014

artspace 101

Roland Levinsky Building, Plymouth University