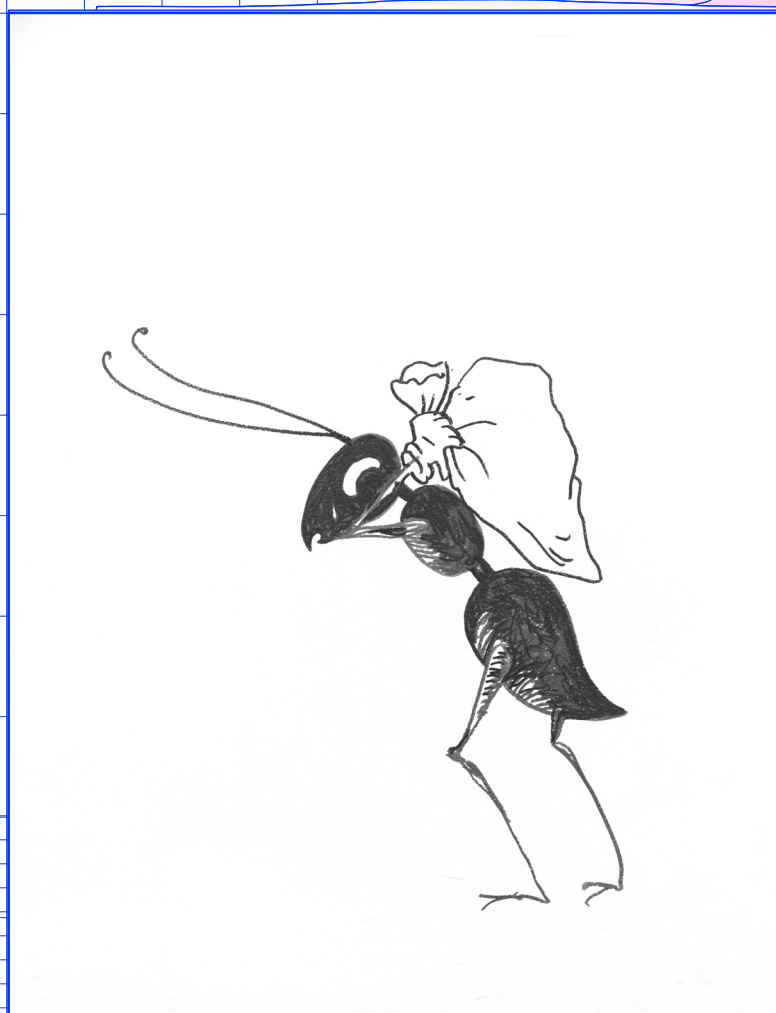


As Line, As Language, As Thread: Ana Jotta at the Wattis

“ Through her art, Jotta defies classification and identification, and makes her own world through the action of drawing. ”

by Evelyn Harra



Ana Jotta, Site-specific installation (2023)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

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If you could draw your own world from scratch what would you draw? A house? A city, animal, or sunset? Would you use colored pencils, pens, markers, watercolor? What is the medium that threads the lines of your world together? Multidisciplinary artist Ana Jotta (b. 1946) explores this autonomy and curiosity in her practice of drawing, as demonstrated in her solo exhibition *Ana Jotta: Never the Less*, at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. Curated by Anthony Huberman and Miguel Wandschneider and organized by Diego Villalobos, the show was on view from September 7 to November 11, 2023. Through her art, Jotta, who lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal, defies classification and identification, and makes her own world through the action of drawing. She explores and expresses herself through drawing, sculpture, painting, photography, and sound. For her, the act of drawing is the act of gathering and making. Jotta is situating and re-situating herself and others through the act of drawing, transforming it into the use of line as thread.

Within this exhibition, Jotta demonstrates an interesting relationship with Greek philosophy and the rejection of societal structures, and creates a space for cynical attitudes. An artist who is interested in animal representations of the self, Jotta



Installation view of *Ana Jotta: Never the Less*
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

chooses specific animals to portray these ideas in her work. This classification and identity is transferred onto archetypes of animals, and the use of animals through her work is visually pronounced. Two animals in particular that were present throughout the exhibition were the dog and the ant. One thread in her work is a contrast and conversation between the two. The dog is a representation of the cynic, as the one who, as Jotta described in a 1998 lecture at the University of Japan, chooses “to growl and snarl so far as to smile not to bite.” The ant is a soldier, representing the all work and no play attitude that works to deal with the hardships of life.

The dog is visually represented in three framed drawings, with one dog per framed piece. The works makes reference to a larger series of Jotta’s entitled *Eu seja cão (I’ll be damned)*, a Portuguese phrase which, despite its idiomatic meaning, literally translates to “I’ll be dog.” These three framed drawings are displayed vertically in a line, possibly in reference to the lines and threads that she draws her practice together with. The dogs are rendered in red and blue ink, in slightly overlapping but otherwise parallel lines of color. The drawing on top, closest to the ceiling, is of a dog looking over its shoulder, possibly at its own tail or off



Installation view of Ana Jotta: *Never the Less*
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

past the end of the paper. The middle dog is mid-sprint, all its legs joining in the middle, about to spring off the ground to continue the momentum. The dog on the bottom seems to have tripped or have thrust itself into a summersault, tumbling through the air, back to the sky, all limbs tucked in.

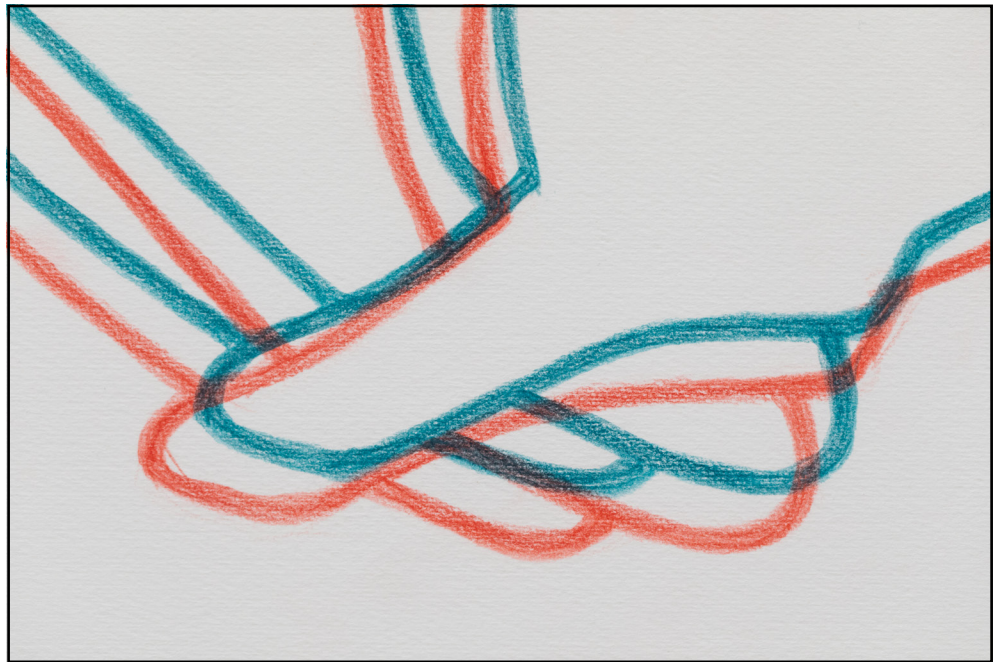
Three sketches of ants are installed on the front facing side of the gallery's reception desk. The ant is leaning forward and has a knapsack slung over its shoulder. In contrast to the dog, the ant is very militant and works within maintenance to survive, with the mindset of building and working hard. The ant is a worker who prepares for the bare necessities of life and doesn't have an interest in engaging in pleasure. The dog, however, is a cynic, to be damned, to be the dog. Both of these animals have human goals or interests; the dog criticizing society, and the ant



Ana Jotta, *Untitled* (1993)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

preparing for the coming cold of the winter. Each animal has a strong sense of personality and traits which humans can identify with.

On October 12th, the Wattis hosted a poetry reading with Norma Cole and Adrian Lürssen in the gallery space, in conjunction with Jotta's exhibition. Jotta, Cole and Lürssen all use line to draw their worlds; Lürssen and Cole use line in the form of words and language, whereas Jotta uses line as a thread within her visual work. These three also all draw their worlds through the depiction

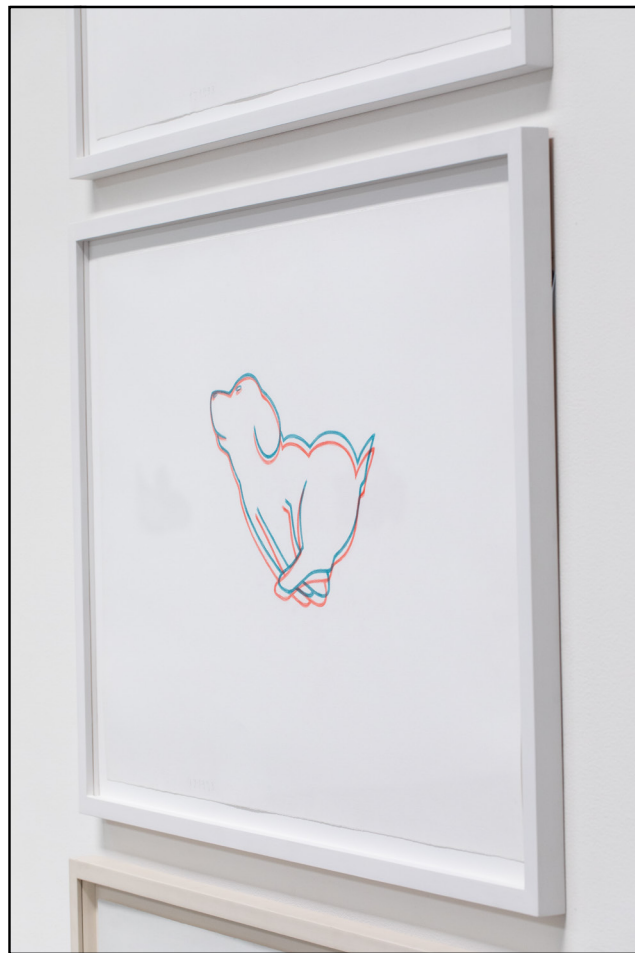


Ana Jotta, *Untitled (detail)* (1993)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

of animals, to convey aspects of their perceptions of reality. Seeing Jotta's dogs and ants on the gallery walls as Cole and Lürssen read their work, established a thread between the three artists.

There were additional lines and connections between the poetry reading and the exhibition space. During the talk Lürssen expressed his joy in collaborating with Cole, so much so that her poetic phrases influenced Lürssen's own writing. Lürssen read from his work *Human is to Wander*, written in 2022. Cole read from her collections entitled *Actualities*, which features visual art by Marina Adams, and *Where Shadows Will: Selected Poems*

1988–2008. The collaboration between Cole and Adams in *Where Shadows Will* creates another thread linking the visual and the poetic. Adams herself is both a painter and poet, contributing yet another crossover of media tying these lines together. Within the poetry reading Cole shared her poem “The Horse Declares,” which speaks to the drive and internal feelings shared among species and articulated verbally through language by humans. Jotta, Cole, and Lürssen’s lines all draw inspiration or connections between themselves and animals, therefore relating animals to people’s emotions or actions. Jotta drew ants as being militant workers, she references the grasshopper as the seeker of pleasure, and portrays the dog as the cultural cynic. In “The Horse Declares,” the horse has a desire and thoughts of returning home. Each of these humanistic archetypes and personification of animals lends a lens into the world that we draw for ourselves, and how we draw ourselves into this ecosystem of drawings, to continue the thread.



Ana Jotta, *Untitled* (1993)
Photo courtesy of Nicholas Lea Bruno

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