



Huma Kabakçı *Confined Objects:
More Than a Documentation*

Huma Kabakçı is a second-generation collector, independent curator, and founding director of Open Space, living and working between London and Istanbul. Open Space is an itinerant, non-for-profit organisation that supports emerging creative practice, promoting dialogue in the arts through a yearly programme of dynamic projects.

Conceivably, drawing may be the most haunting obsession the mind can experience... But is it quite, after all, a question of mind... A few drops of ink, a sheet of paper as material for the accumulation and co-ordination of moments and acts, are all that is required...

– Paul Valéry, *Degas Manet Morisot*¹.



Antonio Riello *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* 2012
blown borosilicate glass and book ashes 39 x 13 x 13 cm

Throughout art history, drawing has been, without a doubt, seen as the most direct, immediate of all art processes - the way in which humankind has found an instinctive tool of representing the world and externalising thoughts and emotions into visual expression. For centuries charcoal, chalk, graphite and paper have been adequate enough tools to launch some of the most profound images in art. Tracing back to our distant ancestors, the earliest cave drawings of those in Chauvet and Lascaux in France, and to how our expression of drawing advanced over time in knowledge, science and technology, shows how the medium has changed the way we live. Institutions like the Drawing Centre and MOMA in New York, Drawing Room and Tate Modern in London have showcased exhibitions pushing the boundaries of drawing and what it can mean. The traditional role of drawing was to make sketches for larger compositions of paintings, sculptures or even for architecture. Because of its relative immediacy, this function for drawing continues today. Despite the fact that painting has been seen as a higher form of art in comparison to drawing, in the contemporary context, both media are seen as equal. Although, painting remains to be the more pertinent and dominant medium in the industry. Drawing acts as a catalyst, a form of language and is used to readily document what an artist sees, remembers, or imagines. In recent years, artists have continually pushed the boundaries of what a drawing can mean and be – radically redefining drawing in an ‘expanded field’ (a term coined by art historian Rosalind Krauss in 1979 referring to sculpture, but which applies equally well to the expansion of drawing practice during this period).

Whilst contemporary artists continue to use traditional tools like pen, pencil or brush, recent works also blur the boundaries between drawing and other mediums such as sculpture, land art and even performance.

During the global pandemic in 2020, with many of us confined to our homes to slow down the spread of COVID-19, many contemporary artists actively began, or went back to drawing, as it was the most immediate and accessible medium available. Not only artists but also schoolchildren, teachers, nurses, journalists and even shopkeepers began to draw as it became more urgent to do so. Hand coloured rainbows adorned windows of homes to support NHS healthcare workers across the UK and globally. Movements such as the Artist Support Pledge (a generous culture and a dynamic economy open to ALL artists and makers anywhere in the world set up by artist Matthew Burrows) enabled income to artists in times of turbulence, and art to collectors at accessible prices². More and more works on paper appeared. Drawing's immediacy, its accessibility to all and its capacity for processing ideas, thoughts and emotions made it a vital tool for navigating uncertain times. It certainly did for Antonio Riello's practice during the lockdown.

Riello is an eclectic, experimental artist, working with mediums such as painting, sculpture, design, photography, installation and video games, whilst exploring the irony of conceptual deception. The artist manipulates and almost mistreats the objects and images he invents. He is committed to exploring the most topical and controversial issues with a controlled and varied degree of ambiguity which is a significant element of his research. Nearly two years on, Danielle Arnaud Gallery presents a selection of works by the Italian artist focusing on an ongoing series of biro drawings started during the lockdown in Italy, but will also include *Ashes to Ashes*, a series of bespoke glass vessels containing the ashes of the artist's beloved books.

Antonio Riello's *Confined Objects* drawings, first commissioned by Open Space for its digital project *Kitchen Takeover* (April 2020), are a very personal and tormented reportage of a kitchen landscape³. As an independent curator and founding director of the organisation, I found it vital to commission contemporary artists to create work or content from their homes exploring food as a medium. At that time, when I came up with initiating the digital project, the notion of an 'Open Space' and what it actually means when we are all in confined spaces really made me question how we can utilise our kitchen from our homes and open it up to a wider audience. For creatives and freelancers, like many of us, the pandemic was a particularly challenging time, with many redundancies, furloughs, postponed or cancelled projects indefinitely without a safety net being provided. Whilst many were adjusting in their permanent or temporary homes, I really tried to think of a way to produce something meaningful. Occurring both on Instagram and via the Open Space website, the project offered a digital space for creatives to share their kitchen secrets with our growing online community, from recipes to drawings, musings or performances. The project didn't act merely as a platform to present recipes, but to explore the domestic kitchen space through issues around sustainability, food production systems, hierarchy, excess and the lack of food (especially in times of panic buying). *Kitchen Takeover* was a social, domestic, somewhat political and experimental space that now continues to expand and formulate into a physical exhibition.

Specifically, with the *Confined Objects* series exhibited at Danielle Arnaud Gallery, Riello started an extensive production of a catalogue around kitchen tools and objects from his home in Italy. What started as modest sketches, all together, became a great 'Visual Dictionary of Quarantine', a sort of late-Modern as well as Enlightenment Encyclopaedia. Up to date, the artist has drawn around 350 tools of which this has become a work in progress: a taxonomic classification of every creature 'living' in the artist's domestic environment. A selection of 27 drawings of these tools on A3 sheets of

paper alongside two larger drawings and smaller 12 x 12 cm drawings will be highlighted at the gallery. As Riello obsessively documented all the objects in his kitchen at such an ambiguous time, the artist turned himself into an 18th century style explorer re-discovering his familiar indoor spaces as if they were untouched, unknown exotic islands. When examined together, these objects almost morph into Medieval tools of torture.

Riello's drawings are both frantic, yet very controlled, displaying a typically surrealist expression of anxiety and erotic drive similar to the renowned Swiss artist Alberto Giacometti. These rigorously flat compositions of the *Confined Objects* echo his sculptural works and installations. The still life drawings of the objects surrounding his kitchen are multifaceted and layered not only in style but also in meaning. The taxonomic classification of almost every 'creature' like object shows Riello's passion for Mark Dion's research and practice where the main idea is to create an Anthropological Museum of culinary ergonomics and cruelty. The drawings are completely made of blue pen (BIC) ink (the same one Alighiero Boetti loved to use). Examining Riello's still life compositions, I immediately think of Giorgio Morandi's pencil drawings, where they become more spectral and unoccupied - forms at their most distilled, platonic ideals of bottles and jugs - employing cross-hatching to achieve ever loser compositions of layered shades of grey to embody the volumes of still life. Similarly, to Morandi, Riello converts ordinary tools into something extraordinary. The use of the bluepoint pen proves that art does not need elaborate materials to express the complexity and the seduction found in these frenetic drawings.

Whilst Riello's solo exhibition highlights his lockdown drawings, in the series *Ashes to Ashes*, the artist ceremonially burns some of his loved and influential books, reducing them to illegible ashes and stores them in their own bespoke glass urn, designed and made by the artist in the same way the Middle Ages holy relics were protected and preserved. Comparing *Confined Objects* to *Ashes to Ashes*, Riello states 'If my gut is in the kitchen, my mind is in the library'. Not knowing the

longevity and the future of the books in his library, each book is scanned by the artist and kept in a hard drive disk before it is burnt. Each urn (made of borosilicate glass) is properly printed with the book name and author, year of first publication and year of destruction, almost like a book cemetery: a respectful funeral celebration of the printed books and libraries⁴. Charles Baudelaire once stated, 'A book is a garden, an orchard, a storehouse, a party, a company by the way, a counsellor, a multitude of counsellors.' What would then be a library of books in one's home? What happens to the afterlife of these books? Do they live on, get disregarded or thrown away? Not knowing the destiny of the books in his library, Riello turns these individual urns into a collection where each one of them is canonised.

Examining the selection of the artworks for the *Confined Objects* exhibition at Danielle Arnaud, one can see that the artist has created his own cabinet of curiosities within his obsessive approach to documenting paraphernalia belonging to his daily life. *Confined Objects* is not only a documentation but also an integral part of Antonio Riello's oeuvre.

Notes:

1. Excerpt from Paul Valéry, *Degas Manet Morisot from Stage of Drawing: Gesture and Act*, 2003, p. 25.
2. Burrows, Mathew. "English." *#Artistsupportpledge*, 15 Dec. 2021, <https://artistsupportpledge.com/english/>.
3. Open Space is an itinerant, non-for-profit organisation that supports emerging creative practice, promoting dialogue in the arts through an annually recurring programme of dynamic projects in unexpected spaces.
4. Borosilicate glass is a type of glass with silica and boron trioxide as the main glass-forming constituents.

Cover: **Antonio Riello** *CONFINED TOOL 87* 2020
blue BIC ink on paper 42 x 29.7cm

Antonio Riello *CONFINED OBJECTS*
22 January - 5 March 2022

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