In Nathalie Alfonso's Line performances, the artist carefully constructs a thick charcoal line, then arduously erases it before an audience. Informed by her own experience cleaning houses, Alfonso exposes labor that is often “invisible,” transforming cleaning into a spectacle. After a final performance in 2019, Alfonso put the work to rest; however, she continues to use line to explore an evolving relationship to labor and craft.

In Anatomy I, a large-scale drawing exposes the innards of a gallery wall. Using a variety of tools, Alfonso identified the location of studs, boards, and other materials. She renders these structural components in 3-D and to scale, offset by opaque black charcoal rectangles that give the illusion of negative space; the result is a wall that appears to be in the final stages of the building process, before the constructed armature is concealed. Alfonso considers the work to be a continuation of her concern with invisible labor and effort to draw attention to it. This time, however, the labor she “exposes” is not her own. The illusion Anatomy I constructs then is two-fold: viewers gain access to the wall’s structural elements that they cannot see, and Alfonso imagines the work of an unnamed laborer she can never know.

In a different, highly affective register, Alfonso uses drawing and line as a means of studying herself and others. While traveling in Guatemala, she produced a series of drawings in which she tracked the movements of weavers. Using both hands, Alfonso synchronized the movements of her pencils to their own. Her lines are erratic and energized, lending the transcription a kinetic vibrancy.

Alfonso grants equal consideration to her own craft. In one of her recent experiments with film, shots toggle between Alfonso drawing a line in ¾ framing and extreme close-ups of her hand performing the motions of drawing. In the former, Alfonso uses a pencil whereas in the latter, she simply mimics the mechanisms of her internal autopilot. The short was intended for an audience but also serves as a self-reflexive object of study for the artist, interested in the specificity of her mark-making, abstracted and set in the third-person.

Lately, Alfonso considers where her preoccupation with line came from. She cites her exposure to her father’s and sister’s practices, who trained in construction and architecture respectively. Growing up, Alfonso observed their supreme attention to line as well as the lack of recognition they received for their creations. This may be one reason Alfonso gravitates towards the white wall—the backbone of art spaces—whose makers often go unknown. In it lies a central contradiction: the capacity of art to inspire close looking and the bounds of this inspired view, another sort of optical illusion.

-May Makki
ANATOMY I

MEDIUM
GRAPHITE AND CHARCOAL

YEAR
2019

SIZE
30' W X 8' H
DIVISION OF ART M.F.A.
QUALIFYING EXHIBITION

MARCH 28 – APRIL 18, 2020

This 2020 M.F.A. thesis exhibition is the culmination of two years of intensive work by M.F.A. candidates in the Division of Art and feature works in a wide-ranging variety of styles and mediums.

POLLOCK GALLERY
SUITE 101
EXPRESSWAY TOWER
6116 N. CENTRAL EXPRESSWAY
DALLAS, TX 75206