

**Catalogue Essay by: Karen Louise Jones**  
**Jane Francis *IN THE THICK OF IT***  
**Slide Room Gallery, Victoria, BC**

The most immediately striking feature of Jane Francis' recent abstract drawings on paper is their dramatically large scale; the two life-sized drawings invite the viewer to fully engage with them. The gestural graphite marks of gently arching and curving lines weave in and out of each other with graceful femininity. Reminiscent of natural forms each drawing is an idiosyncratic representation of nature's offerings; carefully examined, assimilated and translated.

The larger of the two drawings is titled *Close of Day*, whose graphite marks disappear and re-appear and are interwoven with translucent washes of watercolour that is kept to a limited palette of earth tones. The paint is both poured and brushed, allowed to pool in some areas and drips off the bottom edge of the paper, refusing to be restrained. The layered washes of paint combined with areas of raw paper provide the drawing with a sense of lightness and openness; a chance for the drawing and the viewer to breathe.

I have an overwhelming sense of knowing the space Francis has created in this work: I am reminded of looking up through the gently entwined branches of a birch tree in the fall; almost barren of its leaves, but just enough remain to provide a comforting glow in the late day setting sun. My thoughts jump to Helen Frankenthaler's *Mountains and Sea*. Although Frankenthaler's use of thinned oil paints to stain the canvas is counter to Francis' chosen media, it is clear Francis, like Frankenthaler is inspired by nature; not to overtly represent it, but to capture its essence.

In *Conusphilia* Francis does not use paint; instead she allows the dark graphite lines to dominate the paper. I am reminded of a contour drawing, the marks are strong and feel determined; the lines are heavy evidence of the physicality of its' making. The meandering lines weave across the paper creating a sense of following a thought, a memory or a feeling. The drawing is evocative of an outstretched human form engaged in a solo dance; perhaps a reflection of the artist at work.

Francis says her current drawings are a departure from previous work. Nonetheless, she continues to draw on her experience from her graphic design career, her love of nature and light, and the 'in between spaces'. With these drawings she has put away source material, freeing herself to make immediate, intuitive marks; relying on her personal experiences of nature. These are physical drawings; using both hands simultaneously. I imagine an orchestra conductor's performance. These large-scale works are fluid, rhythmic and graceful.