

# Smudge

Karel Klein

A smudge can't exist without an other. Something needs to be smudged. My photograph, my window, my knife blade, my face, my clothing, and of course, my drawing can be smudged. I suppose a smudge can be smudged. But would I notice? What's the difference between two smudges? Is a smudge a form? Can a smudge have a figure? If I see a face in the smudge, is it really there? If I deliberately shape a smudge, is it still a smudge?

I think I made a mistake when I smudged my drawing. But sometimes I hear about people intentionally smudging. Before game seven, Phil Jackson smudged the air of a locker room with burning sage to help players into game faces. I've seen in galleries artists making smudge drawings. When I put on makeup, it often ends with a smudge. My children do nothing but smudge.

Things of nature can also smudge. My dog can smudge my drawing. The rain can smudge my drawing. A rock can fall on my drawing. But would I call the mark left by the rock a smudge? I think I heard of an artist that makes drawings from tree branches marking a page while the branches move in the wind. I suppose the same tree can smudge its drawing after it's done. But would its drawing ever be finished? If it's never finished, when would the smudging begin?

Is a cloud a smudge? Turner rendered clouds by smudging paint. The sky makes clouds by smudging water. What's the difference? If I see a face in the cloud above me, what's difference from seeing a face in the painting of the cloud in front of me? Richter smudged paintings to sense the sublime. If I sense the sublime in the smudges of nature, am I sensing something different from Richter's painting?

Murmurations of starlings look like smudges. At moments, the smudges look like something. When I stare at the coffee grounds after I'm done with my espresso, I see the murmurations of starlings. It's tempting to study tasseography so that I might understand these smudges better. But is there anything to understand? Rorschach was so convinced that these smudges revealed secrets that he formulated a system of smudges. But the secrets were in the looker, not in the smudges. Or so the story goes.

Leonardo suggested starting with a smudge to compose a battle scene. Careful composition would look too static, too stable. The horse with the twisted neck, kicking away terrified from the violence was born in a smudge. Is born the right word? Leonardo saw a horse in the smudge. Rorschach would rather say, "The horse was in his head, not in the smudge. The smudge merely opened the door." But it's more interesting to believe the horse was in the smudge, and Leonardo opened the door to what was in the smudge.

Is all that I see out there nothing but random keys to open the infinite doors to my head? Or is all that I see nothing but infinite doors to open. When I smudged my drawing yesterday, did I make a mistake? I tried not to smudge my drawing. I'm not sure why.