

ETHAN MURROW. FOOL'S GOLD

Adventurers. Visionaries. Inventors. Day-dreamers. And downright madcaps. The protagonists in Ethan Murrow's drawings are reaching for the far side of the moon, only to realize in the end that they can't chew on the massive bite they've taken. Murrow once explained that all of his characters tend to end in failure... but it seems as if they do so with a big smile on their faces, because at least they tried to overcome impossible obstacles on their quest to outgun the unthinkable.

The manifold rewarded artist - son of legendary broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow - creates large-scale, obsessively detailed photorealistic worlds with graphite only, in which the bigger narrative aspect is equally as important as the impressively skillful translation of it. At the moment he's preparing for a group show at Brussels' La Galerie Particuliere that deals with Gabriel Garcia Marquez's book "100 Years of Solitude" in September, as well as on a forthcoming solo exhibition for Siete Gallery in Los Angeles that's scheduled for November, which uses American landscape paintings from the 1800s as a platform to discuss contemporary environmental absurdities and idiotic realities of ecology in the United States. "One component of the show: I am working with an engineer on a device that will make icebergs", explains Murrow, "so, yes, at the moment I'm just working on sensible everyday stuff like that."

Ethan, you work as a writer, you're involved in filmmaking, you're teaching and you obviously draw... would you say you prefer one over the other or are these passions all

strangely connected in your creative universe? Working across many media helps me build and refine ideas all at once. For example, I often stop mid-stream in a drawing project and begin writing a narrative piece that dovetails with imagery on the paper, expanding on elements of a character or examining the subtleties of a landscape or scene. Usually these bits of text are more hare-brained than my drawings, and in the writing I let myself get really weird and follow any tangents and leads that may arise, promoting active brainstorming and diversions from the imagery in the works on paper. These

snippets of writing serve many purposes for me. They may become stand alone text pieces, options for new drawings, beginnings of proposals for new video work or they may linger in a box of ideas entitled "possibly stupid/potentially awesome." A stop and start approach in the studio forces me to constantly question all of my making and thinking.

Your skill set is a mind-blowing one... when did you realize your talent for drawing? And were you always fascinated by this photo-realistic style? I prefer to think of it as stubbornness rather than talent. Drawing is a skill anyone can learn and I happen to be really persistent and unwilling to accept mediocrity within my practice. I once had a professor politely - and appro-



privately - question my skills in drawing and I think I may still be trying to deal with that comment. In my opinion, it's good to have a chip on your shoulder, something that drives you, irks you, beguiles you or stumps you. Drawing is that chip. It is simultaneously simple in its tools and options and infinitely complicated in the multitude of potential outcomes. I am infatuated and infuriated with this duality and as a result I am in the love affair for the long haul.

You once stated that the majority of your protagonists are victims of their own obsessive drive... you on the other hand do insanely detailed large-scale drawings with only graphite and ballpoint pens. Is it safe to say that you're carrying a lot of empathy for your characters?

Yes, indeed. The drive and stubbornness I noted above are useful and intriguing parts of my own methodology but these are also attributes to be wary of. I see parallels between this side of my character and some of the individuals I have often discussed in my work. There are always trade-offs in the pursuit of a grand goal. The Wright Brothers, for example, who defied all and built a flying machine, were barely able to function socially because of their obsessive focus. I admire tenacity and commitment but I also see that it easily slips towards inflexibility and a kind of ego-mania that can bring out the worst in all of us. I am interested in this delicate line between success and failure, hero and villain.

Speaking of which: how long do you actually work on a piece that's 48" x 48"? And would you say that there's still room for "accidents" in your work?

The 48" square pieces take between 3-4 weeks of nonstop work. Of course, it really depends on the nature of the drawing. Trying to finesse a certain expression or transition in an atmosphere can stump me for days and stall the process. Inevitably these moments often form the beginning of change within the drawings as I am forced to reinvent or rethink a section of the piece, which can have a cascading effect upon the rest of the image. There are many accidents in the work and there are countless layers of editing and redacting underneath as I slowly build up grays and alter things. From a distance I like the drawings to gel together into a more refined and focused pictorial space. Up close you can see that the drawings are actually quite loose and they begin to break apart into a random assortment of marks. This looseness allows me to leave room for greater change within the process and also exposes these drawings for what they really are: grand fictions.

I was wondering about the reason why the majority of your drawings are in a square format... that's a rather unusual one, don't you think?

I find the square to be deeply frustrating to compose within and, always eager to chew on something that stumps me, I return to it again and again. I have also used the square format in the past to help relate the work to early photography, a common form of source material.

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