

FORWARD ...from the Director of the Morris Museum

Drawing is perhaps the most immediate and instantaneous manual expression of artistic intent. No matter how simple or complicated, rough or refined a drawing may be, there is always a sense that it directly expresses an artist's inner feelings, thoughts and ideas, more than final polished works. The Morris Museum is delighted to present a wonderful panoply of contemporary (and some historical) drawings in the exhibition: *Timeless: The Art of Drawing*. Organized by the museum's Curator of Exhibitions, Ann Aptaker, sixty-nine artists are represented. In addition to New Jersey, they reflect the museum's neighboring states of New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

It once may have been thought that drawing was dead, at least as assigned in the academies of old. Today, there may be a sense that modern technology has rendered freehand drawing obsolete. As someone with a studio art background and experience, I never witnessed any demise of drawing. And, in fact, it remains central to an artist's way of self-expression. *Timeless*, certainly confirms the primary role drawing plays for art practitioners. The wonderful mix of approaches, materials and concepts gives drawing a new vitality without straying from its fundamental intellectual and emotional freshness.

In considering the history of art, drawing appears to have been where it all started, or at least what survives suggests this. From pre-historic petroglyphs, to early incised decorations on bone, ivory, wood or stone artifacts, to the embellishments of cave walls and other dwellings, drawing attests to the human desire to explain, preserve, admire, and communicate in nonverbal ways. That the practise continues and flourishes is obvious testimony to its value.

THE ACT AND ART OF DRAWING A Curator's View

The proliferation of voices in 21st century art continues to grow, with more artists, more art schools, more art “movements,” more galleries, more and bigger art fairs than ever before creating what some art lovers believe to be a frenzy of clashing visual noise. To succeed in this whirlwind, an artist's work must too often scream for attention; each work a contender in a market-driven game of one-upmanship with every other artist in town.

And yet...

The quieter heartbeat of art's ageless legacy somehow endures. Underneath the latest “movement” and the “current rage,” away from the brouhaha surrounding the newest “art star,” the true artist's need to connect with one's deepest self and human experience thrives.

True, it thrives in the way that it must on this crowded 21st century, with a multiplicity of expressions: from the classical to the audacious, even to the rude. But no matter; what is important here is the survival of the human impulse of mark making, the passion to express one's view of life and its mysteries by the most direct, most intimate method: drawing. Drawing was humanity's earliest visual expression. It remains an enduring obsession and animates the works presented on the Morris Museum's exhibition, *Timeless: The Art of Drawing*.

The richness of expression in these galleries derives from what I believe are drawing's inescapable requirements: skill, vision and courage. Though all forms of art involve acts of courage, expressions of vision, and, traditionally at any rate, at least a modicum of skill, only drawing requires all of these at once. While the various “-isms” of the Modernists, Post-modernists, Conceptualists and so on may be said to have redefined-or, according to some wits, even reduced-much of what is currently accepted as art to a philosophy or an act rather than an expertise, where randomness is sometimes celebrated over cohesive vision, where control of the medium sometimes

takes a back seat to concept alone, the act of drawing, of taking an instrument and guiding it across a surface in a direct and deliberate way, requires patience and skill.

Yet skill alone does not make art. Vision, of course, is the unrestrained force that insists on pursuing art. An artist must not only have something to say, a point of view to share, and a willingness-indeed, a need-to share it, an artist must also be able to translate that vision into a two-or three-dimensional reality.

Yet vision alone, without skill, is an empty vessel, a mere conceit. Only through skill of execution can a vision be communicated to an audience. But so what? Not every vision is profound, or even interesting. A timid, trite vision, no matter how skillfully executed, has no claim to art.

So what, then, elevates a vision, even one skillfully communicated, to art? Courage; a do-or-die need for the artist to be exhilarated by the *risk* of a vision, to welcome the unsuspected and possibly unwanted identities that live inside that vision, and to be willing to push past the skills already mastered and “speak” through newly or barely comprehended properties of line, shape, tone, color, texture and volume.

It is this marriage of skill, vision and courage that allows a work to embody the sublime, and thus become art. Drawing, perhaps more than any other medium, embodies this marriage. How could it not? The medium itself is so deceptively simple: unlike painting, it requires no set-up of pigments and solvents, palettes and brushes; unlike sculpture, it requires no armature, no chisels, no malleable or heavy materials or variety of hardware; unlike contemporary film, video or digital electronic media, it requires no external energy source, no tangle of wires or jumble of recording equipment. Unlike performance art, it requires no special space or site. Drawing, by contrast, is immediate, intimate, accessible to anyone with a pencil, a pen, a stump of chalk. Drawing, or rather, the art of drawing, requires only that which is sublime: courage, vision and skill.

The contemporary art of drawing is thriving in the Morris Museum's "neighborhood" of New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Delaware. What was originally envisioned as an intimate survey of activity in the region grew into the large exhibition you see here as it became clear that there is quite a bit of talent in our neighborhood working in a variety of voices. As submissions came in, and work was seen in galleries and at studios, the definition of "drawing" itself needed expanding. Artists are taking chances with non-traditional media, or using materials from other disciplines. But all here embody the fundamental, timeless act of drawing. Thus, there are drawings in the classical traditions of portraiture and figure studies; there are realist drawings; abstract drawings; drawings that employ the full spectrum of shade, tone and color, others that find finality in minimal use of line; there are drawings rendered in almost childlike simplicity, but to devastating effect; drawings of emotional, sexual or gender ambiguity; drawings of deep tenderness, of sadness, of humor and joy.

Human experience in all its moods is expressed here, which is what an exhibition of art is supposed to do, what museums are supposed to do. Here at the Morris Museum, we are pleased to present this episode of the human adventure, an adventure that is timeless.

Ann Aptaker
Curator of Exhibitions, Morris Museum
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Ms. Aptaker wishes to thank New York University graduate student Anne Ricculi, Summer 2008 Curatorial Intern, for her invaluable assistance in organizing the *Timeless: The Art of Drawing* exhibition.



Robert Brinker

Fox Gloves, 2006

Cut Paper, graphite, Mylar, 50 x 38 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Sara Tecchia Roma New York

I think of timeless as being continuous, without beginning or end and without interruption. My drawings are a reflection of these aspects. I record lines and shapes from 50's coloring books, antique Chinese paper cuts, Arabic calligraphy, and contemporary adult graphic novels, all of which exist in their own history and place. The lines in my drawings have a beginning and an end, physically, but as I draw them out and weave them together, there is no true starting or ending point, just a mass of lines arranged into an organic abstraction. In the end, it is one continuous line that works to each edge of the paper.