

# Art City: 'Drawing' still a powerful medium

Rafael Francisco Salas, Special to the Journal Sentinel August 5, 2016

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(Photo: Dean Jensen Gallery)

Dean Jensen considers drawing an art of connoisseurship. Collectors often feel that artists are most revealed in their drawings, where sensitivities to pressure, breadth and speed can create lines that leap in transcendent arabesque or dig deeply like a plow into wet clay. Jensen's summer survey of drawings is broad, and if a bit glossed over in curation, still a powerful show of hands testifying to this most essential art.

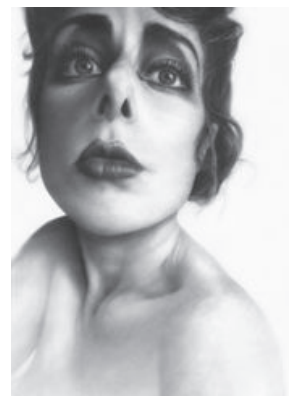
Drawing is the medium at the base of all art, from painting to sculpture to digital rendering. Our first artistic expression was to draw. The charcoal from a fire was used to make a mark and our journey into visual art began. In "Drawing, Broadly Speaking," Jensen has corralled artists who create photorealistic portraiture, handwritten novels and ritualistic drawings of the cosmos.

Scott Espeseth's works on paper seem to be a testament to the traditional until the viewer sees that they are rendered in ballpoint pen. A tool usually reserved for raunchy cartoons in the margins of notebooks, Espeseth uses his pens to create off-of-normal spaces and psychologically heightened scenes. A red pen describes the banal interior of a house charged with quiet menace. Similarly, a boy drawn in blue pen tucks his head into the crook of his elbow as if he is weeping or hiding. He is surreally surrounded by miniature trees and shrubbery. Espeseth displays remarkable craftsmanship and elicits deep moods and atmosphere with clinical cross-hatching and elegant edges. Objects soften and fade as they move into the background air.

Melissa Cooke creates photorealistic self-portraits in powdered graphite. Like the early paintings of Chuck Close or Gerhard Richter, they acknowledge the use of photographic sources. As the viewer moves in close they must tackle the tensions between a laborious handmade object vs. one made with mechanical reproduction. This tension between the photograph and the world at large becomes Cooke's subject matter as well. Her larger than life drawing "Still Silent (Self-Portrait as 'It Girl')" depicts Cooke as a rouged and puckered-lipped ingénue of silent film. The title implicates lingering beauty myths created during the advent of photography and film. The drawing's haunting beauty and romantic protagonist seduces and condemns simultaneously.

The rituals of drawing and writing are elemental to the interactive, ephemeral works of Nirmal Raja. "Tongue of the Hand" consists of a bed of dried rice, elevated to waist height. A projection above displays letters in different languages onto the granular surface. The letters begin to spell the titular phrase and viewers are invited to trace the letters into the rice. The tactile artwork allows the viewer to experience the act of drawing and to witness a line becoming language. The tongue of the hand, indeed.

Nicholas Frank also examines the connection between writing and drawing. He has framed the hand-written first page of a novel titled "Notes of the Reverend." The page describes the "tendency to want to know all the mysteries." From this, other artists were asked to riff on this first page with their own page of text, each framed separately on the wall. While I was beguiled by the various papers and writing styles, I was confused whether to read the work as a drawing, which I admired, or a novelistic version of the Exquisite Corpse, which left me feeling the work was unresolved.



(Photo: Dean Jensen Gallery)

Other works in the show include the dreamy pencil drawings of Jim Shaw and whimsical representations of traffic jams and ladies on bicycles by Seth Albertson. Though the spectrum of approaches in this exhibit is broad in a good way, Jensen might have done well to consider the medium of drawing and its implications in a supporting statement or discussion. Strangely, drawing remains an underappreciated medium. Like jazz, it can be considered elite, an artist's art, or simply as a preparatory tool. A reflection of this topic might have contributed some gravity to this otherwise wonderful survey.

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