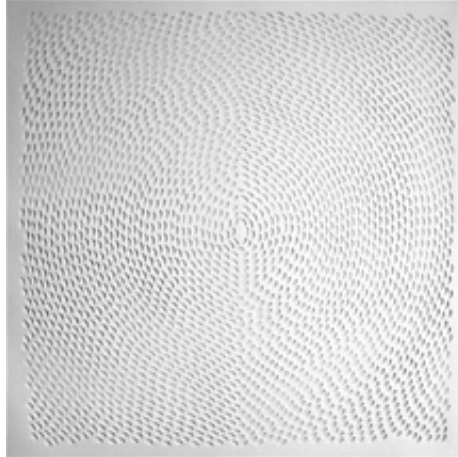


Lucid Dreaming

Drawn Together

by [Beth E. Wilson](#), January 25, 2008



Untitled by Jaq Belcher Tradak

Drawing has traditionally served as a jumping-off point for what was to be the “real” work, the fully realized/finished painting or sculpture that succeeded its sketchy preliminary rendition. In the hands of a master draftsman such as Ingres in the 19th century, drawings could be drop-dead gorgeous, minutely detailed works in their own right, although always still playing second fiddle to classically finished oil painting.

But beginning with the Impressionists, the old academic worldview began to crack, and the painted sketch began to stand on its own as an autonomous work of art. By the early 20th century, drawing (and its scissor-sister, collage) made a strong bid for significance—understanding early Cubism would be impossible without all those analytic pasted newsprint-and-charcoal experiments by Braque and Picasso.

In more recent years, in the wake of postmodernism’s Cuisinart of culture (throw in one part high art, one part mass culture, and hit “pulse”), the old guard modernist distinctions between (and insistence on) specific media have given way to what the theorist Rosalind Krauss has called the “post-medium condition.” A great deal of contemporary art practice has become fluid, transient, and organized around performance or social engagement with the viewer, by whatever means necessary—sculpture, painting, video, creating your own chocolate factory, you name it.

In the midst of this free-for-all, drawing has emerged, with a certain irony, as the preeminent medium of nonmedium-specific art. Perhaps because its uses have historically been so elastic, it has found ways to stretch out and embrace possibilities that something as stringently codified as painting has had a harder time doing. Perhaps it’s because in this current moment of flux, of feeling inbetween (historically, artistically, you name it), the tentative associations of the medium have a special resonance.

Against this backdrop appears the current show at Garrison Art Center, “Drawing Revealed,” curated by

Susan English and Jaanika Peerna. (Especially refreshing in this context is the fact that neither of these artists has included her own work in the exhibition—a frequent, if dicey, potentially conflict-laden practice of late.) The artists included in the show memorably chart the enormous territory embraced now by the term “drawing.”

Painter Laura Battle has created a significant body of work in graphite on gray paper, networks of geometrically generated lines that seem to pulse with a delicate energy impossible to capture in reproduction. This work is an important adjunct to her painting practice, yet provides distinctly different opportunities for her to pursue—these are not preparatory sketches in any traditional sense, but freestanding, independent (and gorgeous) works in their own right.



Kingston Reformation Reformation Act, by Simon Draper

Charlotte Schulz takes the concept of the finished drawing even further—once a painter, she’s now all but abandoned that medium in favor of creating obsessively detailed, dreamlike architectural spaces in charcoal. The details of these locations are at once very specific, yet at crucial junctures a bit blurred, or indistinct, and emptied of human presence, which allows the viewer to slip him/herself into the scene, as though taking on the dream space of someone else’s unconscious, to uncanny effect.

At the other end of the scale from Schulz is Thomas Huber, a painter who documents his working process here in a wall installation of sketches, notations, doodles and scraps, ultimately building toward the idea of his abstracted paintings, which are built through layering and collage. Here drawing serves as staging ground for work in another medium, although the emphasis on process, and the concept of presenting that process as an installation provide the contemporary twist. Jeessoo Lee, a recent SUNY New Paltz graduate (and winner of the prestigious Thayer Fellowship) also shows drawings intended as preparatory work for her paintings—here she uses thread and tiny strips of paper to create what are actually small maquettes for her ambitious, sculptural paintings. (Her MFA thesis show consisted of a gigantic, multipart collage/painting that devoured the enormous back wall of the Dorsky Museum’s Chandler space.)

The very concept of drawing is interrogated by other artists in the show—rather than employ “normal”

means such as pencil or charcoal to make lines on paper, Jaq Belcher cuts repeated forms into white paper, prying the edges up to create elegant formal patterns of light and shadow. Line is transposed into the concept of the cut, a brilliant fusion of drawing and collage. Nancy Bauch takes a different direction altogether. A ceramicist, she collects and intricately arranges found objects on a table in her workshop, something she considers to be her “sketchbook.” She describes her process—predicated on her admitted inability to draw in the traditional sense—in a documentary video prepared by the curators, which presents the artists in their studios, speaking directly to their varying approaches and aesthetic philosophies. The video is a great accompaniment to the show, and ought to go far in explaining to the public what otherwise might seem a bit perplexing in this unconventional exhibition.

While Susan English’s work is not included in the Garrison show that she curated, it does make an appearance in Beacon this month, where gallerist Carl Van Brunt has managed to conjure up another intriguingly curated group show, which in its own way is as unconventional as the Garrison drawing exhibition. “Little Big Things” successfully manages to balance Buddhist consciousness with market practicality, along the way presenting a number of critically interesting artists. The press release for the show begins by contrasting the physical size of Richard Serra’s Dia sculptures with the vastness of the universe on a cosmic scale—they really are but “specks of dust on a speck of dust in a far corner of our galaxy”—and draws attention (or should I say “mindfulness”?) to the importance and scale of ideas in consciousness.

In keeping with this overarching concept, the show presents small works by a range of artists—from the immaculate, dreamy landscapes of Colin Barclay to the crudely executed, neoprimitive, film-referencing, cartoonish paintings of Scott Daniel Ellison.

One of my sentimental favorites here has to be Simon Draper’s installation, *Kingston Reclamation Reformation Act*, which consists of the door/shutter panels from his shed installation in the 2007 Kingston Sculpture Biennial (which I curated). Draper continues to extend his recycling aesthetic by turning previous works of art into new ones, reclaiming the past and imaginatively and pragmatically using it to question the inviolability—and subliminal wastefulness—of traditional cycles of artistic production and consumption. Now, there’s a little big idea I can fully endorse.