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Drawing in the Present Tense

Roger Malbert and Claire Gilman

A richly illustrated, up-to-the-minute overview of new approaches in drawing, set in the context of recent developments of other forms of contemporary art.

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Key Sales Points

- Showcases a diverse selection of recent drawings by 75 of the most exciting contemporary artists from across the globe, many of whom make use of nontraditional materials.
- Identifies emerging talents as well as presenting the work of well-established artists.
- Theoretically innovative, suggesting new ways of conceptualizing drawing in terms of gesture and performance, for example, as well as drawing in the digital age. Written by two prominent curators in the field, this is a highly contemporary and authoritative overview.
- Enables the reader to encounter afresh this most democratic form of visual expression that has found renewed relevance in the era of Covid and global crisis.

Provisional



DRAWING IN THE PRESENT TENSE

CLAIRE GILMAN + ROGER MALBERT

With artist texts by Roger Malbert





+

introduction CLAIRE GILMAN + ROGER MALBERT

Drawing is a fundamental, universal act that lies at the core of the representational arts. It serves different purposes, chief among them being to record or depict the visible world, to visualize the invisible and imaginary, to sketch out ideas or think through issues that are in gestation or remain unresolved. But drawing is also a distinct artistic tradition, one often associated with a particular intimacy between the artist and their materials. Of course, much contemporary art challenges this notion, giving rise to a central tension between the personal and intimate, and the mediated and detached.

Indeed, in being both present and immediate, drawing literally manifests the passage of time: in the form of a line extending from one point to another, and in the traces it bears of its own process of construction. In this lies its power and its elusivity. For drawing is always incomplete. If, simply put, painting aims to establish an all-over compositional space, drawing looks outwards, gesturing away from and beyond itself.

Drawing in the Present Tense explores the vitality of contemporary drawing by looking at its diversity across seventy-five artists from around the world, all of whom hold drawing as a central part of their practice. Our aim is not to produce an all-inclusive survey of drawing in all its aspects, but rather an anthology showing the originality, urgency and imaginative power to be found in drawing today. In recognition of the expansive nature of the medium, our approach has been open-ended and exploratory, seeking not to define what drawing is, but rather to show how it acts and functions, and to demonstrate its particular and sustained relevance.

Drawing is necessary now, more than ever. We exist in a moment of fear and uncertainty, with the COVID-19 pandemic still defining life well beyond the initial lockdowns, with climate change wreaking its devastating effects globally, with police brutality an ever-present reality and political and racial violence and repression threatening basic human rights around the world. Meanwhile, digital technology is transforming social relations and increasingly invading personal space. In this environment, drawing's intimacy offers a potent form of connection and fulfillment. Drawing is flexible and adaptable. It brings us close, literally, through its intimate scale and through the physical sense of touch. Malleability, precariousness, fragility,

← JENNIFER PACKER
Title, 2020
Ink and mixed media on paper
000 x 000 cm



1

repetition + rehearsal CLAIRE GILMAN

CAMILLE HENROT / CECILY BROWN / TSCHABALALA SELF / WAQAS KHAN
EDDIE MARTINEZ / RACHEL HARRISON / CAROLINE KRZYECKI

Drawing, as a medium, does not immediately evoke the idea of repetition. That distinction is reserved for printmaking, photography and film or video, disciplines that are dependant on mechanical reproduction and therefore engage repetition and iteration at their core. As Walter Benjamin articulated in his landmark essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', technological innovation prompted the demise of the artwork's unique essence – what he called 'aura' – as works became accessible by being brought close through reproduction.¹ Drawing, by contrast, would seem to be resistant to this kind of de-authoring, reliant as it presumably is on the unique, personal impression. To put pencil to paper is to produce an indexical sign that registers as having taken place here and now, once and for all. What, then, to make of the penchant for repetition in the work of steadfast drawers like Cecily Brown, Rachel Harrison, Camille Henrot, Waqas Kahn, Caroline Kryzecki, Eddie Martinez and Tschabalala Self, the artists who comprise this chapter? What to make of their tendency to do and redo and redo again, with no claim to resolution?

To grasp what these artists are about, it is necessary to understand repetition as a third term that exists somewhere between the auratic and essential 'original', and the idea of the copy. For the philosopher Gilles

Deleuze, to repeat is not to create an exact copy or to undo singularity in favor of equivalence. Rather, in opposition to 'generality', which 'expresses a point of view according to which one term may be exchanged or substituted for another', 'repetition as a conduct and as a point of view concerns non-exchangeable and non-substitutable singularities.' Deleuze continues: 'To repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent.' In other words, rather than iterating an identical self or version, repetition revisits with the understanding that this redoing is predicated on the fallacy that there is any such thing as a perfect model or authorial rendition. Understood in this sense, repetition is a 'transgression'. It introduces 'disequilibrium' – following 'an element of one instance with another element of a following instance' – in a process that is predicated on movement and change.²

It is precisely in this space of irresolution and anti-stasis that drawing operates. This is true of the medium's age-old status as a tool with which to work out ideas, often across multiple pages. But it is also true of the very nature of the drawn gesture, which in its open-endedness rebukes painting's all-over compositionality. As David Rosand observes in his 2002 essay 'Drawing Acts', 'Drawing will always carry the traces of its surface construction...the

← CAMILLE HENROT
Out for a Walk, 2020
Watercolour on paper
55.9 × 76.2 cm (22 × 30 in.)

TSCHABALALA SELF

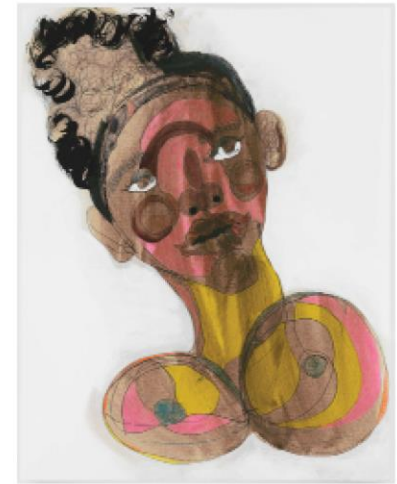
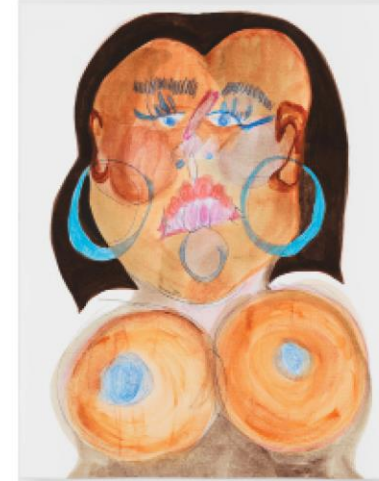
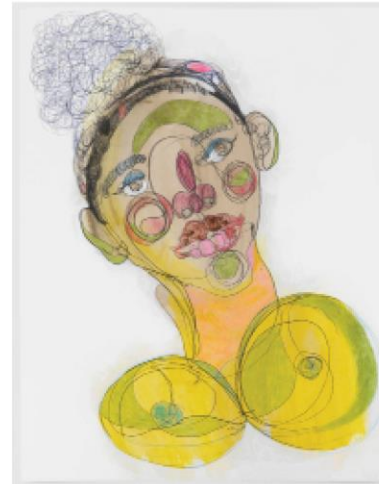
Born and lives in the US

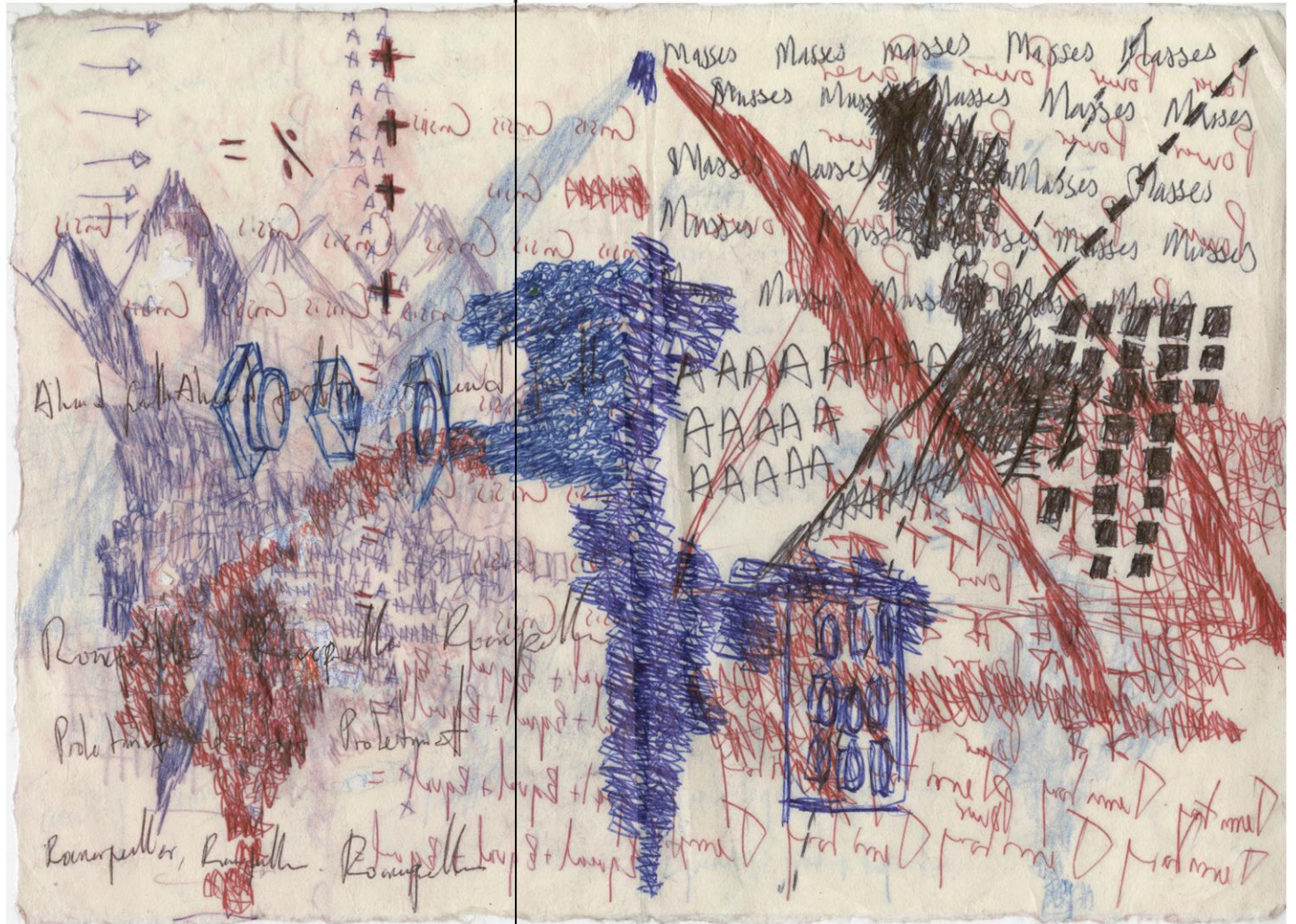
Tschabalala Self's subject is the iconography of the Black female body in contemporary culture, but isolated from historical and environmental references, floating free on the canvas – breasts, hips and buttocks flaunted joyously, over-emphasized, sexualized, celebrated. 'I believe in cultivating positivity and optimism in my work', she says, remarking elsewhere that 'the disgusting and perverse violence projected onto the Black body in Western society is an abomination'. If the pale, slimline, adolescent look that the mainstream fashion industry promotes as the paradigm of feminine beauty could be taken as a reproach if not an insult to all women of other shapes and sizes, how much more so to the Black women whose bodies are often viewed as a foil to eurocentric standards?

Self's paintings are composed of scraps of cut fabric and paper, sequins, glitter, acrylic, gouache and oil paints and coloured pencil drawing. All of the collaged elements are sewn onto the canvas. Drawing is the starting point and remains an element in some of the paintings, especially the faces. She describes her characters as avatars, 'my vehicles for self-realization'. The characters in these coloured pencil and watercolour portraits are similar, looking with an air of self-assurance straight at the viewer, wholly on their own terms.



Black Face with Cute All Brown, 2020
Black Face with Yellow Breasts, 2020
Black Face with Sweet Pink, 2020
Black Face with Streaked Wig (red and black), 2020
Black Face with Brown Bob, 2020
Black Face Yellow with Black Bob, 2020
Coloured pencil, acrylic paint, gouache, charcoal,
graphite on archival inkjet print
Each 91.5 x 71 cm (36 x 28 in.)







80 abstracting the figure, figuring abstraction



GPTM3, 2020
GPTM4, 2020
Acrylic and ink on paper
Each 76.2 x 57.2 cm (30 x 22 1/2 in.)





ANNA PARK

Born in South Korea and lives in the US



In her adherence to the single medium of charcoal, which she calls her 'bread and butter', Anna Park has progressed rapidly from intimate, meticulously rendered figure drawings and interiors in 2017, through wild, orgiastic party scenes with grotesque distortion of bodies and faces, to near total abstraction. Park's recent, densely packed images retain vestiges of caricature, but these are swallowed up almost entirely in the smear of action, fluttering and caught as in a 'dynamic hieroglyph' by the Futurist painter Severini, or Joseph Stella's *Mardi Gras on Coney Island*.

Her monochromatic lens used to defer to old black and white movies, classically composed of light and shadow, in

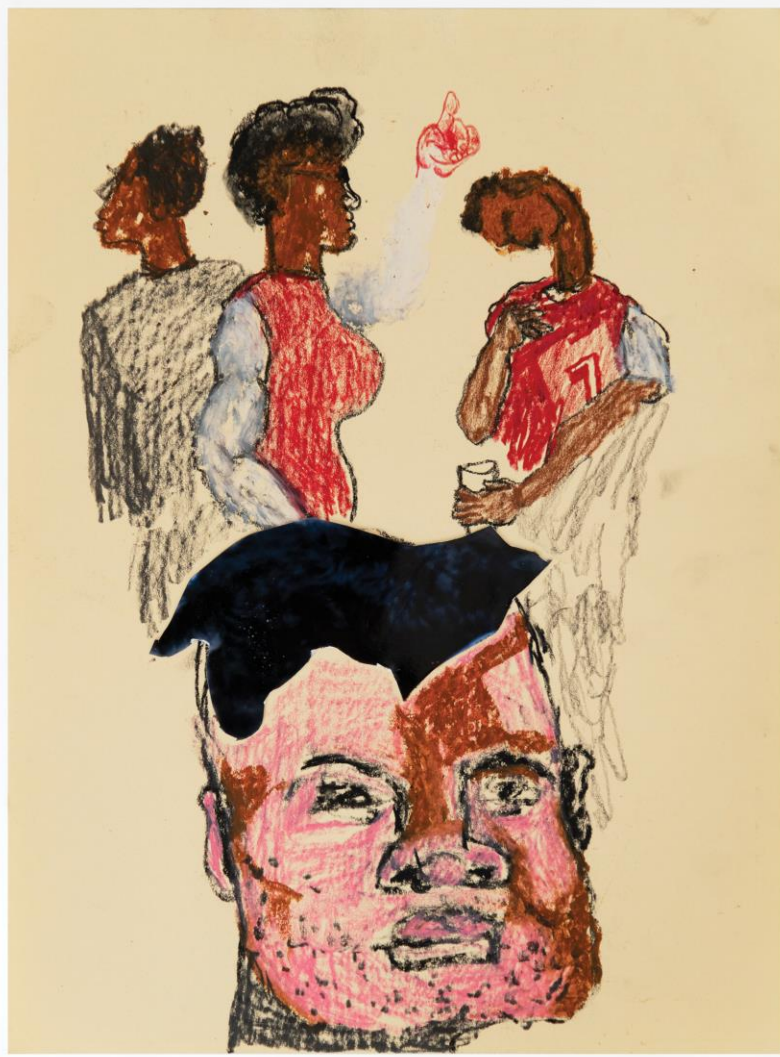
crowded social realist scenes with a critical edge. The element of satirical exaggeration grew stronger, to a comic-book extent – the confusion of tangled drunken revellers is only held in check by the artist's assiduous command of her medium's power to render pictorial space. The leering faces and frenzied gestures express the madness of the moment when everyone is out of their heads; the claustrophobia of these noisy, congested interiors is palpable. One can almost forget the painstaking sobriety of their means of depiction, in nothing but dry, black dust.

← Pass Me Another, 2020

Charcoal on paper mounted on panel
121.9 × 152.4 cm (48 × 60 in.)

Mixed Signals, 2020

Charcoal on paper mounted on panel
152.4 × 203.2 cm (60 × 80 in.)



← **Untitled, 2019**
Coloured pencil, graphite and oil pastel and
collage on archival tagboard paper
30.5 × 22.9 cm (12 × 9 in.)

Untitled, 2019
Coloured pencil, graphite and oil pastel on
archival tagboard paper
30.5 × 22.9 cm (12 × 9 in.)

TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA

Born in Nigeria and lives in the US



Toyin Ojih Odutola's experiments with combinations of drawing materials have given rise to unique, stylized portrayals of Black people, their skin tone rendered symbolically rather than naturalistically. Drawing in black ballpoint pen on a black ground, she realized that the ink shone on the surface with a copper hue; the darkest became the lightest. Ojih Odutola is a storyteller, composing series based on fictional narratives. One such tale is of two aristocratic Nigerian families living in prosperity and ease, in a world where Nigeria had never been colonized. 'Why not imagine an alternative reality?', asks the artist.

Training for Compatibility, 2019-20

Paste and Charcoal on linen over Dibond panel
Diptych, each panel 213.4 x 127 cm (84 x 50 in.)

A Countervailing Theory is her most ambitious, complex project to date, a sequence of forty large monochrome drawings of an imaginary prehistoric civilization in Nigeria, ruled by warrior women who are served by male humanoids. Sex or emotional interaction between the two strata is strictly forbidden. The story tells of a couple who break the taboo. The drawings are made with charcoal, white chalk and pastel on gessoed linen and black board, and the effect is an uncanny inversion of the conventional techniques of graphic illustration. 'I wanted to create a work of art that visually stood apart from occidental picture-making, that felt very "other"', she has said.

To Be Chosen and Not Known, 2019-20 →

Charcoal, pastel and chalk
on linen over Dibond panel
213.4 x 127 cm (84 x 50 in.)



ZOYA CHERKASSKY-NNADI

Born in Ukraine and lives in Israel



Zoya Cherkassky-Nnadi grew up in Ukraine until she was fourteen; in 1991, the year of the collapse of the Soviet Union, her family emigrated to Israel. There, she continued her art education and developed her singular style of figurative painting, inspired variously by social realism and humorous and satirical illustration. Following a few years in Berlin in her early thirties, she returned to Tel Aviv to co-found a collective with four fellow young women painters who had also grown up in the USSR. They called themselves the New Barbizon group, dedicated like their

original model to painting outdoors from direct observation – but with everyday life as the subject, rather than nature. As a Jew in the Soviet Union and a Russian-speaking immigrant, married to a Nigerian, in Israel, Cherkassky-Nnadi has an outsider's perspective on both societies – and an anthropological eye for the mundane but telling detail. She is best known for her series *Soviet Childhood*, based on her recollections of family life in Kyiv, a confined environment that she depicts with evident affection and nostalgia as well as humour.

We are the Red Cavalry, 2015
Markers on paper
8.5 x 19.5 cm (3 3/8 x 7 3/4 in.)

TOP
She forgot to wear her skirt!, 2016 →
Markers on paper
18 x 30 cm (7 1/8 x 11 7/8 in.)

BOTTOM
The long recess, 2016 →
Markers and watercolour on paper
16.5 x 30 cm (6 1/2 x 11 7/8 in.)



RASHID JOHNSON

Born and lives in the US

Since Rashid Johnson's initial work in photography in the early 2000s, his multidisciplinary practice has extended to sculptural installation, painting, collage, ceramic tile mosaics and cinema (in 2019, he directed an award-winning adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*). His conceptual agility and boldly unorthodox way with materials give his work a particular energy and gravitas. Tropical plants, shea butter and a viscous paint-like medium composed of black soap and wax are among his favourite ingredients. Johnson has plenty to say, often drawing on his personal biography as well as a strong historical consciousness and wide reading. Escapism and anxiety are recurrent themes, the latter being explored in the series of drawings he undertook for an exhibition at the Drawing Center in 2015. The first *Anxious Men* series consists of faces scratched with a sharp tool into black soap and wax on tiles, followed by further versions on paper and canvas. They have the raw urgency of graffiti carved into walls in extremis. Anxiety is a disabling emotion, mostly experienced alone. The coronavirus pandemic has made it a near-universal condition, and in response Johnson created a new version of his anxious men in an alarming red, a special emergency colour, which he devised for the purpose with his favourite paint manufacturer in New York.

Untitled Anxious Drawing, 2018
Oil on cotton rag
152.4 x 213.4 cm (60 x 84 in.)

