

2014 Faculty Research and Creative Work Grant Application

Department of Art

Panrubble Assimilation: Visual representations of casually and formally linked entities

Scholarly Significance:

I am interested in the kind of marks that can be created by the physical act of drawing. Gestural marks can possess a great deal of authenticity because they give viewers glimpses into the precise moments that the marks were made. When assessing my own drawings, I generally appreciate the marks that are not overworked. I often leave a handful of “unedited” marks in my work because of their imperfection. Visual art is sometimes compared to written language, and the elements in my drawings have descriptive abilities. Often my marks can point the viewer to intended (or later realized) content and indicate emotional dimensions (e.g. timid marks versus bold ones). A detail of one of my drawings is below. The frenzied marks highlighted in this detail are meant to indicate turmoil in a particular geographic region:



The Absurdity of Being Governed by an Island (inspired by Thomas Payne) detail, graphite, charcoal, ink and pastel on paper, 2013, 50"h x 38"w

I find that drawing techniques often provide elegant solutions that direct the viewer to the essence of meaning. If we think about drawing in its raw form it has very little to hide behind. Traditional drawing requires rather few materials (e.g. paper, graphite, charcoal). In the hands of experienced draftspeople, humble materials can be manipulated to create marks that would be difficult to replicate in any other media. While we can erase our mistakes, drawing is a discipline that always risks being overworked.

In the art world, drawing is currently undergoing some exciting changes and a number of innovations have gained momentum. Perhaps this is why there has been considerable interest during the last decade in artworks that employ

techniques and ideas from drawing . Michael Rooks (the director of the High Museum in Atlanta, GA) has recently committed significant resources to the collection of drawings for the museum's permanent collection.

Rooks said the next round of collecting will emphasize drawing for reasons beyond price point. "I think it's one aspect of collecting that's really exciting no matter where you are," he said. "Because drawings are so personal, you really start to get to know the artist and get inside their head and to understand where they're coming from, whether it's craft-based or idea-based. I love being able to ... literally introduce them to our audience." (Pousner, 2014)

The trend to collect and exhibit drawing-based artworks is not unique to the High Museum.

In 2013, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (in Aldrich, CT) held a six exhibition series entitled "Extreme Drawing". These exhibitions tested the boundaries of what drawing is and what directions this art form might take in the future. "Extreme Drawing" explored materials in an interesting way. One of the exhibitions in the series featured artwork created using ballpoint pen, a material that is generally neither pH neutral or archival. Using non-precious materials (like ball-point pen) for a historically traditional activity (like drawing) undoubtedly alters many of our current notions about fine art conservation. Drawing has, at times, flirted with an ephemeral existence but never to the extent that contemporary drawing does.

"Ballpoint Pen Drawing Since 1950," features work by nearly a dozen artists created with the humble ballpoint pen, which was designed as a mass-produced replacement for the fountain pen. Here you have ballpoint masters like Il Lee, whose abstract *BL-120* (2011) uses the pen's minute hatching capabilities, as well as the shininess of its ink, to full effect; or Bill Adams, whose neo-Surrealist drawings center on furry Cyclops-cube-forms. The show also includes an artist associated with Surrealism itself: Alberto Giacometti, who started drawing with ballpoint pens in the early 1950s, and is represented by his *Portrait of Diego* done on the cover of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, a French literary journal, in about 1963. (Schwendener, 2013)

By linking the age-old practice of drawing to modern day consumerism and throw away culture, drawing asserts itself into a discourse beyond preparation/representation into social commentary. Drawing today conjures multi-layered conversations about content. These content-heavy discussions were once only relegated to disciplines like painting and sculpture. There is no doubt about it, contemporary drawing stands on its own in the art world today.

The Aldrich is not the only notable contemporary art venue that has taken on the topic of contemporary drawing. The John Michael Kohler Arts Center held "The Drawing Season" in 2012, a series of six exhibits devoted to the practice of drawing. One of the exhibits was called "The Line Unleashed" in which five artists were commissioned to create installations. The line is an essential element associated most closely with drawing.

Artist Dave Eppley uses vinyl tape to create his colorful interpretation of the line called *Loom*. A rectangular panel of colored lines on the wall quickly moves out of its traditional format and begins to bend and weave, careering around the floors, walls and electrical outlets. Lines tear joyfully down the hallway and into the water fountain in the lobby. They appear as neon lights or lightning bolts on trajectories of their own design. They are whimsical and beg the viewer to follow them around the museum. (Salas, 2012)

Artists engaged the architectural space, including activating the gallery walls, thus freeing them from the confines of standard paper dimensions and examining the notion of what drawing can be.

I had the chance to view “Graphite” an exhibition at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in 2012. “Graphite” included the works of Kim Jones and Judith Braun. Both Jones and Braun created large-scale drawings that activated entire walls. These “installation drawings” work confront viewers in a very visceral/physical way as they are often larger than life.

In the “Extreme Drawing” exhibition at the Aldrich, the ball-point pen portion of the exhibit took on one of the more traditional approaches to drawing. The rest of the exhibitions deviated far from what we think of as traditional drawing into the realms of sculptural drawings, installations, and video. It is not unusual to enter a drawing show today and see this kind of media crossover. Drawing is as much an idea as it is a process.

William Kentridge is a South African artist who uses traditional drawing techniques along with video. One of the ways in which Kentridge works is by using stop-action animation. I had the opportunity to see Kentridge’s video work at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago in 2009 and more recently at several venues in Europe. When viewing his work, the method of stop-action, sound, and scale all contribute to the overall power of the videos. While Kentridge uses digital media to present his finished works, his work still retains the essence of traditional drawing since he uses common drawing materials. As one views Kentridge’s videos, each previous drawing is seen frame by frame as light graphite marks in his video. Ghostly marks linger through the successive drawings, showing evidence of previous iterations and alluding to the process of drawing: working and re-working the page.

Still, Kentridge is at the leading edge of a growing wave of artists who appear to be reacting against the numbing acreage of lifeless video projection and sleek, large-scale photography. Defined more than anything by deadened, gee-whiz technology, such work was once useful in creating a pose of ironic detachment. But that's about the last thing we need in art right now. (Knight, C. 2002)

The magic of Kentridge’s work is that his final product is a slick digital image projected on a wall that still shows the viewer the process of drawing and evokes the dusty atmosphere of the art studio.

Drawing is at the core of my inquiry. My work is created through the depiction of visual and metaphorical layers. I often include a layer in each piece that refers to the physical environmental terrain of the Earth. My work is meant to conjure ideas about the cycles of life. Various figurative elements in the work refer to the presence of human life undergoing its natural cycles. Mutations (often depicted as figurative/insect/animal hybridizations) are sometimes included as allusions to humankind’s interconnectedness to other forms of life on Earth.

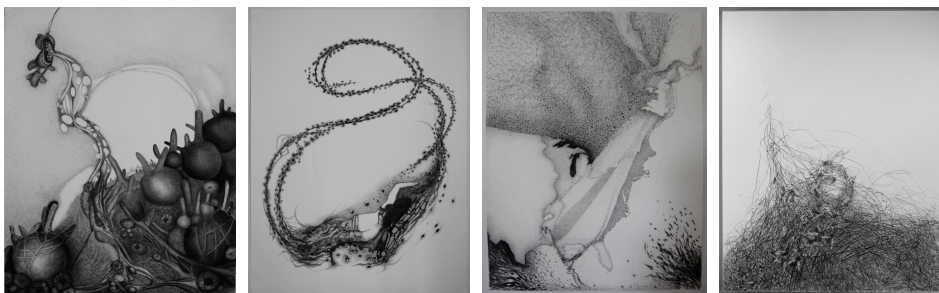
I have titled this proposal Panrabble Assimilation because this proposal is meant to fund my current research. Currently, my work deals with observations of variously sized groups of people. At the correct distance I imagine all of these groups appear loosely linked and lacking order. I am most interested in the process of order and chaos in various stages of forming and/or separating.

I am specifically exploring the dynamics of groups and how they often have larger social and political implications. My research considers what it means to feel a sense of belonging in a group and also what it means to feel like an outcast. Individual members of each group both gain and lose from these dynamics. For instance, the artworks (below left to right), *Rumor*, *Moving up The Clique*, *Conformity and Separation*, and *(I Did It For The) Dopamine* all deal with social group situations.



Materials: charcoal, ink and pastel on paper dimensions: 50"h x 38"w

Pearls Before Swine (revisited), *Adherence vs. Autonomy*, *The Absurdity of Being Governed by an Island*, and *Swarm* (left to right, top of next page) deal with larger factions that (because of their size and power) often have the ability to affect lives by enforcing rules, changing legislation, and even to declare war. I am exploring how participation in groups has the ability to help propel some people forward but at the same time to hold some back. Large and powerful groups have the ability to change the course of history ultimately leaving parts of the population disenfranchised.



Materials: charcoal, ink and pastel on paper dimensions: 50"h x 38"w

In this work I am making visual connections between human groups and insect swarms, so my work often depicts flying insects. I have assigned my own personal symbolic system to these winged-creatures. For instance, the flies are often warlike and foreboding while the transformative cicadas are peaceful but they also play the role of prey.

Description of Project:

I am seeking funding to support the creation of new artworks and experiments that would primarily be made during the summer 2014. I have a dedicated art studio in my home that is approximately 250 square feet where I will conduct the majority of my work. The results of this research will be submitted to national and international exhibitions and will also be included in a solo exhibition. I am already scheduled to have a solo exhibition from January to March 2015 at the Cochenour Gallery at Georgetown College in Georgetown, KY. Currently I am using the working title "Panrabble Assimilation" for this show.

This grant would allow me to experiment with my work in ways not available to me in the past due to the lack of resources. It would allow me to investigate contemporary drawing and inspire me to further pursue the interesting results that arise from this research. It would result in more systematic and safe organization of my artworks, thus freeing up some of the constraints I currently encounter regarding my method of working. This grant would allow me to explore scale and how my work engages the viewer on a physical level by giving me access to a wider range of materials. This grant would also allow me to explore the intersection of traditional drawing and technology.

My current drawings are around 38" x 50" and a typical drawing at this size takes 3-4 weeks to complete. Based on my typical method of working I am proposing to complete the equivalent of 2-4 artworks/videos (depending on size and scope). I do not anticipate any time constraints that would interfere with the creation and experimentation of artworks during the summer of 2014. The actual artwork and/or work created out of this research will be incorporated into my ongoing series of drawings, will be exhibited in a 2015 solo exhibition, and will be entered in future exhibitions.

This project directly affects my teaching since I primarily teach 2-D classes in the Department of Art. One of the things I have tried to do with my Art 106 course is to include at least one non-traditional drawing project. For instance, a project I devised and developed for Art 106 is a 3-D drawing project. For this project students were required to construct stylized forms of animals and then use traditional drawing materials to render realistic textures on the forms (see example below). Research conducted during summer 2014 will translate directly to the classroom. I will have better hands-on knowledge of contemporary drawing methods that will help fuel modifications to existing projects and the development of new projects that will specifically address contemporary drawing issues.



Example and details of an Art 106 drawing assignment inspired by contemporary drawing concerns
Assignment example from Elizabeth Belt

Contemporary drawing is ripe with fresh ideas. One only needs to look to the bevy of drawing-specific exhibitions and to books such as *Vitamin D* to see the variety in contemporary drawing. Drawing today may or may not include the use of traditional drawing materials and substrates. Because of this there is tremendous flexibility in the creation of drawings. Drawing has traditionally been viewed as a means of working out ideas that would later be created using more substantial materials (like paint, wood, and bronze). Drawing has generally been thought of as preliminary and ephemeral. But in recent years artists have exerted great pressure on the discipline to challenge old ideas. One way artists have done this is by exploring the use of more substantial and archival materials and methods in their drawings (such as sculpture and video) and at the same time also have used less substantial materials (like ball point pen). I am seeking funding from the USI Faculty Research and Creative Work Grant to help advance my current research by engaging in more experimental investigations including video. The main outcomes from the work created during this grant cycle will be disseminated in a solo exhibited during 2015.

Budget:

I am seeking funding for materials to assist in my current research. I would like to explore more experimental methods of working. I have included in my budget funds to acquire several different varieties of papers, drawing materials, texts, exhibition items, items for preserving artworks in progress, and a tripod and lens for my digital camera.

New methods of working and materials will be tested. I have included some paper samples in my budget. At present there are no retailers in the Tri-State area for large art quality papers. Currently, I buy my paper in bulk from online suppliers. For the past few years I have been using a medium quality paper. Because there is a lack of art paper suppliers in our geographic area I rarely have the ability to test new paper. In addition to the samples, I am requesting funding for a variety of large, better quality paper for the creation of artworks. Higher quality paper is especially needed to experiment with stop-action animation because this paper needs to hold up to heavy use and erasing.

My research methods will include exploring contemporary drawing through examining drawing-related texts (such as *Vitamin D* and those published by

academic drawing journals like TRACEY). These drawing-related texts include lesser-known artists (many of whom are not yet in art history texts) and generally focus on cutting-edge/experimental ways of working. Since it is not always possible to attend drawing exhibitions (as they occur all over the globe) these texts offer another way to stay informed of contemporary drawing trends.

At present, I do not have access to flat files for travel and the protection of finished works and works in progress. Currently, my artwork in progress is stored more horizontally than vertically and it is at constant risk of damage. My budget includes flat files for the protection of my somewhat fragile drawings. I am also including glassine (a pH neutral material used to cover works) for the protection of artworks during storage and transport to my solo exhibition in Georgetown, KY.

In order to shoot a stop-action animation the camera and drawing area must be cordoned off and marked so that the image stays more or less stable. For this part of the project I have included a tripod and inexpensive lens in my budget (as I already own a camera and the software needed to produce a video). The stop-action video would document evolving drawings and would mainly be experimental in nature. Video(s) created as a result of stop-action experimentation from this grant will be published to my website (www.nancyraenmendez.com).

Citations:

John Michael Kohler Arts Center; the line unleashed: Drawing escapes the picture plane. (2012). *News of Science*, , 1926. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/922790193?accountid=14752>

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