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THESIS**

**COLLISIONS: DRAWING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

**By  
Jonathan McBurnie**

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This volume has been presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney.

# ***Collisions: Drawing in the Digital Age***

Jonathan McBurnie

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## **Abstract**

This research outlines the reconfiguration of the creative act of drawing through physical practice as a response to mass culture. This practice takes place in the context of developing digital technologies, culminating in metadrawing. Metadrawing is defined as the integration of the post-digital collapse of media specificity in the visual arts. This research posits metadrawing as a descriptor for the paradigm shift between the physical act of drawing in pre-digital mass culture and the principles of drawing incorporated into digital technologies.

Through this shift, drawing has become an artistic act that is no longer working to collapse media divisions, and now operates within and without these divisions, destabilised by digital technologies. This research examines drawing as a history of innovations and responses to shifts in technologies and their applications. Questions of genre, form and medium are subsequently downplayed for an interdisciplinary approach. High and low are no longer distinct, as the internet search engine is adopted into the artist's toolbox, alongside the digital camera and animation software. The many accessible and disposable images are integrated as raw matter, to fossick and sift through.

Accompanying studio research operates within the interdisciplinary freedoms of the metadrawing. Approaches to quotation, appropriation, pastiche, irony, detachment and sincerity are explored through a rigorous drawing practice, resulting in a vast, multilayered body of work. This self-reflexive and intuitive practice incorporates numerous ciphers into its many suspended, but interrelated narratives. Beyond the physical level, the work operates on an intertextual level, moving between the metaphysics of genre and previously separated art forms to create a reconfigured history, unhampered by previous distinctions and boundaries of media and form. This research posits the act of drawing as a reaction to, or divergence from, the dominant techno-capitalist status quo, treating the tactile experiences of studio practice as subversive, transgressive, and erotic. This research explores the subjectivity and the subjective agency of the artist. Drawing is therefore defined as a process of unrepeatability, a process that, while no longer necessary for picture making, still forms a crucial and engaging tier of the visual arts. Drawing's divergence from the commercialised intangibility of the digital has revitalized its practitioners, demanding a reconsideration of what it means to draw today. This tension is explored through the different methods of studio practice, on the level of the personal-biological, the erotic, and in terms of collision and materiality. Specific images are selected through criteria directly linked with the subjective agency of the artist, and reconfigured through artistic practice, creating a new imbrication of the raw image matter.

## Introduction

On September 11, 2001, two aircraft flew into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City, an event that would have devastating repercussions for the decade to come. Thousands of citizens recorded these events on mobile devices as the attack unfolded, documenting the happenings from a multitude of angles. While people were using cameras and phones to capture footage, artist Gary Panter went to the rooftop of his Brooklyn studio and made five drawings in his sketchbook. The drawings depict the towers on fire after the first impact, the second tower falling in a cloud of debris, and three drawings of the immediate aftermath (fig. 1). Each drawing is annotated with the time and quickly-scrawled notes. The act of feverishly documenting the events of September 11 reflects the theoretical thrust of this thesis. The world watched this catastrophe through thousands of mediated camera-eyes, through a maelstrom of media sensation that was instant, indistinguishable and ultimately disposable. In direct contrast to this, five drawings were executed that elicit responses, not just through the reactions to the event, but through the artist's idiosyncratic interpretations. Drawing is an economical means for describing such an event, pre-fitted with a voice that comes unfiltered through the intuitive hand.

This research refers to drawing as an autonomous artistic discipline, as opposed to its contingent uses, such as preparatory drawing, commercial art, design and architecture. These practices, while related, are not a large part of this study, and at certain points will be discussed briefly. While drawing remains associated with traditions of preparatory process or as a pedagogical tool, it is no longer limited to these discourses.<sup>1</sup> This research investigates drawing's integral role within contemporary art, and responds to a renaissance of the discipline. Recently, many high-profile exhibitions focused on drawing have found their way into major institutions. Nonetheless, rigorous investigation into changes in the discipline, specifically in relation to mass and digital cultures, has been less common.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, given the ubiquity of drawing in art practice, little attempt has been made to consolidate drawing's role in light of technological change, a discourse that this research seeks to address in its neologism of *metadrawing*. The resurgence of interest in drawing can be partially explained by the Modernist and Postmodernist collapses of genre and culture boundaries. The collapse of genre and beaux arts are circumscriptions that began with photography, accelerated with collage and climaxed in minimalism and conceptual art. These collapses have allowed graffiti, comic books, animation, and contemporary commercial design to claim or reject cultural

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1 Deanna Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 3.

2 Daina Augaitis, *For the Record: Drawing Contemporary Life*. Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003, 14.

legitimacy as art forms. The pervasiveness of mass culture increases in traction not only in Pop, but increasingly in other art, so that today they are no longer just appropriations (as in Lichtenstein or Paolozzi), but are seen to be art forms in their own right. While these varying forms have brought attention to drawing, their relative artistic autonomy is still anecdotal, for they seldom discuss in a critical way the discourse confined largely to description and comments about technical proficiency. Primarily associated with a commercial model, these forms are seemingly beyond or unconcerned with criticism, as a 'techno-capitalist information communication culture.'<sup>3</sup> Drawing remains an important investigative tool for the conceptualisation and execution of visual ideas, as an act that is deeply ingrained in many image-making processes. The historical relationships drawing has enjoyed with other forms enriches, but complicates its investigation. The history of drawing is positioned within contemporary art as interdisciplinary, and historically subject to the preparatory and educational requirements of painting, sculpture and printmaking. While this graphic culture operates with increasingly sophisticated language, it is largely the product of strictly commercial enterprise, and cannot be relied upon for a genuine artistic voice outside that of the desired marketing strategy. Rather, this thesis explores drawing as a primary and vital method of art making, through studio practice. One of the objectives of this thesis is to create a system whereby work can be created that takes advantage of the qualities of drawing, and contribute to its traditions, philosophies and histories, as well as related media that share a relationship with drawing which has developed over centuries of practice.

The complex relationship of drawing and mass culture is of primary importance to this research, as well as its contemporary recognition as an autonomous art form.<sup>4</sup> Historically, drawing has seen a far broader variety of application, spanning the artistic and the scientific. Digital technologies have become indispensable to many vocations, including many that historically relied on drawing. There is much contemporary work that combines traditional elements of drawing with digital technologies, theoretically and practically, some of which will be discussed here. However, the traditional qualities of drawing can be lost in translation, specifically its intuitive or improvisational quality, which necessitates this research into the contemporary positioning of drawing and the digital world. Metadrawing refers to drawing practices within and outside art making that have grown out of the manual practice of drawing, but evolved beyond its traditional forms. For a clearer understanding of metadrawing, it is important to consider specific qualities of the drawing discipline as well as its traditional place

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3 Miles Hall, *the Anatomy of an Image: Painting in the Digital Age*. (Brisbane: Griffith University, 2010), 7.

4 Christine Morrow. 'I Walk the Line.' In *I Walk the Line: New Australian Drawing*. (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2009), 2.

within the fine arts, and put into the context of the contemporary post-digital and post-media era, and the implications therein. The very use of the term 'drawing' in this thesis works as an inclusive umbrella term because other, similar terms, particularly in the French (*dessin*), Italian (*disegno*) and German (*Zeichnung*) traditions, are often associated with a particular function or context, and in some instances no longer extant, now confined to history. Furthermore, the term 'drawing' reflects a discipline, practice and process that is connective and amorphous in nature, inclusive of these many and varied processes within its own context and history, where frequent overlap within other disciplines is understood. This thesis and accompanying studio research will not only demonstrate the validity of drawing in the digital age, but demonstrate its continuing conceptual and artistic development through practices associated with metadrawing. In this way, drawing extends across what once would have been considered divides of high and low, virtual and physical.

It is now a commonplace to state that digital interfaces offer new, innovative avenues for drawing, including the challenge of potential technological obsolescence of the discipline altogether. This thesis investigates modes of drawing, discussing them as important alternatives to the increasing dominance of digital technologies. The continued investigation of drawing practices is not intended to reflect ignorance of digital possibilities, but rather offering divergence to the disembodied digital experience.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary art is not without its own digital Luddites, practising seemingly-archaic disciplines such as drawing as their own form or resistance in isolation. However, upon consideration, the contemporary Luddite's choice to reject the use of digital technology is a position that can potentially reinforce the status quo that the Luddite is attempting to resist. Aside from the supposedly moralistic implications of this position, there are also practical considerations. Avoiding technology by choice can really only be felt in the studio where the art work is conceived and executed. Digital technologies have become so fully assimilated into the structures of society that they cannot be avoided visually, sonically or socially in some instance without considerable difficulty. These technologies also have the potential to extend the possibilities of the drawing indirectly, as a makeshift drafting tool itself, a convenient method for stockpiling or altering visual stimulus, or as a concept from which to diverge through discourse.

Central to the theory of drawing is the notion of the sketch, which conceptually anchors the discipline. The tension between incompleteness and resolution is one of the core conceptual considerations of drawing. This thesis explores drawing as an act of unrepeatability, which is dependent upon the intuitive nature of the drawing act, as well as the spontaneity the

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5 Hall, *the Anatomy of an Image*, 7.

discipline can engender within a broad spectrum of conditions. Drawing's past as a compositional tool to so many art forms, coupled with its contemporary autonomy, operate in parallel, contributing to its complexity. Drawing's historically interdisciplinary application makes it hard to define without mention of the other forms to which it has been applied, further stimulating innovation. Graphic art and design is now more than ever absorbed into the collective consciousness, and the aesthetics, vocabulary and culture of everyday life. This presents artists with a decision whether to enter the domain of tattoo design, skate graphics, video games, t-shirt designs, favouring aesthetics and design above all else, or to elevate drawing beyond mere design into art. This distinction must be made in response to the overwhelming graphic stimulus of contemporary life.

In Europe, in the wake of the Renaissance, the importance of drawing has been somewhat diminished in favour of painting.<sup>6</sup> This oversight is largely ascribed to drawing's historical use as preparatory process.<sup>7</sup> This research will contextualise contemporary drawing through historical paradigm shifts. Many of these paradigm shifts are not only technical or perceptual, but technological. Artists are therefore considered in the context of a historical continuum of mass culture, beginning with Renaissance printmaking and culminating in digital technologies. This research seeks to develop an artistic continuum by citing key artists who were not only masters of the discipline, but made significant advancements to drawing's eventual autonomy. This research therefore will focus upon artists who have adopted drawing strategies and theories into their practices over artists to whom drawing is merely a start-point. These artists will demonstrate contemporary tensions inherent throughout work that operates within the bounds of the drawing discipline. In short, drawing has manoeuvred itself into a place where it breaks with the past in terms of its role in art practices, yet still operates within the very rich traditions of drawing throughout art history. As in preceding paradigm shifts, drawing actively investigates these new ways of seeing as it always has: with a line connecting high and low, traditional and contemporary, past and present, real and imagined.

The written thesis will therefore include a detailed account of studio practice, philosophies and processes. This allows a more studio-specific account of drawing as a mode of research. The key to contemporary drawing lies in a paradigm shift in perception and execution, prompted by the cultural absorption of digital technologies. The abilities facilitated by these technologies challenge the idea of drawing as a means for artistic expression, and of the performative nature of gesture and mark-making.

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<sup>6</sup> Augaitis, *For the Record*, 13

<sup>7</sup> Morrow, *I Walk the Line*, 2.

Given that it is fundamental to visual arts, it is no surprise that drawing has been discussed at length, particularly in discourse of history, practice and technique. However, drawing as a practice in its own right only comes to the fore at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. As something independent of painting, drawing is still a relatively new occurrence. Few texts have contextualised how and why this has happened, or drawing's implications on contemporary art, instead concentrating on history, and technique. This is something this research seeks to address. Deanna Petherbridge's *The Primacy of Drawing* (2010) is a comprehensive text that arranges its chapters thematically rather than chronologically. This allows a more complex historical overview and illustrates the tradition of drawing as a multi-faceted art form that does not progress at a consistent pace typical of most volumes attempting to overview drawing's history. However thoroughly the publication covers the drawing discipline, the text does not investigate contemporary drawing at length. While Petherbridge makes astute observations in her final chapter on contemporary drawing, these act more to raise questions about the future of drawing than to define it. This allows the author to cut through history with ease, discussing artists from different countries or centuries on the merits of their artistic concerns, rather than the linear progression of most histories. Petherbridge structures her text around the notion of drawing as continuum, asserting its separation from other forms of art, architecture and design at one end of the linear spectrum and coalesces with them at the other. The continuum stretches between *finito* and *non finito*, private and public, and the perceptual and the mimetic. The binary oppositions that pull drawings between extremes—sketchy and finished; spontaneous and measured; self-generating or outwardly directed; colour or monochromy— are linked by the moving line of drawing itself.<sup>8</sup> Petherbridge's text serves as a strategy for shaping a discourse that, while not chronological, clarifies the many approaches to drawing of historical and contemporary artists, a strategy that is adopted within this thesis.

Miles Hall's research is centred upon the friction between the handmade and digital mark. In his thesis *The Anatomy of an Image: Painting in the Digital Age* (2010), Hall positions painting as a resistance to the disembodied digital experience, highlighting Guy Debord as having foreseen the contemporary digital banking of mass imagery, the 'flood of images', in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).<sup>9</sup> Hall discusses tactility in the context of the materiality of painting, an argument that easily translates into the intuitive character of drawing. While Hall

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<sup>8</sup> Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Hall, *the Anatomy of an Image*, 3.

outlines the problems of supposed obsolescence that any traditional form now faces in the digital age, he argues that the onset of digital technologies are another chance for painting to reassert its human qualities and pertinence. Hall outlines the challenges that digital technologies present, which are particularly inherent in the politics of the screen. Unlike painting and photography, the plasma screen's images can be composed and executed on the virtual plane, a series of stabilised mathematical and electrical signals.<sup>10</sup> Taking into account the contemporaneousness of digital art and its impacts on other media, Hall acknowledges the importance or the embrace of digital technologies, but not without caution, noting the risks of digital art.<sup>11</sup> This research begins at a place of acceptance of Hall's positioning digital media as a potentially destructive force. However, extrapolating this perspective of resistance to include not only painting but drawing, is not so simple, as unlike painting, drawing is not limited by the materialist particularities of paint on support. This research diverges from Hall's own, which is 'against transcendence, metaphysics and the desire to locate meaning beyond that which is tangible to the senses'.<sup>12</sup> While a focus upon tactility, human gesture and material sensuousness is paramount in both investigations, this research posits drawing as historically engaged with other art forms through its heuristic and intuitive applicability as a discipline. In addition to existing as X substance on Y support, drawing also exists as a conceptual framework for the very process of 'making', which has been extended into the virtual frontiers of what has been conceived with the terms of metadrawing.

Survey exhibitions and publications focusing on a multitude of facets of drawing have appeared with increasing frequency, alongside monographs of artists for whom drawing is a vital or primary discipline. These include Marlene Dumas, Raymond Pettibon, William Kentridge, Robert Crumb, Neo Rauch, Richard Serra and Jack Kirby, all of whom have seen the publication of various volumes in recent years entirely dedicated to their drawings. The MoMA exhibition and accompanying catalogue, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (1990) encapsulated the problematic relationships of high and low culture up until that point. *High and Low* has been criticised for celebrating cultural appropriation and by comic book theorists for actively reinforcing and justify commodity-driven distinctions between reified high arts and neophyte low arts.<sup>13</sup> The exhibition downplayed the role of comics within the work of artists, particularly of the Pop idiom, asserting that the comic industry itself owes a debt to Pop for

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10 Hall, *the Anatomy of an Image*, 4.

11 Hall, 28.

12 Hall, 125.

13 Bart Beaty. *Comics versus Art*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 188.

reinvigorating comic book sales during Pop's popular peak.<sup>14</sup> While some of the definitions of low art have shifted since the *High and Low* publication, these shifts are by no means universal, and its standpoint is still consistent with many more conservative art commentators.

In a similar vein, the *Masters of American Comics* (2005) exhibition and accompanying catalogue has been attacked for its exclusions and dubious cultural statements. The exhibition presented 15 selected artists, all justified and amply represented by the exhibition's 900 exhibited works, and in the accompanying catalogue. The exhibition included no female artists, and works were exhibited on walls, to be viewed rather than read, achieving some of the institutional legitimacy that comic artists have historically craved, at the cost of some of the comic's formal qualities.<sup>15</sup> Exhibitions such as *High and Low* and *Masters of American Comics* serve to reinforce distinctions between high and low culture, rather than to validate specific elements of the relationship. Ironically, these distinctions themselves have been under attack with the democratising presence of digital technologies. This research questions the relationship of art and mass culture being established in such survey exhibitions, as their discourses of canonization are perhaps more harmful to the long term legitimacy of comics.

Bart Beaty discusses this historically fraught boundary at length in two texts. Beaty's *Comics versus Art* (2012) and *Frederic Wertham: The Critique of Mass Culture* (2005) have provided valuable insight into high and low culture, a discourse that has been increasingly entangled between critical theory and passionate fandom, a division that in the new millennium becomes increasingly hard to define. The study of the comic book form has become an important aspect of this research, which takes place in a time where the comic book has shifted from a purely commercial, entertainment-based medium into an art form of great artistic diversity. Beaty's emphasis on the frictions between both art and comics is particularly indicative of the self-serious hubris of both idioms. Thierry Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (2007), itself translated by Beaty, offers a formal counterpoint to Beaty's own texts, by focusing solely upon the formal qualities of comic books. Groensteen gives no truck to the aspirations of legitimacy of even the most ambitious of comic artists. Groensteen approaches his text from the position that comics already have cultural legitimacy, recognized or not, through their constant formal evolution, and their sophisticated hybrid of narrative, pictorial and linguistic mechanics. Both texts serve as a critical approach to the formal qualities of comics, which is pertinent to studio research and to the complex relationship between drawing and mass culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 68.

<sup>15</sup> Beaty, 198.



Roxana Marcoci's *Comic Abstraction: Image Breaking, Image Making* (2007) analyses the practices of artists whose work occupies territory that be so simply categorized as art or comics without implicating the other. Aware of the changes and innovations made possible by interdisciplinary practice, the artists of *Comic Abstraction* display an iconoclastic bent, and operate in the slippage between the borders firmly established in MoMA's *High and Low*. It should be noted that the selected artist's relationship with abstraction is rooted in their use of graphics and printed matter as source material. Despite the title of the exhibition and accompanying catalogue, not all of the artists use actual comic books as raw materials. Curator Roxana Marcoci uses the term 'comic' as 'a bridge between disposable modes of visual expression and rarified brands of "fine art."' <sup>16</sup> 'Comic' therefore becomes a more general term for the popular arts, visual fodder with already constructed associations available for appropriation and assimilation into image making processes. Marcoci's catalogue essay outlines her intention to contextualise the chosen artists' work historically, citing Joseph Leo Koerner's text *The Reformation of the Image* (2004), in which Koener describes the iconoclastic acts of the Protestants, destroying sacred Catholic images, as treating the representational beliefs of the Catholics as real, and therefore proving their power as objects, making the Protestants image-makers themselves. <sup>17</sup> The act of iconoclasm, of image-breaking, satire, deconstruction, critique and appropriation of imagery, then, becomes a form of image-making in its reconstruction or assimilation into the new whole, and has gained renewed cultural relevance and artistic prevalence in the post-digital world of the remix culture. This research places this subversive approach to practice as a response to the flood of images that is digital culture, a sifting through and processing of the ever-widening visual detritus that is produced with hastening speed. Though it is only occasionally mentioned, Lawrence Lessig's *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in a Hybrid Economy* (2008) has served as a revealing account of the many legal hurdles of contemporary art and mass culture.

Drawing itself has been brought to attention in recent years, with exhibitions such as MoMA's *Drawing From the Modern* (2005), and *I Walk the Line* (2009), curated by Christine Morrow for Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. While curators of *Drawing from the Modern* could select from MoMA's vast collection of graphic works, *I Walk the Line* featured a leaner selection of contemporary Australian artists. MoMA's *Drawing from the Modern* was a comprehensive chronology of drawing spanning the last century, and presented preparatory sketches and studies, side-by-side with drawings as finished works. Notably, in both

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<sup>16</sup> Roxana Marcoci, *Comic Abstraction: Image Breaking, Image Making*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Marcoci, 9.

exhibitions, choices of works were not limited to ink or charcoal on paper, presenting an expanded perspective of what drawing can be. The exhibition illuminated just how fully drawing has been absorbed into art practices in the latter decades of the twentieth century, and allowed a more intuitive, personal art unencumbered by philosophical trends and agendas. Such approaches would seem to validate the perspective on this research, choosing investigate many strands of drawing practice, rather than establishing boundaries between them.

Walter Benjamin's works 'A Brief History of Photography' and 'Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (version three) are both germane to the theoretical and historical positioning of this research. Both texts underscore the implications of significant technological progressions of society in general and art in particular. Benjamin discusses issues prototypical of the contemporary digital/analogue discourse referred to within this research, and both essays are directly applicable to the discussion of drawing in light of its interdisciplinary history and its likely hybridised future through digital devices. Benjamin's prescience in this context is applicable to the relationship between drawing and mass culture, which is a primary focus of this research.

The writings of Susan Sontag have been used in the development of studio research. Sontag's essays 'Against Interpretation' (1966), 'The Pornographic Imagination' (1967) and 'Notes on Camp' (1964) have provided context for studio research, which relies upon symbols, ciphers and metaphor, which are found within the index of studio drawing. Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1977) and *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1988) are crucial in understanding and deciphering socially-constructed myths around disease, and how these ideas are translated and adapted through the arts. The writings of sociologist Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1995) and *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness* (2002) offer a counterpoint to Sontag's ideas with a personal viewpoint that is less concerned with the arts and more intent on elucidating the socially realities of treating and suffering from disease. All of these texts, while not primary sources for this paper, have been highly influential within the studio, tempering the autobiographical voice, and stimulating critical thought on approaches to personal narrative strategies.

Comic books, as highlighted in this research, have been historically problematic in an academic sense as they rely upon the slippage between discipline and media. Comic books usually, though not explicitly, operate with a marriage of image, text and sequence, three aspects that are most often attributed to art theory, literature and film theory respectively. A difficulty with the inclusion of comic books, much like film, is the fact that many hands often collaborate within the forms, particularly in the mainstream. To avoid this problem, this thesis

discusses comic book works that primarily reflect the artistic intent of one artist, much like the Hollywood *auteur*, or a collaborative of writer and artist. For example, Gary Panter's *Dal Tokyo* (2012), is a product of his own narrative vision, written and drawn himself. Other comic book works investigated at length in this research include Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000), Grant Morrison and Frank Quitely's *Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery* (2012), all of which manipulate the formal qualities of the comic book to self-reflexively comment upon the metaphysics of artistic process.

This research includes analysis of art works that engage with the ideas and philosophies of drawing as a transgressive, sensual and tactile investigation. Artists that most exemplify these ideas have been selected for study based upon their use of drawing as a significant or primary discipline of their studio practice, as well as their challenges to the status quo of the form, transgression of traditional boundaries of media, form and method, and their embodiment of the tensions between discourses such as high/low, digital/analogue and human/machine. Many of the artists discussed are subject to much academic attention in the context of drawing technique, so care has been made to select not works viewed as exemplary of the artists' proficiency in drawing, but works that clearly demonstrate the incremental steps in the development of the discipline, and their responses to mass culture. It must also be noted that the artists discussed within are not the only artists that examine the ideas put forth. An exhaustive examination of every strata of drawing is simply not possible within the allotted space. Instead, artists have been selected based upon their own practice, as well as their influence upon this practice-led research. These include works by Dürer, Goltzius, Rubens, Hogarth, Goya, Topffer, Daumier, Seurat, Grosz, Beckmann, Herriman, Kirby and McCay are discussed at length in this context.

Marlene Dumas' works are discussed individually and in sets, which are considered as one work rather than series. While the diversity of Gary Panter's practice is discussed, it is primarily his comic book work that bears analysis, for it is his cartooning that most strongly incorporates the more innovative aspects of the drawing discipline. An artist that is dedicated to the publication of comic books as well as more gallery-oriented paintings is highly unusual, but it is by the publication of comic books that Panter makes the most deliberate steps in breaking down the traditional barriers between high and low, and adapting his work for a new, post-digital market not reliant on an outdated commercial gallery system. Different from both Dumas and Panter, Raymond Pettibon's oeuvre is difficult to contain in either sets or publications. Pettibon no longer adopts such a system of collectivity, instead arranging his vast body of works according to the intended exhibition space. Pettibon sometimes exhibits his

drawing in loose configurations, suggesting vague interconnection. Furthermore, Pettibon's oeuvre is expansive, numbering in the thousands, and aside from his self-published zines, remains completely untitled. Therefore, the typical strategy of most publications of the artist's work is adopted within this document; *No Title*, followed by the first three-to-four words of the the drawing's text in brackets.

Finally, chapter five examines several younger artists whose practice exemplifies the expanded field of drawing, and its virtual application in metadrawing. These artists include Julie Mehretu, Zak Smith, David Shrigley, Thomas Houseago, William Kentridge and Chris Ware.

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One of the primary roles of drawing in this research is the way in which it explores, subverts and ultimately shatters the division between high and low. These ideas are often at odds with one another; hence it must be noted that through the studio work, cuts through these oppositional, or at least mismatched, ideas can take place. As such, rather than attempting to be a survey of drawing, this research will focus on artistic and theoretical concerns inherent within studio practice. One of the primary features of the focus artists of this research is their exploration and subversion of the tension between high and low, and between forms. While the barriers between high and low are often thought to be eroded, it is folly to make this observation in such simplistic terms, as demonstrated within the research of Bart Beaty, and explored through many of the artists throughout. Such high/low barriers are renegotiated and reconstituted with each theory and studio breakthrough of the artist, and the high/low binary itself is under contention in the post-digital world. This thesis will be careful to clarify the artistic, theoretical and literary spaces that accompanying studio research exists within. The result is a collision of elements derived from comic books, art history, and the heightened reality of literature and film, which are all broken down and reconfigured in a new form through the art theory associated with illness metaphor, prosthesis and cyborg theory, and eroticism. These ideas are often at odds with each other, so it must be noted that it is through the studio work itself that these seemingly oppositional, or at least mismatched ideas are reconciled through their relationship with mass culture. It must also be noted that, while chapters two, three and four are bookended with the two chapters that discuss the trajectory of drawing and mass culture in broad terms, the three chapters each focus upon a specific artist. These three artists— Marlene Dumas, Gary Panter and Raymond Pettibon— are chosen for their engagement with drawing and mass culture, and will be discussed in more depth than the artists of the other chapters. Their practices are diverse, and therefore it is important to reiterate the different aspects of discussion between chapters.

Chapter one will outline a brief history of western drawing, based on Walter Benjamin's essay 'A Brief History of Photography', serving as a framing device for the structure and treatment of the chapter. This chapter will extrapolated from the relationship between painting and photographic technologies, still in its infancy at the time of Benjamin's text, to the contemporary and newly-autonomous discipline of drawing and its relationship with mass culture. As well as clarifying painting's position within the photographic age, Benjamin's text also explores the many implications of the high and low culture arms of painting and photography and the related, often commercial arms of painting not relegated to what is viewed as the traditional place of the fine arts, the gallery.

The history of drawing will be discussed in abbreviated fashion according to several key concepts, avoiding a summary of great masters and virtuosos that are already so thoroughly discussed. Rather, this chapter seeks to establish a history of innovators, artists that sensed the power and versatility of the drawing discipline and broke new artistic ground in response to various technological progressions throughout history, particularly mass culture and its early forms, of which digital technologies are a recent addition. This is in order to contextualise contemporary artists as belonging to the great and diverse history of drawing. The study of mass culture includes prototypical explorations of what would become the satire and cartooning that would eventually explode, aided by the industrial revolution, into the twentieth century. While many would condemn a history of drawing that largely overlooks masters of the discipline, such concessions must be made in order to demonstrate the key arguments of the thesis in the space prescribed. Ingres, in no doubt a master practitioner of drawing, could be overlooked in favour of an artist such as Dürer, whose explorations of printmaking and through it a nascent form of mass culture, for a more prescient demonstration of the argument of this research. Many such omissions have been made, and the chapter makes no claims of authoritative completeness, but instead stands as a brief overture, contextualising the rest of the thesis. The chapter breaks down the history of drawing into specific sub-chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of the relationship between drawing and mass culture. As such, many artists have been overlooked for their lack of interaction or cursory involvement with mass culture.

Chapter two examines the work of Marlene Dumas in terms of her use of the image bank, autobiography and resistance to death. Drawing is positioned as a tactile, potentially transgressive act. In Dumas' case, her work is examined through the rubric of eroticism, as explored by Georges Bataille, because of the qualities of drawing, and her use of erotic and pornographic imagery. The chapter uses the corollaries of other artist's work to clarify Dumas'

relationship with these notions, including Auguste Rodin, Francis Bacon and Hannah Wilke, all artists who examined eroticism extensively through their artistic practice.<sup>18</sup> This chapter will contextualise the research through a thorough study of the work of Dumas, which is ideal for study in terms of the overlap between established orders of high and low, particularly with the use of popular culture and imagery as a starting point for image making, as well as a metaphysical background and history with which to build upon through her work.

Chapter three analyses the work of Gary Panter. Panter's work embraces mass culture in formal as well as aesthetic terms. Having worked outside of the gallery context on television, design, and most notably comic books, without compromising artistic integrity or agency, Panter flits between media at will. Panter is discussed alongside Jack Kirby, a significant influence, and in the context of his 1980 *Rozz Tox* Manifesto, which self-mockingly outlined artistic strategies that foresaw the contemporary necessity of formal and media diversification. The *Rozz Tox* manifesto is also compared and contrasted with Donna Haraway's 1985 *Cyborg Manifesto*. Both of these are in some way indebted to Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*, which is discussed in this context.

Chapter four examines the work of Raymond Pettibon. This chapter conceptually pastiches Jaques Derrida's essay 'Signature Even Context' (from the anthology *Margins of Philosophy* (1982)), which is directly applicable to the unrepeatability of drawing. Derrida's investigation of language finds him making him a distinction between speaking and writing, which is differentiated by a lack of listener, or pre-empting of the reader, in the case of writing.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Derrida's own definition of writing is not necessarily tethered to text as such, but, citing Condillac, including pictographic, hieroglyphic and ideographic writing within this definition.<sup>20</sup> The act of communication through a repetitive code of different ciphers in lieu of a verbal statement is applicable to, and characteristic of the drawing discipline. As this thesis is based on studio research findings and the theoretical, historical and philosophical frames that inform it, this chapter will elucidate the studio research process, contextualising the histories, theories and philosophies through actions, decisions and visual problem-solving. Thus the studio research is on some level heuristic, 'finding through doing, with no initial plan or goal except the will to draw', and on the other hand a conscious exploration of the theories

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<sup>18</sup> It must be noted that, while this chapter discusses eroticism in relation to Dumas' work, and so is predominantly concerned with the erotic subject/object axis of the female body, this will be mirrored in chapter four in the discussion of Raymond Pettibon and the erotic subject/object of the male body.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', Translated by Alan Bass. In *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 315.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, 312.

discussed throughout this thesis.<sup>21</sup>

Chapter five examines the contemporary reconfiguration of the relationship between high and low. This is an attempt to chart the trajectory of recent drawing practice by considering the contemporary scrambling of existing barriers between high and low, and art's reliance upon popular culture as a constant source of reinvigoration. This research seeks to contextualise drawing's role in contemporary art not only as a medium but as a unique activity and important mode of research. Instead, this chapter outlines a fluid definition of drawing, as well as metadrawing, which operates as a kind of theoretical extension of the properties of Drawing into different, usually non-gallery-specific, and often commercialised, media. This chapter posits that the digital destabilisation of the high/low binary has allowed a reintegration of mass culture and the visual arts. Additionally, this sub-chapter introduces the neologism of metadrawing, thereby fusing the multiple strands of ideas discussed so far to the artists discussed in subsequent chapters, as well as the associated studio research of the thesis.

In conclusion, this thesis will summarise its investigations and findings, and reinforced with the inclusion of an appendix. This appendix consists of a self-interview, conducted much in the manner of Slavoj Žižek, included as an appendix to *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality* (1994). In the evident irony and veiled self-satire, this has been included as further insight into the creative process, attempting to illuminate the relationship, and slippage, between theory and practice in the studio. This forestalls the need for analysis of related studio work within the paper, which is complicated by inclusion in a paper written in the third-person. The appendix will dispense of the formalities of academic writing and adopt a more conversational tone, to better discuss artistic practice, unencumbered by the requirements of the third person. Appendix three is a full list of works produced within the four-year postgraduate period, which ties into the presentation works, which are arranged in a faux-retrospective of the postgraduate period, as arranged and documented in the final five images.

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21 Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 152.

## Chapter One: Aspects of Drawing and Mass Culture

### Strategies of Graphic Reproduction

In his essay 'Brief History of Photography' (1931), Walter Benjamin outlines the evolution of photography, as well as various responses to these developments within painting and throughout the visual and commercial arts. The application of Benjamin's method of analysis to drawing aims to illuminate the circumstances that have been foregrounded by the advent of digital technologies, to which contemporary drawing must now respond. In order to clarify this relationship, citation of historical precedents of drawing responding to, and in some cases instigating, technological innovations, is necessary. Benjamin's discussion of the metaphysics of photography, a still relatively new medium at the time of writing, shares many parallels with the position of contemporary drawing, and will be used as a blueprint for the analysis of drawing in the context of mass culture. Using discourses of image-making modelled upon Benjamin's framework, summarises the history of drawing itself, while forecasting these implications on the future. In his essay Benjamin outlines the challenge that painting, particularly *plein-air* and the portrait miniature, faced in the representational possibilities of the daguerreotype and then the photograph.<sup>1</sup> Such technological advances dramatically alter the possibilities of art through technical, philosophical and even perceptual challenges to tradition. This chapter will contextualise the challenge presented to drawing by digital technologies as the latest in a history of such technological developments.

The history of drawing is a history of technical innovations and shifts in practice. Artists have contributed to drawing's development through the preparatory, pedagogical, technical, commercial and industrial functions of drawing's past. The outlining of drawing's overlaps with other disciplines, and significant developments and responses to technological advancements (key among them printmaking) is necessary in order to understand its contemporary position. Examining the role of drawing and mass culture, artists will be approached in consideration of the 'high/low' binary, which can be traced to its historical application since the Renaissance invention of moveable type. Movable type serves as a historical starting point to plot various drawing-related innovations, leading to what we now know as mass culture. However, as this chapter will explain, this high-low binary can be historically problematic, and sub-chapters are structured to reflect this. Drawing's interdisciplinary applicability is a defining characteristic of drawing that is still manifest in contemporary art. This chapter concludes with the contemporary reintegration of high and low, which reflects the destabilization of the high-low

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Brief History of Photography.' Translated by J. A. Underwood. In *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London: Penguin, 2008), 179.



binary via digital advancements. Drawing has rarely been a static, coherent art form; its past spans historical periods, geographies and cultures. An historical overview inclusive of pre-Modernist era Eastern drawing practices is not possible within the purview of this research. Eastern drawing, which reached a point of artistic and conceptual sophistication far before that of the West, and would be better suited to its own thesis to be investigated thoroughly and respectfully.

The ability to reproduce drawings has two primary implications. The first is the effect of reproducibility upon the visual characteristics of drawing itself, and the second is what it means for the artist to be able to reproduce such graphics. Linear sophistication and perceptual innovation was not exclusive to the Renaissance artists of Florence and Venice. These would become highly developed by artists of the Northern Renaissance, whose own apprenticeships in printmaking paralleled the Florentine focus on painting. Northern printmakers would make advances in the development of the drawing discipline, particularly in terms of innovating the reproductive capabilities of art and improving its accessibility. Line defined the visual language of printmaking until the later invention of the tonal aquatint process. Tone could only be suggested by closer hatchings and cross-hatchings, and thus a different pictorial style was developed to best suit the capabilities of printmaking.

Nuremberg printmaker Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) executed prints and drawings with a fine, curvilinear accuracy, quite unlike the colour-oriented Venetians and more tonally-based Florentines (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> This mastery of curvilinear form was developed in an apprenticeship specialising woodcut and drypoint, both techniques at which Dürer excelled. Travelling from Nuremberg to Venice, Dürer executed many watercolours and drawings. Worked straight onto paper with a brush, describing the scenes and their contents in a methodical fashion, these landscapes predate the growth in popularity of the Western landscape tradition of the 1600s, also serve as some of the few non-military descriptions of the German landscape of the era.<sup>3</sup> Dürer embraced the thought and technique of the Florentine Renaissance, augmenting his own Northern skill set.<sup>4</sup> Like da Vinci, Dürer's observational and scientific drawings were a constant aside in his practice. Dürer's artistic output was substantial, and the artist was ideally suited to the studio rigours of bookmaking. His *Apocalypse*, or *Apocalypse with Pictures*, a series of fifteen woodcuts depicting the events from the book of Revelations, was published in 1498, finding popularity (fig. 3). The success of *Apocalypse* owed much to the artist's vivid imaginings

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2 Deanna Petherbridge. *The Primacy of Drawing*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 54

3 Maria Snyder, 'Articulating Space: Nuremberg and the Evolution of Landscape in Early Modern Technical and Military Literature (Schedel, Maximilian I, Dürer, Sachs).' (St Louis: Washington University, 2003): 22.

4 Joanna Shaw-Eagle, 'By-the-Book Dürer.' *Insight on the News* 16, no. 47 (2000): 27.

of the events, executed in crisp line with fanciful clarity. Dürer contributed to this popularity by producing single prints from the series for patrons of lesser means. This catering for a broader patron base reflected the advances of publishing in Dürer's time, allowing the proliferation and publication of such books and prints as never before. The *Apocalypse* woodcuts contain imagery and iconography that is typical of both late Gothic and early Renaissance Catholicism, and some scholars associate Dürer's printed works as being a dangerous proposition during a period of social and political unrest.<sup>5</sup> The *Apocalypse* works also mirror the events that spurred the Lutheran Reformation, accounting for the sensation the prints incited in the public.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to this claim, others disagree with this theory, citing certain Lutheran-derived imagery in the artist's work.<sup>7</sup> Some commentators infer that Dürer was more interested in symbolism and allegory than the particularities of either faith; the artist appropriated religious and astrological motifs that interested him or suited his purposes.<sup>8</sup> Dürer's many drawings and studies that formed, as Dominiczek describes, an 'iconographic database.'<sup>9</sup> The idea of drawing from such a resource, as was practised by Dürer and da Vinci, demonstrates the possibilities made during the early stages of what we now know as mass media of the Renaissance, which was in turn made possible through the proliferation of paper and new printmaking technologies.

Much like Dürer, Dutch artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) used printmaking as a means of making his work more accessible, and expanding his renown. Rubens would become one of the most sought-after and influential artists of the Baroque era. Rubens' approach to possibilities of printmaking as a means of increasing his artistic standing prefigured modern notions of intellectual property. A canny strategist, Rubens pioneered the beginnings of a legal framework for the protection of intellectual and artistic property, developing marketing strategies of self-promotion and distribution. While contemporaries of Rubens made drawings strictly as preparatory works or presentation pieces or as copies of other works as a means of teaching students, Rubens made many drawings as a means of investigating representation, independent of works that would become paintings or presentation drawings. Rubens would even stipulate in his will that his drawings were to be reserved for family members.<sup>10</sup> Much

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5 Jane O. Newman, 'Luther's Birthday: Aby Warburg, Albrecht Dürer, and Early Modern Media in the Age of Modern War.' *Daphnis*, no. 37 (2008): 82-3.

6 Newman, 83

7 David Hotchkiss Price, *Albrecht Durer's Human Renaissance: Humanism, Reformation and the Art of Faith*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003): 227.

8 Trevor Winkfield, 'Dürer's Melancholia I: New Looks.' *Raritan* 25, no. 3 (2006): 131.

9 Marek H. Dominiczak, 'the Skill and the Broad Knowledge: Albrecht Dürer as the Epitome of the Artist Intellectual.' *The Clinical Chemist* 58, no. 7 (2012): 1170.

10 David Jaffe, 'Drawings.' In *Rubens and the Italian Renaissance*. (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1992), 174.

like da Vinci and Dürer before him, Rubens amassed a substantial visual referencing system. The well-travelled Rubens' system differed, however, in his collection of thousands of exotic artefacts, which he would use to add visual grace notes of authenticity to his lavishly-rendered works.

Andre Hottle's research places Rubens as an early exemplar of an artist actively strategizing the advancement of their artistic standing through the abilities afforded with reproductive technologies. After the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621), Rubens needed to secure patronage outside the Southern Netherlands. In order to do so, and avoid renewed warfare and associated social and economic disruption, Rubens employed Lucas Vorsterman (1595-1675) to create engravings of his most famous works (fig. 4).<sup>11</sup> These included dedicated inscriptions to specially-selected figures of influence that could assist the artist's career. Before the first of the Vorsterman engravings were made available, Rubens secured the seventeenth-century equivalent of copyright over his entire output, through the unprecedented petition of royalty or officials in the United Provinces, France and the Southern Netherlands<sup>12</sup>. The reproducibility of the engraving, coupled with Rubens' flair for dramatic composition and Vorsterman's own formidable skills allowed the Rubens to invigorate his career during a period of downturn affordable engravings. By the end of the Twelve Years' Truce, Rubens, finally having achieved international recognition and demand, dismissed the engraver, along with the dedicated inscriptions.<sup>13</sup>

The print became a common alternative for artists to financially support themselves, and slowly increased in popularity after its invention. Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669), whose technical mastery of drawing translated fluently into etching, which he developed into a highly nuanced, sensitive art. The Etching technique, originally used in the decoration of armour and weaponry, is an innovation attributed to the German armourer Daniel Hopfer (circa 1470-1536), was ideally suited to Rembrandt's combinations of hard and soft line. Etching differs from engraving in its mark-making process, which involves the inscription of lines onto a zinc or copper plate covered with a protective coating. The lines inscribed would then be bitten into the metal plate by submersion in acid. These etched lines would collect printing ink while the surface is wiped back and then pressed onto paper, creating a seemingly bottomless, obsidian black of line (fig. 5). The mark-making process of etching allows a looser application of line than the woodcut, which requires a disciplined physical control. Rembrandt's ease within etching is partially explained by his general aversion to highly-

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11 Hottle, 'Peter Paul Rubens and the Dedicated Print', 216.

12 Hottle, 73.

13 Hottle, 218.

involved preparatory sketches and studies, instead directly composing on the copper plate.<sup>14</sup> Rembrandt's few surviving compositional studies demonstrate the varying modes of consideration he would use drawing to explore, and had little value to the artist.<sup>15</sup> These served as a kind of thinking process rather than a formal investigation of composition. Composing largely on the plate, Rembrandt would rapidly execute different versions of his images until finally achieving the desired effect.

Though Rembrandt had explored and, to a large extent defined the visual possibilities of etching, his practice did not rely upon its multiplicity to function. Multiplicity was key to the *Caprichos* of Francisco Goya (1746-1828), a series of allegorical responses to war (fig. 6). Goya expanded the visual possibilities etching with his mastery of the aquatint process, but remained an avid draughtsman, owing his flowing, steady line and use of mid tones to his drawing practice. Aquatint allowed varying grey tones to be worked into the existing linear spectrum of etching, and was an invention of artist Jan van de Velde the younger (1593- circa 1641), himself a talented engraver. While Goya is renowned for his paintings and his prints, his drawings are worthy of close attention. Goya made many, both as complete works and as studies and sketches, but all retain the flourishes of his drawing's brushwork, which at once gave his fantastical figures movement, depth and weight. Goya's *Caprichos* and *Disasters of War*, intended as moral allegories, are phantasmagorias of the monstrosities of the human race, and stand as some of his most powerful and visually innovative works<sup>16</sup>. The works are remarkable not only in terms of visual sophistication, but for formally pre-dating the conventions of war photojournalism and the sequential arts. Furthermore, they stand as examples of the rapidly shifting political environment of Europe, which was largely contingent upon the outcome of the French Revolution.<sup>17</sup>

In France, the new lithographic process, which was finalized during the revolution, found great popularity, and a new social context. The post-revolution relaxation of censorship laws allowed a new level of freedom for artists of socially or politically critical temperament.<sup>18</sup> The lithographic process, invented in 1796 by Alois Senefelder, enabled a faster graphic reproduction than previous printmaking techniques, capable of meeting the daily demands of

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14 Michael C. Plomp, 'Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints.' *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2006), 7.

15 Jeroen Giltaij, 'The Function of Early Rembrandt Drawings.' *Master Drawings* 27, no. 2 (1988): 113.

16 Robert Hughes, *Goya*. (London: Random House, 2003), p.179.

17 Jutta Held. 'Between Bourgeois Enlightenment and Popular Culture: Goya's Festivals, Old Women, Monsters and Blind Men.' *History Workshop*, no. 23 (1987): 40.

18 Elizabeth Childs. 'Big Trouble: Daumier Gargantua, and the Censorship of Political Caricature.' *Art Journal* 51, no.1 (1992): 26.

the early mass media.<sup>19</sup> Journals such as *La Caricature* employed many such artists, and defined the possibilities of the political cartoon in an age of increasing technological innovation and social change. Chief among these artists were Honore Daumier (1808-1879) and Jean Ignace Isidore Gerard Grandville (1803-1847), whose satirical prints exposed the vulgar decadence of the French ruling class, and observed the peculiarities of their fellow man. Daumier's line work ranged from a loose, expressionistic building of mass, reminiscent of his ink drawings, to a confident control, compared to the elegant precision of Grandville (fig.7). Both artists displayed an aptitude for withering caricature, a reflection upon the changing attitude toward individual agency and society. However, it is Daumier's stature that has grown in the years since his death, with commentators drawn to the artist's commercial work for its virtuosity, and penetrating more deeply into the subversive core of his oeuvre.<sup>20</sup> There is a recurring discourse surrounding Daumier involving his reputation, supposedly held back by his labelling in his own time as 'merely' a cartoonist. This forms a retrospective dialogue around Daumier's work that has evolved in parallel with mass culture.<sup>21</sup> Artists associated with commercial lithography share a space within the high/low discourse that has been shifting almost since they began. Unlike the comic book artists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose recognition as artists took much longer to begin, lithographers were the subject of the high/low discourse even in their own time. As a renowned caricaturist, Daumier struggled to have his paintings exhibited, and when they were, they were subject to critical discourses of politics and form before artistic merit.<sup>22</sup> While it would seem to be meritorious to evaluate Daumier's work on their artistic qualities alone, which are significant, this would downplay the importance that his work would have in the high/low discourse, and downplay the very real barriers that the artist faced in his vocation.<sup>23</sup> The discourse surrounding lithography is therefore the first instance of a high/low discourse that has evolved alongside photography, offset printing, animation, film and now digital media.

Another artist closely associated with the lithographic process is Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901). Lautrec's entire output was visually indebted to his expressive and confident drawings. Many of Lautrec's paintings appear as little more than contour drawings and incidental colour over a mid-tone support, very similar to the chiaroscuro technique (fig. 8).

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19 Walter Benjamin. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Third Version).' Translated by Edmund Jephcott and Others. In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4 (1938-1940)*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 253.

20 Oliver Larkin. 'The Daumier Myth.' *S & S Quarterly, Ltd* 1, no. 3 (1937): 353.

21 Larkin, 350.

22 Larkin, 350-351.

23 Neil McWilliam & Michel Melot. 'Daumier and Art History: Aesthetic Judgement/Political Judgement.' *Oxford Art Journal* 11, no. 1 (1988): 3.

Indeed, his flowing linear grace translated easily to lithography, and the artist shows a remarkable faculty for capturing movement.<sup>24</sup> Lautrec was approached to design many posters, one of the new inventions of the industrial age. However, differing from Daumier, Lautrec avoided becoming associated solely with such practices, approaching poster designs as one-off commissions rather than a regular occupation. Some commentators view Lautrec's posters, while accomplished, as distraction from his paintings, prints and drawings.<sup>25</sup> While Lautrec's posters still carry some historical weight, they are the inverse of Damier's cartoons and caricatures, which have increased in artistic value.

Conversely, Odilon Redon (1840-1916) seemed aware of the rich darkneses available with the lithographic process, creating many nightmarish, surreal images that were possibly inspired by his participation in the Franco-Prussian war as a soldier (fig. 9). The connection between Redon's charcoal drawings, which he referred to as his noirs, and his lithographs cannot be overstated.<sup>26</sup> The initial waxy marks made onto the lithographic stone are most appropriate in translating Rodin's fluency in charcoal drawing, as well as broad tonal work. In a fascinating variation on the typical role of preparatory drawing, Redon's charcoal works, while related in theme and similar in execution to his lithographs, were not prioritized over them, and did not always precede them.<sup>27</sup> Lithography was incorporated into Redon's practice as a strategy of reproducing more affordable versions of art works, as in the practice of Rubens before him.<sup>28</sup> However, unlike Rubens, who abandoned printmaking once it had served his Machiavellian ends, lithography remained a crucial extension to Redon's practice as a process that greatly appealed to the artist in its technical affectations.<sup>29</sup> Redon's work incorporated many Eastern influences, which were made increasingly possible in the increasingly fast transport and communications, of the increasingly global industrial age.

By the twentieth century, the artist's adaptation of technique to best suit the method of graphic reproduction was assumed. However, many artists viewed the rise of mass culture as at odds with, or at least irrelevant, to their own work. However, the influences of mass culture are evident in the fringes, at least until Pop Art. While Picasso's confident drawings translated fluently into etching, the artist largely avoided using the mass media. Pollock, de Kooning and the other abstract expressionists were largely a-technical, for any mass media, particularly in the early twentieth century, did not yet embody the immediacy that the abstract expressionists

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24 Lincoln S. Johnson. 'Time and Motion in Toulouse-Lautrec.' *College Art Journal* 16, no. 1 (1956): 15

25 Angus Stewart. 'Toulouse-Lautrec: The Graphic Work.' *RSA Journal* 137, no. 5389 (1988): 56.

26 Asher Miller. 'Odilon Redon: Prince of Dreams, 1840-1916.' *Master Drawings* 34, no. 4 (1996): 441.

27 Miller, 443.

28 Miller, 441.

29 Claude Roger-Marx. 'Odilon Redon.' *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 36, no. 207 (1920): 270

celebrated. It is unlikely that mass culture was considered a useful artistic avenue, although de Kooning is known to have referred to and occasionally collaged from, mass-produced images for some of his paintings, notably his *Woman and Bicycle* (1952-3).<sup>30</sup>

While the carnage of the American Civil War was the first war to be heavily documented by photography, it was World War I that coincided with the global potential of the mass media. Images of war were published in newspapers and magazines, and by the time of World War II, this was increasingly common and accessible. Many such images were referred to in the work Max Beckmann (1884-1950), Otto Dix (1891-1969) and George Grosz (1893-1959), all used the immediacy of drawing to respond to the horrors of war with a shocking intensity (fig. 10). The violence of both their subject matter and its visual treatment, carried forth by decisiveness of line work, continuing the tradition of politically subversive drawing of Dumier, Hogarth and Goya before them (fig. 11).

Grosz' work in particular displayed a keen knack for violence and caricature, informed by a rough childhood and through the print media (fig. 12).<sup>31</sup> With the rise of the Nazi party, Grosz relocated to the USA and essentially abandoned drawing and caricature for painting, later citing that he was attempting to destroy his past.<sup>32</sup> Notably, Grosz' critical works, despite their strong stylization, were informed by thorough technical competence, and often by his own erotic works. Though not intended for exhibition, Grosz' erotic works demonstrate his command over the human figure and his subversive disposition, which is at turns humorous and monstrous (fig.13).

Francis Bacon is a well-known exemplar of the ways in which the rapidly expanding mass culture of the early twentieth century could be adapted into artistic practice. Not only does Bacon's oeuvre demonstrate the increasing use of mass culture in artistic practice for reference material, but in Bacon's case, a convenient substitute for the sketch. Bacon repeatedly denied ever drawing, despite evidence of a handful of surviving drawings and oil sketches, but this is incidental, considering the importance the artist placed on reference material. Bacon's frequent visual references to the photographic investigations of movement made by Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) were invaluable to the artist.<sup>33</sup> This reference point helped Bacon maintain a strand of visual consistency throughout the different periods of his work. The use of Muybridge's work, as well as occasional film stills, such as the famous

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30 Robert Hughes. *Nothing If Not Critical*. (London: Harvill, 1990), 314.

31 Mario Vargas Llosa. 'George Grosz: "You Nourish Yourself with Everything You Hate".' *Tate Etc.*, no. 9 (2007): 76.

32 George Grosz. *George Grosz: An Autobiography*. Translated by Nora Hodges. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 270.

33 Harrison. *In Camera*, 65.

'Odessa Steps Sequence' from Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), allowed Bacon to experiment with sequence, which would manifest in many of his triptychs (fig. 14).<sup>34</sup>

Another frequently-used reference point for Bacon was that of the Diego Velasquez (1599-1660) portrait, *Pope Innocent X* (1650), of which the artist collected multiple reproductions (fig. 15).<sup>35</sup> This is a revealing variation of the long-established tradition of the artist copying from works in the flesh and in reproduction as a means of unlocking the secrets of the work and learning the skills of the artist. By engaging in this practice, Bacon continued a tradition stagnating in light of then-fashionable abstract and non-figurative practices. This practice stagnates once again today, with the internet search engine replacing the act of searching physical resources for a reproduction, yet Dumas still insists upon the acquisition of reference material by physical means. This interest in the images and mechanics of cinema are echoed in Dumas' practice, an interest reflected in many artists of the time.<sup>36</sup> As with Bacon, the film still can reference the film as a text, or the still image as a frozen series of movements. These reference points illustrate the increasing importance mass culture to artists of the time, although there was yet a group to discuss mass culture explicitly.

The imitation, or integration of this graphic reproducibility was a unifying characteristic in the diverse group of post war artists that constituted the Pop movement. Pop mirrored the post war glut of consumer culture, and moved away from the utopian vision of modernism and the grand heroism of abstract expressionism. Pop artists became known for their appropriation of the iconography of popular culture, but approaches to this could vary substantially, according to media and visual strategies. The work of Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein highlights the differences of possible approaches to, and interpretations of, mass culture. In parallel to Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol (1928-1987) sought to incorporate the aesthetic of the machine into his artistic practice. Like Lichtenstein, Warhol had worked in the commercial arts and drew upon its bold design and manufactured materiality of for inspiration.<sup>37</sup> However, Warhol adopted various strategies in this ongoing investigation, notably turning his studio of assistants into his famous Factory. While Warhol did explore mass culture through drawings, in which he would emulate the simplified, easy to reproduce illustration styles of commercial packaging, it was but one strategy deployed by the artist (fig. 16).

Warhol's work depended upon the assumption that there was a qualitative divergence

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34 Harrison, *In Camera*, 26.

35 Harrison, 11.

36 Bloom, 'Conversation with Dumas', 27-28.

37 Hughes. *Nothing If Not Critical*, 247-8.



between perceptions of high art and the mass culture.<sup>38</sup> Warhol's success was due in part with the radical reconfiguration of the social hierarchy, made possible by the burgeoning PR mechanics of what is now referred to as the Culture Industry, borne of television and cinema-driven celebrity culture.<sup>39</sup> Warhol's efforts to replicate the machine went as far as to simulate the sheer quantity of indiscriminate production.<sup>40</sup> Enabled by his Factory studio assistants to produce a mechanised art factory in a literal sense.<sup>41</sup> The machine was emphasised by Warhol's own decided evanescence; the artist himself adopted a coy and mysterious public persona.<sup>42</sup> While Warhol did draw, and with some sophistication, it was with a diagrammatic detachment. Warhol was employing the frictionless, mechanical filter of photography, and would leave a singular, unavoidable oeuvre.<sup>43</sup> Subsequent artists would need to align or disassociate with Warhol's dictum, for it reflected a mass culture-instigated paradigm shift that would only increase in volume and frequency in the digital age.

Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997) famously appropriated comic panels, imitating the dot matrix of the printing process in his scaled-up paintings (fig. 17). Bart Beaty highlights the fraught relationship of Lichtenstein and comics in *Comics Versus Art*, using the artist's work as a case study of fine art's history of appropriation of comic book imagery in particular, although he appropriated from other sources, notably including art history. Beaty notes that hostile, anti-elitist sentiments of comic artists and fans are often levelled at the fine arts, which is viewed as a 'seemingly perfect "evil" in the mind's eye of resentful cartoonists'.<sup>44</sup> This tension has been reconciled to a great extent. During this time, comic books were considered trash culture in the United States, and therefore considered fair game for appropriation by Lichtenstein and his peers.<sup>45</sup> The comic book has now been established much more effectively as an art form in its own right, but the role of Pop Art in this transformation from trash to culture is contestable.

While Pop may have brought some attention to comic books, its success also ensured that the comic book would not be viewed as a valid medium for some time to come. Beaty recognizes that Pop's reliance on popular culture is emblematic of high/low tensions, citing Lichtenstein as the most targeted example of angry comic artists and fans. While this tension has largely dissipated with the increasing critical and academic appreciation of comics as a

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38 Hughes, *Nothing if not Critical*, 244.

39 Hughes, 247.

40 Paul Bergin. 'Andy Warhol: The Artist as Machine.' *Art Journal* 26, no. 4 (1967): 359.

41 Bergin, 360.

42 Hughes, 248.

43 Hughes, 249.

44 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 54.

45 Beaty, 55.

form, and the increasing distance to Pop's heyday, it remains an insightful perception. 'The ongoing critical success of pop art limits the possibility that comics will achieve artistic legitimacy on their own terms [...] If the status of comic books were to be elevated, the status of Lichtenstein would be thrown into question and possibly imperilled,' says Beaty.<sup>46</sup> The answer to this problem exists somewhere between commerce and intention. The first generation of comic book artists, which includes Irv Novick, Jack Kirby and Russ Heath, all of whom had work appropriated by Lichtenstein (fig. 18). These artists took issue with Lichtenstein making money and gaining notoriety from work they were paid 'extremely low page rates for their semi-anonymous work'.<sup>47</sup> Comic book fans took issue with the philosophy of Pop, which they saw as devaluing the form by reaffirming prejudice against comics, a medium they had significant personal investment in.<sup>48</sup> From their inception, it was the socio-political situation of the two divergent forms that set them up for conflict.

Comic books are of lower, more-accessible class origins, owing to their design for reproducibility. The mass-produced comic book is considered culturally inferior to the work of art in its original form, owing to the aura as an object of worship.<sup>49</sup> Lichtenstein is often the most targeted in the debates of those viewing the appropriation of popular culture imagery as exploitation by the renowned or wealthy artist of the underpaid, underdog comic book artist.<sup>50</sup> This much is true: Novick was paid a comparatively fractional per-page figure for a 1962 *GI Combat* panel that Lichtenstein appropriated for his work *Okay, Hot-Shot* (1963), and vocally bemoaned this perceived injustice (figs. 19, 20).<sup>51</sup> According to Beaty, the relationship between comic books and Lichtenstein's comic book appropriations is highly problematic for comic books' standing as a legitimate art form. This stems from the assumption that by appropriating comic book images for use in paintings, the artist is debunking the credibility of the comic book as an art form and placing higher importance upon painting. This assumption is at least partially reflected in a commercial sense- Lichtenstein's work sells (and re-sells) for millions of dollars whereas Heath or Novick are left with the original per-page rate from the time the original page was drawn, which was considerably lower than today. This assumption overlooks two facts. The first is that the fine arts, and particularly painting, has a long history of appropriation, as a way of learning that stems in this form at least as far back as the Renaissance apprenticeship system, and as a way of referencing specific masters, works,

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46 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 68.

47 Beaty, 58.

48 Beaty, 58.

49 Benjamin, 'the Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', 256.

50 Beaty, 52.

51 Beaty, 56-57.

myths and narratives that have come before. While the commercial side of the argument– that Lichtenstein received more commercial success than the artists whose work he appropriated– cannot be denied.

A contemporary reading of this friction does need to include context: the place of comic books has climbed several rungs on the cultural ladder since the 1960's. There are arguments that Pop Art helped the elevation of comic book artists such as Heath, and of the cultural status of comic books as a whole, but how much this is true is hard to ascertain. Certainly the context of Pop, and particularly Lichtenstein's work, with its dependence upon tactile sites of mass media for appropriation, has come and gone, giving way to the digital.<sup>52</sup> However, given the proliferation upon deliberately cliché, nostalgic and anachronistic imagery in Lichtenstein's work, its own apparent expiry date has contributed to its ongoing relevance.<sup>53</sup>

It is a popular reading of Pop Art in general, and Lichtenstein in particular, that works selected by the artist for appropriation and chosen in order to satirise the comic book form, or debunk it as a cultural crudity inferior to painting. However, Lichtenstein himself, not unlike many artists of the first wave British Pop movement, who appropriated popular imagery from discarded U.S. Paraphernalia for its exotic quality, sees this as a sincere appropriation of a loved item of nostalgia.<sup>54</sup> It must be noted that comic book artists, even at the beginning of Lichtenstein's career, were no strangers to appropriation, pastiche and satire themselves, and had developed these forms to recognisable, and often innovative, formulae. Lichtenstein's desire to distance himself via removal of gesture or recognisable style has made his work less accessible in the post-print, digital world, yet at the same time prototypical of the detachment that digital technologies would eventually bring to the arts. His subject matter was more akin to the first-wave British Pop artists in its nostalgia and sincerity. Lichtenstein has admitted to this on many occasions, classifying that comics for him, were something of value, rather than scorn. It is also pertinent that Lichtenstein did not only appropriate comic book and other commercial imagery, but also the fine arts including, notably, Picasso and De Kooning, among many others.<sup>55</sup> Like his comic book appropriations, Lichtenstein does not work from the original source, but from its reproductions. This is prototypical of the way artists not use google and other internet search engines to filter and source reference material. Important in Lichtenstein's work is that his attempts to simulate the mechanical process, were executed by

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52 Sheena Wagstaff & James Rondeau. 'Introduction.' In *Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective*. (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2013), 20.

53 Wagstaff & Rondeau, 20.

54 Wagstaff & Rondeau, 'Introduction', 20.

55 Irea Candela, 'Picasso in Two Acts.' In *Lichtenstein*, edited by Maia Rigas.) Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2012), 59.

hand. This is a direct inversion of contemporary artists who seek to synthesise the gesture in the mechanical realm of the digital. Lichtenstein simulated the aesthetic mass culture as a visual strategy, creating a dialogue between art and mass culture.

### **The Journal and the Cult of the Sketch**

Deanna Petherbridge discusses what she calls 'The Persistent Cult of the Sketch' in her book *The Primacy of Drawing* (2010). The chapter investigates the notion that the sketch, which has remained a fairly consistent concept and practice throughout history, as demonstrative of the thought processes of the artist, attributable to the talent or genius of the artist in question.<sup>56</sup> The notion of the sketch implies an intuitive process of problem solving, taking place between the idea and its fabrication.<sup>57</sup> Petherbridge notes the duality of the sketch, which prefigures its own destruction but is miraculously preserved because of its potential.<sup>58</sup> Tracing the term 'sketch' to ancient Greece, Petherbridge notes that Pliny the Elder's observations on sketching was remarkably modern in his understanding of the artist's marks as traces of the thought process.<sup>59</sup> The term has since become commonly used in the context of other disciplines, as well as to forms outside the visual arts, such as literature, mathematics and performance, but remains consistent in its meaning.<sup>60</sup> The sketch functions as both a concept and an action of cognition, allowing freedom from the imperative of mimesis in order to encourage spontaneity and exploration.<sup>61</sup> The self-affirming value of the sketch can thus be applied to a multitude of contexts, but remains true as a cognitive process of revelation and improvisation.<sup>62</sup>

Drawing was a fundamental approach to teaching and learning in the Renaissance artist's apprenticeship.<sup>63</sup> Masters would teach the apprentices about the practicalities of perspective, mass, contour, tone and form before ever moving to paints, in the rigorous, constructed and tightly controlled environment of the life-drawing room.<sup>64</sup> Apprentices would draw for several years before learning to paint, depending upon their abilities and progress, working from artist's parchment copybooks.<sup>65</sup> These workshop copybooks were completely

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<sup>56</sup> Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Petherbridge, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Petherbridge, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Petherbridge, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Petherbridge, 26-28.

<sup>61</sup> Petherbridge, 31.

<sup>62</sup> Petherbridge, 36.

<sup>63</sup> Jill Dunkerton et al, *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 122.

<sup>64</sup> Dunkerton et al, 136.

<sup>65</sup> Dunkerton et al, 141.

separate from the journal however, which was incorporated with increasing importance artistic practice through the Renaissance. The increased technical developments of drawing within the studio were made possible through the greater availability of paper, which had been steadily innovated in Europe since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, finally becoming more readily available in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>66</sup> The development of drawing, coupled with Johann Gutenberg's c-1496 development of moveable metal type, dramatically affected the cultural position of monastic illuminated manuscripts. With the printed book becoming more common, this highly formalised manuscript began to lose much of its necessity and prestige, which made texts more easily reproducible.

Through the Renaissance establishment of the studio apprenticeship, drawing became a part of the image-making system, the outcome of which was generally frescos and paintings for wealthy patrons, and prints for patrons of more modest means. In this context, drawing was relegated to a role of preparatory process, and not the final outcome, which would be further institutionalized into formal pedagogy with the advent of the academy in the seventeenth century. The esteem masters placed on the drawing discipline was rarely reflected in patrons, whose appreciation for paintings reflected the status commissioned paintings were to bestow as the more expensive art. Conversely drawing would become associated with printmaking, which has a close linear relationship, therefore being viewed as the lesser, inexpensive art. Apprenticeship would dominate the pedagogy of drawing for some time to come, and through this, the techniques developed by Renaissance artists would find continued salience in the teachings of masters to their students.

During the early Renaissance that linear and volumetric modelling techniques were developed to new heights, broadening artists' capabilities of representation. The Renaissance preoccupation for development of more descriptive and nuanced representation led to a greater understanding of the applications of light of perspective, as in the work of Piero Della Francesca (1415-1492) and Pontormo (1494-1557). These advancements were in themselves different from the illustrated manuscript, which favoured flat planes of colour and stylisation of shape and representational form. While the chiaroscuro technique had existed in a crude, prototypical form in the Byzantine era, its Renaissance development would allow a level of depth and finish previously unattainable. Chiaroscuro was developed as a drawing technique in which dark tones and highlights are made on a middle ground tone, usually a coloured paper support. This technique almost instantaneously transforms a flat mass of line into a rendered, volumetric representation of form and mass, and continues to be used as one of the primary

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<sup>66</sup> Dunkerton et al, *Giotto to Dürer*, 141.

drawing techniques in the present day. Chiaroscuro was also a significant step away from drawing as a purely diagrammatic, illustrative or pictorial representation. As the drawings of Michelangelo (1575-1564) attest, the development of the chiaroscuro technique allowed drawing a high level of representation with minimal tools (fig. 21). Chiaroscuro was often used to make presentation drawings, which were intended as finished works, rather than preparatory studies for painting or sculpture.<sup>67</sup>

Florentine Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was in many ways exemplary of the Renaissance draftsman, using drawing not only as a compositional device for paintings, but as a means of traversing the fields of science, architecture, anatomy, design, cartography and mathematics. Da Vinci's broad application of drawing demonstrates the historical necessity of its mastery, and the difficulty in its contemporary definition in purely media-specific terms. Da Vinci's wide application of drawing strategies is evidenced in the surviving collections of notebooks and manuscripts. The *Codex Atlanticus*, a collection of close to four thousand sheets covered in da Vinci's drawings and notes dating from 1478 to 1519, is the largest of several such collections.<sup>68</sup> Da Vinci's drawings are investigations, borne of studious observation, developments in not only drawing, but perception and its delineation.<sup>69</sup> Da Vinci's own views on the role of the sketch remain insightful, aware of its cognitive functions, citing the unfinish of such drawings.<sup>70</sup>

Da Vinci's 1481-2 studies for his abandoned *Adoration of the Magi* demonstrates many aspects of the artist's different applications of drawing (figs. 22, 23). Within the three primary studies, the last presumably intended to be the finished work, or presentation drawing, a conscious development and refinement of the composition is clear. The first drawing acts as a notation of different visual ideas, loosely establishing the scene with brown ink, and adding the figures that will fill its spaces.<sup>71</sup> The scene is filled with elements that will continue throughout all three versions, but the work lacks the unity later incarnations would achieve. The second version is more complex, with a tightly measured grid ruled in pen and ink, grounding perspective lines to a slightly off-centre vanishing point. Over this grid the architecture of the composition is added, with a mid-tone added to darker areas, giving the composition additional depth. Finally, in a third layer, the figures of the composition is executed in loose brush strokes of ink. While the overall composition has been tightened, these figures are no more exacting than the previous study, however their placement is more deliberate. The horses, disturbed and

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67 J. A. Gere, *Drawings by Michelangelo*. (London: British Museum, 1975), 7.

68 Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo Da Vinci*. (London: Penguin, 2005), 98.

69 James S. Ackerman, 'Leonardo Da Vinci: Art in Science.' *Daedalus* 1, no. 127 (1998): 207.

70 Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 30.

71 Clark, 66.

writhing throughout the composition of this version, refer to the quarrel of the Magi, and settle after proximity to the Christ child. This visual device operates as what Petherbridge describes as 'a superimposition of time, as well as space'<sup>72</sup>. This is repeated in the third and final iteration, although the horses are fewer and more studiously drawn. The composition has again shifted, settling at a perspective closer to the original study, but retaining much of the complexity of the second without its visibly laborious gridding. Though the study remains short of complete, darker tones have been added to the ochre mid tones of the support, adding to the high level of finish and resolution.

The level of finish demonstrated in da Vinci's work sets it in contrast to his contemporaries. Fellow Florentine Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) applied drawing not to the grid-based perspectival system of da Vinci, but in enhancing the linear grace of his forms. Compared to da Vinci's work, especially that of the *Adoration of the Magi* works, Botticelli's work appears flattened and stylised. Botticelli was a master of egg tempera paint, a medium that lends itself to line rather than tone, which accounts for the artist's linear aptitude. Tempera is most effective when used in layered, hatched and cross-hatched lines rather than deposits of pigment. Botticelli's work was therefore advanced by his skills in drawing. Many of Botticelli's paintings display a linear sophistication that favours lyrical flourishes of stylised form over the realistic renderings of mass and tone. The drawings Botticelli made as references for engravers constituted the first version of *Dante's Inferno* to be printed (fig. 24).

The diminished role of the illuminated manuscript, owed to the invention of moveable type combined with the political and religious upheavals caused of the Reformation. Some techniques associated with the illuminated manuscript were applied to other forms, such as grisaille. Grisaille differed from the manuscript insofar as being executed in monochromatic combinations of oil, ink or tempera rather than the bright, flat, planar colour and design of the late Gothic. Washes and fine pen hatching and cross-hatching, usually on paper, pushed the light and dark tones further forward and back, giving the figures more weight and depth. Grisaille was often rendered for its own sake, as well as a kind of original or artist's proof for a relief sculptor, engraver or underpainting apprentice, or a patron's more affordable alternative to a full-colour work. Grisaille is a precursor to the interdisciplinary nature of much contemporary drawing, operating as a hybrid of the rapidly-developing Venetian and Florentine methods of representational painting, and the linear economy of Northern printmaking. It is also an example of a strand of drawing that was not used for reproduction, instead being valued as a one-off art object.

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<sup>72</sup> Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 190.

The Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius (1558-1617) developed his mastery of chiaroscuro to new levels of artistry in the form of grisaille (fig. 25). With an adept command over linear printmaking techniques, Goltzius applied his virtuosity to grisaille with great success. Goltzius, a master engraver, executed grisaille works so meticulously, that they were considered inimitable by other engravers, and in their scarcity became highly sought-after in their own right.<sup>73</sup> This was unusual at the time, the typical convention being that paintings were valued most highly, with prints fetching more modest prices. Goltzius created an exaggerated, grandiose visual style, incorporating complex linear systems to describe passages of light and darkness. The 1591 engraving *The Farnese Hercules*, made from drawings of the ancient Roman sculpture Goltzius made from life, demonstrates the artists firm grasp of linear form and his flair for mannerist exaggeration (fig. 26).

1635 saw the opening of the first state-supported art academy, the *Accademia e Compagnia delle Arti del Disegno* (Academy and Company for the Arts of Drawing). The founding of the academy marked a shift in the education and industry of the fine arts, with drawing a central focus. Academies would teach the value of drawing to students of sculpture and painting through copying prints and plaster copies of classical sculptures, before drawing from life, and finally moving on to drawing from live models after a year or so. Analytical thinking was especially important to understand the representation of volume, tone, and weight. With this grounding in tradition and rigour, the Academies of Paris would become not only a bastion of the importance of the sketch, but lively debate over its role. This debate would spark massive change in the late years of the academies, of line versus colour, centred largely two figures of 17<sup>th</sup> Century art; the French classicist Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and the gestural Rubens. Poussin and Rubens are subject to a notable inversion in their use of the sketch. Although Rubens made delicately-rendered drawings as presentation works, it is his preparatory oil sketches that exemplify the gestural language of the sketch. Executed swiftly vigorously, Rubens' preparatory oil sketches encompass a linear freedom that would eventually influence the Impressionists. In contrast, Poussin, whose cool drawings are executed simply with ink and wash, did not use the sketch as an indefinite, exploratory exercise, so much as the fast description of a fully-formed composition (fig. 27).<sup>74</sup>

The embrace of emotive subjects and adoption of new philosophies were exemplified in artists such as Th  odore Gericault (1791-1824) and Eug  ne Delacroix (1798-1863), both admirers of Rubens. Gericault and Delacroix relished in dramatic works executed with robust

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<sup>73</sup> Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Petherbridge, 38.



colour and sweeping movement, and represented a radical contemporary reassignment of the theories and techniques of the academy (fig. 28). Such radicalism was interpreted as challenge by the Neo-classicists, best exemplified by Jean Auguste Domanique Ingres (1780-1867), one of the great draftsman of the Academy, and the chief artistic rival of Delacroix. Highly-finished and formal in execution, Ingres' work was heavily influenced by the masters of the Renaissance. Ingres considered himself a custodian and practitioner of tradition, rather than an innovator, differing to many painters of the age. Through Ingres, drawing had reached another peak of refinement and finish, but had yet to mature as a conceptually challenging and autonomous medium, instead still acting as either a compositional precursor to 'finished' paintings or a Neoclassical investigation of formal composition. Thus, Delacroix and Ingres stand at a discourse that, at its heart, is about the role of the sketch, and the tension between finish and unfinish, one of the core qualities of drawing.<sup>75</sup>

One of the tenets of Impressionism grew out of a re-evaluation of the role of the sketch within the French Academy, which many attribute to a veneration of Rubens' vigorous approach to drawing.<sup>76</sup> Previously, the sketch had been made for compositional considerations, and in the academy the work would be completed within the studio. The sketch is, of course, a term that has been adopted by many different art forms, including musical composition, architecture, dramatic performance, and notably in this case, painting. The term 'Impressionism' was first used with scorn, with critic Louis Leroy's play on words subverting the title of Monet's 1872 painting, *Impression, Soleil Levant* (fig. 29). The painting was criticised for *being* a sketch, and Impressionism was rightly viewed as an assault on tradition.<sup>77</sup> This tradition typically relied upon elaborate composition and preparation, not reliant upon drawing for its expressive, intuitive qualities, but for its rapid use in compositional thinking.

The term 'Impressionism' alluded to the seemingly unfinished state of exhibited works, and was eventually adopted by the artists themselves. These 'unfinished' paintings were quickly-executed in order to capture the fast-changing light and colour of the scene, and were a culmination of the academic debate over the role of the sketch, and the role of the studio. Impressionist painters, in particular, were indebted to the well-established artistic practice of making observational drawings from life for study and reference. Impressionism, however, shifted this mode of observation from preparatory study to final work. Like Romanticism, Impressionism stepped once more toward secular themes and imagery, rejecting moralist and

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74 Erika Naginski, 'Drawing at the Crossroads', *Representations*, no. 72 (2000): 64.

75 Kermit S. Champa, Modern Drawing, *Art Journal* vol. 5, no.3 (1966): 227.

76 Notably, an important part of Monet's early artistic explorations was that of caricature, a talent wholly dependent upon the speed and convenience of the sketch, as outlined in Hugh Edwards' 'The Caricatures of Claude Monet', *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* vol. 8, no. 5 (1943): 71-72.

historical painting, which were historically artistic constructions of the studio.

The nineteenth century saw the birth of the daguerreotype, which was announced publicly in 1839, developing into photography, which would have lasting ramifications upon art. Photography challenged painters to re-evaluate the role of their art, as well as effectively displacing drawing as a necessary preparatory tool for painters. Photography would threaten neoclassical tradition, challenging its role in portraiture and historical documentation. Coupled with the Impressionists' preoccupation with capturing light and colour in a vigorous and closely-observed sitting, the role of the sketch was moved into a central position. Instead the sketch was incorporated into the painting itself as a way of perceiving and investigating a subject, and threatened to make the distinction between drawing and painting redundant. A fine example of the two modes of thinking lies in the work of Georges Seurat (1859-1891), whose paintings are a singular vision of light, colour and form, and contrast greatly to his drawings, which capture the absence of light with equal ease (fig. 30). By this stage, the academies had renegotiated their views on the importance of the sketch, encouraging competitions and field trips for *en plein air*.<sup>78</sup>

With the Impressionists' rejection of the traditions of the academy, and the advent of the Lithograph, the role of drawing was again shifted. Drawing's role as a laborious, exacting preparatory process and preferred academic and apprenticeship pedagogy was displaced with the movement, speed and gesture of the sketch, which were ideal for graphite-like marks of lithography. This lent the lithograph a heightened usefulness in the industrial era, particularly within the newspaper. With its similarity in mark-making and tone to charcoal or pencil, the medium was also an ideal conductor for the gestural aspects of drawing in artists. Certainly the range of mark making lithography lent itself to the artistic philosophies of the Impressionists, but rendered useless to the movement by the heavy lithographic stone, in terms of their frequently working *en plein-air*. As such, lithography would operate within the conventions already established by other printmaking disciplines. It must also be noted that the lithograph was rapidly displaced by photography in newspapers, which were at the time the most widely distributed media, relegating the lithographic process from its brief tenure as mass culture to the Fine Arts, where it has remained since.

The role of drawing would change in the twentieth century, through the breakdown of established generic conventions and categorizations of media, the shift toward abstraction and non-figurative works in a theoretical avant-garde and an explosion of mass-media, in which the discipline of drawing would be integral. The breaks in academic tradition of the Impressionists,

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<sup>78</sup> Albert Boime, *the Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, 47.

and their reconfiguration of the role of drawing, would become the grounds from which many other artists would continue to alter the course of the drawing medium, eventually granting it autonomy. Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), would use drawing as a vigorous tool for exploration and experimentation. Picasso would challenge the artistic language to accommodate the rapid changes in society brought upon by technological leaps previously unknown to the human race. Picasso's incessant drive for artistic innovation was mirrored in his drawing practice in its variety, multiplicity and rigour (fig. 21). The artist and his contemporaries radically altered representation with constant reconfigurations and reinterpretations of the very nature of form.<sup>79</sup> Picasso was a restless draftsman, spewing out drawings at pace in order to best investigate ideas for his sprawling practice that spanned so many disciplines; drawing remained at the core of his practice, and manifested in different ways. In sculpture, the lumpen blackness and the primitive form and construction of his ink and charcoal studies.

After Picasso and his contemporaries of form and representation, the artistic firmament of western art was undergoing radical change. Drawing was incorporated into two very different schools of New York creativity during World War II: Abstract Expressionism and the comic book industry. These two completely independent movements are diametrically opposed to each other in terms of commercial ideologies, but would become the first truly innovative visual art forms of the USA. Making drawings as preparatory studies for their works, Abstract Expressionists used the immediacy of drawings to experiment with process, gesture and movement which was then translated directly into their paintings, which were part or wholly abstract. Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), and Willem De Kooning (1904-1997) used drawing to streamline processes, explore ideas and to make stand-alone works. De Kooning and Pollock were two of the great experimenters of the period, blurring the distinctions between drawing and painting, largely in ignorance of mass culture.

## **Sequence and Movement**

Sequence and movement are central components of the enduring popularity of the mass media, including film, animation, comic books and digital media. The description of sequence and movement would at first appear to be made possible by photography and film, within the photographs of Étienne Jules Marey (1830-1904), or the influential studies of Muybridge. As examined by Benjamin, the subsequent repercussions of photography can be examined changes human perception.<sup>80</sup> These changes are visible in the work of immediately

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79 W. J. H. B. Sandberg, 'Picasso's "Guernica".' *Daedalus* 89, no. 1 (1960): 246.

80 Benjamin, 'the Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility', 255.

subsequent artists. Edgar Degas (1834-1917), Monet (1840-1926), Seurat and Lautrec all demonstrate a cognitive shift, offering perceptual responses to the paradigm shift through the renegotiation of the sketch. However, printmakers William Hogarth (1697-1764) and Rodolphe Töpffer (1799-1846) offer the early examples of a sustained investigation of movement and sequence.

While caricature was common by Hogarth's time, the era saw a marked shift away from sacred and historical subjects in both forms, with Hogarth busying himself with an aesthetic that was as equal parts socio-political satire and academic craft presented as social allegory, masking a prominent streak of personal titillation. Hogarth's artistic development grew in parallel to increasing literacy and a burgeoning print media, which in turn allowed a more nuanced, critical age of opinion. While Hogarth's works such as *A Harlot's Progress* (1732), a series of works visually based on Dürer's engravings depicting the Passion of Christ, and its sequel *A Rake's Progress* (1735) were positioned as an instruction on morality, the lurid illustrations of the social ills which these works supposedly spoke out against are simultaneously sanctimonious and titillating, reflecting the social upheavals of a rapidly-expanding London.<sup>81</sup> Hogarth's work prefigure the proto-comic strips in form and content by more than a century.<sup>82</sup> The form Hogarth explored consisted of a narrative built over a succession of images with familiar characters, and their confused and sometimes problematic combination of high-culture moralising and low-culture gratuity (fig. 32). Hogarth's work is emblematic of the high/low discourse, attracting criticism from commentators such as Goethe, who was rankled not by the artist's technique or skill, but his capacity for illustrating the vulgarity of the lower classes.<sup>83</sup> Hogarth published multiple versions of his popular series, which eventually included three images per page with a narrative caption beneath, reprinted in *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, and is now widely regarded as the first newspaper strip.<sup>84</sup>

Similarly, Töpffer incorporated both text and image within a sequence of panels, and is attributed with the invention of the comic book.<sup>85</sup> While this may not appear to be radically different to the work of other artists that used a hybrid of image and text, and there have been many, it was Töpffer's use of the text as incorporated into the images that differentiated the system (fig. 33). Previously, as in Hogarth's print version of *A Rake's Progress*, for example, text

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81 John Carlin, 'The Real Comic Book Heroes.' *Tate Etc.*, no. 9 (2007): 62.

82 Martin Rowson, 'William Hogarth: The Grandfather of Satire.' *Tate Etc.*, no. 9 (2007): 71.

83 David Kunzle, 'Goethe and Caricature: From Hogarth to Töpffer.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985): 167.

84 Carlin, 62.

85 Thierry Groensteen, *the System of Comics*. (Oxford: University of Mississippi, 2007), 1.

was included outside of the image frame, describing the scene in the form of a larger narrative. The narrative would continue across the series, which in this case consisted of eight separate images, which could be published separately or in sequence, not only prototypical of comic books, but cinema.<sup>86</sup> The deployment of cinematic terminology is appropriate when discussing the formal aspects of comics– there are many parallels between the two forms– but in reality the ‘cinematic’ is in fact indebted to the already established graphic terminology of drawing, printmaking and early comics. In this regard, the graphic narratives of comics have developed in lockstep with those of cinema. While drawing, as such, is lost in film, its visual strategies of sequence and movement have become incorporated into the visual language of film, and especially animation, becoming indivisible from each other.<sup>87</sup> Animation clearly demonstrates the relationship between film and comics, being comprised of aspects of both.

Töpffer’s works differed in two ways, most significant of which was his incorporation of multiple images in the same work, which formed a sequence complete in itself. It is important to note that Töpffer would often change the perspective of the scene from panel to panel, creating the illusion of movement through space, as well as directing the viewer through the narrative, one page to the next. It is here that Töpffer’s second great innovation is employed. While text would, for the most part, remain outside of the image frame(s), each frame would include its own text, to be read in tandem with the image, before the next. It is also important to note that Töpffer considered text as important as image, allowing captions to sometimes invade the image and even interrupt it, rather than hovering in the periphery, as with Hogarth.<sup>88</sup> From there, the shift to the innovative use of text, captions and speech bubbles that cartoonists Richard F. Outcault (1863-1928) and Windsor McCay (1867-1934) would eventually explore evolved over time. Using these visual devices, Töpffer innovated a means with which to direct the reader through sequence, creating a manoeuvrable representation of movement through time. While his drawings did not display the sophistication of Hogarth, his formal innovations would have a significant influence over generations to come.

The 1904 invention of offset printing increased the speed of the printing process exponentially. However, this innovation initially complicated graphic reproduction; text was easily printed, but images required more care, which is evident in the difference between early comic strips and comic books. Comic strips became increasingly used by newspapers to expand their demographic. Newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst’s populist

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<sup>86</sup> David Kunzle. ‘From Hogarth to Töpffer’, 164.

<sup>87</sup> Groensteen, *the System of Comics*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Groensteen, 8.

publishing style was associated with sensationalist headlines, bold design and generous space for cartoons, and helped Hearst secure acquisition after acquisition. Hearst took on a nuanced view of the role of cartoonists, employing many of whom he regarded as the best, whether this was reflected in their popularity or not. This attitude is typified in Hearst's continued employment of George Herriman (1880-1944), whose popularity was not as universal as many of his contemporaries, possibly owing to his idiosyncratic dialogue and frequent aversion to panels.<sup>89</sup> Herriman, like many of the early comic strip innovators, included a strong metaphysical theme to the work, using the self-referentiality of the strip to clarify its existence outside of conventional reality (fig. 34).<sup>90</sup> Herriman's most famous strip, *Krazy Kat* (1913-1944) regularly featured metaphysical romps that made use of the multiframe format of the strip. Set in a surreal, desert-like landscape, the strip features the titular Krazy Kat, who is in love with Ignatz, a mouse that despises Krazy, whose favourite activity is throwing a brick at Krazy's head. In an inspired 1939 Sunday page, Ignatz makes a sequence of drawings of himself, engaging in this activity, for Offisa Pup, the strip's law enforcement. Pup, responding to Ignatz' implied, but not actualized, violence, makes a drawing of Ignatz in jail, allowing Ignatz to hurl a real brick at Krazy who is watching Offisa Pup. Such narrative devices demonstrate the subversive capabilities of the form, and knowingly blur the distinction between reality and fiction.<sup>91</sup>

The comic strips of Winsor McCay (c.1867-1934), also a long time employee of Hearst, are some of the inventive the form has ever seen. McCay was acutely aware of the graphic possibilities of the strip, especially over the format of the broadsheet newspaper, which is comparatively huge compared to the prescribed space for strips today (fig. 35). This wide expanse offered McCay the space to explore the formal and narrative aspects of the new form with his elegant and inventive compositions.<sup>92</sup> McCay's influential series, *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905-1914, 1924-1926) incorporated a strategic narrative conceit. The titular child character Nemo would fall asleep at the beginning of each chapter and awake at the end, allowing the artist to explore any number of fantastical characters and situations on the basis that Nemo was dreaming. The dreams would continue throughout the series, accumulating into one of the most visually inventive stories ever produced. Unlike many comic strip artists of the time, McCay was unafraid to stray from established narrative convention, regularly altering the

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89 John Carlin. 'Masters of American Comics: An Art History of Twentieth-Century American Comic Strips and Books.' In *Masters of American Comics*, edited by Paul Karasik & Brian Walker John Carlin. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 42.

90 M. Thomas Inge. 'Form and Function in Metacomics: Self-Referentiality in the Comic Strips.' *Studies in Popular Culture* 13, no. 2 (1991): 2.

91 Inge, 'Form and Function in Metacomics', 4.

92 Carlin, 27.

format of the page layouts from week to week. McCay was also an early innovator of animation. A precise and prolific draftsman, McCay produced a total of ten short, animated films, many of which were solely animated by himself. McCay and Herriman were not the only artists to push the boundaries of the comic strip. The strips of Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956) were also consistently visually inventive. Feininger produced some 51 pages of *Kin-Der-Kids* and *Wee Willie Winkie's World* strips for *the Chicago Tribune* between 1906 and 1907 (fig. 36). These proved highly influential, with their incorporation of atypical designs combining art and comics.<sup>93</sup>

By the 1930s, comic strips were becoming increasingly figurative due to deliberate emulation of commercial successes, leaving the more experimental, innovative work of McCay and Herriman for a more cinematic realism (figs. 37, 38).<sup>94</sup> This was core to the work of Chester Gould (1900-1985), Alex Raymond (1908-1956) or Milton Caniff (1907-1988), who wrote terse, tough-guy dialogue combined with propulsive plotting and exquisite, stylized drawings for *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon* and *Terry and the Pirates* respectively. While there could be no valid basis to discount the artistic magnitude of Gould, Raymond or Caniff, their work in the 1930s would mark the end of the most innovative period of the comic strip, soon to give way to the popularity of the comic book. The comic book had a somewhat surreptitious beginning. Rather than enjoying original material, the earliest comic books were reprinted collections of newspaper strips, rearranged and serialised for the magazine format, black and white on cheap stock. These reprints were put out by publishers of pulps, genre-based literary magazines with occasional incidental illustrations and lurid, full-colour covers. The cheap print quality of early comics made it almost impossible to publish anything to the same level of detail as the strips of Caniff or Raymond, let alone the intricate, ornate designs of McCay. However, the first issue of *Action Comics*, which introduced the character Superman, reflected the forward thinking of his creators Jerry Siegel (1914-1996) and Joe Shuster (1914-1992). Up until then, comic books had been predominantly black and white, so Siegel and Shuster had the sense to give Superman's costume as many colours as possible, which at that time were the three primary colours.<sup>95</sup> While Superman was not the first character of this kind, the comic book he appeared in, *Action Comics*, was the first comic book to feature both colour pages and completely new material, rather than reprinted newspaper strips.<sup>96</sup> While Joe Shuster's drawings didn't have the level of sophistication of newspaper strips, they displayed an

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<sup>93</sup> Carlin, 'Masters of American Comics', 37.

<sup>94</sup> Carlin, 27.

<sup>95</sup> Grant Morrison. *Supergods*. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 11.

<sup>96</sup> Les Daniels. *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes*. (London: Virgin Books, 1995), 22.

appealing linear simplicity and grace that reprinted clearly. The resulting publication was a massive success.<sup>97</sup> Following the success of *Action Comics*, and the examples of mass media promotion of animated characters like Pat Sullivan's *Felix the Cat* and Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse*, Superman was aggressively marketed through film, animation, radio and merchandising.<sup>98</sup>

Because of these limits in the printing process, and its immaturity as a form, many early comic books appear brutal and naive, particularly compared to the more established medium, the comic strip. However, the constraints imposed on artists by cheap printing encouraged stylistic deviations from the intricate and graphically sophisticated work of the Sunday pages, exemplified in a new generation of artists that relied upon bold colours, clarity and dynamism. Early comic books, however, were written and drawn by young men with little or no formal art education, and printed by publishers of ill-repute, often pornographers wary of obscenity laws and their gangster owners.<sup>99</sup> The *Superman* and *Batman* publishers who started the company that would eventually become known as DC Comics had connections with infamous mobsters Frank Costello, Meyer Lansky and 'Lucky' Luciano.<sup>100</sup> The low status of the comic book was not helped by the proliferation of 'Tijuana Bibles' in the WWII battlefields. 'Tijuana Bibles', or 'Eight-pagers', as they were known, were pornographic comics, surreptitiously produced and distributed, featuring popular characters of cartoons, comic books, strips, and film, printed and stapled in short, low-quality volumes (fig. 39).<sup>101</sup> These low origins continue to influence the form, and its perception, to this day, which is viewed by some as a negative quality, but typically comic enthusiasts enjoy and even revel in this aspect of the medium. Certainly, it offers exciting visual possibilities to the artist.

The comic strip's innovation as a medium, and the universal appeal of Superman, was almost completely halted at the advent of the comic book, which took over in terms of the readership (fig. 40). The comic book gained popularity over newspapers and magazines during World War II, with its portability and convenience.<sup>102</sup> The comic strip then became a simplistic version of its former self, its diminished popularity reflected in its diminishing allotted space in the newspaper. Where the surreal and self-referential stories Herriman and the intricate and elegant compositions of McCay once demanded a broadsheet page at a time, this had been

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97 Bradford W. Wright. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 13.

98 Wright, 13-14.

99 Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*. (London: Random House, 2004), 59.

100 Jones, *Men of Tomorrow*, 44.

101 C. Eddie Palmer. 'Pornographic Comics: A Content Analysis.' *The Journal of Sex Research* 15, no. 4 (1979): 287.

102 Wright. *Comic Book Nation*, 31.



drastically downsized by the time of Charles M. Schulz (1922-2000) and his popular strip *Peanuts*.<sup>103</sup> Drawn and lettered with an elegant simplicity, Schulz' strip reflected the shift of the more flamboyant visual talent to comic books, leaving strip artists to adapt to diminishing print quality or face obsolescence.<sup>104</sup> World War II also meant the end of the first-wave of Superhero comics, which would dwindle in sales until a revitalisation in the 1960s, replaced in the meantime with genre-based western, romance, science fiction, crime and horror titles (figs. 41, 42).

The popular new form of comic books would propel drawing into the public consciousness, despite its then low-culture status. While these commercialised art forms would remain adrift from the world of art for some time, they would eventually become imitated, sincerely by the first wave of British Pop artists, ironically by the next wave of Americans, and finally adopted by artists along with the full spectrum of media. The comic book would itself begin to cater for more complex, experimental experiences among its many generic styles. This owes to the assimilation of comic book characters and ideas into the digitally-enhanced, big-budget cinematic blockbuster, which continues to flourish sometimes artistically, almost always commercially. Originally conceived as a quickly and cheaply-produced product with rare artistic or literary merit, comic books were published and sold alongside the pulps, pornography and thinly-veiled homosexually-oriented pornography, adding to the perceptions of the medium as strictly working-class.

Comic books, usually using both words and images, have always been hard to define as a medium. Comparisons to both the visual arts and literature can offer some degree of critical discourse, yet are usually ended with categorization as bastardisations of either arena, a perceived simplification or vulgarism of form, which does inevitably occur in certain instances. However, this comparison is not accurate in that the image and word in this instance are conceived together, and read together, specifically for the form. Although there are many instances of comic book adaptations of both literature and film, most comic stories have been created specifically for the medium, and only then occasionally adapted into word and screen. Ironically, the recent trend toward big-budget Hollywood adaptations of comic book stories, particularly superhero stories, has granted the comic book, long considered geek-culture specific, a respectability not attainable before. The comic book has suffered in this way through the problems of its often confusing authorship. These problems, like the medium's respectability, stem back to the comic book's beginnings, which usually adopted a Fordist

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103 John Carlin. 'Masters of American Comics', 86.

104 Carlin, 86.

model of production, a model that still operates today in mainstream comic publishing houses. This is ironic, considering the widespread use of studio assistants by many artists throughout history.

Typically, the roles of production of a comic book include the writer, penciller, inker, letterer and colourist, as well as an editor and publisher, both of whose level of input can vary significantly from case to case. This is similar to film, a medium that can operate with many hundreds more, however sometimes avoiding the problem of authorship after the rise of the notion of the 'auteur-director', whose vision for the film is viewed as a kind of creative guiding light. This idea is problematic in terms of downplaying the contributions of others to the film, particularly the cinematographer.<sup>105</sup> Similar problems exist when transposing the notion of the auteur to comic books. While there have been many cases of writing and pencilling duties handled by one artist, and even occasionally extending to inking, colouring, lettering, editing and publishing duties, the notion of the auteur in comics is a relatively recent one. This has been a contributing factor in the increasing legitimization of comics, after the commercially-independent and therefore uncensored rupture that was the underground 'Comix' movement of the 1970s. Escaping the corporate concerns of mainstream comic book companies, the artists of underground comix were able to explore their own artistic territory, unconstrained by house styles or genre. This in turn was viewed as a generational shift very similar to the French New Wave of cinema; a historically commercial form of mass culture becoming artistically acknowledged as transcending its form, rather than merely justifying its own existence.<sup>106</sup>

In conclusion, drawing has been constantly innovated in responses to technological advances, and crucial in the development of mass culture. The history of drawing is therefore a history of academic and commercial developments, a conflation of the high/low discourse. In this context of it seems appropriate that an ongoing investigation into the resolution of these two aspects is evident in so many artistic practices. Graphic reproduction, the sketch, the journal, sequence, and movement have all become central concepts that have contributed to the development and innovation of drawing and mass culture, and are therefore applied to the next technological step; digital technologies.

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<sup>105</sup> Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 84.

<sup>106</sup> Beaty, 188.

## Chapter Two: Marlene Dumas

### Eroticism and Drawing

Marlene Dumas (1953—) manipulates mass culture iconography and its inherent violence and sensuality. The largely monochromatic finish of Dumas' work belies the complexity of her iconography, which explores notions of sexuality, gender, and race with a confronting, sometimes autobiographical frankness. The female form is a recurring concern in her work, and by extension, the frequent enquiry into the female form in mass culture. The work of Dumas is alive with intersections of politics, mass culture and art history. Dumas incorporates a dialogue of eroticism, pornography and mass culture through her selection of imagery, which is emphasised by the materiality of her drawings (fig. 43).<sup>1</sup> Dumas also paints, and while these works are technically not drawings, they are made with a similar approach, emphasizing line and wash, rather than colour and surface. Imbricating appropriated imagery with personal photographs, Dumas' drawings are executed rapidly in ink wash and brush. The image bank therefore becomes an important studio tool for the artist, drawing from and commenting upon mass culture. While eroticism can be implied within the sensual tactility of Dumas' drawings, it is also the accumulation of imagery and themes associated with the erotic that prompts discussion on these terms.

In order to proceed, eroticism must be positioned in the context of the artist. Eroticism has potential that depends on wildly varying indicators, including the inner desires, thoughts and experiences of the erotic subject, the artist, as well as the qualities of the erotic object, which is unrestricted in its manifestation. In the case of art, eroticism and its intentions and interpretations, is not static. Therefore, additional qualifications must be made, which are found in the more concrete connotations of pornography and sensuality. Pornography itself differs from eroticism in its approach and outcomes. However, pornography is not always specifically designated to be pornographic by its producer. A product, whether artistic, documentary or otherwise, may be deemed pornographic, in which case it is seen to have transgressed taboos or exceeded acceptable notions of taste. Although the producer/consumer relationship of pornography is often one of commercial exchange, this is not core to its definition. Particularly in the digital era, the possibilities and variations of the producer/consumer relationship have multiplied as a result of the proliferation of accessible technologies and the burgeoning culture of amateur pornography. These variations offer a greater flexibility of format, and allow a broader dissemination of pornography, allowing its infiltration of the mainstream.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Shiff, 'Less Dead.' In *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, ed. Elizabeth Hamilton. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 162.

The complexities of eroticism make a concise definition problematic, which is due in part to the ongoing difficulty in demarcating a line between the erotic and the pornographic.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the French Revolution, eroticism was defined as a malady related to love, a delirium or melancholy of excessive bodily appetite that manifests in various physical and emotional afflictions.<sup>3</sup> Confusion between the erotic and the pornographic originated in the early nineteenth century with the use of the term pornography. The first French use of the word is generally accredited to Rétif de la Bretonne, who used the term in his book *Le Pornographe* (1769) as a play on words.<sup>4</sup> However, the word and its meanings proliferated in parallel to mass culture and the widespread rise of literacy and education.<sup>5</sup> At that time, pornography became popularly associated with the obscene, in part due to the availability of such print matter.<sup>6</sup>

The association of the word pornography to the obscene is notable in its obfuscation of other uses, and in truth this association was a deliberate manipulation of economic, moral, and political thought.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, pornography can have subversive, critical and liberating implications of the rise of the individual, particularly during times of robust censorship. Pornography's connection to the obscene marks a deliberate shift in the demarcation of high and low, in light of the 'menacing' democratisation of culture allowed by an increasingly educated class and the proliferation of print media.<sup>8</sup> Of course, erotic and pornographic works of literature, obscene or not, and art had existed long before these developments, but occupying a distinct position within culture, not accessible to everybody. To be categorized as pornography, a text is dependent upon not only content that is deemed pornographic by its own social context, but to be intended for public consumption, thereby entering the realm of the taboo.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of the French context of the emergence of the term pornography, so too emerged the so-called secret museums. These museums consisted of locked rooms or uncatalogued libraries of pornographic art and literature designed to regulate the consumption of the obscene and exclude the lower classes.<sup>10</sup> Hunt associates imagery of women as a central figure in the demarcation of eroticism and pornography, as gender boundaries were radically

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2 Lynn Hunt. 'Introduction.' In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, edited by Lynn Hunt. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 4.

3 Vivian Cameron. 'Political Exposures: Sexuality and Caricature in the French Revolution.' In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, edited by Lynn Hunt. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1991), 90.

4 Hunt, 3.

5 Hunt, 3-4.

6 Hunt, 3.

7 Cameron, 91.

8 Hunt, 3-4.

9 Hunt, 3.

10 Hunt, 3.

shifted during the French revolution, which are reflected in subsequent literature and art.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of this political shift was in the case of Marie Antoinette, who was not only lampooned, sensationalised and mocked in erotic and pornographic literature, but in part condemned by them.<sup>12</sup> Antoinette's sexualized and sensationalised body, even after death, became a symbol of the corruption of the decadent French state.<sup>13</sup> By this rationale, it is no coincidence that discourse surrounding pornography and eroticism subsequent to the French Revolution has so often been associated with the politics of the female form. Dumas, as a woman who frequently engages with such imagery, is a contemporary manifestation of this continuum.

Considering the contemporary entry into the mainstream of pornographic iconography, enabled by widespread digital technologies, the demarcation between the two terms is once again being renegotiated. The erotic, a term which pre-dated the categorization of pornography, remains somewhat amorphous. It is here that Georges Bataille's investigations into eroticism become vital. Rather than focusing purely upon politics and imagery, Bataille traces eroticism to its ancient and primal beginnings. In Bataille's *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, the functions and manifestations of eroticism include war, transcendence, ritual, cannibalism, taboo and death. Bataille's exploration of base, erotic and tactile symbols are particularly applicable to the physical elements of drawing, posed as a sensual, human act, capable of exploring the cerebral and the physical simultaneously. Bataille acknowledges the gaps within scientific method that cannot be defined solely by empirical fact. Seeking cohesion amid the variety of differing facts, Bataille works in contradiction to scientific method, citing the inability of examining eroticism outside of the history of religion.<sup>14</sup> As Bataille writes, 'Science studies one question by itself. It accumulates the results of specialized research. I believe that eroticism has a significance for mankind that the scientific attitude cannot reach.'<sup>15</sup> This inability of the 'scientific attitude' that Bataille refers to is not unlike some aspects of the discussion of art, which is not always quantifiable in scientific terms. In his resistance to scientific method, and by extension rationalism, Bataille builds a framework for approaching eroticism, rather than defining it.<sup>16</sup>

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11 Hunt, 'Introduction', 2.

12 Lynn Hunt. 'The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette: Political Pornography and the Problem of the Feminine in the French Revolution.' In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, edited by Lynn Hunt (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 108.

13 Hunt, 111.

14 Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*. Translated by Mary Dalwood. (San Francisco: City Lights, 1962), 7-8.

15 Bataille, 8.

16 Frederick Lawrence & Jürgen Habermas. 'The French Path to Postmodernity: Bataille between Eroticism and General Economics.' *New German Critique*, no. 33 (1984): 80.

Bataille identifies the positioning of eroticism by objective intelligence as unquantifiable and monstrous, as with religion.<sup>17</sup> Bataille's own investigations into the monstrous link humankind's fascination with deformity to a perverse pleasure and horror parallel<sup>18</sup> To avoid this, Bataille stipulates that eroticism must be considered in relation to inner experience.<sup>19</sup> Eroticism is not to be confused with sexuality, which Bataille associates with more scientific, reproductive connotations. Violence and death have prominent roles within eroticism, as they do in Dumas' work, whose imagery rarely strays outside these parameters. As Bataille writes, 'Violence is what the world of work excludes with its taboos; in my field this implies at the same time sexual reproduction and death.'<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the transgression of these taboos is a resistance to and a celebration of death in the same act. Death is the end point against which eroticism resists and subverts, a futile contradiction of ephemeral existence; violence and death, according to Bataille, repel and fascinate simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> Sensuality, meaning the enjoyment or pursuit of physical pleasure, is positioned by Bataille as a problematic condition in the context of religion and sexuality. According to Bataille, it is through the senses' deciphering of sensation from outside of the human consciousness that the rudimentary and purely animal can be transcended.<sup>22</sup>

Sensuality, which is bound within the physical senses, can ignite the machines of reproduction, and is thus politicized by the laws of religion or state. It follows that although sensuality can found within drawing, it can be problematized by association with sexuality or pornography. When sensuality is considered taboo according the laws of creed or morality, it becomes a potentially transgressive and/or violent experience, and therefore, according to Bataille, erotic.<sup>23</sup> In a historical parallel to the work of Dumas, Anne M. Wagner investigates the practice of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) in the context of critical responses to the eroticism of his work (fig. 44). Wagner examines published responses to Rodin's work in the form of essays, reviews and cartoons, all of which tend to disregard the more erotic works as unimportant, or non-canon, or focus solely upon this aspect to the exclusion of all else.<sup>24</sup> In the context of Dumas, there is a particular value to examining Rodin's work in this fashion, which is to allow, and even expect, contradictory readings of eroticism. At one end of Wagner's

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17 Bataille, *Eroticism*, 37.

18 Bataille, 'The Deviations of Nature', *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*. Translated by Stoekl, Lovitt & Leslie (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 53.

19 Bataille, *Eroticism*, 37.

20 Bataille, 42.

21 Bataille, 45.

22 Bataille, 29.

23 Bataille, 234-235.

24 Anne M. Wagner. 'Rodin's Reputation.' In *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, edited by Lynn Hunt. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991), 191-192.

presented critical spectrum, Rodin is viewed as typifying the male artist as genius, a primal, physical, and even animalistic figure using his mastery to tame and command his models, attempting to resolve the irresolvable.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, others view Rodin as revolutionary in terms of enabling the artistic discussion of female sexuality, even undertaking feminist readings in this context.<sup>26</sup> These different readings of Rodin's eroticism are related to the inner experience described by Bataille. Wagner draws attention to a critical passages that describe Rodin's sensuality as something he suffers, the artist 'expanding energy desperately to reach an impossible goal'.<sup>27</sup> Such vivid accounts of Rodin's practice are paralleled subsequently in Bataille's writings and Dumas' drawings. The drawings of Rodin are, in fact, central to many of the artist's critics on the basis of their eroticism. One critic, Richard Dormant, repulsed by what he saw as the 'perversity' of Rodin's erotic works, suggested that they would not be responsible for Rodin's reputation so much as his more traditional sculptures.<sup>28</sup> Rodin's public exhibition of these drawings marks a historical shift in the distinction of the drawing as, barring grisaille and presentation drawings, an art object of the private realm.<sup>29</sup> If the drawings of Rodin altered the boundaries of the discussion of female eroticism, Dumas' practice subsequently updates this discourse for with not only a female perspective, but a contemporary one.

Identifying the ironies of using erotic imagery, Dumas once remarked in an interview, 'often if you take eroticism as your subject matter, then it doesn't have to be an overtly erotic image at all. You can make a very boring, dead work using pornographic subject matter.'<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the difference between the erotic and the pornographic operate in different ways, particularly in the context of art. Even in the early days of the categorization of pornography, the erotic was defined by the relationship with the erotic object.<sup>31</sup> Inner-experience is not an aspect of pornography, which has a defined mechanism of signs and signifiers not reliant upon the viewer's own experiences. In contrast, the erotic relies on the individual's own associations, as well as the object itself, creating a more complex and variable relationship with the viewer than that of a pornographic, whose reading is generally more fixed. Therefore, the individual deems the erotic by their own experience, whereas the pornographic is categorized externally and collectively. The two definitions need not be mutually exclusive, but this is entirely dependent upon the inner experience of the viewer/reader. The use of imagery in

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25 Wagner, 'Rodin's Reputation', 200.

26 Wagner, 231.

27 Wagner, 233.

28 Wagner, 191.

29 Wagner, 233.

30 Barbara Bloom, 'Barbara Bloom in Conversation with Marlene Dumas.' In *Marlene Dumas*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 22.

31 Cameron, 'Political Exposures', 90.

Dumas' work is then complicated, according to its categorization as eroticism or pornography. Barbara Bloom notes the disproportionate amount of gallery patron attention being spent on Dumas' work that is made from pornography.<sup>32</sup> This kind of investigation is uncommon in female artists before Dumas' generation, as Dominic van den Boogerd implies, after the female nude was 'excommunicated by feminist theory'.<sup>33</sup> Dumas' female nudes occupy contested and sometimes politicized territory while remaining evasive of specific messages of so-called political correctness or incorrectness. Mariuccia Casadio confirms this, describing Dumas' work as 'refusing to make categorical distinctions between the aesthetic and the ethical'.<sup>34</sup>

Some works demonstrate this tension more clearly than others. *Porno as Collage* (1993) is a series of six works crudely drawn from photographs found in pornographic magazines (fig. 45). These drawings depict various sex acts in loosely liquid execution. Black inks have been applied over still-wet washes, bleeding into the page. Boogerd claims that the series has been rendered 'neither titillating nor moving', and that it is the sensuality of its execution that is stimulating.<sup>35</sup> These selections of images are reconfigured upon their exhibition, forming a loose narrative based on the structure of the fairy tale. Dumas refers to these works as Pornokitsch, using the fairytale 'as a concealment, a veiling of intentions ... A sugary way to clothe impure motives'.<sup>36</sup> Dumas' Pornokitsch embodies an inherent eroticism through its subversion of recognizable traditional heteronormative narratives, as well as connecting traditional and contemporary forms through folk tales and pornography. Dumas works quickly, imbuing drawings with the fluid sensuality of inks.<sup>37</sup>

Metallic synthetic polymer paint is sometimes added to the ink to extend the physical dimension of the ink work.<sup>38</sup> Dumas works on the studio floor, accommodating the fast-drying ink and wash, contributing to the intimate scale and full-frontal, confrontational camera-eye with which many of her works are made.<sup>39</sup> Various erotic signifiers appear in Dumas' work come together in the series of drawings *In Search of the Perfect Lover* (1994). This work is one of Dumas' few series of gridded drawings that operates using not only images from different parts of her image-bank, but a variety of angles, sizes, and even multiple-panel drawings within the greater grid configuration. The faces are of men, women and people of indeterminate sex.

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32 Bloom, 'Conversation with Dumas', 19.

33 Domanic van den Boogerd, 'Hang-Ups and Hangovers in the Work of Marlene Dumas.' In *Marlene Dumas*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 51.

34 Mariuccia Casadio, 'Josephine.' In *Marlene Dumas*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 93.

35 Boogerd, 'Hang-Ups and Hangovers', 77.

36 Pauline Burmann, 'the Thread of the Story: Two South African Women Artists Talk About Their Work.' *Research of African Literatures* 31, no. 4 (2000): 160-1.

37 Burmann, 160.

38 Shiff, 'Less Dead', 151.

39 Burmann, 163.



Many faces resemble Jesus, particularly considering The Christ-like figures included in the grid, which reference studies of classical paintings of the crucifixion and descent from the cross. Veiled faces, pornography, lovers, child-like figures and crucifixes punctuate the grid with their own conflicting, confronting and interacting statements. The recurring visual motifs encourages familiarity in viewers, and builds an internal system that links coded images to a visual history or narrative.

### **Gathering as a Dialogue with Drawing**

Embracing the possibilities provided by mass culture in its supply of imagery, Dumas maintains a significant studio image bank. The practice of gathering reference materials forms a dialogue with the process of drawing. Rather than exploring the internet for such materials, Dumas takes images directly from books and magazines, which mirrors her decidedly physical artistic practice. Instead, she reconfigures the images provided by printed matter, building tension between the source imagery and affectation of mass culture, mediated through the artist's hand. Dumas engages with mass culture without manipulating its aesthetic. Denying the reproductive possibilities of mass culture is a considered tactic, reasserting the artist's critical outsider position.

Cornelia Butler regards Dumas' sifting through the detritus of mass media as central to her studio practice, a response to extreme media obfuscation.<sup>40</sup> By filtering imagery, Butler opines that Dumas not only identifies imagery and subject matter of merit for use in the studio, but remains vigilant as a citizen of uncertain times.<sup>41</sup> Butler's reading of Dumas' practice of gathering reference materials as a 'citizen' infers a distinction between the subjects of the reference materials themselves. The soldiers, supermodels and terrorists of Dumas' drawings are therefore separated from real life by virtue of their reproduction within different media. However, Butler reiterates that the contemporary proliferation of mass culture's images makes it difficult to 'distinguish reality from fiction' anyway.<sup>42</sup> Such selections of imagery therefore create a dialogue with a mediated history, by virtue of their selection, and use, by Dumas.

Dumas' gathering of raw material begins with a wide collection of images of interest, which are then slowly ordered into loose categories.<sup>43</sup> Dumas selects these materials from mass media with specific intentions of filtration and editing. By sorting through the archive, images

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40 Cornelia Butler, 'Painter as Witness.' In *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, ed. Elizabeth Hamilton. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 45

41 Butler, 45

42 Butler, 47.

43 Butler, 44.

are excavated and then visually and thematically reshuffled by the artist.<sup>44</sup> Despite the mixed authorship of appropriated images, they come with their own associations to both the artist and the viewer. Dumas relies upon a loose, iconographic association, preferring an emphasis on images, or series of images, over clear narrative sequences. The imagery is used in a way that is both personal and sincere, once recontextualised within their work. This complicates the reading of the work through the collisions of usually separate signs and signifiers, drawn from different materials.<sup>45</sup>

Butler describes Dumas' own referencing system, noting recurring motifs of the body, collected in thematic sets, as part of her ongoing research.<sup>46</sup> Dumas' reference system acts as a kind of mapping of visual direction for new work. For Dumas, the rearrangement of reference materials operates in a similar way as the sketch operates for other artists. Reference materials are amassed and filed, making the artist's preliminary sketch largely redundant, particularly in light of Dumas' frequent use of water based drawing media, which relies upon gesture and mark over the process of linear construction. In the monograph *Measuring Your Own Grave* there is a photograph of a selection of Dumas' image-bank: several folders with spines displaying categories like war, death, Jesus, saints, love, the nude female, porn, intimacy, beauty, gay, Eros, photography.<sup>47</sup> This gives insight into Dumas' accumulation and cataloguing of such materials. Echoing Dumas' own habits, Dominic van den Boogerd arranges his survey of Dumas' work into specially-grouped themes, commenting upon her penchant for working in thematic sets, many of which recur throughout her artistic career.<sup>48</sup> Dumas' series of 100 drawings entitled *Models* (1994) depicts models and muses, referencing the history of art and the shifting notion of the model (fig. 46). These include models who have appeared in the work of Correggio, Rembrandt, Manet and Vermeer, as well as more contemporary additions, such as Anita Eckberg, Brigitte Bardot and Claudia Schiffer.<sup>49</sup> This juxtaposition of sources demonstrates Dumas' consideration of art history and popular culture as equally valid reference points for appropriation and manipulation. The *Models* series questions the representation of women through ideals of beauty, the mechanics of such representations, and the flattening of personality in such a public existence.<sup>50</sup> Boogerd notes of the *Models* series, 'All are shown as illustrations, not so much of women, but of the way in which women are

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44 Butler, 'Painter as Witness' 45.

45 Butler, 71.

46 Butler, 45.

47 Jeremy Strick, 'Director's Foreword.' In *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, ed. Cornelia Butler (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008) 6.

48 Boogerd, 'Hang-Ups and Hangovers', 32.

49 Boogerd, 65.

50 Boogerd, 65.

represented'<sup>51</sup> Extrapolating from this premise, the artist builds another metaphysical register by drawing these flattened, homogenized and mass produced icons from reproductions, not the models themselves.

Executed in the same year as *Models*, the series *Rejects* consists of drawings intended for, but not included in the highly finished *Models* series (fig. 47). These were rejected because of mistakes, inconsistencies or flaws in the works when compared to what eventually comprised of the *Models* series.<sup>52</sup> When juxtaposed side by side, *Rejects* are not necessarily less pleasing than the *Models* as a whole. Rather, *Rejects* displays a more unnerving darkness, through a thicker application of ink, its ripped, collaged additions and subtractions of facial features, and generally darker expressions. Notably, *Rejects* is the only set of the artist's portrait drawings that changes and grows, whereas other sets of drawings remain static in their exhibited configuration.<sup>53</sup> While both sets are in theory similar enough to be exhibited together, the decision to divide the drawings according to their quality of finish helps to illuminate the editing processes that occur within the studio of an artist as prolific as Dumas.

In the accompanying publication to an exhibition of works by Dumas and Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Marente Bloemheugel and Jan Mot characterise and align both artists through their persistent renegotiation of classical portraiture as an objective, mimetic artistic expression.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Butler associates Dumas and Bacon through their embrace of portraiture, citing their use of the body or face as a site for meaning.<sup>55</sup> Dumas and Bacon's 'renegotiation of portraiture', as Bloemheugel and Mott put it, operates through reproductions of photographs and paintings (fig. 48). This subverts the conventional relationship between artist and model, and so confuses categorizations between portraiture and image making. Dumas' use of mass culture combined with specifically made photographs, attraction to and subversion of classical portraiture, and penchant for erotic imagery has been famously pre-empted in the work of Bacon, a parallel that deserves further attention.<sup>56</sup>

While the link between Dumas and Bacon may seem tenuous at first, consider the studio practices of the two artists. Bacon, like Dumas, abandoned working from life, instead using an image bank. This is notable, especially considering how far the art world consensus has shifted regarding the gathering of mass culture-sourced materials and their subsequent treatment

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<sup>51</sup> Boogerd, 'Hang-Ups and Hangovers', 65.

<sup>52</sup> Bloom, 'Conversation with Dumas', 16.

<sup>53</sup> Boogerd, 68.

<sup>54</sup> Marente Mot & Jan Bloemheugel. 'The Particularity of Being Human.' In *Marlene Dumas/Francis Bacon*, edited by Marente Bloemheugel. (Rivoli: Charta/University of Michigan, 1995), 20-21.

<sup>55</sup> Butler, 'Painter as Witness', 44.

<sup>56</sup> Mot & Bloemheugel, 20.

since Bacon's time. In Bacon's early years, the breakdown of traditional portraiture could be partially-attributed to photography and subsequently Cubism, both of which had major repercussions upon modes of representation.<sup>57</sup> Evidence of film stills, postcards, books, magazines and reproductions are present in both artists' studios. However, Bacon did carefully censor his own legacy, through vetoing catalogue essays, alteration of interview transcripts and most notably in this context, removing unwanted materials from his image bank.<sup>58</sup> In this light, the image bank becomes not only a vital tool of the artist, but a legend for deciphering their visual lexicon. Hamilton accredits much of the continuing power and relevance of Bacon's oeuvre to his assimilation of horrors of the twentieth century through film and photography.<sup>59</sup> It remains unclear as to the extent Dumas' image-bank is edited, but the accretion of visual stimulus is clearly vital to her practice, particularly in anchoring her imagery to a post-9/11 time period, which has notably come to include images associated with terrorism (fig. 49).

Through the appropriation of such images from mass culture, Dumas actively sorts through and mediates the detritus of the everyday experience. Butler considers Dumas' work as 'an effort to literally reposition anonymous characters and acts in order to disturb our own projections and fantasies of sexuality, birth, and death'.<sup>60</sup> Dumas' examination of death has become more prominent, reflecting a rise in the Western world of post-9/11 media attention to terrorism and torture, which has infiltrated her image-bank accordingly. The practice of gathering and referencing mass culture has become far more common in artistic practices of Dumas' era, however this has become an increasingly digital process. In this light, Dumas' gathering habits are resistant to new technologies, whereas Bacon's were embracing. What is consistent is both artists' continuing use of photographic reference and the simultaneous rejection of photorealism through distortion as a response to shifting modes of perception.<sup>61</sup> The studio gathering and digging of this raw mass media is a highly seminal practice for both artists.

## **Drawing, Autobiography and Death**

Death is a theme to which Dumas returns throughout many of her works.<sup>62</sup> The notion of death is central to Susanna Egan's *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999), which discusses death as a universal experience of human existence, and the impossibility of describing death

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<sup>57</sup> Mot & Bloemheugel, 'The Particularity of Being Human', 21.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Harrison, *In Camera- Francis Bacon: Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 230.

<sup>59</sup> Harrison, *In Camera*, 232.

<sup>60</sup> Butler, 'Painter as Witness', 71.

<sup>61</sup> Mot & Bloemheugel, 21-22.

<sup>62</sup> Butler, 46.

in the context of autobiography.<sup>63</sup> Dumas' work is often interpreted through the rubric of autobiography, even though she rarely depicts herself. The description of death is problematic, as it cannot be made after first-hand experience. Egan questions, 'how does one present the unrepresentable?'<sup>64</sup> Bataille claims that the orgasm brings us closer to death, that reproduction is a biological admission of the need to self-perpetuate, and is therefore an admission of mortality.<sup>65</sup> Dumas' work often investigates death through her choices of subject matter, through referenced photographs of the dead drawn from the mass media.<sup>66</sup> Bloemhevel and Mott also note the irony of portraiture outlined by Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), in which the subject of the portrait is mortified by the portrait itself (fig. 50).<sup>67</sup> Barthes' notion is complicated by Dumas' use of post-mortem photographic sources from which to draw. Barthes notes the eminently perishable qualities of the photograph, and of paper.<sup>68</sup> By this rationale, Dumas is replacing one perishable object with another by drawing from photographs. This continuation, the desire to propagate or reproduce, neatly mirrors Bataille's own approach to the compulsion behind eroticism, the resistance to death. As Butler states, 'It is as if [Dumas] has painted them back to life while simultaneously re-enacting the death implicit in the photographic moment'.<sup>69</sup> Butler's reading of Dumas' relationship with photography incorporates elements of both painting and photographic traditions. Dumas' work therefore investigates death through imagery of the dead, but contributes to its own animation through its tactile or painterly aspect.<sup>70</sup> In this way, Dumas' pictorial approach to the representation of death owes as much to the death mask, a frozen moment of the deceased state, rather than a conventional portrait, an illusion of ongoing life. Using photographic references in the context of death, in tandem with gestural qualities that suggest life, creates a representational tension.

Considering that personal imagery is sometimes used, it can become indistinct from appropriated imagery, forming an oeuvre that is at once universal and personal. Aligning personal and appropriated imagery domesticates and familiarises found imagery, adopting it into the artist's lexicon, falsifying the personal. The conflicting personal and public identity creates an opacity of individual identity in the image. Dumas therefore embraces the notion of portraiture, rather than a confessional voice, as a way to structure her project and reveal

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63 Susanna Egan, *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 195.

64 Egan, 195.

65 Bataille, *Erotism*, 55.

66 Butler, 'Painter as Witness', 46.

67 Mot & Bloemhevel, 'The Particularity of Being Human', 21.

68 Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida*. (London: Vintage, 2000), 93.

69 Butler, 46.

70 Shiff, 'Less Dead', 146.

personal or universal truths.<sup>71</sup> If portraiture is indeed the 'perfect expression of a typically Western belief that art is the reflection of an objective, accessible exterior reality combined with uniqueness', as Mott and Bloemheuvel stipulate, then Dumas subverts, and contributes to it in several ways. Firstly, the classical idea of portraiture, of artist and sitter, is suspended.<sup>72</sup> Dumas instead turns to photographic reference, whether the sitter is an acquaintance or somebody found in a magazine. This alters the traditional relationship between artist and subject, and it must be noted that Dumas does not work with materials located via digital means. Dumas also subverts the traditional mode of portraiture by exhibiting them in sets. This mode of exhibition destabilizes the typical hierarchy of portraiture and group portraiture. Not only are the subjects granted equal gravity through the gridding of the works, but they are all drawn on the same size sheets and, almost uniformly, the same composition: a close-up face, head and neck in view. Conversely, this has the effect of de-individualising the subjects in their integration into group compositions.<sup>73</sup> This pseudo-democratic configuration is also at odds with traditional group portraiture wherein subject/patrons would pay a larger share of the commission for a more prominent position within the portrait, or more detail, such as hands or lavish fabrics. Dumas obscures a clear autobiographical reading which she regards as oversimplistic, through this imbrication.<sup>74</sup> Further obscuring such definition, works are given titles that allude to meaning, but stop short of dictating specific readings.<sup>75</sup> 'The titles redirect the work; however they do not eradicate the inherent ambiguity', insists Dumas.<sup>76</sup>

Egan describes the complexity of autobiography that resists death through complex forms of identification with others, who 'validate the dying self,' and, as living beings, themselves will also one day die.<sup>77</sup> The artist's subjects, therefore, become associated with the artist's own autobiography, which is emphasized with the occasional insertion of the Dumas' own photographs of family and friends into references for various sets of works. Viewed in this light, Dumas' oeuvre is readable as a lengthy meditation on death. For the artist, a problem arises in the representation of illness or death. As Egan explains, 'For the dying subject [...] strategy becomes a pressing issue: How does one connect the representation of living persons to representation of their dying bodies so as to persuade a reading public that this profoundly disturbing experience is not obscene?'<sup>78</sup> Drawing the dead turns the obscene horror of death

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71 Butler, 'Painter as Witness', 44.

72 Mott & Bloemheuvel, 20.

73 Boogerd, 'Hang-Ups and Hangovers', 68.

74 Bloom, 'Conversation with Dumas', 12.

75 Bloom, 12.

76 Marlene Dumas, 'Artist's Writings.' In *Marlene Dumas*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 120.

77 Egan, *Mirror Talk*, 198.

78 Egan, 197.

into preserved life. Conversely, the act of drawing from a photograph of a dead body can manipulate its own reading through the artist's hand, separating it from the immediacy of the photograph.<sup>79</sup> These dual connotations of drawing the dead are applied to the life study, which itself is often associated with the erotic, the sensual and sometimes the pornographic. Avoiding obscenity, in Dumas' case, is not necessarily a goal. Often, Dumas' works are obscene in their representation of death, and the pornographic, which can also become obscene. Death and birth are presented as binaries that are opposite each other, yet still open to reconciliation.<sup>80</sup> The link between the obscene and the binary of life and death is discussed by Bataille in two interrelated branches of erotic sensuality directly related to the body. One is physical corruption, the putrefaction of the physical form that occurs after death.<sup>81</sup> The other is excreta, which Bataille notes we are born between, as sexual channels are also channels of excretion.<sup>82</sup> Both of these notions then contribute to the way taboo is organized, and subsequently transgressed, thus becoming subject to eroticism and sensuality.

The obscenity of physical corruption is explored in Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* and *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. These texts examine and critique the symbolic uses of cancer in various art forms, particularly in literature and the popular arts. Sontag wrote *Illness as Metaphor* while undergoing treatment for cancer, and draws attention to the common use of military euphemisms by the medical community, particularly in the context of the treatment of cancer. Cancer is referred to as aggressive or hostile, the Other, the treatments as battles or a wars, procedures as invasive<sup>83</sup>. Sontag disagrees with the use of cancer and tuberculosis as metaphors, noting that these illnesses are used in such a way because of their status as incurable in an era in which medical innovations are becoming increasingly advanced. These diseases remained mysterious in their times. Sontag continues, 'Cancer is the disease of the Other. Cancer proceeds by a science-fiction scenario: an invasion of "alien" or "mutant" cells, stronger than normal cells [...] The original fear about exposure to atomic radiation was of genetic deformities in the next generation; that was replaced by another fear, as statistics started to show much higher cancer rates among Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors and their descendants'.<sup>84</sup> This description emphasises the link between the physical reality of illness and the more abstract, subconscious or emotional reality of illness. Sontag examines the fashionable Victorian concept of the 'tubercular woman' at length, observing that its upper

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79 Shiff, 'Less Dead', 146.

80 Bataille, *Erotism*, 55.

81 Bataille, 56.

82 Bataille, 57-58.

83 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, (New York: Picador, 1977), 71.

84 Sontag, 68.

class index was that of 'being genteel, delicate, sensitive'.<sup>85</sup> Sontag also designated the thinness associated with Twentieth-century fashion as 'the last stronghold of the metaphors associated with the romanticizing TB'.<sup>86</sup> This association adds another register to Dumas' *Models* series, seemingly connecting them more closely to the artists' terrorist and post-mortem works via *Dead Marilyn*. Tuberculosis has of course been all but eradicated, but Sontag equates cancer and, in her follow-up, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (1989), as its contemporary equivalent.

Sociologist Arthur W. Frank writes plainly of the processes that went on during his own experiences of heart attack and, one year later, cancer. Like Sontag, Frank uses militaristic language to describe the body's diminished role as territory to be fought over, and ultimately colonized.<sup>87</sup> The notion of colonization is inescapable for the expatriate white artist of Apartheid South Africa. As a political backdrop, the notion represents a significant and onerous topic in discussion of any theory or depiction of identity, appropriation or myth. Thus, Frank's choice of the term 'colonize', as a white American, with historical parallels of his own, is significant, as is the South Africa-raised Dumas' *Black Drawings* series (fig. 51). Like Sontag, Frank is somewhat averse to humanising illness and the pain that comes with it. Both authors prefer to associate illness with the monstrous Other, somewhat above classification or empirical measurement, and abstract by definition. 'Giving illness a face, a temptation enhanced by the dark, only muddles things further. At night I faced only myself. When we feel ourselves being taken over by something we do not understand, the human response is to create a mythology of what threatens us. We turn pain into "it", a god, an enemy to be fought. We think pain is victimizing us, either because "it" is malevolent or because we have done something to deserve its wrath. We curse it and pray for mercy from it. But pain has no face because it is not alien.'<sup>88</sup> The resistance to death becomes a resistance to oneself, or a reflection of oneself. Pain, which is itself an inner experience, is recounted, becoming an autobiographical inversion of the inner experience of eroticism. Eroticism's original designation as a malady is a striking parallel to pain; the sufferance of the inner experience becomes physically manifest, and both conditions are complicated by these dual sensations.

Dumas' perspective as an expatriated South African affirms her outsider status, but ironically she remains tethered to a colonial experience, having relocated to the Netherlands, itself a colonial nation. Dumas retains a wary tone when commenting upon colonialism.<sup>89</sup> Dumas' series *Black Drawings* take her investigation of portraiture into this territory. The

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85 Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, 28.

86 Sontag, 29.

87 Arthur W. Frank, *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness*. (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), 51.

88 Frank, 30-31.

89 Dumas, 'Artist's Writings', 140.



series explicitly discusses the idea of blackness, a rousing and uncomfortable topic when considered in the context of Dumas' upbringing in apartheid South Africa. These works draw into question the ethics of portraiture, of a white, privileged artist making such a series. While many of Dumas' works betray only incidental pieces of information, they rarely disclose an overt personal or political narrative. 'I give [viewers] a false sense of intimacy. I think the work invites you to have a conversation with it', Dumas once commented in an interview.<sup>90</sup> However, this position is risky: vagary of intent could potentially render the subjects as shallow investigations of 'the savage', the 'primitive' or otherness.<sup>91</sup> To discuss blackness in the context of a white artist raised in Apartheid South Africa is a politically bold and potentially fraught action. Dumas' *Black Drawings* also demonstrate the way the materiality of drawing, in this case the blackness of ink, can be reconsidered in the context of such political stances. The ink's thick, viscous application via loaded brushes heightens the sensuality of the drawings and darkens the marks. So while *Black Drawings* are not strictly autobiographical, they do discuss a distinct aspect of Dumas' lived experiences as a comparatively privileged white woman and a colonial background which, despite Dumas' relocation to Amsterdam, cannot be escaped. 'White people share a collective guilt that will not be forgiven in our lifetime', writes Dumas.<sup>92</sup> In this way, Dumas' *Black Drawings* explore the sensitive territory of racial identity, provoking merely by existing. Perhaps this is the reason why the *Black Drawings* are the most straightforward of Dumas' drawings. There is no possibility of the men and women depicted being interpreted as a cipher for the artist's own self. Or is this itself a misconception, a red-herring to again distance the artist from one clear message or reading? 'I often make dark works of figures of indeterminate or non-specific origin. The ordinary white critic seems to perceive and thus describe everything that's not *very white* as black', writes Dumas.<sup>93</sup> This statement creates a tension with the title of the series, which appears to be a direct reference to the racial origin of portrayed subjects. This discord of potential readings is resolved in their execution as black and white drawings. The introduction of colour would allow a more nuanced prescription of assumed racial backgrounds of the subjects, thus nullifying this tension of black and white.

The finality of death is present in the work of Hannah Wilke (1940-1993), who explored gender politics through a variety of art forms, including photography, sculpture, performance, video and drawing, often through the lens of eroticism. Like Sontag, Wilke was diagnosed with

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90 Bloom, 'Conversation with Dumas', 12.

91 Casadio, 'Josephine', 90.

92 Dumas, 'Artist's Writings', 140.

93 Dumas, 141.

cancer which eventually proved fatal. In a confronting use of autobiography, Wilke documented her seven-year ordeal with photographs (fig. 52). A cruel irony was that it became the 'destruction' of Wilke's physical beauty that became the focus of her career, which sought to critique sexual politics, particularly in the context of the Feminist discourse of the beauty myth.<sup>94</sup> Wilke's death was made more tragic not by its circumstances, but by her deteriorating physical state, which she documented, in light of her 'bygone' beauty, indicting society and its increasingly beauty-obsessed trajectory.

Wilke, like Sontag, investigates the body's most powerful and sometimes indescribable conditions, which cannot necessarily be put to words.<sup>95</sup> However, unlike Sontag and Frank's accounts and disseminations of their experiences, which are thorough, Wilke's works are frighteningly immediate, triggering a visceral response. Nancy Princenthal wrote of Wilke's harrowing self-portraits and their fatality. 'Depicting fatal illness— her mother's, and her own— did not simply transform the shape of Wilke's career into a tidy narrative arc that goes from beauty to decay, pride to fall,' writes Princenthal of Wilke's documentation of her treatment. 'If the *petite mort* of orgasm suggests a nexus of shared sublimity between sexual climax and mortality, the flip side of that transcendence— its fleshly guarantee— is in gross physicality.'<sup>96</sup> According to Princenthal, the state of death is synonymous with the decay of the physical, which is also the basis, according to Bataille, for many ancient taboos associated with death and the ritual of burial.<sup>97</sup> The dead are buried to avoid the risk of contagion, which has become ritualized, and so the exhumation of a corpse, for example, remains a strong taboo. Autobiography, and self-portraiture, is also connected to death, for in a corpse we see an image of our own unavoidable destiny.<sup>98</sup>

The 'gross physicality' that Princenthal describes is particularly suited to drawing, a practice to which Wilke returned in her final years. Drawing remained a relatively convenient and fast way for Wilke to continue her artistic engagement. These drawings consisted entirely of self-portraiture, grimly reflecting not only her exhausted features and bandaged, intravenous-threaded wrists, but her own diminished technical capabilities (fig. 53). Even the looser medium of brush and wash could not fully accommodate her failing energy, but at this point in her treatment, the execution of the drawings was its own triumph.<sup>99</sup> Wilke's own autobiography would continue, enabled by her artistic practice, until her death. Dumas' own

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94 Nancy Princenthal, *Hannah Wilke*. (Munich: Prestel/Random House, 2010), 147.

95 Princenthal, 123.

96 Princenthal, 122.

110 Bataille, *Erotism*, 55.

111 Bataille, 44.

99 Princenthal, 134.

continuing, partially-autobiographical oeuvre includes many meditations upon the nature of death, often counterpointed with images preoccupied with life. In terms of autobiography, death is the end of the narrative from the perspective of the author. Egan describes the autobiographical death as having the ability to bring about narrative resolution, which 'can seem inappropriately romantic or contrived'.<sup>100</sup> Conversely, Egan infers that this romanticized notion of death is often subverted through the author's desire to name, or depict, the object of fear and helplessness.<sup>101</sup> Dumas appears to distance her work from any such fears, whether they are mortal or political. In one of Dumas' 2004 works, *Stern*, the artist highlights the complexities of death through the public eye of mass culture. *Stern* depicts radical German militant Ulrike Meinhof, made by Dumas from the German news magazine of the same name (fig. 54). The photograph was taken after Meinhof's suicide, on the eve of her sentencing for various charges associated with her involvement with the West German radicals known as Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction). Gerhard Richter (1932— ) also used the magazine's photograph to make three paintings, which, according to Shiff, made Dumas' work comment not only on the subject matter of the photograph, but on Richter, and his versions of the image. Shiff notes that Dumas' version is rendered 'more graphic, more immediate; she made the image of death less dead'.<sup>102</sup> The portrayal of the dead animates as the portrayal of the living mortifies.

Dumas' works depicting children resolves the erotic tension that is evident throughout her work. The discontinuous human existence is continued beyond death, through conception, pregnancy and childbirth, all of which Dumas has depicted multiple times. As Lisa Gabriella Mark notes, Dumas 'dared to evoke the erotic flush and existential terror of motherhood', a difficult subject.<sup>103</sup> Mark outlines Dumas' ongoing interrogation of motherhood and the female experience as equal parts sublime and abject, depending upon the work in question.<sup>104</sup> Dumas' 1986 series, *Fear of Babies*, wickedly satirizes its mass culture source, a 1978 *Cosmo* magazine which features cover girls interspersed with studio portraits of babies. As Mark bleakly notes, 'One particularly sinister-looking baby wears a crown, while another's flat right cheek and graduated neck cause it to resemble a mollusk'.<sup>105</sup> The extent to which the babies are made to look ugly or monstrous is unclear, but the series' irreverence toward the *Cosmo* portraits is

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100 Egan, *Mirror Talk*, 196.

101 Egan, 196.

102 Shiff, *Less Dead*, 155.

103 Lisa Gabriella Mark, 'the Blinding Factor: The Maternal Gaze of Marlene Dumas.' In *Marlene Dumas: Measuring Your Own Grave*, ed. Cornelia Butler (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), 201.

104 Mark, 203.

105 Mark, 203.

clear.

Demonstrating a much more serious approach toward children is Dumas' work *The Painter* (1994, fig. 55). The work, made from a photograph of Dumas' daughter in thin washes of pigment, depicts a toddler standing with hands covered in paint. Mark describes the work as 'a near-allegory for the primal experience of mark-making, while at the same time serving as a nuanced psychological portrait of mother and daughter'.<sup>106</sup> This interpretation makes a compelling argument for not only Dumas' practice's inherent eroticism, but her approach toward it; personal in content, guardedly vague of intent, approximate in representational likeness and at ease with its adaptation of mass culture. As Bataille states, 'Childbearing cannot be dissociated from [the] complex of feelings. Is it not itself a rending process, something excessive and outside the orderly course of permitted activity?'<sup>107</sup> Art appears to imitate life in this regard, just as Dumas depicts images of death. Between the extremes of life and death is an exploration of the erotic, through a sifting and reconfiguration of pervasive mass imagery, explored through the sensuality of drawing. Dumas' meditations upon death are reconciled by the act of making the drawing, its finality tempered by a resolute, but futile, gesture.

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<sup>106</sup> Mark, 'the Blinding Factor', 214.

<sup>107</sup> Bataille, *Erotism*, 54.

## Chapter Three: Gary Panter

### Drawing, Comics and the Hybridization of Word and Image

Gary Panter's practice grows from a journal based exploration of images and ideas. Drawing serves as a framework for approaching and processing visual ideas, which Panter considers the primary element of his practice.<sup>1</sup> Panter's work self-consciously traverses the gap between the institutional fine arts, and the crass, commercialised territory of popular culture (fig. 56). Panter does this with an equally firm grasp on the history of art, particularly Blake, Bosch and Dante, and the low world of television, comic books and rock 'n' roll of Frank Zappa, Jack Kirby and Captain Beefheart. Panter displays in his work the ease with which contemporary art can now move between previously-distinct boundaries between high and low art forms. Panter is particularly versatile, having established a career as an artist, exhibited on a national and international level, a frequently published comic book artist, as well as occasional commercial art and design. Such meanderings led to designing sets, characters and the overall aesthetic of the hit 1980s TV show *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

Panter is commonly associated with the Los Angeles punk scene of the late 1970s, however considering his visual investigations into psychedelia, comics, monster movie and other subcultures, punk appears too restrictive in scope. Artist Mike Kelley describes Panter's work as cyberpunk, in reference to his post-industrial, science fiction settings and alien denizens, and Panter's transcendence of punk ideals and aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Cyberpunk is a pertinent description, considering the constant collision of visual and conceptual elements within Panter's drawings (fig. 57). These collisions include constant exploration and reevaluation of the relationship between high and low, with Panter engaging with Surrealist and Modernist image-making strategies and applying them to his own non-linear and suspended narratives.<sup>3</sup> These high/low collisions of abstraction and figuration build the narratives within Panter's work, and complicate the already complex relationship between the original media.<sup>4</sup>

While this dichotomy between high and low has become more commonly examined through the exhibition of original comic book pages of artists like Kirby and Robert Crumb, it is virtuosity that is typically valued in these instances. The formal qualities of the comic book are particularly difficult to adequately examine in a typical museum's display format. A wall is an acceptable place to display an original comic book page, but this falls outside of the original

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1 Robert Storr, 'Painting, No Joke!: A Conversation with Gary Panter.' In *Gary Panter*, ed. Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 12.

2 Mike Kelley, 'Gary Panter in Los Angeles.' In *Gary Panter*, ed. by Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 7.

3 Doug Harvey, 'Pictures from the Psychedelic Swamp: Gary Panter, Narrative, and the Politics of Idiosyncrasy.' In *Gary Panter*, ed. by Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 10.

4 Harvey, 11.

context of the comic book itself, and many of its formal aspects can be lost.<sup>5</sup> Such displays smack of artefact rather than art object, particularly in regard to a deceased artist such as Kirby. The original comic book page loses something in the context of the gallery wall, just as a painting does in publication. Panter's work bypasses this problem simply by producing work in excessive quantities for both media, adapted to best suit the method of display, whether wall or page. The debate over comic books' validity as an art form has been in progress since comic book scholarship began to appear. Recent scholarship has accelerated academic acceptance of the formal complexity of comics, with commentators such as Thierry Groensteen and Bart Beaty positioning comics in consideration of the increased commonality of contemporary mass culture and art. Beaty notes that the hybrid visual language of comic books, while one of the medium's great formal strengths, was what earned comics criticism by Clement Greenberg, for a lack of modernist purity.<sup>6</sup> Panter manipulates this high/low friction through collisions of references. Appropriated comic book imagery is itself a loaded and somewhat political signifier in terms of media, particularly to the comic book fan (fig. 58).

Groensteen's *The System of Comics* (1999) is a thorough investigation into the formal aspects of the form. Less concerned with history and aesthetics, Groensteen categorises comics as subverting and contradicting traditional modes of reading and viewing.<sup>7</sup> Groensteen positions comics as capable of deploying filmic and literary devices simultaneously, but is quick to point out that viewing this hybridity as confrontational is counter intuitive.<sup>8</sup> Instead, Groensteen categorises comics' inherent hybridity as constantly innovating the experience of the form, which relies on an active participation by the modern 'reader-viewer'.<sup>9</sup> Groensteen bypasses problematic definitions associated with the hybridity of comics by presenting a system that accounts for the form's complexity, while remaining open enough to be applied to its many formal variations.<sup>10</sup> This is especially appropriate in an extended analysis of Panter's work, considering that many of his comics, and indeed his gallery work, adopt different aspects of comics as visual strategies, which are rarely repeated (fig. 59).

Like Dumas, Panter adopts a broad range of visual sources, but relies on these images for no more than a glancing reference. Source imagery serves as more of a starting point from which Panter can work tangentially, different to Dumas using such an image as a base for the work. Panter's linework has been dubbed the 'ratty line style' in reference to his rapid and

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5 Bart Beaty, *Comics versus Art*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 186.

6 Beaty, 20-21.

7 Thierry Groensteen, *the System of Comics*. (Oxford: University of Mississippi, 2007), 10.

8 Groensteen, 8.

9 Groensteen, 10.

10 Groensteen, 20.

curious line, which seems to renegotiate its course constantly, eschewing realist representation for a more expressive approach.<sup>11</sup> Panter's amorphous, adaptable drawing style tends to reflect narrative eccentricity rather than attempt visual consistency.<sup>12</sup> Writer and curator Doug Harvey positions Panter as entirely separate from the sterile, ironic pop art scene, identifying his work as aware of the mass media operating as a kind of collective unconscious.<sup>13</sup> Harvey also notes Panter's insistent predisposition for narrative as a factor in determining his 'outsider' status in the art world, rather than the use of popular culture.<sup>14</sup> Such readings of Panter's work simultaneously affirm and subvert his significance. Panter rarely acknowledges the high/low barriers as any more than an idea to subvert, which is reflected in his equal consideration of Picasso and Kirby as the foundation of his artistic practice.<sup>15</sup> Where a critic may regard this as a discordant association, Panter's practice does relate to both high and low art forms, and as such draws freely from both. Furthermore, Panter considers Abstract Expressionism a paradigm of interest, but incorporates its principles into a way of preparing surfaces and backgrounds for figurative work.<sup>16</sup> This simultaneously acknowledges Panter's Modernist precursors, and subverts the philosophical foundations upon which Abstract Expressionism was based. By applying his own philosophical framework to his willingness to work in art forms traditionally associated with both high and low art forms, Panter secures artistic agency free from editorial intervention of mainstream comic books. Panter's work synthesizes high and low not as an academic exercise, but a way of life.<sup>17</sup>

Panter's imbrication of high and low was not only a reflection of his own visual interests, but a strategy to maintain artistic practice within challenging economic circumstances. Panter's manifesto was written in consideration of mass culture from the outset, being published piecemeal in the *LA Reader's* free 'personals' pages.<sup>18</sup> A section of Panter's 1980 'Rozz Tox' manifesto highlights the Warholian marriage of art and commerce, mechanically translated through the mistype of the newsprint.

It is unfortunate and unacceptable that vile and lazy do nothings are given unwarranted

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11 Roger Gastman, 'Comics, Pee-Wee's Playhouse and the Hippies Getting What They Wanted.' *Juxtapoz*, no. 77 (2007): 108.

12 John Carlin. 'Masters of American Comics: An Art History of Twentieth-Century American Comic Strips and Books.' In *Masters of American Comics*, edited by Paul Karasik & Brian Walker John Carlin. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 148.

13 Harvey, 'Pictures from the Psychedelic Swamp', 10.

14 Harvey, 11.

15 Gary Panter, 'Gary Panter on Gary Panter.' In *Gary Panter*, ed. Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 342.

16 Panter, 344.

17 Carlin, 140.

18 Panter, 308.

credence for mouthing such foul and mean cliches [sic] as "rip-off" and "sold-out [sic]. They have no understanding of our economy and the time it takes society to go. CONFESS AND SHUT UP! CAPITALISM GOOD OR ILL IS THE RIVER IN WHICH WE SINK OR SWIM. INSPIRATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN BORN OF RECOMBINATION [...]

Currently we are suffering a lean economy. By necessity [sic] we must be self-supporting. Popular media is bigger than fine art media. Aesthetic mediums must infiltrate popular mediums. [W]e are building a BUSINESS based art movement. This is not new. Admitting it is.<sup>19</sup>

Panter's manifesto condones not only hybrid forms, but hybrid economies, conceding capitalism's dominance. With Panter's constant hybridization of seemingly separate forms, and his own manifesto, a comparison to Donna Haraway's short, declarative, propositional essay, 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1985) is relevant for its response to the shifting Reagan-era politics of the USA. Haraway contextualised the cyborg as a challenging symbol onto which could be projected ideas of radical otherness, uncoupled from established, phallogentric gender roles.<sup>20</sup> Haraway's invocation of the cyborg is used as a rejection of barriers between man and machine, between the natural and the artificial, a metaphor for a new paradigm shift. Haraway's ironic stance allows the essay to embrace humorous and serious concepts in equal measure, through blasphemy, in this instance of the evangelical traditions of US Politics.<sup>21</sup> This includes resisting any concession for patriarchy, even stipulating specific feminist alterations to the Marxist and socialist models of feminism.<sup>22</sup> Haraway criticises the failure of Marxist feminism to naturalize unity, instead becoming a 'possible achievement' in a still-capitalist and patriarchal system.<sup>23</sup> Haraway refers to modern warfare as 'a cyborg orgy', in positioning the cyborg as mapping 'social and bodily reality'.<sup>24</sup> Haraway makes the distinction that boundaries between science fiction and reality are 'an optical illusion', drawing comparison to cyborgs of contemporary science fiction and medicine.<sup>25</sup> Even Haraway's use of the term 'optical illusion' is a carefully phrased hybrid of two terms that are both associated with art and science fiction. While a much longer document, Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto' resembles Panter's own manifesto on several key points, particularly the call for a reconfiguration of the relationship

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19 Panter, 'Gary Panter on Gary Panter', 309.

20 Donna Haraway. 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s.' In *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture*, ed. Bruce Grenville. (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2001), 141.

21 Haraway, 139.

22 Haraway, 149-150.

23 Haraway, 150.

24 Haraway, 140

25 Haraway, 140.



between capitalism and creativity. Also like Panter's manifesto, *A Cyborg Manifesto* takes for granted the social reality in which it is written, and makes demands on that basis, rather than a nostalgic wishing for 'simpler' times. Panter uses mass culture as a way to broaden the scope of artistic production. While this superficially resembles the credo of Warhol, who went to great lengths to synthesise the aesthetic and productivity of the machine, Panter takes this one step further and actively engages with the machine itself. Warhol's act of imitating the machine is paralleled by Haraway's reference to the pre-cybernetic machine, which is not autonomous, and cannot achieve man's dream, 'only mock it'.<sup>26</sup> Rather than obtaining comic book imagery, synthesizing the pleasing aesthetic of the printing press dot matrix, Panter instead produces his own comic books, which aligns the artist with Haraway's cyborg; the machine is in this case not imitated, but deployed as an artistic tool. In doing so, Panter makes a statement pertaining to the separation of mass culture and art without being drawn into any such debate.

Panter uses these strategies in a variety of ongoing projects, including his poster series (fig. 60). Many of Panter's posters are made with a process that involves photocopying drawings over magazine pages. While the photocopier allows reproduction in large quantities, the use of different magazine pages as paper stock allows for infinitesimal variation, with the original drawing and magazine page interacting differently with each reproduction.<sup>27</sup> Notably, many of Panter's posters advertise nothing but their own existence, circumventing the advertising purpose of the practice, and display text that verges on the incomprehensible.<sup>28</sup>

Panter applies the same level of innovation to the distribution of his work as to creating the work. In one ongoing project, Panter sells modestly-priced, one-off drawings over his website (fig. 61). This project is designed to allow younger, or less-financially able patrons to purchase original work.<sup>29</sup> In order to manage the to-order production of drawings, Panter uses a uniform paper size, and asks patrons to submit three words from which he then free-associates, making the drawing. In this way, patrons forgo the choice of a particular work in exchange for a small part in the drawing's execution. The drawings are also documented and catalogued, thereby canonized in the artist's oeuvre. Panter recently published the first 100 of these works in the *100 Drawings by Gary Panter* book (2004), available from the artist's website. Other low-cost items are available through Panter's online platform, including prints, toys, small-edition artist books, comics and even one-off, hand-drawn dinner plates. This kind of innovation is made more practicable by digital technologies, and allows the artist to further

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26 Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', 143.

27 Coley, 'Mindprobe', 230.

28 Coley, 232.

29 Storr, 'Painting, No Joke!', 12-13.

explore fields not usually associated with comics or fine art, yet becoming a part of the artist's output.<sup>30</sup> Panter thereby includes himself in fields not traditionally associated with cartooning.

Cartooning itself has taken decades to achieve artistic legitimacy. Partially due to the commercial aspects of comic books and strips, combined with a difficulty in assigning credit for creative direction in a form that is often collaborative, cartooning is associated to high/low debates by virtue of its own hybrid form. Beaty highlights the career of Jack Kirby, widely considered one of the most influential comic book artists in the form's history (fig. 62). Kirby's work has been influential for its powerful and lurid visual style, his sincere and melodramatic storytelling, and obsessive investigations of the relationship between God and Man. Kirby's work, which spans several decades, finds ways of shaping the artists' own obsessions and concerns into a multi-faceted, yet thematically and artistically singular, body of work. The narrative possibilities of drawing have been exhaustively investigated by comic books, with their cinematic and manoeuvrable delineation of time and sequence, over decades of innovation. Until recently, the comic book medium has received little academic acknowledgement of conceptual or even artistic innovation from institutions. Kirby's work, despite his highly-refined and individualistic style and his investigation of personal themes throughout his 20,000 (published) page career, remains primarily associated with the commercialised comic book medium. This is pertinent to Panter's own comic book practice in revealing the cultural shifts in the acceptance of cartooning between the two artists.

Unlike Panter, whose artistic autonomy and legitimacy has never been in contention, Kirby's legitimacy outside of comics scholarship is a recent occurrence. With increasing the interest and academic study of comic books, Kirby has been retroactively canonized as one of the geniuses of the field.<sup>31</sup> Mainstream comics, being a predominantly collaborative form, can be complicated by such assignment of genius or auteur status. For Kirby to be conceptualised as an auteur, the contributions of inkers, colourists, letterers, and even writers becomes minimised in the same way the artist's assistants have been obscured throughout art history.<sup>32</sup> The roles of the other contributors are therefore downplayed, or even ignored, as Beaty highlights, citing Kirby's posthumous inclusion in the UCLA/Hammer Museum *Masters of American Comics* exhibition as an example, of which Panter was also a part. Kirby's collaborators from the pages featured in the exhibition and accompanying publication are omitted from the credits.<sup>33</sup> This contentious accreditation is the result of the Fordist method of

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30 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 134.

31 Sean Howe. *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*. (New York: Harper, 2012), 360-361.

32 Beaty, 88.

33 Beaty, 88.

comic book production and publication, and was the cause of endless troubles for Kirby himself. Kirby co-created many popular characters under work-for-hire agreements, receiving little credit and few royalties for their use for decades.<sup>34</sup> The return of original pages had to be fought for, staggering considering that the original pages were actually the legal property of the artists under United States law, and the sheer number that Kirby produced.<sup>35</sup> This again reflects the slow fight for legitimacy that the artists of comic books faced. The benefits associated with the medium, in finances and reputation, grew with the reputation of the medium as a legitimate artistic form. Kirby is therefore not only an artistic influence on Panter and many other artists and cartoonists, he is also a martyr for intellectual property, corporate ownership and the artist's fight for agency, as exemplified in his 1970s creations, where Kirby was given free rein to create, but no ownership (fig. 63).

Kirby's work is representative of the contested territory that comic books, and other mass culture, sometimes occupy; territory that Panter is now enabled to explore, largely free of the limitations that cartoonists of Kirby's generation faced. The distinction between what constitutes comic books and art grows increasingly obscured. The relationship between artists and comic artists is problematic at best, with comic artists particularly vexed by the frequent use of their beloved medium as fodder for gallery artists' appropriation or inspiration.<sup>36</sup> This appropriation itself can reinforce the idea of comics as a disposable medium, and therefore denies comics' acceptance as an art form.<sup>37</sup> A long-standing discourse pertaining to comics' validity as an art form is still debated, reinvigorated by a spate of comic book exhibitions at major art museums, as well as the crossover of comic artists such as Crumb and Panter into the art world. Indeed, as Beaty points out, even scholars whose work predates the recent Crumb gallery crossover have difficulty finding consensus in defining the form.<sup>38</sup>

Panter's work is situated within both the art and comic books, both of which the artist incorporates interconnecting visual elements.<sup>39</sup> Panter's work moves freely between formal and structural conventions of both art and comics, but resists definition. Contradicting traditional assumptions about the roles of art, comics and commercial illustration and design, Panter manages to find continued success in all three areas.<sup>40</sup> Such hybridization is most evident within his long-running comic strip, *Dal Tokyo*, collected and published in 2012. Some

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34 Mark Evanier, *Kirby: King of Comics*. (New York Abrams, 2008), 150.

35 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 89.

36 Beaty, 56-57.

37 Beaty, 55.

38 Beaty, 29.

39 Beaty, 131-2.

40 Beaty, 133.

of Panter's most intriguing and visually masterful works are made in comic book or strip format. *Dal Tokyo* has provided a narrative pretext for Panter's experimentation, its very premise a hybridization of different cultural and sub-cultural constructions of Japan and the USA ('Dal' is short for Dallas). As the strip evolved, so too did the varying styles Panter would explore. These visual affectations are sometimes functional within, or complimentary to, the ongoing narrative, while occasionally subverting the strip's momentum.<sup>41</sup>

This comic strip, which Panter began in 1982, is the artist's longest running project. A continuous narrative that takes place on a future planet-wide colony on Mars, *Dal Tokyo* manages to weave elements of punk, psychedelic, UFO-spotting, reggae and custom car culture, pornography, Japanese monster movies, Walt-Disneyesque cute animal cartoons, the beefcake horror vacui of Jack Kirby, Genesis, video games, horror and science fiction into a cohesive yet sprawling narrative and artistic whole. Panter describes *Dal Tokyo*, explaining that its fictional denizens 'built echoes of their ancestral home, Earth, into the Martian terrain in the form of vast transport systems of all types that take as templates the highway and subway and train maps of Earth Texas and Earth Tokyo'.<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that while *Dal Tokyo* does exist in the form of a comic strip, which is itself a commercial form, it has been created without any of the prescriptions typical of the form, enabled by the occasional commercial successes of other ventures such as *Pee-Wee's Playhouse*.

Panter's most ambitious narrative series is a 'mis-recounting' of Dante Alighieri's three volumes of his *Divine Comedy*.<sup>43</sup> *Jimbo: Adventures in Paradise* (1988), *Jimbo's Inferno* (1995) and *Jimbo in Purgatory* (1999) take the titular Jimbo on a metaphysical journey through Dante's famous allegories, also referencing Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (1353) and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1478).<sup>44</sup> This comprehensive literary reconfiguration, which goes as far as to include detailed marginalia, creates a collision of styles, borrowing equally from the complex formalities of the hybridized image and text of illustrated manuscripts as much as comic books (fig. 64). Panter's interpretation of the texts is apt, considering their multifaceted structures, which are in themselves precursors to the kinds of complex narrative possibilities engendered in comics. Furthermore, the texts were highly influential upon Blake, who was in turn influential upon Panter.<sup>45</sup> Chaucer and Dante's narratives are both structured around a journey, which is echoed in Panter's mis-recountings, which provides the artist with a meandering array of visual possibilities to explore (fig. 65).

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41 Carlin, 'Masters of American Comics', 148.

42 Gary Panter, *Dal Tokyo*. (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2012), 17.

43 Richard Gehr, 'Dal Tokyo Dispatches.' In *Gary Panter*, edited by Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 246.

44 Gehr, 248.

45 Panter, 'Panter on Panter', 320.

Beginning with Hogarth, John Carlin draws a line through the history of cartooning, positioning Panter's Jimbo/Dante trilogy as a contemporary equivalent of Goya's *Los Caprichos*.<sup>46</sup> Carlin cites Panter's knack for evolving his drawings to match the narrative tone, comparing the parallel tragedy and horror in both artists' work.<sup>47</sup> Panter's collision of styles are adapted from a range sources, including popular culture, music and the fine arts, as well as what the artist describes as 'sentimental' detritus (fig. 66).<sup>48</sup>

Panter's use of text outside of his more narrative works undergoes the same process of hybridization or collision as his imagery. In one journal, used between 1988 and 1994, Panter took a list of the best-selling products from a chain of dime stores, one of which his father operated, and used them as titles for the drawings throughout.<sup>49</sup> Creating a disjuncture on each page between word and image, the drawings correspond in no way with the text. This strategy creates new associations between word and image, and Panter applies it, along with other dadaist and fluxist wordplays, in many of the titles throughout his work, and particularly his drawings.<sup>50</sup> Carlin positions contemporary cartooning as occupying a more artistically and commercially amorphous cultural space than in previous generations, evinced in Panter's own work.<sup>51</sup> Panter's work still reflects his own philosophical ethos of his 1980 manifesto, maneuvering interdisciplinary practice across the no longer mutually exclusive mass media and fine arts. Exhibition, publication and distribution of Panter's work therefore incorporates practices of both paradigms, renegotiating the possibilities of both the art market and the art object (fig. 67).<sup>52</sup>

## Finish/Unfinish

The tension between finish and unfinish is one of the most recognizable qualities of drawing, attributed to centuries of drawing being used as a preparatory tool. In his 2000 essay, 'Always Incomplete: On the Virtuous Weakness of Drawing', Adam Geczy explores a fundamental component of drawing that is its resistance to definitions of finish and unfinish.<sup>53</sup> The physical act of drawing, where the intuitive and often accidental marks made are the means for the artist to not only find an identifying, individual voice among contemporaries, but to

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46 John Carlin. 'The Real Comic Book Heroes.' *Tate Etc.*, no. 9 (2007): 68.

47 Carlin, 68.

48 Panter, 'Panter on Panter', 336.

49 Richard Klein, 'Taking Inventory.' In *Gary Panter*, ed. Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 202.

50 Klein, 202.

51 Carlin, *Masters of American Comics*, 154.

52 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 133.

53 Adam Geczy, 'Always Incomplete: On the Virtuous Weakness of Drawing.' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* vol. 1, no. 2 (2000): 200.

exercise skill in visual and compositional problem solving, through this gestural improvisation. Panter's drawing methods are often translated into different disciplines, particularly painting and printmaking. However, all of these ideas are explored through drawing throughout an ongoing journal practice.<sup>54</sup> Panter's journals are used in the ongoing genesis of art works, and the exploration of an expansive array of styles and subject matter can be found within their pages (fig. 68).<sup>55</sup> The journal also houses many of the artist's incomplete, or abandoned ideas. In a brief essay about Panter's drawing practice, Richard Klein is attracted to the *Satiro Plastic* journal (1999-2001), which happens to contain Panter's 9/11 drawings from life, calling the journal a 'compendium of life'.<sup>56</sup> On the page immediately after, depicting a simple drawing showing a school yard, and the inscription 'SOCCER PRACTICE WITH FLAG AT HALF MAST SEPT 2001'.<sup>57</sup> These drawings, which Klein regards as important works of the artist, remain in the journal, having never been applied or adapted to other more 'finished' works.<sup>58</sup> The *Satiro Plastic* journal is a demonstration of the role of drawing in Panter's practice, which is not only applied to the rough, frantic finish of his comics, but of generation and investigation of ideas, whether they be resolved or incomplete.

The unfinished drawing as 'a gauge for the combination of skill, sight and sensibility', as described by Geczy, is a venerable aspect of the discipline.<sup>59</sup> *Pentimenti* operates on both the conceptual and the physical level of drawing. The term *Pentimenti* is used to describe a permanent line or mark that cannot be so easily erased, transforming the sketch to a finished work. The word itself is derived from the word 'repentance', and implies sorrow at the loss of the sketch itself, upon expanding from erasable, impermanent marks to a more definite and permanent series of decisions.<sup>60</sup> The idea of repentance through drawing has an undertone of religious piety, a solemnity that acknowledges drawing's importance to the fundamentals of art and design. In the context of Panter's work, *pentimenti* is applicable not only to the drawings themselves, but the way text and narrative are used within the work, which is usually scrambled or non-linear (fig. 69).<sup>61</sup> Indeed, *Pentimenti* is a crucial aspect of Panter's approach to drawing, which extends into his paintings. Panter's is rarely fussy in his markmaking, which usually features the defined outlines of his drawings, applied over abstracted and geometric

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54 John Carlin, 'Crossing the Line: The Profound and the Profane in Gary Panter's Cola Madness.' In *Cola Madness*. (New York: Funny Garbage Press, 2000), 208.

55 Klein, 'Taking Inventory', 204.

56 Klein, 205.

57 Gary Panter, *Satiro Plastic: Drawings by Gary Panter*. (Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2001), 99.

58 Klein, 205.

59 Geczy, *Always Incomplete*, 199.

60 Deanna Petherbridge. *The Primacy of Drawing*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 31.

61 Todd Hignite, *In the Studio: Visits with Contemporary Cartoonists*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 62.

surfaces without elaborate planning.<sup>62</sup> While predominantly figurative, Panter often incorporates abstraction into his process, attempting to create and then subvert the illusion of representation.<sup>63</sup> Panter adopts such registers within his work, from the self-referential and metaphorical to dada word collage and non-linear narrative, usually tempered with a broad knowledge of art theory and popular culture.<sup>64</sup> Carlin notes the array of visual signatures that Panter emulates, including Chester Gould, Nast and Kirby, but 'without resolving them into one continuous whole', preferring to innovate through this kind of recombination.<sup>65</sup>

The agonistic relationship with the reproductive capabilities and commercial machinations and of popular culture, and the relative idiosyncrasies of the fine arts are a recurring starting point for Panter's visual strategies. In works such as *Special Fund* (1994), or *Cowboy Whizzle Horde* (1994), Panter uses popular culture by drawing various pieces of toy packaging. By drawing these compositions, complete with miniature text, bar codes and imitating the off-register colours with ink wash, Panter confuses the play between high and low by obscuring the intention of the work. In many drawings, Panter works in ink and wash, allowing no room for compositional sketch. The use of pentimenti leaves little room for the pop art's mimicry of the machine, and reveals the artist's hand, further disrupting the high/low binary by personalizing the mass-produced. This strategy also adds another sequence to the history of reproductive arts, and in particular calls the bluff of Pop art in the reconfiguration of the imitated mechanical mark back into the human domain. The works superficially resemble works by Warhol and Lichtenstein, who sometimes used mass-produced packaging to draw or paint from. However, in flattening the packaging and laying it side-by-side, Panter creates new compositions that echo both pop art and geometric abstraction. The flattened substrates reveal tabs and print registration cross-hairs previously hidden by folds in the packaging. Panter considers these visual strategies as akin to the fast and exhaustive stylistic mutations of Picasso, particularly in the use of line as an innovative, exploratory device.<sup>66</sup>

The second volume of the *Gary Panter* monograph (2008) includes chronological drawing selections made from over 100 of Panter's journals, spanning 1971-2002. The volume demonstrates the expansive artistic scope of Panter's drawing practice, including everything from the casual or unfinished to the highly resolved.<sup>67</sup> The volume includes pages reminiscent of his comics, complete with text (*NUKE*, 1977), drawings from photographic references (*Slick*

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62 Storr, 'Painting, No Joke!', 13.

63 Panter, 'Panter on Panter', 340

64 Coley, 'Mindprobe', 232.

65 Carlin. *Masters of American Comics*, 148.

66 Panter, 342.

67 Don Nadel, 'Editor's Note.' In *Gary Panter (2nd Volume)*, Ed. Don Nadel. (Brooklyn: Picture Box, 2008), 6.

*Pen Paints Assorted/Ladies Sweater*, 1993) as well as Picassoid experiments (*Untitled*, 1981), abstract drawings (*Untitled*, 1978), landscapes (*The Balloon Crashes*, 1983), character designs (*Untitled*, 1980), life drawings (*Coronet Bath Tissue/Flower Bush*, 1988), still lives (*Untitled*, 1980), and drawings made from Music magazines (*Slo Poke Suckers/Aluminium Foil*, 1988), advertising (*Untitled (Waco)*, 1993), men's magazines (*A Few Other Crazy Ideas*, 1985) film (*The Jungle/Untitled*, 1982) and pornography (*Dead Calm*, 1985). Such visual sprawl can become unwieldy at such volume, but Panter intervenes. Each journal is complete with start and finish dates, title pages, date stamps and free-associated titles for most pages, and an individualised cover. The date stamps appear to denote the finality of the drawing in question. Whether finished or unfinished, the date stamp is an indicator that *Panter is done with the page*. These additions make each journal akin to a one-off artist book belonging to a series of one-off artist books, tempering the graphic incontinence of the artist with some self-imposed order. No doubt such measures are important to instigate before engaging with the narrative logic of comics, whose formal structure is paramount to their effectiveness as a form.<sup>68</sup>

## Anthologies and Mythologies

Panter, particularly in his *Dal Tokyo* and *Jimbo* work, creates a self-enclosed world, complete with characters and environs that echo distort and confuse our world with a world of comic books and cartoons. This anarchic world is a contemporary vision akin to Bosch's feverish dreamscapes of heaven and hell (fig. 70). This complex world is populated by hundreds of characters, each with their own traits, yet at the same time denying a formal narrative, each character playing a small part in a fragmented and nervous drama.<sup>69</sup> Panter actively subverts the formal mechanics of the comic book, as outlined in Groensteen's *The System of Comics*, particularly in the mechanics of the page and panel layouts. Groensteen breaks down the physical complexity of comic books by assigning units of reference to both pages and panels that create a narrative whole.<sup>70</sup> Groensteen describes this system as operating in tandem with the viewer-reader, who is led by the multiframe of the comic's panels, which are often routinely reconfigured from page to page, dictating the law of the images, rather than the viewer-reader.<sup>71</sup> Groensteen then assigns the hyperframe as having a value unto the page as the frame is unto the panel.<sup>72</sup> The divisional function of the page and panel then work as a filmic off-

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<sup>68</sup> Groensteen, *the System of Comics*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Hignite, *In the Studio*, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Groensteen, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Groensteen, 25.

<sup>72</sup> Groensteen, 30.



screen, altering the reading of the sequence.<sup>73</sup> Unlike film however, the viewer-reader of the comic is assigned active autonomy in not only the narrative and iconographic analysis, but in its temporal pacing and rhythm.<sup>74</sup> The simultaneous display of the multiframe allows the smaller units, the panels, to be read in sequence, or the larger units, the pages, to be considered as a larger composition.

Panter is familiar with the mechanics of comic books and strips, and manipulates their formal elements to expand the visual language of comics into the world of Picasso, Hogarth and Piranesi. Panter's disregard for taste-boundaries of high and low is most evident within his *Dal Tokyo* narrative. Rendered in landscape-format strips, *Dal Tokyo*'s formal bedrock echo early comic strips (fig. 71). Beginning simply with a character called Mr. Gabble driving along a highway, *Dal Tokyo* flags Panter's artistic and narrative intent. The captions read in declarative capitals, 'MR. GABBLE DRIVES PERHAPS THE LAST MUSTANG IN THE WORLD. HE'S PART OF A DYING BUT INFLUENTIAL BREED: THE CUSTOM CAR ENTHUSIAST. THE CAR IS NO SINGLE MODEL'. The caption of the last panel changes register, moving from capitals to lower-cased lettering, 'It's an amalgamation'. As the story, which is itself made up of several disjointed, but parallel, narrative strands, evolves visually as well as structurally. Mike Kelley cites *Dal Tokyo* as one of Panter's seminal works, in terms of scope and visual sprawl. 'The dark plot is melange of noir and sci-fi set in a rotting post-industrial setting. Mutants, robots, cyborgs, dinosaurs, and the scum of the earth cavort in this metropolis [...] The atmosphere flashes from black to white, panel to panel. Images fall apart into scrambles of marks, cubist line clusters, and then into word salad and incomprehensible lists of data,' enthuses Kelley.<sup>75</sup>

Kelley's description highlights the many competing influences within Pettibon's oeuvre. The comic book, and particularly the science fiction genre, is known for adopting and adapting complex scientific ideas, sometimes misinterpreted, always grossly oversimplified, and incorporating them into stories. While much of this pseudo-science is not particularly inspired, it did unwittingly adopt a system of adaptation that could be built upon and retroactively altered. Stories have a fluid quality, and could be reconfigured to facilitate the tastes and attitudes of contemporary audiences, in effect a constant re-imagination of a history. Panter's invented world of *Dal Tokyo* exists in a space that is open to visitors from other art forms and art works. Characters like Godzilla can be spotted within any number of Panter's drawings.<sup>76</sup> This is not a strange occurrence in the context of art, as many characters have been referenced

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<sup>73</sup> Groensteen, *the System of Comics*, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Groensteen, 45-46.

<sup>75</sup> Kelley, 'Gary Panter in Los Angeles', 7.

<sup>76</sup> Gehr, 'Dal Tokyo Dispatches', 247.

from popular cultural sources over the last century.<sup>77</sup> Within the comic book, however, this is a subversion of the metaphysical narrative laws that have been established in comic book worlds. For example, if Warhol makes an art work depicting Superman and exhibits it in a gallery, it is not considered unusual. It is not the traditional context for Superman, but there is precedence for his appearance in Warhol's art, as part of an iconography of popular culture. If Superman appears in a comic book alongside Batman, this is not considered unusual either. Batman and Superman are both properties of the same company, and have shared many narratives in the past. Superman appearing with Spider-man in a comic book creates a narrative tension between the original context of these characters and the metaphysical narrative laws that have been established. Superman and Spider-man are owned by separate companies, and exist within different worlds, and thus require explanation as to their convergence within the same world. Such conventions can be dismissed, as they are in the world of *Dal Tokyo*, but not without this rupture.<sup>78</sup>

This aspect of comic books also allows insight into the internal metaphysics of Panter's work. While Panter's art historical references are imbricated throughout his work, the formal foundations of his oeuvre are a hybrid of those of art and those of comic books. Panter has described a difference of concern between his narratives, which he will frustrate in his formal investigation, and suspended narrative work, which he views as more poetic, 'pregnant moments'.<sup>79</sup> Non-canonical stories, narratives that occur outside the accepted fictional history of events, serve as experiments and possible templates or variations for future stories. Clearly, Panter does not feel bound by the infinitesimal historical detail of the fictional worlds of comic books so much as the innovations of their formal aspects. Jimbo, perhaps Panter's most recognizable invention, appears intermittently throughout comic books, sculpture, toys, paintings and prints. The insistent hybridization of word, image and text extends well beyond the traditional relationship that art and popular culture share. Despite being an ongoing narrative, *Dal Tokyo* also subverts narrative conventions by its refusal of consistency of style traditionally associated with comic strips. Deploying a shifting index of iconography and changes of aesthetics and drawing styles, Panter uses narrative, but describes narrative as accidental, evoked by the relationships between signs.<sup>80</sup> As espoused by Groensteen's spatio-topical system, *Dal Tokyo* can be read in narrative sequence, or as a series of suspended, interconnected images.

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77 Gehr, 'Dal Tokyo Dispatches', 248.

78 For those unfamiliar with the minutiae of superheroes, Spider-Man stands alone in his use of hyphenation, a deliberate move by Marvel comics to differentiate the character's logo from another red and blue clad superhero.

79 Storr, 'Painting, No Joke!', 12.

80 Storr, 12.

A precursor to Panter's practice and the narrative sprawl of *Dal Tokyo* was discovered in 1972 in the home of Henry Darger (1892-1973). Darger, a reclusive janitor, would soon pass away, leaving a massive and detailed literary and artistic legacy to decipher. Darger's work, which included three massive hard-bound volumes of panoramic drawings, roughly two feet high and twelve feet wide, which illustrated an immensely detailed and convoluted narrative, entitled *In the Realms of the Unreal*, which was itself comprised of some 15,000 hand-typed pages.<sup>81</sup> Also found was Darger's autobiography, and multitude of reference materials, including magazines, newspapers, scrapbooks, comics, collages, painted photographs, notes and miscellanea, which would form the primary entry-point into Darger's vast, shambling oeuvre (fig. 72).<sup>82</sup> Darger's epic, which documented the fictional 'Glandeco-Angelinian War', repurposed hundreds of images from mass culture in its depiction of the narrative's heroes, the seven Vivian Girls. The Glandeco-Angelinian War was based on the American Civil war, of which Darger had a deep knowledge, although it was the slavery of children, rather than African slaves, that was at the heart of his narrative.<sup>83</sup> Darger, who was institutionalized, and orphaned, at a young age, no doubt incorporated many of his own experiences and stories into *In the Realms of the Unreal* (fig. 73).

Much has been made of the imagery pertaining to Darger's Vivien Girl characters, who often appear naked, many of whom sporting penises, prompting some commentators to hypothesize gender confusion and childhood abuse.<sup>84</sup> However, considering the limited information available on Darger and his work, any such suppositions are quickly stymied. Darger's work, like Panter's, incorporated mass culture into its form and execution.<sup>85</sup> Unlike Panter, Darger was never formally trained, and his reliance upon printed matter extended from reference for his drawings, materials for collage and even re-worked and adapted passages for his writing. Unlike Panter, however, Darger would not draw figures freehanded, instead tracing figures from his reference materials. This technique would translate easily to his panoramic scope, recalling film's widescreen format, and explains his use of three standard sizes of figures throughout his drawings (fig. 74).<sup>86</sup> L. Frank Baum's *Oz* series (1901-1920), predominantly illustrated by John R. Neill, was highly-influential upon Darger, and brought featured two

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81 Klaus Biesenbach. 'Introduction: American Innocence.' In *Henry Darger*, ed. Klaus Biesenbach. (Munich: Prestel, 2009), 13.

82 Brooke Davis Anderson. 'An Artist's Studio at 851 Webster Avenue.' In *Henry Darger*, edited by Klaus Biesenbach. (Munich: Prestel, 2009), 88.

83 Biesenbach, 15.

84 Michael Bonesteel. 'Henry Darger's Great Crusade, Crisis of Faith, and Last Judgement.' In *Henry Darger*, ed. Klaus Biesenbach. (Munich: Prestel, 2009), 272.

85 Biesenbach, 12.

86 Biesenbach, 21.

aspects that would recur throughout Darger's work: a young, female protagonist, and a furious storm. Darger's narrative included a fictitious hurricane named 'Sweetie Pie', not unlike the hurricane that transported Baum's Dorothy to Oz, which was chronicled over some 5000 pages of *In the Realms of the Unreal*.<sup>87</sup> In retrospect, Darger appears to be fascinated with storms, constantly using tempestuous cloud formations in the background of his drawings. Among the detritus found in his home was a decade of weather journals, which documented the weather conditions at predetermined times every day, as well as numerous newspaper and magazine clippings of storms and hurricanes.<sup>88</sup>

Despite frequently referencing mass-produced images, Darger sometimes weaved art iconography into his drawings, including that of Jan van Eyck, John James Audubon and Martin Johnson Heade.<sup>89</sup> However, these choices of appropriation seem to be made entirely by affinity for subject matter rather than a high/low discourse. Brooke Davis Anderson comments upon the artist's American Civil War imagery in her essay on the Darger archive of the American Folk Art Museum, noting that such recurring interests owe much to mass culture, 'Because [Darger] was reliant on American popular media, his work is inflected without appetite for national history and traditions and out nation's consumer habits. These sources became the basis for the visual language he developed over the decades, an American mass-media vocabulary at the core of Darger's artistic production.'<sup>90</sup> Anderson's appraisal is insightful, but only to the extent that Darger's selections of imagery are not all-inclusive of the litany of mass-media imagery available in 20<sup>th</sup> century USA. For example, while many of Darger's reference images are indeed adopted from mass culture, the artist has a tendency to avoid heavily-stylized imagery. Darger also seems to avoid using recognizable popular characters; note the complete absence of highly-recognizable cartoon, comic book or Hollywood icons. Instead, Darger relies upon images that are simple and somewhat realistic, and complimentary to his consistent, outline-and-colour drawing style, reminiscent of children's books. So while Panter's long-running *Dal Tokyo* is self-consciously reconfigured to both serve and subvert its own narrative, Darger's *In the Realms of the Unreal*, which is thought to be drawn over a five decade period, retains a remarkable consistency of aesthetic. Panter's references vary from the familiar to the obscure, and can be disseminated from the many avenues of the late-capitalist, post-digital system of mass culture. Darger's work, however, being made in an earlier, more limited system of mass culture, allowing a more fixed, straightforward reading that is

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87 Bonesteel. 'Henry Darger's Great Crusade', 274.

88 Biesenbach, 'American Innocence', 12.

89 Anderson, 'An Artist's Studio', 88.

90 Anderson, 90.

paradoxically harder to grasp.

But Panter's work is not always obscure. In *Cola Madness* (drawn in 1983, published in 2000), Panter tells the more straightforward story of a cargo cultist named Kokomo, who hosts a ritual feast in order to procure consumer goods from the Gods (fig. 75).<sup>91</sup> Kokomo's reverence for mass culture, like many of Panter's chosen metaphors, works on different levels. On a self reflexive level, Kokomo is a cipher for Panter's own enthusiasm for pop-culture detritus, which he approaches with enthusiasm and fondness. Kokomo also echoes of the first generation of British pop artists, whose own procurement of Americana was fuelled by postwar cultural austerity, and the exoticism of these remnants, many of which were discarded by U.S. Soldiers upon the war's end and their return home. John Carlin considers *Cola Madness* an important addition into an American mythology that continues in a tradition of John Ford and William Gibson; texts that present a spiritual rupture between the individual and nature.<sup>92</sup> This duality resists the perpetuated American myth of a Euro-centric manifest destiny and allows the consideration of cultural crossover, which plays out through several aspects of *Cola Madness*'s narrative.<sup>93</sup>

*Cola Madness* occupies an unusual place in the artist's publication history as a seemingly self-contained and complete story, a rarity in Panter's narrative work. Panter's other narratives rarely adhere to traditional narrative structure. The strip-based *Dal Tokyo* is arranged as more of a prolonged sequence of suspended narratives that happen to occasionally feature recurring characters than a traditional serial. While the *Jimbo* stories based upon the works of Dante follow the source material, they do so loosely, and combine Panter's own love of Dadaist wordplay and imbrication of usually disconnected visual references.

*Cola Madness* was originally conceived on the mistakenly-interpreted request for a comic book for Japanese publication, thus Panter approached the story re-imagining America through the eyes of potential readers in Japan.<sup>94</sup> This premature pre-emptive measure potentially explains the seventeen year gap between the creation and publication of *Cola Madness*, as well as its almost-uniform two-panel page layouts, which emulate Japanese *Manga*.<sup>95</sup> Panel layouts are a convenient way for Panter to incorporate his work into a larger continuum, such as in his Dante-inspired works, which demonstrate the continuing resonance of the gridded system of comic books, and their relationship to historical works.<sup>96</sup> The work's

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91 Gehr, 'Dal Tokyo Dispatches', 247.

92 Carlin, 'Crossing the Line', 202-3.

93 Carlin, 199.

94 Carlin, 197.

95 Carlin, 197.

96 Groensteen, *the System of Comics*, 18.

inherent hybridity of eastern and western influences neatly encapsulates the Panter project. Like *Dal Tokyo*'s opening salvo, 'It's an amalgamation', Cola Madness is emblematic of the multiplicity in the post-digital world of not only contradicting influences, but contradicting approaches to these influences. Panter's work is nothing if not exploratory of the visual potential of drawing.

## Chapter Four: Raymond Pettibon

### Word and Image

A collision of word and image, Raymond Pettibon's work operates using a broad understanding of culture, and draws freely from art history, film, advertising, television, comics and other popular media<sup>1</sup>. Pettibon reconfigures subcultural references into small, suspended narratives, using text taken from film, literature and snatches of overheard conversation. Pettibon is prolific, following a working process whereby drawings will be executed simultaneously, weaving the many works into a greater whole. The artist divides these into thematic sets for display. Pettibon's use of text creates a dialectic between text and image, where the text operates with the image in unexpected ways.<sup>2</sup> Many of Pettibon's visual strategies explore the relationship between art, mass culture and literature, itself a form of mass culture. Pettibon's imagery usually comes from television and film, often traced directly from the paused video screen, the technology exaggerating the light and contrast of the image<sup>3</sup>. This chapter approaches Pettibon in the context of his relationship to other media, which he reappropriates within the studio. This is most clearly demonstrated in works that appropriate characters such as Batman or Gumby, recontextualizing them into ciphers for the discussion of different conceptual frameworks. These frameworks usually center around some form of deviance and resistance. Batman and Gumby are discussed throughout the chapter as recurring motifs of Pettibon's work that engender a surprisingly varied number of Pettibon's artistic and thematic strategies.

Associated with the Californian punk movement in the early stages of his career, Pettibon drew many posters and flyers for bands such as *Minutemen* and *Black Flag*. Yet this so-called 'California' aesthetic extends well beyond punk, into other subcultures of Pettibon's home state, most notably the surf, hippie punk and drug cultures (figs. 76, 77).<sup>4</sup> Pettibon became to engage with the idea that punk may replace the cultural space previously occupied by the hippies, and began exploring the subcultural icons of both accordingly.<sup>5</sup> During this era, the artist began mass-producing loosely-themed, photocopied zines and comic books full of his drawings, which saw the development of what would become his recognizable style. Eventually, Pettibon began producing work for the exhibition context, but retained the curatorial mentality

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1 Cary S. Levine, 'Pay for Your Pleasures: Cultural Critique in the Work of Mike Kelley, Paul McCarthy and Raymond Pettibon.' (City University of New York, 2006), 7.

2 Grady Turner, 'Interview with Grady Turner (Extract).' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Phaidon, 2001), 137.

3 Robert Storr, 'You Are What You Read': Words and Pictures by Raymond Pettibon." In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Phaidon, 2001), 58.

4 Storr, 39.

5 Byron Coley, 'Pettibon Was Not a Punk before You Were Not a Punk.' In *Raymond Pettibon*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), 62.

of his zines that was disparate sets of drawings displayed together. Pettibon's drawings are executed quickly, allowing them to proliferate to large numbers that, coupled with Pettibon's extensive investigations into text and quotation, can be an overwhelming gallery experience<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the very quantity of Pettibon's oeuvre can be an intimidating (fig. 78).

Jaques Derrida's essay 'Signature Event Context' (1971) is a helpful tool in order to approach the intricacies of Pettibon's work. Here Derrida asserts the unrepeatability of the signature, which is an index of the event as well as being an identifier of the signer. While the essay is not written, or intended to be considered in the context of drawing, Derrida's notion of *signature* has parallels to the act of drawing. For drawing's unrepeatability, applicable to both image and text when executed by hand, as in Pettibon's case, is capable of incorporating a visual distinction associated to the artist in lieu of the signature itself. For the task of unifying these drawings as a whole, characterized with many permutations of both image and text rendered by hand, the Derridian signature is used as an approach to understanding Pettibon's practice, rather than an analysis of their content.

Derrida states that the signature 'implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer'.<sup>7</sup> The signature is a repeatable mark that must 'have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form'.<sup>8</sup> As Derrida is discussing communication, which he defines for the purposes of the essay as 'the vehicle, transport, or site of passage of a *meaning*, and of a meaning that is *one*',<sup>9</sup> he avoids specifying media, although the signature implies a relationship with writing in particular. This overarching definition of *communication* allows for both writing and drawing in its discourse, and precludes the involvement of a second party, or an addressee, with whom the signer's mark continues their life past their original intended message or meaning.<sup>10</sup> Derrida approximates this relationship to painting and trace, in which 'the sign is born at the same time as imagination and memory'<sup>11</sup>. This implies that a displacement of communicated intention occurs the moment the addressor's marks are received by the addressee. This point of disruption is where Pettibon's work is situated, through its hybridization of image and text. Much like the Derridian signature, Pettibon's drawings are a set of repeated motifs that are in themselves imperfect, insofar as they are made by hand, and cannot be repeated identically. It must be noted that the Derridian signature of any writers of text quoted in Pettibon's

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6 Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 60.

7 Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context.' Translated by Alan Bass. In *Margins of Philosophy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 328.

8 Derrida, 328.

9 Derrida, 309.

10 Derrida, 313.

11 Derrida, 313-4.



drawings are absent. This dislocation of text and signature suspends the authenticity implied by the signer's signature. Instead, words and image are thematically recontextualized and physically reconfigured as they are repeated in the artist's hand. In other words, while Pettibon quotes and references other works, he is altering the signer's original context simply by drawing it.

Academic and critic Robert Storr appears to agree with this, noting that Pettibon's collisions of imagery and text encourage tensions between works, as well as a distance between the author and image.<sup>12</sup> The challenges of prospective viewers that Storr describes is anchored by the multiple references of the images and texts appropriated by Pettibon for use in his drawings (fig. 79). This appropriation, however, is not a case of simple replication. The image and text are translated through the artist's hand, reconfiguring these elements through the act of drawing into what Derrida refers to as signature. As Storr states, 'Poetic license in Pettibon's case means a creative infidelity to the original text, which he lifts out of context, truncates and frequently rewrites to suit himself'.<sup>13</sup> When viewed in series, whether in zines, monographs or exhibitions, the configuration of these narratives is again circumnavigated, partially in accordance with the viewer's own navigation through the images, and partially by the design of the artist. In recalibrating, adapting and colliding images and texts from different sources, Pettibon creates new, hybridized and suspended narratives within each work, mediated through his own tastes and artistic decisions (fig. 80).

### **Drawing as Subversion**

In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud examines the tensions between society and the individual. These tensions are inherent in laws and taboos made by society, which limit the freedoms of the individual for the good of the society.<sup>14</sup> These laws and taboos are punishable if broken or subverted, and Freud posits that the populace experiences discontentment through their adherence to them.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, subversive behavior becomes a clear mode of resistance. With so much of his imagery being drawn from counterculture, commentators often situate Pettibon as a figure somewhere between an outsider artist and political dissident, although the artist would be quick to dismiss any notions. Pettibon does, however, explore tensions between society and the individual that Freud discusses by virtue of his subject matter and choices of appropriation. As Storr infers, many of Pettibon's works examine these

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12 Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 61.

13 Storr, 64.

14 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization & Its Discontents*. Translated by Joan Riviere. (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, 1930), 59.

15 Freud, 44.

tensions in the form of bleak, nihilistic and often cinematic alienation (fig. 81).<sup>16</sup> According to Freud, alienation from society is not uncommon to the paranoiac or hermit with a creative instinct, whose attempts to remodel the world correspond with their own hopeful visions.<sup>17</sup> While Pettibon certainly remodels the world, his vision could hardly be considered optimistic.

Both Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Cary S. Levine observe the political ennui in Pettibon's drawings, positioning him as a kind of advocate for subcultures and countercultures. Levine considers Pettibon a critical thinker demonstrating that 'what is held sacred can turn deviant, and vice versa, through simple shifts in context and perspective'.<sup>18</sup> This statement may be an accurate assessment to some degree, but there is more to Pettibon's practice than political advocacy.<sup>19</sup> Pettibon's iconoclasm is indiscriminate in its targets, at turns nihilistically and sarcastically disassociating the artist from his contemporaries.<sup>20</sup> Many of Pettibon's appropriated images attain an aesthetic akin to film noir, by merit of both their content and execution, as well as the genre's inherent nihilism. Howard Halle supports this association, identifying the aesthetics of film noir with Pettibon's 'pervasive alienation'.<sup>21</sup> This is supported in the numerous drawings the artist has made from films of gangsters, molls and private detectives dark, ink-rich compositions, to say nothing of appropriated tough-guy dialogue. Halle suggests that Pettibon's drawings operate in a post-ironic state, bitterly commenting upon a contemporary America 'distorted by television'.<sup>22</sup> This may be accurate on some levels, but the multiplicity of voices in Pettibon's drawings prevent such a simple reading, particularly in light of Pettibon's self-professed love for, and fascination with, many aspects of American culture and its distortion.<sup>23</sup>

Like Halle, Benjamin Buchloh places Pettibon's work in direct opposition to a mass culture that he describes as a society of 'enforced simulation of technological competence'.<sup>24</sup> However, Buchloh diverges from Halle in the positioning of Pettibon's relationship with mass culture, exploring the complexity with which Pettibon's vast oeuvre operates. Buchloh elaborates upon Pettibon's own drawing capabilities, which he considers deft enough to maneuver between haphazard and de-skilled modernism and effective imitations of the

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16 Robert Storr, "'The Language Is on Fire, Spit It Out!': From American Spleen to American Rage.' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), 234.

17 Freud, *Civilization & Its Discontents*, 36.

18 Levine, 'Pay for Your Pleasures', 10.

19 Dennis Cooper, 'Dennis Cooper in Conversation with Raymond Pettibon.' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (London: Phaidon, 2001) 20.

20 Storr, 40.

21 Howard Halle. 'An Actor's Life.' *Grand Street*, no. 49 (1994), 171.

22 Halle, 172.

23 Mike Kelley, 'By Way of Norman Greenbaum: Raymond Pettibon Interviewed by Mike Kelley.' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), 164-165.

24 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh. 'Raymond Pettibon: Return to Disorder and Disfiguration.' *October* no. 92 (2000), 36.

perceptual shifts allowed by technological developments.<sup>25</sup> This contradiction denies the concise and definitive reading of Pettibon's work offered by Halle, instead acknowledging the tensions inherent in Pettibon's work.

The tensions of Pettibon's work are a result of the artist's complex codex of adapted images, appropriated from different sources. Filtered through his distinctive drawing style, these end up somewhere visually between comic book and film noir in appearance. These appropriated characters, which include Batman, Superman, Gumby, Pokey, Ronald Reagan, Babe Ruth and Charles Manson, are iconic ciphers for American culture. These ciphers come with an existing metahistory from their own historical weight, whether real or fictional, that Pettibon can explore, pay homage to or subvert. Batman in particular is frequently used, often in reference to the televised, Adam West incarnation of the character, as a cipher for youth subcultures of the 1960s, suggesting a homoerotic, and sometimes violent, regard for his youthful sidekick, Robin.<sup>26</sup> Pettibon's work introduces familiar characters to underground worlds such as homosexual, skinhead, and hippie counterculture, presented through a hybrid of camp Byronian flourish and tough-guy pastiches to film gangster dialogue. Howard Halle describes the 'actors' of Pettibon's vignettes as engaging in sexual deviance, violence or death, sometimes administered together for maximum shock value, political commentary or dark humour. Buchloh classifies the sexual deviance and occasional depravity that appears in Pettibon's visual index as a 'condition of resistance'.<sup>27</sup> In exploring imagery of deviance and violence, Buchloh considers Pettibon's drawings as acts of deviance and rebellion in and of themselves, subverting the mechanics of the dominant social order.<sup>28</sup>

Like many contemporary artists in which drawing forms a large part of their practice, Pettibon's work is deliberately offset by his manipulation of variables, most importantly the speed at which he executes drawings, which is rapid. Buchloh continues to elucidate that contradictions exist within Pettibon's work. Drawings displaying both virtuosity and haphazard execution are made frequently, sometimes appearing to be related to the Warholian mechanical imitation of Pop Art with use of the cinematic angles and close-ups of cinema and television, yet at the same time considering 'the self-conscious de-skilling of drawing at best a dubious camp value'.<sup>29</sup> Like Warhol, whose own large, recurring index of imagery could at once be read as revelatory and obfuscating, Pettibon appears to have some tempering detachment from his broad array of source material. The influence of comic book references, for example,

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<sup>25</sup> Buchloh, *'Return to Disorder and Disfiguration'*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> Halle, *'An Actor's Life'*, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Buchloh, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Buchloh, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Buchloh, 39.

Pettibon downplays, considering them as more of an extension of film.<sup>30</sup> Film is then downplayed in comparison to literature, which Pettibon considers his primary influence.<sup>31</sup> Film, television comic books and illustration transmute and form the meta-narratives of popular culture, forming a new, mostly-fictional history from which to draw inspiration. A likely explanation of Pettibon's comic book drawing style is his background as a zine maker, and the stylization of drawing that must occur in order to make the photocopied reproduction most effective.

In between the late 1970s and the early 1990s, Pettibon drew and self-published over 100 zines (fig. 82). Zines, which are fast and affordable to produce, and are strongly associated with the pre-digital photocopier aesthetic. Like early comic book artists, zine makers needed to adapt their style to match the strengths of the photocopied image, which often lacked fine detail and subtlety. Predominantly black and white, the zine featured prominent line-work or dot screens rather than mid-tones, which could be lost to black or negative space, depending on the nuances of the particular photocopier. These were produced using a similar aesthetic to Pettibon's early band posters and flyers. Pettibon's brother was a member of Californian punk band *Black Flag*, an association that led to designs for other bands of the era, many of which, like his zines, are now highly sought after as art objects in their own right. Pettibon's zine, band poster and flyer works predate his gallery exhibitions and have had a lasting effect on his drawing style.

Certainly superhero comics, a lifelong source of imagery and mythology have incorporated violent and erotic imagery almost since the form's inception. The doomed love triangle of Superman, Lois Lane and Clark Kent; Wonder Woman's overt bondage themes; Batman and Robin's inappropriate domestic situation. The Batman and Robin 'situation' is a particularly problematic relationship for modern viewers, and has been for some time, prompting publishers and producers to introduce regular girlfriends for Batman and Robin in order to throw critics off the perceived homoerotic scent. This kind of subtext has been thoroughly explored through many of Pettibon's drawings. Mark Cotta Vaz, writer of *Tales of the Dark Knight: Batman's First Fifty Years: 1939-1989* tries particularly hard to clear the character of any such 'incredible' homosexual readings.<sup>32</sup> Vaz also rejects assertions that the character has unresolved hostility towards women, which he accredits to his witnessing of his mother's death, perceived by the infant mind as abandonment, casually responding that 'the Caped

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30 Dennis Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 11.

31 Cooper, 8.

32 Mark Cotta Vaz. *Tales of the Dark Knight: Batman's First Fifty Years: 1939-1989*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989, 44.

Crusader's only negative attitude toward women has been an old-fashioned chivalrous manner around the ladies',<sup>33</sup> and proceeds to then list Batman's various love interests (fig. 83). Whether Vaz is correct, however, is irrelevant. The question of the character's sexuality is merely one facet of the many subversive aspects of the superhero genre.

Batman's quest is not unlike that of a clansman: a white man perceives a wrongdoing, dons an outrageous costume with a pointy cowl, and sets out to right the perceived wrongdoing. Equating Batman with a clansman is a disquieting comparison considering the character's enduring popularity across a plethora of mass media. These elements that contradict the hero's marketable ethos, that of truth, justice and the American way, are used in conjunction with subversive fringe material, usually associated with sex or violence. Dr. Frederick Wertham, the psychologist responsible for the near-illegalization and subsequent censorship of comic books, criticized Batman and his sidekick Robin of homosexuality.<sup>34</sup> Of course, this was firmly denied by the character's owners, who were in damage-control, attempting to save their most profitable characters, and indeed their industry, from being legislated out of existence. Perhaps the most revealing response to this claim came from readers, who categorically rejected the notion, despite the argument's evidence.<sup>35</sup>

The debate over Batman's queerness is only one discourse that the superhero, a somewhat complex cultural avatar, is subject. Mainstream comic books have incorporated sex and violence into their form in a variety of subtle ways and the underground scene has proven its ability to break barriers in resistance to the kind of moralist codes imposed upon the mainstream through legislation and lobby groups. Many of Wertham's critics denounced his views as alarmist, a dismissal that in turn denied serious critical discourse of a form historically known for its self-denial of subversive content.<sup>36</sup> This denial, however, usually came from publishers, eager to keep their business economically viable in the precarious cultural landscape of McCarthy-era USA, in which comic books were made to undergo strict legislation of acceptable content. The artists employed to create the comics did not necessarily share the same view, and would often incorporate fringe material into the stories themselves, as Wertham would note, 'the supermen are either half-undressed or dressed in fancy raiment that is a mixture of the costumes of SS men, divers, and robots ... Blood flows freely, bosoms are half

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33 Vaz, *Tales of the Dark Knight*, 125.

34 Les Daniels, *DC Comics: Sixty Years of the World's Favorite Comic Book Heroes*. (London: Virgin Books, 1995), 114.

35 Bart Beaty, *Fredric Wertham and the Critique of Mass Culture*. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 201.

36 Beaty, 201.

bared, girls' buttocks are drawn with careful attention'.<sup>37</sup>

Created by writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster, Superman is another character included in Wertham's critique, and coincidentally a superhero that Pettibon uses in his drawings (fig. 84). Surprisingly, it was not so much Siegel's often-Marxist ideologies that attracted Wertham's criticism of the character, but for Superman's psychological undermining of authority figures in the eyes of youths.<sup>38</sup> While Joe Shuster would avoid incorporating such fringe material into superman stories, Wertham had a different interpretation. 'The Superman virus was sown not, of course, by the two nice Jewish boys who take the credit, Messrs. Shuster and Siegel, but by Hitler. With only this difference that, in the ten-year effort to keep supplying sinister victims for the supermen to destroy, comic-books have succeeded in giving every American child a complete course in paranoid megalomania such as no German child ever had, a total conviction of the morality of force such as no Nazi could ever aspire to.'<sup>39</sup>

While Wertham's crusade may seem unrelated to the Pettibon's drawings, it demonstrates many of the discourses that Pettibon is fascinated by, and illustrates the contested territory that comic books once occupied. By the early 1950s, Shuster's failing eyesight was preventing him from taking on the demands of comic book work. Instead, Shuster was illustrating BDSM stories for an underground publication called *Nights of Horror*, which was almost completely invisible to criticism, despite incorporating far more subversive content into its stories (fig. 85). *Nights of Horror* regularly featured nudity, spanking, flagellation, bondage, torture devices, voyeurism, lesbianism and other risqué activities.<sup>40</sup> In a technical sense, this was some of Shuster's best work, even if the characters within resembled Superman, Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen (fig. 86).<sup>41</sup> If Wertham ever discovered Shuster's uncredited involvement with the publication, it remains undocumented. However, Wertham was well aware *Nights of Horror*, being asked to testify as an expert in the trial of the neo-Nazi youth gang, the Brooklyn Thrill Killers, where he used the publication to emphasize the potential vulgarities of the comic book, despite technically not being an example of the medium.<sup>42</sup>

In many cases, Wertham's charges of comic books being 'sexually aggressive in an abnormal way',<sup>43</sup> or making 'violence alluring and cruelty heroic',<sup>44</sup> were at least partially

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37 Craig Yoe, *Secret Identity: The Fetish Art of Superman's Co-Creator, Joe Shuster*. (New York: Abrams, 2009), 15.

38 Grant Morrison, *Supergods*. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 55.

39 Yoe, *Secret Identity*, 15.

40 Yoe, 17.

41 Yoe, 21.

42 Yoe, 26.

43 Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 94.

accurate. Certainly, Wertham's claim that comic books made a 'deliberate attempt to emphasize sexual characteristics' of characters could not be denied.<sup>45</sup> Wertham's criticism of the comic book medium caused the legislation and censorship of their content, subsequently causing the cancellation of many of the most artistically innovative publications of the time. This explains his contemporary rejection by comic book scholars whose goal is to elevate the comic book medium and legitimize its art.<sup>46</sup> Wertham's reading of the medium as entirely capable of subversive, and powerfully compelling content, is accurate. This is the context from which Pettibon's appropriated characters, superheroes or otherwise, are referenced. Pettibon's versions of appropriated characters are detached from their original contexts, and confronted with philosophical problems of their own, as Halle and Buchloh argue. This reconfiguration is not entirely at the fancy of Pettibon. Rather, it is the teasing out of existing tensions inherent in the characters as icons of mass culture, exposing their sometimes surprisingly subversive core.

Pettibon's awareness of these different strata of reference is evident in a drawing of two men noticing the pointy-eared shadow of Batman. The men are facing and touching each other, one is naked save for sunglasses and the other is wearing underwear. Considering the exposition written throughout the drawing in Pettibon's hand, whose capitals reference comic book text, it is plain that Batman has malevolent intentions.

ROBIN HAS BEEN HANGING OUT WITH A ROUGHER, HARD-CORE CROWD OF NO-GOOD PUNKS EVER SINCE HE STARTED SPENDING HIS FREE TIME WITH THE ARCHIES... THOSE ARCHIES WERE A GOOD BUNCH OF KIDS, TOO, BEFORE THEY STARTED THAT ROCK BAND. IT'S GETTING TO BE SO I DON'T LIKE MY ROBIN TO LEAVE GOTHAM CITY, RIVERDALE'S GOTTEN SO BAD. AND IT'S MOSTLY KIDS... GOOD KIDS GONE BAD.<sup>47</sup>

Within one drawing, Pettibon references Batman and Robin, Archie's hometown and friends, drugs, underground comics, gay culture, rock 'n' roll and body building. The Archie reference is pertinent in the context of 'good kids gone bad', an echo of the Brooklyn Thrill-killers. All of these references are strongly associated with postwar USA counterculture, however, and their reconfiguration into one narrative defies the conventions of each element, and recontextualizes them by virtue of the drawing's contemporary execution. Consider the

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<sup>44</sup>Wright, *Comic Book Nation*, 94.

<sup>45</sup>Wright, 95.

<sup>46</sup>Beaty, *Fredric Wertham*, 3-4.

<sup>47</sup>Halle, 'An Actor's Life', 167.

fictional characters, Batman and Archie, both of whose original medium was the comic book, have male sidekicks, and are mass culture icons of the USA. While the characters share their media of origin, they are owned by separate interests, and operate under different generic conventions, and thus have never met in any officially-sanctioned canon. In making a suspended narrative in which not only the characters, but their expanded fictional worlds-both Gotham and Riverdale are cited, as well as Robin, Veronica and Jughead- are one and the same, thereby Pettibon actively manipulates the metaphysics of these fictional realities. Elements of Pettibon's world, according to his interest in counterculture, leak in. By means of rock 'n' roll, steroids and gay culture, Pettibon subverts the fictional generic and formal foundations of beloved icons of mass culture, making Batman subject to the same metaphysical problems as ordinary people. Batman's provocation by Robin's deviant behavior with Archie and his friends is more typically symptomatic of real-world father-son problems than those in his fictional city of Gotham. By transposing Batman into a suspended narrative that has hybridized the fictional worlds of Batman and Archie and the 'real' world of the viewer, Pettibon creates a text that subverts the generic conventions of Batman canon and canonizes the character into his own dense oeuvre.

David Halperin's essay 'How to do the History of Male Sexuality', while not entirely parallel in terms of content, does provide a model to which approach a complex and historically changeable subject through its subversive qualities. This approach to forming a multi-faceted historical narrative that weaves different theoretical strands into a cohesive whole is highly valuable to an artist such as Pettibon. Ever-productive, Pettibon's large body of work can be overwhelming in terms of sheer quantity. Halperin's process of simplifying a vast historical narrative, while explicitly outlining the points of convergence and difference offers a method of structuring studio works into a form that not only illustrates the points of the thesis itself, but extends upon them. Halperin describes this history of male homosexuality as incorporating and responding to a 'long historical process of accumulation, accretion and overlay'.<sup>48</sup> In other words, in such an historical approach, it is difficult to separate the individual elements of a continuum without overlap. Such an accumulation of varying and sometimes contentious definitions of male homosexuality deny a single unifying history. Halperin instead discusses this history within five categories that occur within and without male homosexuality (effeminacy, pederasty or active sodomy, friendship or male love, passivity or inversion, and

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<sup>48</sup> David M. Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality.' In *The Routledge Queer Studies Reader*, edited by Donald E. Hall & Annamarie Jagose. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 264.



modern homosexuality).<sup>49</sup> Given Halperin's hesitation in claiming any singular definition of homosexuality, coupled with the vast and incremental variations of broader sexuality, Halperin's essay highlights that homosexuality is divergent from what is considered 'normal', despite the inherent problems in defining what 'normal' is (fig. 87).<sup>50</sup>

In a similar manner to Halperin's approach to homosexuality, Buchloh positions Pettibon as reorganizing a history, in this case the youth countercultures of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, by means of a retroactive narrative. Buchloh suggests that by reconfiguring the conventions of the literary imaginary, and subverting the socially progressive and radical aesthetics of postmodern paradigms such as Minimalism and Conceptualism, Pettibon is creating discourse with a 'techno-scientistic imaginary'.<sup>51</sup> According to Buchloh, such an imaginary spurns contact with traditional artistic practices such as narrative and representation. Pettibon's drawings could therefore be interpreted as a critique of mass culture, but Buchloh considers this an oversimplification, citing the 'industrial scale' of Pettibon's 'skirmishes with skill, narrative, expression, and the self-reflexive grapheme'<sup>52</sup> as dissociating the artist from any one-sided viewpoint. This denial of singular voice gives credence to the kind of polyvalent narrative that Halperin discusses, and with industrial scale Buchloh cites, Pettibon's multiple voices are once again multiplied.

Pettibon considers literature his most important source of references.<sup>53</sup> This point possibly unbalances the relationship between image and text in Pettibon's oeuvre in terms of a clear prioritization of message, but it is in this juxtaposition of image and text that complicates a defined reading.<sup>54</sup> Literature offers numerous possibilities for the juxtaposition of multiple intended meanings into a single text. Isolating fragments of text and juxtaposing them with images and other fragments reconfigures their context to create new readings. This isolation from its original, intended context allows different formal and linguistic aspects to come to the fore.<sup>55</sup> Many texts are identifiable such of those drawn from William Blake down to Alan Ginsberg, but countless more remain unidentifiable in their literary obscurity. But as in Pettibon's work, definitions of literature are amorphous and contestable.

Pettibon himself questions the definitions of literature in his essay on influential comic book artist Will Eisner (fig. 88) published in the accompanying publication to the 2005

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49 Halperin, 'History of Male Homosexuality' 265.

50 Halperin, 263.

51 Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 41.

52 Buchloh, 41.

53 Turner, 'Interview with Grady Turner', 137.

54 Buchloh, 39.

55 Buchloh, 39.

*Masters of American Comics* exhibition. Pettibon criticizes Eisner's proposition that comics are a literary form. Pettibon suggests that such a claim disrupts the autonomy of comics as an art form, and by extension drawing.<sup>56</sup> This criticism of Eisner clarifies the embattled position that comic books have traditionally held in the arts, a complex discourse between the visual arts and literature, which Pettibon insists is an unnecessary debate, despite occupying a similar visual territory himself.<sup>57</sup> As part of the first-generation of artists that developed the formal qualities of the comic book, Eisner sought to elevate his art form from what he saw as a cultural position akin to pornography.<sup>58</sup> Decades on, the comic book has been elevated through not only the art world crossover appeal of artists like Robert Crumb and Jack Kirby, but also the increased prominence of mass culture. Pettibon's suggestions that comic books have suffered refer to medium's continual striving for propriety.<sup>59</sup> This propriety can in turn can be directly linked with the form's elevation, which Pettibon sees as problematic in its aspirations to be seen in the gallery, rather than being seen in its original, hand-held form.<sup>60</sup>

Pettibon's literature is, in tandem with his index of visual and textual references, highly complex (fig. 89). Buchloh likens this to a form of literary imaginary, rejected by the post-1960's radical avant-garde for its socially progressive aspirations.<sup>61</sup> In addition to references made with sources at hand (the book, the comic, the video tape) the artist includes overheard snatches of conversation, dialogue from film and television, and more random discoveries, such as sentences transposed from his Father's old teaching notes.<sup>62</sup> This proliferation of image and text, and adoption of different voices serves to obscure artistic intention and decentralize the voice of the author.<sup>63</sup> The proliferation of different voices and references is a constant reconfiguration of the studio process. There is a working system in place in Pettibon's practice, but this is open to constant moments of inspiration that come in the form of unplanned verbal or text-based intrusions that are then juxtaposed within the unfinished- or waiting- images. Pettibon describes the process of searching for potential reference images as 'mechanical'.<sup>64</sup>

Pettibon's drawings are again reconfigured from wall arrangements to sequential arrangement in his many self-published zines such as *Tripping Corpse*, *American Lynch Law*

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56 Raymond Pettibon, 'Eisner by Pettibon' In *Masters of American Comics*, edited by Paul Karasik, Brian Walker & John Carlin. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 248.

57 Pettibon, 'Eisner by Pettibon', 255.

58 Gerard Jones, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*. (London: Random House, 2004), 135-6.

59 Byron Coley, 'Dreams Not Sprung from the Bush of Madonna: Interview with Byron Coley (Extract).' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Phaidon, 2001), 103.

60 Pettibon, 248.

61 Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 41.

62 Robert Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 35.

63 Ulrich Loock, 'Vavoom.' In *Raymond Pettibon*. (New York: Phaidon, 2001), 80.

64 Dennis Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 21.

and *Capricious Missives*, which Pettibon has made since 1978 though with less vigor since the mid-1980s. While issues of *Tripping Corpse* resemble underground comix through their rough, photocopied aesthetic and Pettibon's characteristic image-and-text drawings, they actively resist any such comic book conventions. The zines' drawings vacillate between the virtuosic and the naïve, making full use of the visual conventions of the wide set of references within.<sup>65</sup> Each issue has a vague thematic thread throughout, but falls short of consistent narrative flow between drawings, instead resembling more a collection of short stories, or more accurately, short scenes. Pettibon insists that despite appearances, comics are just one element for reconstitution through his drawings, 'I never read comics until I was in my late teens, and they were a way to learn to draw ... Comics are just kind of debased by the nature of their audience'.<sup>66</sup> Like his gallery work, Pettibon's zines incorporate comic book conventions, notably incessant text hand lettered in capitals and gutters or margins around the drawings. At this stage in his career, Pettibon was yet to begin experimenting with different fragments of text, forming conversations between different sources; rather employing, as Robert Storr puts it, 'lethal one-liners'.<sup>67</sup> Storr describes the *Tripping Corpse* aesthetic as 'Pettibon's sarcastic doggeral appeared in a truly low-budget package resembling a high school literary journal of the sort destined to be folded and dog-eared. [Pettibon explores] the miserable eloquence of febrile delusions laid out like study notes, tender emotion tattooed on trash.'<sup>68</sup> According to Storr, the punk aesthetic of *Tripping Corpse* and *Capricious Missives* is a deliberate decision made most likely in opposition to then-contemporary art world trends and discourses. The image-and-punchline drawings in Pettibon's early zines are a standard format of cartooning, an economical and accessible visual delivery system of intended meaning, made available in 'clandestine and exclusionary' fashion to a specific subcultural audience.<sup>69</sup> The 'lethal one-liner' is a comfortable balance between the popular culture that Pettibon so frequently references with the crude, do-it-yourself aesthetic of the punk ethos and the calculated detachment of the artistic avant-garde. Pettibon describes these works as being narratives 'about stories'.<sup>70</sup> This again complicates the cartooning form by considering its metaphysics, particularly in regard to the relationship between word and image, and between the artist, the zine, and the reader. The link to cartooning looms visually large in Pettibon's work, but when

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<sup>65</sup> Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 11.

<sup>67</sup> Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 43.

<sup>68</sup> Storr, 35.

<sup>69</sup> Buchloh, 43.

<sup>70</sup> Coley, 'Interview with Byron Coley', 103.

considered in the context of literature this comparison becomes more tenuous.<sup>71</sup>

It is from these zines that Pettibon developed what he considers his mature style, and as his technical confidence grew, the number of zines produced diminished, turning instead to drawings not intended for reproduction in the zine format, but as works of art in themselves.<sup>72</sup> The zine format is the ideal solution to visual tensions between word and text. A medium with the potential to incorporate elements of graphic design, literature, image, text, comics and various other elements, the zine offers not only a less-formal space for experimentation, but the expediency and affordability offered by the photocopier. While Pettibon would slowly move away from the zine format, he has yet to escape its influence. Pettibon's drawings, which are predominantly linear, are made with tapering brushstrokes. This method of mark making is ideal for the process of information transferal of the photocopier, allowing a near-industrial multiplication of the artist's already prolific output.<sup>73</sup>

Pettibon has adopted a far more complex system of references into his more recent work. Consider the drawing *No Title (I Thought I)*, fig. 90), which depicts a clutter of bodybuilders, nudes, and sculptural forms. Another cluster of eight drawings from the 2006 Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Pettibon retrospective contained five of vegetables, three of bodybuilders. The text within the eight drawings ranges from musings on drawing, bodybuilding, gardening and sexuality. Once again, Pettibon's declarations shout themselves in capitals, 'ONLY A PORTION OF THE WORK IS NOW PRESENTED IN PUBLIC', 'MAKE A PICTURE IN IT' and 'COLOR TO TASTE' are inscribed alongside longer, hybridized verses. Take the second drawing *No Title (While I Hesitated,)* (2003), a drawing of a blue male model or bodybuilder posing, for example.

WHILE I HESITATED, HE STARTED.

I SKETCH OF IT - - MOST OF IT BY MEMORY - - WHAT I CAN... WISHING I'D HAD MY  
CAMERA - - A VIDEO CAMERA, BUT WITHOUT THE ANNOYANCE OF SOUND... WELL,  
HE IS KINDA HOT, IN A KIND OF BLUE WAY - - (HE SHOULD BE; HE MODELS FOR ME) -  
-

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE POSING, AND STRETCHING WHILE POSING, TO TAKE ONE  
OUT OF ONESELF. BUT A GOOD SCRATCH WILL TAKE ONE BACK. OUCH! PINCH ME! - -

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71 Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 11.

72 Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 49.

73 Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 44.

I MUST BE DREAMY.

A PINCH OF SALT AND A POUND OF FLESH... NOT TO MY TASTE.

AND I'M TOO AWFULLY AGITATED TO SIT!

ALL THIS, ROUGHLY AND HASTILY SKETCHING, WHILE THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE,  
WHICH I MAKE EFFORT TO TRANSCRIBE FOR THOSE WHO INTERLIES IN THAT.

I'D THOUGHT AT ONE TIME THAT HE WAS THE PROTOTYPE FOR MY  
WHAT? BUT HE WAS PART GUMBY, PART THE GOO. I JUST HADN'T NOTICED- HOW  
COULD I NOT?<sup>74</sup>

Of the seven different fragments of text, none is immediately identifiable from a particular text, although there are subtleties that allude to particular media. The use of double hyphens, in particular, are a convention of comic books and strips. Referred to as beats, these double-hyphens are used primarily in speech bubbles to allow dialogue a more realistic flow. Pettibon has written 'PINCH ME! - - I MUST BE DREAMY', which infers the source of the text as either a comic strip, or more likely, a film from which Pettibon has dictated the dialogue, using this linguistic convention of comic strips. The double-hyphen of cartooning represents a pause, whether for effect or natural hesitation, which is the ideal solution to dictating overheard dialogue (fig. 91). Storr refers to Pettibon's drawings as 'his masks',<sup>75</sup> each allowing a different character or voice to come forth. These voices are numerous, both representative and unrepresentative of the artist.

### **Drawing, Cipher and Index**

The the use of multiple voices, the many ciphers in Pettibon's oeuvre can create challenging complexities that can span between drawings as well es exhibitions. Buchloh notes that Pettibon reformulates the dialectic of the matrix and the grapheme together. Buchloh describes the matrix as the concealment of the subjective impulse and the denial of the gesture as an index of subjective experience.<sup>76</sup> This is at odds with the grapheme, indexicality as

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<sup>74</sup> Frances Rose, San Martin et al, *Raymond Pettibon*. (Málaga: Centro de Arte Contemporáneo 2006), 233.

<sup>75</sup> Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 66.

<sup>76</sup> Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 46.

'subjective inscription [originating with] neuro-motoric and psychosexual impulses'.<sup>77</sup> In reconciling this dialectic, Pettibon not only destabilizes post-Surrealist and post-Freudian approaches to the act of drawing, but broadens its possibilities through the hybridization evident throughout his practice.<sup>78</sup> As previously mentioned, Pettibon's deployment of ciphers is drawn from the collective pop-cultural index. The ciphers are sometimes obscure figures from film noir, sports imagery, religious iconography, and sometimes very specific characters like Gumby, Bob Dylan or Charles Manson (fig. 92). These are always recognizable in a broad sense, if only by its original generic context. The ciphers are usually characters drawn from art historical sources, popular culture, or literature, and appear intermittently throughout series of work when they are required. Each of these ciphers has a function in terms of studio work, and offers a way of distancing the artist from the work when needed. Pettibon himself places himself outside of the work, avoiding any autobiographical implications of emotion.<sup>79</sup>

In his investigations into the art/comics debate *Comics Versus Art*, Bart Beaty notes that elements appropriated from comic books by artists are usually sociological and iconographic, rather than the formal or sequential elements, naming Pettibon as an exemplar of this.<sup>80</sup> While it is true that Pettibon appropriates characters from comic books and does not employ their sequential possibilities, he does use other more subtle formal elements of the comic book, such as the highly nuanced stylization of voice, lettering and text. Thus, different ciphers can be moved from situation to situation; each of Pettibon's miniature, one-page narratives sees these characters that we know by association deconstructed and reconstructed through context and juxtaposition.<sup>81</sup> The use of recognizable images also allows the work to be more quickly accessible, and quickly read, through these images, as they come pre-fitted with an established meta-narrative, becoming 'visual shorthand'.<sup>82</sup> Even if the cipher is an unnamed character from an unknown text, the viewer can position the context of the image through recognizable visual tropes of genre. These generic tropes are themselves by cultural producers like Hollywood studios and comic book companies for recognizably, allowing new consumers to access narratives at any point, and are reworked outside of their original context in Pettibon's work. These ciphers have an additional power, which is their ability, with their juxtaposed text/s, to speak on additional levels to that of the original context. Despite the accessibility provided in recurring ciphers, however, Pettibon denies any formation of narrative in their

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<sup>77</sup> Buchloh, *Return to Disorder and Disfiguration*, 46.

<sup>78</sup> Buchloh, 46.

<sup>79</sup> Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 19-20.

<sup>80</sup> Bart Beaty, *Comics versus Art*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 190.

<sup>81</sup> Storr, 45.

<sup>82</sup> Cooper, 27.

recurrence.

Any particular image that I've used over and over again was born for the first time every time I used it. It's not connected to the earlier usage ... There's a snowball effect. But I'd have to speak to each individual image I've drawn to speculate on reasons why some of them repeat.<sup>83</sup>

As discussed earlier in the context of Marlene Dumas' work, Pettibon uses appropriation extensively for imagery within his work. Both artists have ongoing series of drawings of particular images of interest; Dumas' works depicting children, faces, dead bodies and Pettibon's works depicting trains, baseball and surfing, have a logic whose parallel can be found in the methodical exploration of both artists' fascinations, as well as their prolific artistic output. Pettibon's practice differs to Dumas, however, in the application of these appropriations. Dumas use of found images resembles an archival space for the artist to explore when needed. Pettibon's use of appropriation appears to have no such organizational system in place. Instead, the artist uses appropriated images and texts in a piecemeal fashion, imbricating different sections of text and image together. Selected imagery is usually completely independent from the selected text, and their juxtaposition creates a new, now unified, meaning for both word and image, although these meanings remain amorphous and partially the responsibility of the viewer.<sup>84</sup> Pettibon's works are then exhibited in loosely-themed sets, which offer further imbrication of word and image, and can be read as a series, or individually. This use of sometimes ambiguous sources has a distancing effect for viewers, whose reading of the work can vary wildly, Pettibon relying 'on the cultural fluency of his audience' for the particular work's outcome.<sup>85</sup>

The reference of Gumby and Goo recur intermittently in Pettibon's work (fig. 93). Both are characters from the long-running animated series *Gumby* (1955-1982), and have abilities that Pettibon riffs on within his drawings. Gumby can phase into books, or more specifically the narratives therein, offering the makers of the Gumby series carte blanche for story possibilities. Pettibon advances this narrative device, at turns subjugating Gumby to existential and metaphysical literary adventures by making him phase into texts such as *Ulysses*, the Bible and *Mein Kampf*.<sup>86</sup> This is a parallel to Pettibon's own work that relies so much on different

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83 Cooper, 'Conversation with Pettibon', 23.

84 Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 48.

85 Levine, 'Pay for Your Pleasures', 8.

86 Loock, 'Vavoom', 80.

texts, and literature in particular. In a metaphysical turn of Pettibon's drawings, Gumby can enter television as well as books, extending the possibilities of the character's adventures to include a broader sphere that now includes mass culture.<sup>87</sup> Goo, a female friend of Gumby, can change her shape at will, and in Pettibon's work, appears not only as a love interest, and at times subject of obsession for Gumby, but as a Pygmalion-like metaphor for the artists' model.<sup>88</sup>

Like the character Gumby (fig. 94), Pettibon's practice is broadened by literature, which acts as an anchor and inspiration for ideas. Self-consciously adopting various guises native to the fine arts, the artist freely explores the iconography of popular culture, carefully distancing himself from autobiography. Although narrative is used prominently within works, Pettibon avoids structures that require prolonged investment. The use of suspended narrative ensures a break between each work, disrupting interconnectedness, allowing a changeable visual configuration that can be adapted to best unite Pettibon's diverse and abundant oeuvre. Pettibon's oeuvre relies upon tensions inherent in both subject and execution, not to mention word and image. Incorporating ciphers from high and low forms, most notably film, literature and comic books, the artist challenges the conventions of genre, voice and formal structure. This frustration of convention is executed through a rapidly executed and therefore wildly variable drawing practice. Rather than resolving the works, the process of drawing solidifies their tensions, allowing the contradictions of Pettibon's imbrication ciphers and texts to metastasize in the form of line and tone.

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<sup>87</sup> Storr, 'You Are What You Read', 50.

<sup>88</sup> Storr, 50.



## Chapter Five: Metadrawing

### Implications of Drawing in the Digital Age

The contemporary refinement and assimilation of digital technologies has affected drawing in different ways. With the emergence of such technologies, drawing faces a similar challenge as painting faced in photography, of being, in Benjamin's terms, 'supplanted by technology'.<sup>1</sup> Speed remains an attractive quality; as the photographic process challenged painting with its speed and reproducibility, so too is drawing challenged by digital technologies. In consideration of the historical responses to technological advancements in Chapter One, the paradigm shift brought about by digital technologies by translating many of the fundamentals of drawing to a digital context. Digital technologies have engendered many new possibilities for drawing that extends into animation, printing, colour design, 3D modelling and printing, architecture and design. Importantly, these technologies have attracted the commercial art world as a cheaper and faster solution to industrial design. This shift has prompted in drawing a previously unavailable remove from the commercial arts, which has enabled drawing to take a more prominent and autonomous role in contemporary art. While drawing is still used in some commercial arts such as animation, fashion design and comic books, it is predominately assisted or co-opted by digital processes.

Conversely, digitally unassisted drawing is now a practice almost exclusive to artists. Digital technologies have amplified a dimension of drawing that can now be considered 'traditional', that is, drawing that occurs in physical rather than virtual space. Hand drawing can now be retroactively considered a subversive discipline, especially in the contemporary context, where it is not strictly necessary. The 'traditional' can now be re-deployed by drawing because it has been absorbed into digital practices, the perverse dimension of the insistence of drawing in the age of digital process. Many practices and ideas associated with commercial drawing have been absorbed into other media after decades, and in some cases centuries, of symbiotic existence. Until recently, it had often been the commercial implications of drawing that, from an academic perspective, held the discipline within the commercial sphere. Drawing has always been present in art, as well as design, fashion, architecture and sequential arts such as comics, film and animation. The digital destabilization of traditional institutional structures of the art world and boundaries of high and low have encouraged a re-evaluation of drawing's standing. With commercial concerns largely abandoning the act of drawing, coupled with the exploration and destruction of boundaries between high and low art forms of modernism and

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin. 'Brief History of Photography.' Translated by J. A. Underwood. In *One-Way Street and Other Writings*. (London: Penguin, 2008), 179.

postmodernism, drawing has become topical for the first time for many years.

Ideas adapted from drawing's pedagogical and preparatory past have been successfully translated into digital hardware and software for design, architecture, animation, and even general platform functionality. This metadrawing is imbued with the interdisciplinary applicability of drawing, but its extension into the physical world is facilitated by the virtual. However, the virtual state of the metadrawing differs fundamentally with drawing in its greatly minimised tactility, and the reconfigured cognitive intuition required of users, forming the basis for their separate categorization. Drawing retains its identity, or its state, but is applied in principle to the virtual world through metadrawing. Metadrawing is made with an awareness of its implications as an action, as an art object and an art form, and is not necessarily limited to X substance on X support. A definition of metadrawing must be as flexible as that of drawing, which is constantly shifting, being both inclusive of artists working within other media. In light of the recent elevation of drawing to autonomous status, which is to some extent tethered to contemporary art, metadrawing suffers no such limitation. Drawing remains a vibrant art form and has managed in the contemporary setting to escape the impositions of the divisive high/low binary, made possible by the multiplicity and broad adaptability of digital technologies. Through these technologies, the thinking, questing, figuring disciplines of drawing can then be more broadly applied to other forms, outside the traditional domain of the discipline, allowing drawing a renewed vitality and influence over a broader domain than ever.

In terms of parallels between drawing and metadrawing, there is evidence of accessibility in both circumstances. Hand drawing is constitutive of metadrawing, but at its core is an economical practice, especially compared to traditional painting or sculpture. Upon further consideration, drawing's inexpensive requirements are the simplest explanation of how drawing originally came to be used as a preparatory discipline. Digital drawing technologies mirror this accessibility not so much in affordability, which is variable, but in its seemingly infinite reproducibility, coupled with its independence from a physical support. The digital drafting process, such as it is, can be completely incorporated in and of itself into the final, finished outcome. So as the act of drawing was historically related to, but not a part of, so many media, so too does metadrawing relate to media in the contemporary world. Metadrawing reflects the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, care of digital technologies, and the implied resolution of the high/low discourse. The binary of drawing and metadrawing is an important component of contemporary drawing, because it is an updated consideration of the ways drawing has traditionally spanned and connected different art forms and media. Unlike Pop art, which approached appropriation with different degrees of irony and nostalgia, and an

assumed stance of art and popular culture being entirely separate, metadrawing exists with knowledge that such borders have been destabilized. Digital technologies have fostered a culture that operates with a deep and familiar knowledge of mass culture and, by default, at least a basic anthropological knowledge of other areas, indentured through this knowledge of mass culture. While not strictly art per se, the long-running animated series *the Simpsons* frequently makes references to other sources, both high and low. Any episode can contain frequent and explicit references to pop music, art, film, literature, television, animation, comic books, gay culture, beat poetry, celebrity culture, and often incorporates self-reflexivity. The work of Julie Mehretu (1970—, fig. 95) collides imagery appropriated from comic book iconography, the abstraction of cartoons and architectural blueprints.<sup>2</sup> The many references in Mehretu's drawings coalesce into a new whole through the drawing process.<sup>3</sup> Mehretu characterises the studio process as a process of abstraction that incorporates the visual genealogy of the images submerged within, implying instead of quoting their language.<sup>4</sup> The layered abstraction of Mehretu's work synthesizes a digital aesthetic reminiscent of complex architectural blueprints or 3D-rendered designs, demonstrating the growing familiarity with digital technologies and the digital aesthetic.

Much contemporary drawing resembles remix culture, taking place in a contemporary legal world increasingly protective of its properties, which often include trademarked melodies, characters and images across the expanding visual world.<sup>5</sup> The increasingly litigious post-digital society in which contemporary drawing and metadrawing now exist form the cultural backdrop to which many artists respond. Contestable legal territory creates a problematic situation for artists that use satire and/or appropriation of popular culture in their work, although there are many historical precedents of litigation, particularly in the field of printmaking. Pettibon, discussed in chapter four, was legally advised to stop using the 'Vavoom' character, who was originally from the animated world of *Felix the Cat*, in his drawings (fig. 96). This is unlike Batman, Superman, Gumby, and many other copyrighted characters that Pettibon sometimes incorporates into his drawings without such incident. Copyright is a contestable and sometimes litigious property, and despite innovation on the part of artists, has grown more legally problematic in the digital age.<sup>6</sup> Just as metadrawing extends the applicability of drawing into virtual space, so too is the ongoing contention of the legality of

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2 Roxana Marcoci, *Comic Abstraction: Image Breaking, Image Making*. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 31.

3 Marcoci, 78.

4 Marcoci, 78.

5 Lessig, Lawrence. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. (London: Penguin, 2008), 17-18.

6 Lessig, 10.

reproducible media an extension of the issues faced by Rubens, as discussed in Chapter one.<sup>7</sup>

However, litigation does appear to be partially dependent upon the visibility of appropriated images. German artist Neo Rauch (1960—, fig. 97), who works exclusively in painting and drawing, imbricates many obscure characters into his lexicon. Unlike American artists of his generation such as Panter or Pettibon, Rauch rarely strays into overt referencing of popular culture. Instead, the artist has his own personal and recurring cast of characters that, unlike recognisable or iconic characters, have little meta-narrative already attached to them. Thus the viewer is forced to unlock these codes, which are often self-reflexive and require a knowledge of or experience with Rauch's oeuvre, on their own. Rauch's oeuvre comprises of series of images that work on their own, but a sense of a larger narrative, or at least many small narratives that take place in in the same world- characters appear and re-appear throughout, often completing tasks, unaware of the viewer. Many of these characters are ciphers for artist or critic, and depict the struggle between the two for dominance.<sup>8</sup> Rauch has adopted a somewhat confrontational stance with what he views as 'critics' of his work seemingly in dissatisfaction with misinterpretation and misinformation of images, rather than critical dialogue in general. The critic becomes an antagonistic cipher for the invasion of artistic agency, and can be spotted disrupting various scenes in Rauch's work. Images are not only broken up between works- often within works, there are discordant or dislocated images within the picture plane, with little attention made to assimilated fully into the picture. Characters are sometimes out of proportion, as if drawn from different sources themselves, or fade into nothing behind another element of the composition- all of these signs and signifiers conjure the planar construction of the collage process.<sup>9</sup>

Rauch, like Dumas, is notorious for use of misinformation in his work, visual red herrings that put distance between previously mentioned 'critics' and his image-making process, which he does not discuss in detail, and partly contrary resistance to the idea of one fixed reading. This idea of personal codified symbols and messages intentionally obscured places Rauch in opposition to the notions of Postmodernist interpretation and muddling of authorship, in a similar fashion to Raymond Pettibon. Readings of the image are encouraged or even suggested through hints and snatches of narrative, but a concrete reading, at least outside

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7 Andrew Hottle. 'Peter Paul Rubens and the Dedicated Print: Strategies in the Marketing of an Early Modern Master.' (Temple University, 2004), 61.

8 Hans-Werner Schmidt, "'I Don't Fit in Your System but You Fit in Mine'". Translated by Alison Gallup and Steven Lindberg. In *Neo Rauch: Munich/Leipzig*, edited by Hans-Werner Schmidt. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 9.

9 Bernhart Schwenk, 'the Power of the Untimely- Neo Rauch: Painter of the Present.' Translated by Alison Gallup and Steven Lindberg. In *Neo Rauch: Munich/Leipzig*, edited by Hans-Werner Schmidt. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 8.

of the artist's own mind, is stubbornly resisted, as if such a reading takes away from the work itself, dampening its power. For Rauch, as compared to Dumas, the image-bank of mass-culture is vast, and provides an equally vast array of ciphers for the work. Rauch's figures are familiar, but unidentifiable. Rauch avoids clear narratives, instead obscuring any specific reading with different reference points, drawn from different sources.

Just as Rauch's work extends into painting so too does the work of Thomas Houseago (1972—, fig. 98) incorporate drawing directly into the realm of sculpture. Houseago's penetration of the third dimension allows free movement between drawn and sculpted forms. Using materials such as clay, plaster, hemp, wood and metal, the artist transfers the gestural immediacy of drawing into the figurative forms he creates. Splicing three-dimensional plaster and clay limbs to other body parts drawn or printed on flat, roughly cut wooden shapes, the sculptures move in and out of three-dimensional space as the viewer moves around the work. While the artist himself classifies these works as sculptures, he emphasises the relationship with drawing, and incorporates the contradictory characteristics of drawing into the work, particularly that of the incomplete sketch.<sup>10</sup> Houseago's work resists definition as metadrawing, for the physical, rather than virtual, act of drawing that takes place; instead, drawing is transposed onto another form.

The work of William Kentridge (1955—, fig. 99) is similarly drawing, expanded and applied to settings outside conventions typical of the gallery. Kentridge views drawing as an accumulative thinking process, different to the frozen moment of photography.<sup>11</sup> This viewpoint is emphasized through Kentridge's variation on traditional cel animation processes. Instead of drawing sequences over hundreds of small, separate sheets of paper or vellum, the artist works rapidly on one large sheet per scene, photographing each addition or subtraction of the charcoal.<sup>12</sup> When the images are edited and played back in sequence, they animate, leaving a charcoal 'ghosting' effect after erasures.<sup>13</sup> Here, the use of digital and photographic technologies play a vital role in facilitating the process of the artist, but again resist categorization of metadrawing for its dependence upon the tactile mark-making of charcoal on paper. Despite being filmed and edited, these works leave one drawing per scene, which are sometimes exhibited themselves, displaying the physical remains of the whole sequence. By doing so, Kentridge effectively reimagines the concept of *Pentimenti*. The final 'frame' of the

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10 Rachel Rosenfield Lafo, 'Figuratively Speaking: A Conversation with Thomas Houseago.' *Sculpture* 29, no. 9, (2010): 26.

11 Carolyn Christov-Barkiev. 'Carolyn Christov-Barkiev in Conversation with William Kentridge.' In *William Kentridge*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 8.

12 Dan Cameron. 'A Procession of the Dispossessed.' In *William Kentridge*. (New York: Phaidon, 1999), 53.

13 Christov-Barkiev, 17.

sequence displays the traces of the scene's lively execution, paradoxically becoming both sketch and finished work. The physical makeup of charcoal is ideally suited to reveal the work's own history, both in terms of process and the illusion of movement.<sup>14</sup> Kentridge neatly moves forward, creating a visual dialogue the contemporary experience, while remaining steadfast to many of drawing's more traditional qualities.

## **Plethora, Promiscuity and Graphomania**

Promiscuous:

1. Having casual sexual relations frequently with different partners; indiscriminate in choice of sexual partners.
2. Lacking standards of selection; indiscriminate.
3. Casual; random.
4. Consisting of diverse, unrelated parts or individuals; confused.

Promiscuity is a useful notion in the description of several aspects of drawing.

Considering drawing's speed in describing and investigating ideas, and ease of performativity, and potential for amassing work, the notion of promiscuity is exemplified in the practice of Zak Smith (1976—, fig. 100). Smith's drawings operate under the framework of promiscuity not only through his prolific output, but the parallels between the studio and life. Smith, despite having formal art school training, retains a sharp anti-theoretical stance upon art making, instead finding meaning in an obsession with popular culture. Rather than feigning ignorance of theory, or casting himself as a lowbrow or outsider artist, Smith demonstrates a well-rounded knowledge of art history and theory, which he uses to reject conceptual art on its own terms.<sup>15</sup>

Smith has made his reputation as a prolific and subversive artist with his rapidly executed drawings which often feature his girlfriends, an attraction to the detritus of mass culture, an affectation of style that is reminiscent of comic books and a flair for the decorative. Smith's career took an unconventional turn when he jokingly remarked to a porn filmmaker that in lieu of payment for his work appearing in a film he could 'fuck some girls in a movie he's doing for *Hustler*'.<sup>16</sup> To Smith's surprise, the filmmaker agreed, and the artist has appeared, with the pseudonym *Zak Sabbath*, in alternative pornographic films *Barbed Wire Kiss*, *Girls Lie*, *Bullets and Burlesque* and *Hospital*, usually donating his fee to charity. The films in turn feed Smith's studio practice and inspired Smith's first book *We Did Porn: Memoir and Drawings*, a

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<sup>14</sup> 14 Deanna Petherbridge, *the Primacy of Drawing*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), 136.

<sup>15</sup> Shamim M. Momin. 'One Thousand Choices per Minute: An Interview with Zak Smith Conducted by Shamim M. Momin.' In *Zak Smith: Pictures of Girls*. (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, Inc., 2005), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Zak Smith. 'Foreword', ' In *Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel Gravity's Rainbow*. (New York: Tin House Books, 2006), xii.

detailed account of both the LA porn and art worlds. To complete Smith's immersion in mass culture, the artist has been making a series of short documentary films entitled *I Hit it with my Axe*, which are filmed during regular games of *Dungeons & Dragons*, another niche sub-culture, with his porn star friends and girlfriend, Mandy Morbid. Smith's engagement with mass culture is key to unpacking his studio practice, which does not disrupt the barriers between high and low, so much as work from the assumption that such definitions are no longer pertinent. A prolific draftsman, Smith generates drawings that form a kind critical mass of 'stuff', a detritus similar to the piles of toys, comic books, film posters, music magazines, and the women-sometimes friends, sometimes porn stars and sometimes both- that pose among it for the artist (fig. 101). Zak Smith's oeuvre is situated very firmly between the once-distinct areas of high and low visual arts cultures. Particularly evident in Smith's work is an imbrication of references to these areas, which form fluid images that do not position high and low as binaries, instead re-composing them within the same framework, inserting icons of mass culture throughout his drawings. To Smith, mass culture is not something to be questioned or adapted. Rather, it is the metaphysical landscape with which Smith is familiar; Smith has not seen digital technologies have become incorporated into everyday life, but was born into a world where they were already incorporated.

The abundance of cultural refuse in Smith's drawings is accumulated in a promiscuous manner, in that beyond an intuitive response to image, the selection of material is indiscriminate, random and confused. What one would have referred to as high and low exist side by side. This not only fuses cultures through the drawing process, but instigates an assimilation, homage or pastiche, of their visual and aesthetic elements as well. 'Good drawing' and 'bad drawing' is employed to capture these tensions of content and form. The lost or destroyed work of art, in the context of plethora, becomes a dead end for the artist's attempted continuation. Therefore the prolific generation of many works of art operate as an erotic or obsessive solution to the possibility of the loss or death or damage of the art object. Plethora in drawing terms is a reflection of the idea that reproduction means continuation of the species, and in essence, continuation of the self, or an attempt to resist death. By reproducing, or actively going through the motions of reproduction, we actively resist death.

Smith's most ambitious work to date, *One Picture for Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel 'Gravity's Rainbow'* (2004), totaling 755 drawings, demonstrates the artist's artistic promiscuity (fig. 102). Using Pynchon's surreal, psychedelic text as a template, Smith translates,

rather than illustrates, the novel.<sup>17</sup> This form of adaptation operates in several ways. The novel allows a guiding framework for the artist's proliferation, holding a narrative form throughout a large and complex body of work. The selection of the Pynchon text, with its disregard for more traditional narrative conventions, and stream-of-consciousness storytelling, prevents the series from lapsing into mere illustration. The drawings have no prominent narrative flow, reflecting the surrealistic prose of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Smith gives himself license to interpret each page as he sees fit, creating a vast version of the text, rather than an illustration of its narrative.<sup>18</sup> More important is viewing Smith's works as a kind of translation, instead of illustration, presenting possible differences in literal meaning and form that are altered or mistaken through interpretation of text by drawing, just as translation of a text from French to English might yield. Smith himself acknowledges the gaps in his own abilities to make clear an intended, or possibly intended meaning from a series of words, especially given the abstract and outlandish imagery of Pynchon's writing.<sup>19</sup> This view allows a much more complex and varied set of readings of the works to be made, as well as illuminating the many ways drawing can be used in direct contact with other disciplines, ever making connections between forms.

In contrast to Smith, David Shrigley (1968—) does not embrace the meditative aspect of drawing so much as its speed and immediacy. Working somewhere between cartooning and children's drawings, Shrigley's work deconstructs traditional role of drawing as a learning tool, and therefore a site for virtuosity (fig. 103). Shrigley instead focused on the basic aspects of drawing, with crudely-rendered drawings rendered with brush or marker, often accompanied by text. Shrigley, like Pettibon, came into making art through self-publishing, a convenient mechanism for the use of countless drawings.<sup>20</sup> However like Panter, Shrigley is unafraid to traverse different media, applying his drawings to various products not traditionally associated with the fine arts. This willingness to adapt his work for new markets places Shrigley in a contemporary vanguard unconcerned with modernist preoccupations of cultural purity and the sacredness of the art object. Shrigley looks to such innovations as ways to survive in a shifting art landscape, made all the more necessary in a conservative political landscape that grows increasingly hostile toward the arts in general, and the fine arts in particular.

Shrigley's manner of drawing continues the satirical traditions of Daumier, Hogarth and Goya, despite its relatively crude execution. However, with its unpredictability of theme and

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17 Erickson, Steve. 'Introduction.' In *Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel Gravity's Rainbow*. (New York: Tin House Books, 2006), viii.

18 Erickson, Introduction, ix.

19 Smith, 'Foreword', xvi.

20 Neil Mulholland. 'Brown Laser: David Shrigley in Conversation with Neil Mulholland.' Translated by Elizabeth Jian-Xing Too. In *David Shrigley*. (Bignan: Centre D'art Contemporain, 2002), 91.



instability of form, Shrigley's work does not adhere with the highly-developed formulae and accessible styling of the bulk of contemporary commercial arts.<sup>21</sup> Instead, he vacillates between ideas of intimacy and universality, mundane to exceptional.<sup>22</sup> Frederic Paul observes that Shrigley draws with a formal effectiveness similar to advertising, delivering its intended message quickly and directly.<sup>23</sup> Shrigley himself considers much of his work a response to advertising, which he finds dull.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Shrigley's contribution to drawing is unlike many artists; it is not technically or technologically innovative, and it does not advance the pedagogy of drawing. Instead, Shrigley's work demonstrates an aspect of drawing that condenses pictorial representation to its most direct form, while simultaneously delivering a broad range of messages and absurdist associations.<sup>25</sup> Shrigley often reconfigures his own role as the author of his drawings, which makes reading his oeuvre as a whole much more problematic. A consistent voice is rejected in favour of the unexpected, and Shrigley's absence of style becomes his style.<sup>26</sup> Shrigley incorporates many autobiographical or confessional incidents and passages into his drawings, as well as an equal number of fictitious incidents, frustrating interpretations of autobiography.

### **Drawing as Autobiography**

The qualities of drawing lend themselves to autobiography, which has become a recurring theme of contemporary drawing. To complete an analysis on drawing in the digital age, the autobiographical possibilities must be noted. Just as the perverse insistence of drawing, despite the proliferation of digital drawing programs and devices, is divergent from these innovations, so too is drawing as autobiography. Social media is entirely dependent upon the digital platforms that host its sprawling vacuity, encouraging a culture of constantly rewritten and reconstructed personal histories. The Facebook user editing the public narrative of their own life through choices of uploaded photographs, statements, or 'events', which can be as mundane or fanciful as the user sees fit. Conversely, the intimacy of the artist's journal, not to mention the relatively simple tools and conditions needed to draw, allow a sense of ease with which to construct one's own autobiography, in a more private context.

Closely associated with drawing and autobiography are artists Robert Crumb and or Zak

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21 Frederic Paul. 'David Shrigley, a Vandal and a Moralist Or: The Ten Fingers of Your Left Hand.' Translated by Elizabeth Jian-Xing Too. In *David Shrigley*. (Bignan: Centre D'art Contemporain, 2002), 57.

22 Paul, 58.

23 Paul, 60.

24 Mulholland, 'Brown Laser', 90.

25 Paul, 59.

26 Paul, 60.

Smith, contemporary artists who have sometimes incorporated themselves into their work. However, upon consideration, such clear representations of self can be misleading, particularly in the context of self-portraiture, which is subject to different conventions to autobiography. A later reluctant citizen of the digital age, Robert Crumb (1943—) has perfected the balancing act between artist and illustrator for several decades, resisting labels of both the establishment and the underground, creating one of the most recognisable careers in comic books' short history. Along with a handful of other influential figures of the comic book form that are recognised outside of the comic book cultural niche and within contemporary art, such as Gary Panter, Crumb has managed to become an exhibited artist on his own comic book terms. Crumb has worked the 'confessional' comic form (fig. 104) to such a degree that it is inseparable from his work, and the tropes and conventions he developed have become the standard rules of thumb in non-mainstream comic books.

Crumb first became a voice of the counter-culture in the 1960s through his underground comics, which candidly discussed drugs, sex and the establishment. While Crumb's work itself is made for and published in comic book form, and therefore adheres to certain stylistic narrative and sequential conventions of form, the drawing itself is influenced greatly by two main subgenres of cartooning: the early 20<sup>th</sup> century form of so-called 'Funny Animal' comics, the precursor to the Disney, popularised form of anthropomorphic animals reacting to various scenarios, and the Warner Bros. formula of stylised violence and slapstick, as well as the tradition of political cartooning of Daumier and Hogarth. Crumb's comics are an oscillation of denial and contrarian resistance. Nature will not allow himself to be pigeon-holed. Certainly, his most recent project, a meticulously researched illustrated comic book version of the Book of Genesis, confounded fans and critics alike with its avoidance of satire of fetish that Crumb has become known for (fig. 105).

Jonathan Meese (1970—) employs drawing as just one element of a practice that spans most art practices in one form or other. However, it is Meese's use of autobiography that is most illustrative of his own work. Meese has created a persona that is ostensibly Jonathan Meese, but simultaneously a construction. Therefore, the 'artist's work' is not the drawings, collages, paintings, photographs, sculptures, videos and performances (fig. 106) Meese makes so much as his persona, for whom the work is made to flesh out and justify. This is an extreme example, and Meese is not particularly innovative when it comes to drawing, but his work is a clear illustration of the metaphysical possibilities allowed in the destabilized contemporary art world, and the metaphysical openness of the terminology of autobiography. Warhol's own investigations into the notion have become the standard by which to measure the device of the

artist's own self as a cipher, rather than reflection.

One form of drawing to gain much cultural and artistic respect recently is the comic book. While many comic books incorporate digital processes into production, there remain a large number of artists that continue to use the same tools that were used in the form's inception. One innovative autobiography is that of Chris Ware (1967—), whose graphic novel *Jimmy Corrigan: the Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000, fig. 106) presents the fictitious biography of Jimmy Corrigan in suburban representation of real-world Chicago. From the outset, *Jimmy Corrigan* explicitly rejects the conventions of the superhero narrative.<sup>27</sup> In the opening pages, an infantile Jimmy is taken by his mother to meet his hero, 'the Super-Man', a generic stand-in for the real-world superhero actor not unlike Adam West at a car show. The Super-Man ends up taking Jimmy and his mother out for dinner, staying the night with her, and sneaking off in the morning. The scene is created from Jimmy's low vantage point, subtly framing details like the Super-Man's wedding band on his (uncostumed) finger, or his expression upon first noticing Jimmy's mother's bust, which is obscured to Jimmy and the reader. Only Jimmy's dialogue is presented in speech bubbles in the sequence, the rest being presented outside the panels, invoking the dream or memory-like manner of the sequence. This strategy is used throughout the narrative, usually from the viewpoint of the child version of Jimmy, or the child version of his grandfather, with whom the narrative viewpoint occasionally splits. This quick dispensation of the generic superhero acts as a distancing device from what Ware considers the vulgar and populist aspects of the comic book medium, allowing him to focus on his own works of self-confessed, hand-lettered 'MONOTONOUS SELF-ANALYSIS AND DELUDED SELF-AGGRENDIZEMENT'.<sup>28</sup> Ware's level of autobiographical engagement varies from text to text, but recurs in some capacity, whether it is an infantile Ware and his classmates being depicted<sup>29</sup>, or a cipher like Quimby the Mouse that can be more destructive or malevolent toward the past<sup>30</sup>.

While the *Jimmy Corrigan* graphic novel is not presented as the autobiography of Chris Ware, there is a certain level of evidence to the contrary, particularly if the reader is aware of Ware's previous work, which contains similar injections of the artist's own experiences and

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27 John Carlin. 'Masters of American Comics: An Art History of Twentieth-Century American Comic Strips and Books.' In *Masters of American Comics*, edited by Paul Karasik & Brian Walker John Carlin. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 162.

28 Chris Ware. *The Acme Novelty Library Date Book: Volume Two, 1995-2002*. (Montreal: Drawn & Quaterly, 2008), 2.

29 Todd Hignite. *In the Studio: Visits with Contemporary Cartoonists*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 234.

30 Chris Ware. *Quimby the Mouse*. (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2003), 13.

opinions (fig. 107).<sup>31</sup> Ware is famously opinionated, particularly in the context of what he regards as an unfair hand that comic books are dealt in critical and academic circles.<sup>32</sup> Beaty points out the embittered viewpoint of Ware in *Comics Versus Art*, noting that Ware's views are representative of a kind of assumed stance of cultural victimisation of comics, often implying the fine arts as the aggressive agent.<sup>33</sup> Unlike many 20<sup>th</sup> century cartoonists that sought the elevation of the comic book's status, Ware is predisposed to cynical resistance to the theoretical, philosophical and critical art world trappings that come with this elevation.<sup>34</sup> This does not stop Ware from comparing himself to Töpffer, one of the key figures in the creation of the comic book form, and thereby cynically consecrating himself as Töpffer's contemporary successor.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to Ware's own misgivings in relation to art, he has achieved respect in the worlds of both art cartooning, in effect, belonging in part to both.<sup>36</sup> The publication of Ware's sketchbooks, which contain countless exquisitely executed studies and formless rants about being misunderstood, Beaty posits are a move to authenticate his genius, thereby validating his cultural legitimacy.<sup>37</sup> Ware's sketchbooks are heavily self-conscious, and ape the (published) sketchbooks of Crumb in terms of self-analysis, autobiography, and even the anachronistic subject matter selected to draw, such as photographs of early film stars and folk musicians. Beaty sees this embedded nostalgia as conflicted and problematic in terms of Ware's critical positioning as a key figure in contemporary comics, literature, and art.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to this viewpoint, John Carlin argues that Ware's ongoing investment into drawing styles and techniques of the past is a direct reaction to the destructive and alienating aspects of modern technology.<sup>39</sup> Carlin elaborates, positioning Ware's references to his cartoonist heroes of the past, such as Frank King, Windsor McCay and Charles Schulz, as an elaborate and sophisticated visual index that avoids irony and replaces nostalgia with the 'psychological overtones' of said artists.<sup>40</sup> Whichever is the case, Ware's work is inextricably linked with his own past, which is sifted for moments and memories for use in a greater autobiographical project.

In contrast to Ware's elegant but sober meditations upon the comic book form, the graphic novel is *Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery* (2012, fig. 109), by Grant Morrison and

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31 Carlin, 'Masters of American Comics', 158.

32 Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 211.

33 Beaty, 215.

34 Beaty, 216.

35 Beaty, 224.

36 Hignite, *In the Studio*, 228.

37 Beaty, 216.

38 Beaty, 216.

39 Carlin, 154.

40 Carlin, 162.

Frank Quitely. The text actively embraces the visual extravagance and pseudoscience of the superhero genre, combined with its melodramatic and metaphysical elements. *Flex Mentallo* was effective because it integrated both the autobiographical backstory of Morrison and Quitely into the metaphysics of the superhero narrative at the expense of neither artistry nor complexity. The story is narrated by the Morrison/Quitely cipher Wally Sage, who has overdosed, and has called a drug counselling hotline in an attempt to stay awake. Meanwhile, Sage's invented superhero, Flex Mentallo, attempts to solve a mystery that loosely spans the history of comics, in parallel to Sage's hallucinatory phone conversation.<sup>41</sup> Morrison's own verbose description of Flex Mentallo's metaphysical quest hints at the intertextual and self-reflexive possibilities enabled by the comic book. In citing literature, film, comic books and art history together, he is not only resisting the pre-digital categorization of media, particularly that of high and low, but identifying the different references as akin to one another formally (fig. 110). Flex Mentallo himself was modelled after Charles Atlas, the Brooklyn bodybuilder and mail-order entrepreneur who partially inspired the invention of Superman.<sup>42</sup> In *Flex Mentallo's* final chapter, the superhero team known as the 'Legion of Legions' must escape a godlike devourer called the Absolute, and in order to do so, must become fictional.<sup>43</sup> Such metaphysical turns sit comfortably within the graphic novel's narrative structure, which challenges not only the formal qualities of the comic book, but the traditional mode of first-person autobiography.

Morrison and Quitely's *Flex Mentallo* is an appropriate place to conclude this mapping of the potential trajectories of drawing, and by extension, metadrawing. Morrison and Quitely's ruminations upon the metaphysics of narrative and the creative process demonstrate the post-digital reintegration of high and low, and show the artistic possibilities of an interdisciplinary world of destabilized barriers. This has in turn forced a reconfiguration of the art market, and simultaneously reinvigorated the very mechanics of the art making. Furthermore, the comic book form exemplifies the shifts of drawing in the digital age. The comic book has the distinction of being borne of both drawing and mass culture, occupying the contested territory of the high/low discourse. As such, Morrison and Quietly's *Flex Mentallo* is the culmination of a hybrid of commercial forms tempered by inventive artistry and challenging metaphysics, a resolved compromise of art and commerce.

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41 Grant Morrison. *Supergods*. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 272.

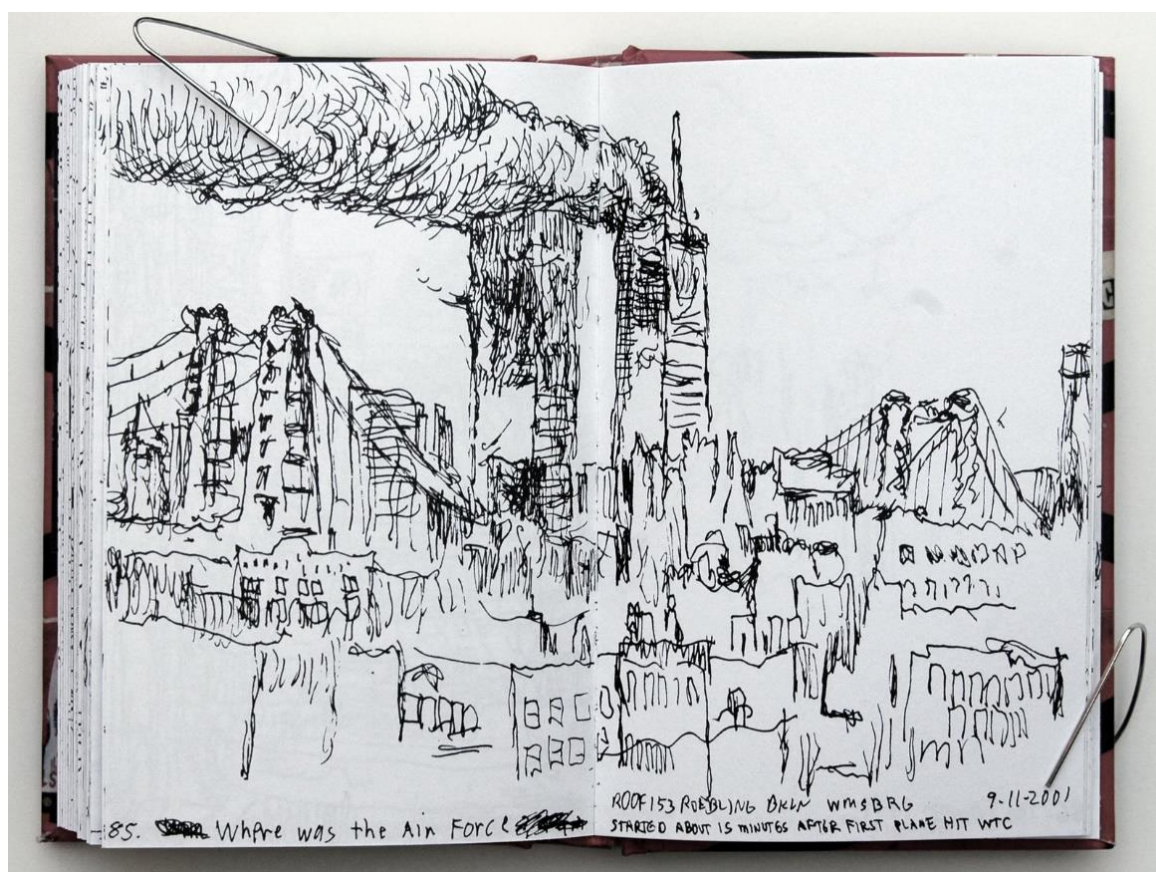
42 Gerard Jones. *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*. (London: Random House, 2004), 70.

43 Morrison, 272.

## Conclusion

Drawing continues to operate within a continuum of human activity, enabled by technological innovation, suspending the fundamental truth of drawing inherent in its unrepeatability. It is in this way that drawing subverts itself, continuing to exist as it always has, via action, and simultaneously echoing itself in the mass-media, through metadrawing. The inherent tension of drawing, of the real and the unreal, manifests throughout each stage in its own development. Through this research, the qualities of drawing have been applied to a broad spectrum of studio approaches and strategies, allowing heuristic process to augment research in several ways. Through the physical execution of drawings on paper, this studio research explores the tactile, sensual aspects of mark making, creating a body of work that incorporates many of the physical, meditative and improvisatory approaches that cannot be quantified in terms exterior to the experience. These gestures, in tandem with the gathering, editing and collating of visual stimulus materials, which cite a different texts and media themselves, combine to produce additional registers of meaning. These registers explore narratives, both functioning within the work and self-reflexively elaborating on the circumstances of its own creation, and incorporate allusions to, and ciphers appropriated from, other texts. By incorporated these registers of meaning, the work becomes both sincere and self-effacing, concealing its complexity by way of revealing its own secrets. These works revel in their own narrative ambiguity, demanding speculative interpretation, rather than a fixed reading. Opposing the equalising, monocultural force of the virtual world, but embracing its interconnectivity, this work seeks to evoke through its imagery a questing, unfulfillable narrative desire in its viewers, while simultaneously satisfying their appetites for the visceral, physical and primal aspects of mark making. The role of drawing is no longer technically 'necessary' to artistic, commercial or industrial production. However, its thriving perseverance proves its success in visually addressing and exploring the world between the physical, the virtual, and the unknowable. In exploring the relationship between drawing and other media, particularly the virtual, the artist is ideally positioned to demand a higher level of visual and cognitive innovation of the virtual, while expanding the language of art.

## Images



**Figure 1** Gary Panter, drawing from *Satiro Plastic* journal, 2001, ink on paper, 10.5 x 15cm, Collection of the Artist.





**Figure 2** Albrecht Dürer, *Study for the Praying Hands of An Apostle*, 1508, ink on paper, 29 x 17.7cm, Albertina, Vienna.

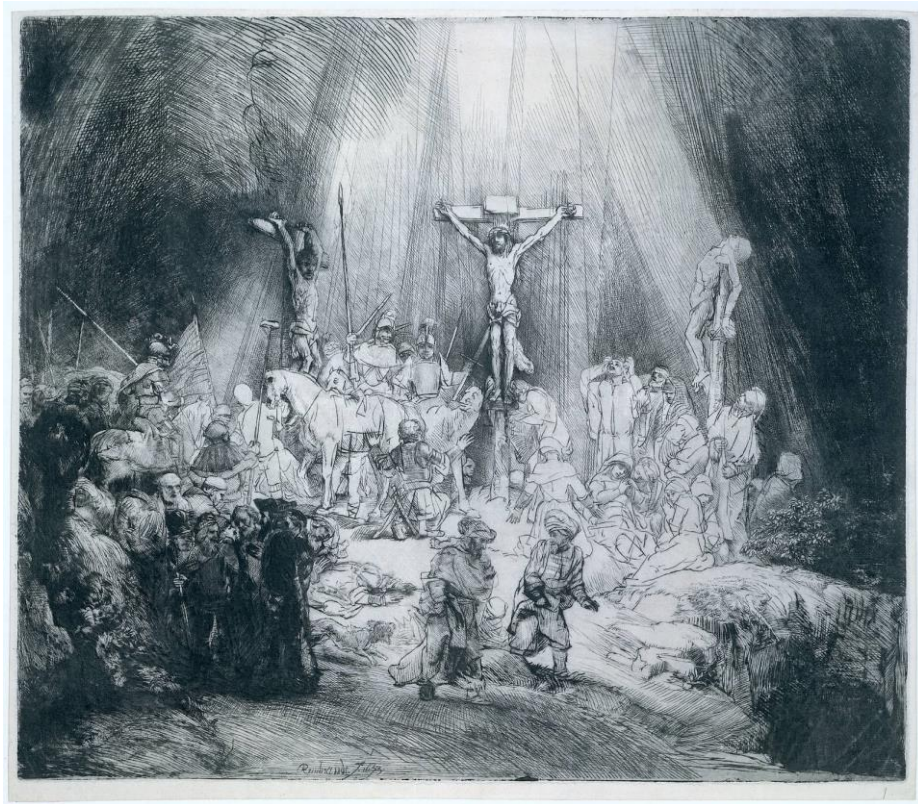




**Figure 3** Albrecht Dürer, *Apocalypse with Pictures (plate 11), the Dragon with the Seven Heads*, 1498, woodcut, 39.2 x 27.9cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Figure 4** Lucas Vorsterman after Peter Paul Rubens, *the Defeat of the Amazones*, 1623, engraving, 85.5 x 119.3cm, collection of Ron McBurnie.



**Figure 5** Rembrandt, *the Three Crosses*, 1653, drypoint, 39.4 x 45.6cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

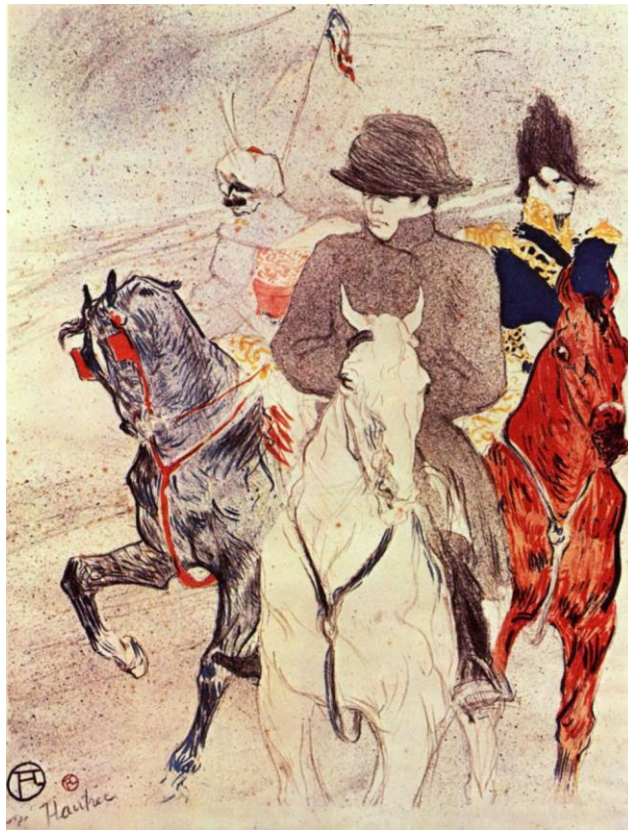




**Figure 6** Francisco Goya, *the Disasters of War (plate 3): the Same*, 1810-20, etching and aquatint, 17.7 x 21.5cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



**Figure 7** John Ignace Isidore Gerard Grandville, plate from *Les Métamorphoses du Jour*, c.1860, lithograph, 27 x 17cm, private collection.



**Figure 8** Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, *Napoleon*, 1895, lithograph, 27 x 37cm, private collection.



**Figure 9** Odilon Redon, *Cactus Man*, 1881, charcoal on paper, 49 x 32.2cm, the Woodner Family Collection.





**Figure 10** Otto Dix, *Wounded Veteran*, 1922, watercolour and pencil on paper, 48.9 x 36.8cm, private collection.



**Figure 11** Max Beckmann, *Carnival in Naples*, 1925, ink, chalk & crayon on paper, Art Institute, Chicago.





**Figure 12** George Grosz, plate 28 from *Ecce Homo*, 1922-23, lithograph, 34.8 x 25cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



**Figure 13** George Grosz, *Erotische Szene*, 1939, charcoal on paper, 63.6 x 48.2cm, private collection.

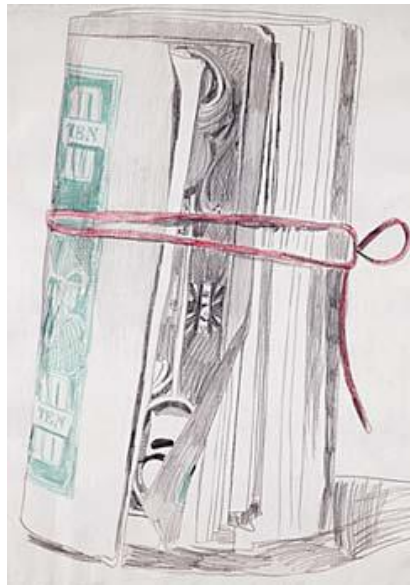


**Figure 14** Sergei Eisenstein, still from *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925, produced by Mosfilm.



**Figure 15** Francis Bacon, *Head VI*, 1949, oil on canvas, 93.2 x 76.5, Arts Council Collection & Hayward Gallery, London.





**Figure 16** Andy Warhol, *Roll of Bills*, 1962, pencil, crayon & felt-tip pen on paper, 101.6 x 76.2cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



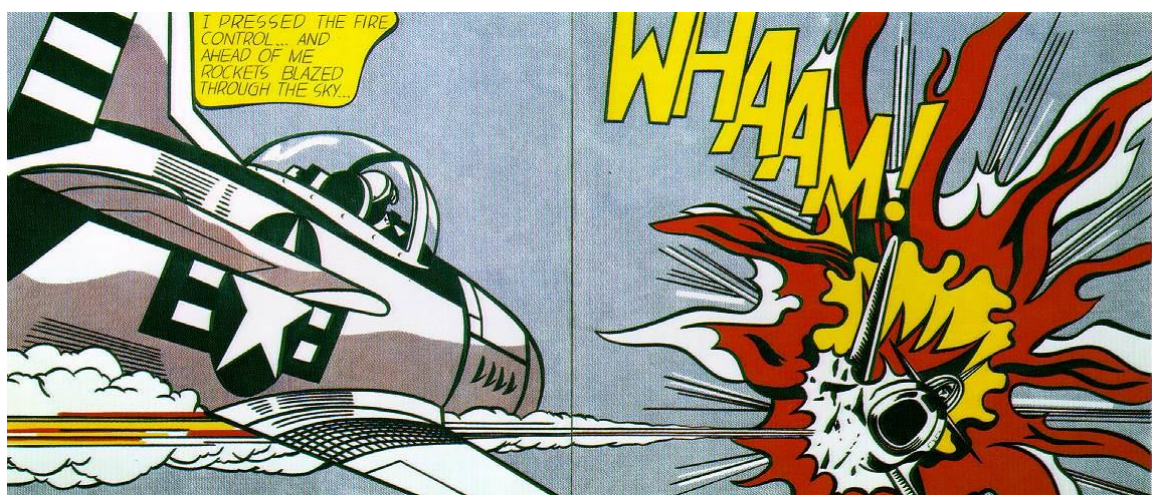
**Figure 17** Roy Lichtenstein, *Okay, Hot-Shot, Okay*, 1963, oil and magna on canvas, 203.2 x 172.7cm, private collection.



**Figure 18** Russ Heath, panel from *G.I. Combat* #94, 1962, published by DC Comics.



**Figure 19** Irv Norvick, panel from *All-American Men of War* #89, 1962, published by DC Comics.

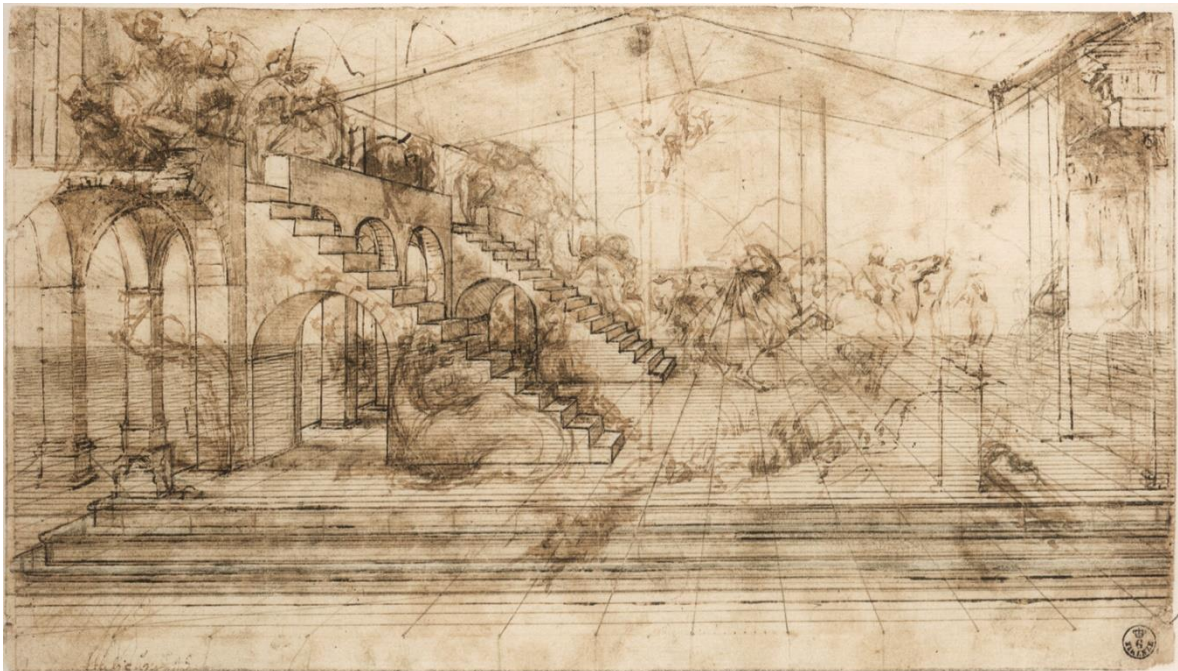


**Figure 20** Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam*, 1963, synthetic polymer paint and oil on canvas, 172.7 x 406.4cm, Tate, London.





**Figure 21** Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Studies for the Libyan Sibyl*, 1508-12, red chalk on paper, 28.9 x 21.4cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Figure 22** Leonardo da Vinci, *Study for the Background of the Adoration of the Magi*, c.1481, metalpoint reworked with ink & gouache on paper, 19.3 x 29cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.





**Figure 23** Leonardo da Vinci, *the Adoration of the Magi*, 1481, oil on wood, 246 x 243cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



**Figure 24** Sandro Boticelli, drawing for *Dante's Inferno* (Circle 7, 12.46), c.1480-1495, ink on parchment, 32.5 x 47.5cm, Vatican Library, Rome.





**Figure 25** Henrick Goltzius, *Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze*, c.1600 ink & oil on canvas, 105 x 80cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



**Figure 26** Henrick Goltzius, *the Farnese Hercules*, 1592, engraving, 41.8 x 30.4cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



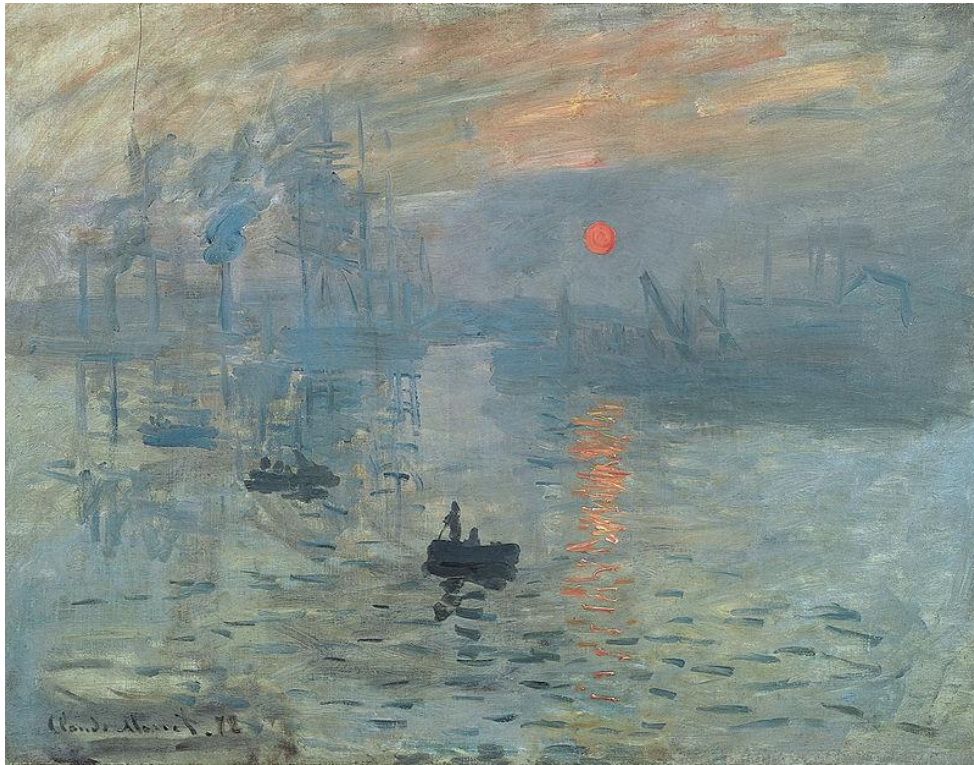


**Figure 27** Nicolas Poussin, *The Saving of the Infant Pyrrhus*, c.1633, red chalk & ink on paper, 20.6 x 34.5cm, The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.



**Figure 28** Eugène Delacroix, *Sketch for Atilla*, c.1843, ink on paper, 17.7 x 22cm, Musée de Louvre, Paris.





**Figure 29** Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872, oil on canvas, 48 x 63cm, Musée Marmottan, Paris.



**Figure 30** Georges Seurat, *the Plowing*, 1882-3, conte on paper, 24.5 x 32cm, Musée d'Orsay.

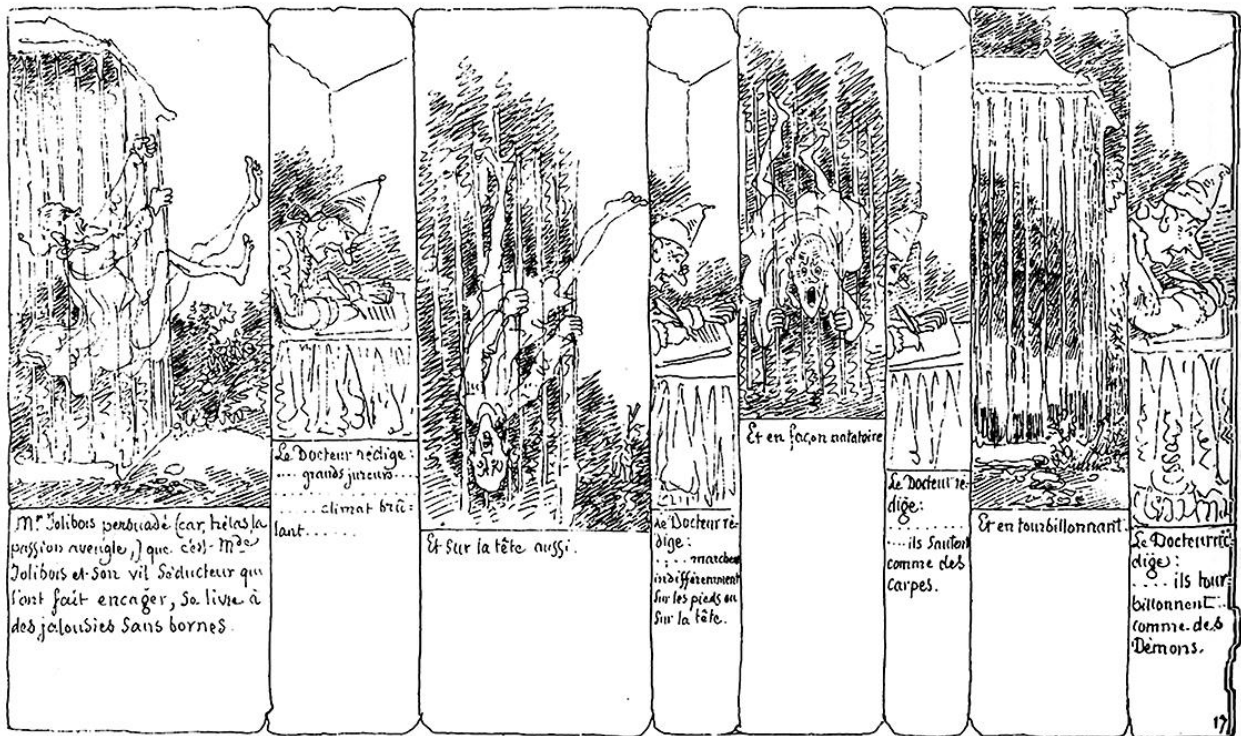




**Figure 31** Pablo Picasso, *Blind Minotaur Guided by a Little Girl with Flowers*, 1934, drypoint & etching, 25.2 x 34.7cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

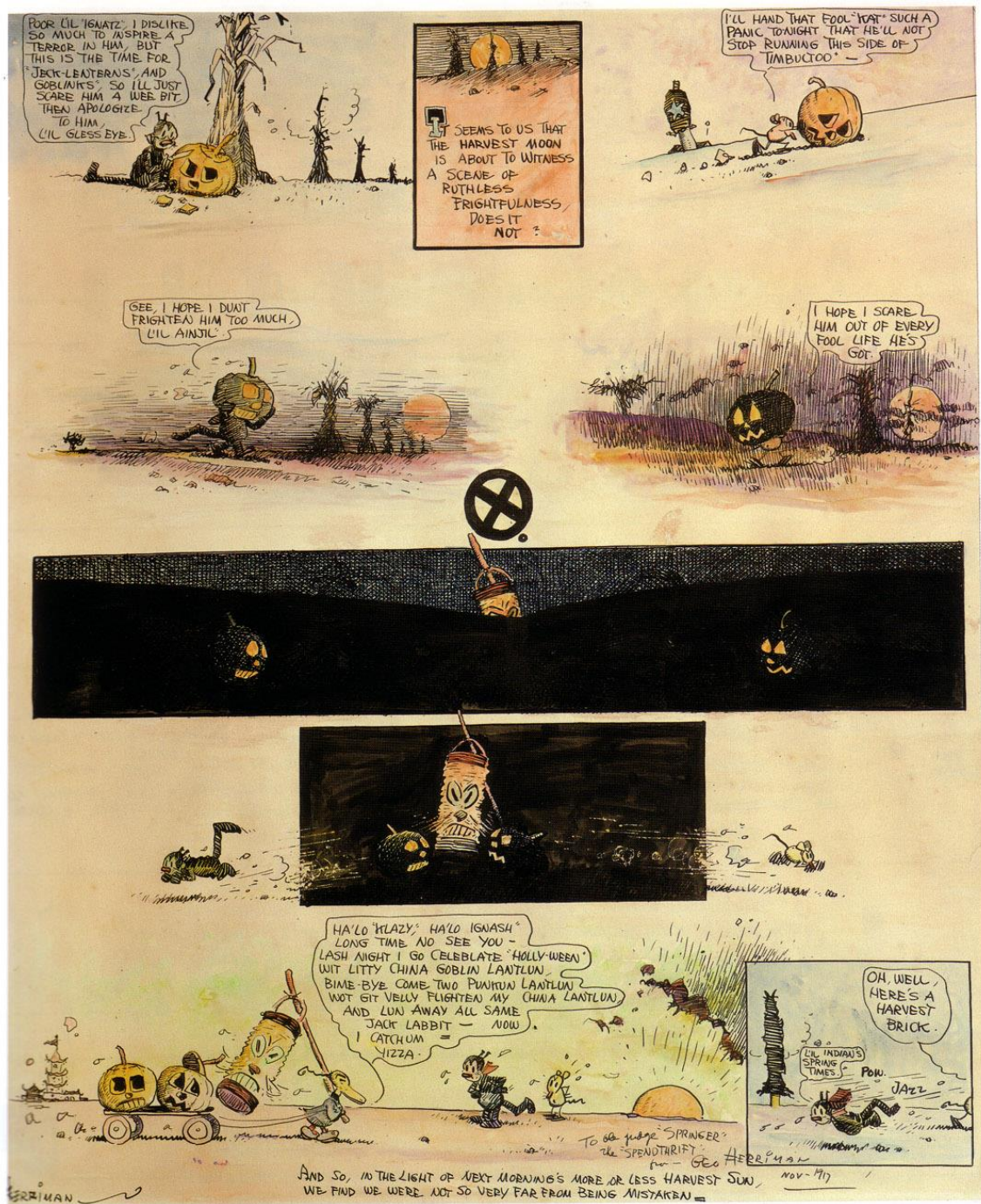


**Figure 32** William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* (plate 4), 1735, engraving, 31.8 x 28.7cm, Tate, London.



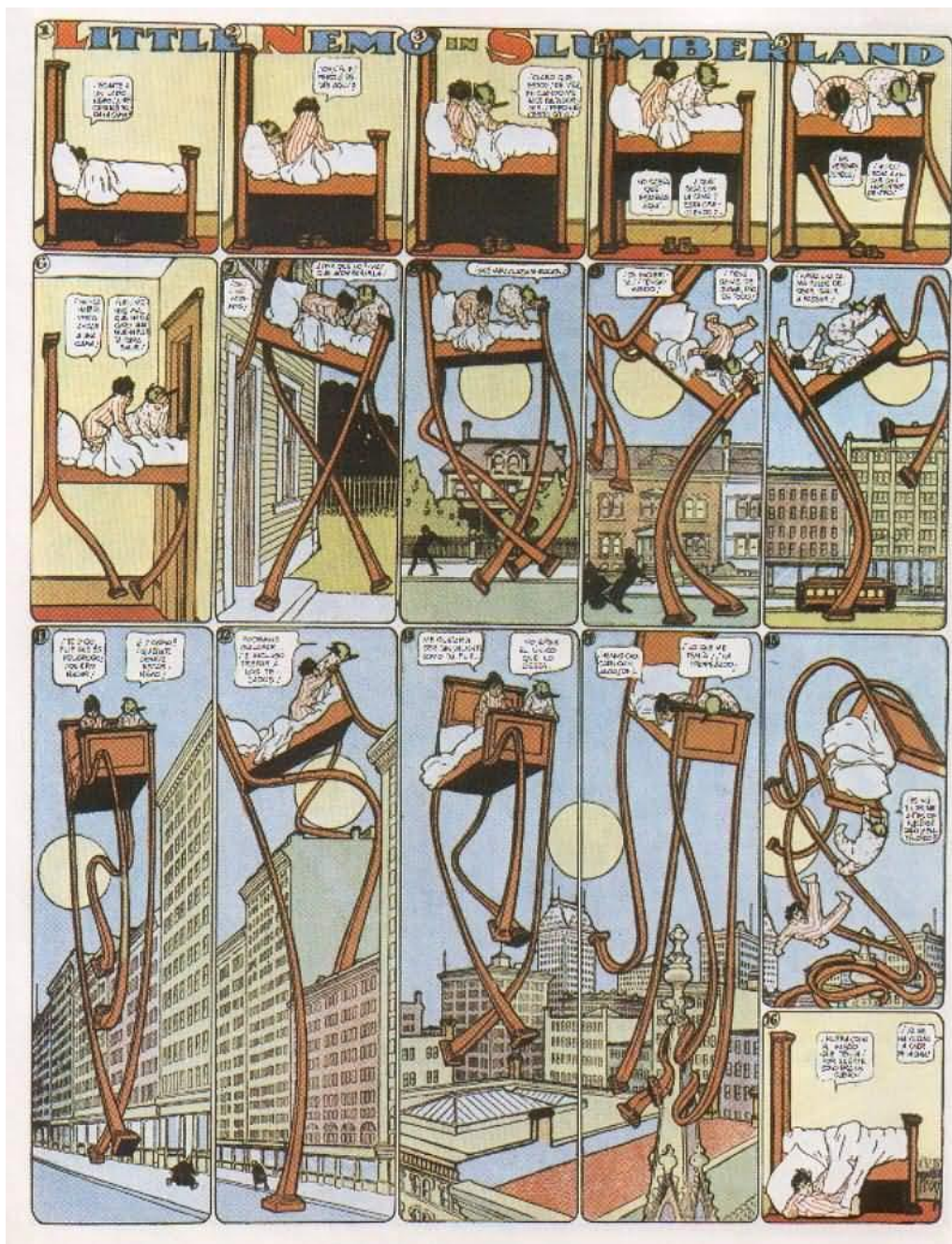
**Figure 33** Rodolphe Töpffer, page from *Monsieur Pencil*, 1840, pen lithograph, 21.6 x 27.9cm, El Nadir 2012 edition.





**Figure 34** George Herriman, original drawing for *Krazy Kat* Sunday page, 1917, ink and watercolour on paper, 55.9 x 48.3cm, Collection of Patrick McDonnell.





**Figure 35** Winsor McCay, *Little Nemo in Slumberland* Sunday page, 1908, published in the *New York Herald*.





**Figure36** Lyonel Feininger, *the Kin-der Kids Sunday* page, 1906, published in the *Chicago Tribune*.





**Figure 37** Milton Caniff, original drawing for *Terry and the Pirates* Sunday page, 1943, ink on paper, 30 x 21.5cm, private collection.

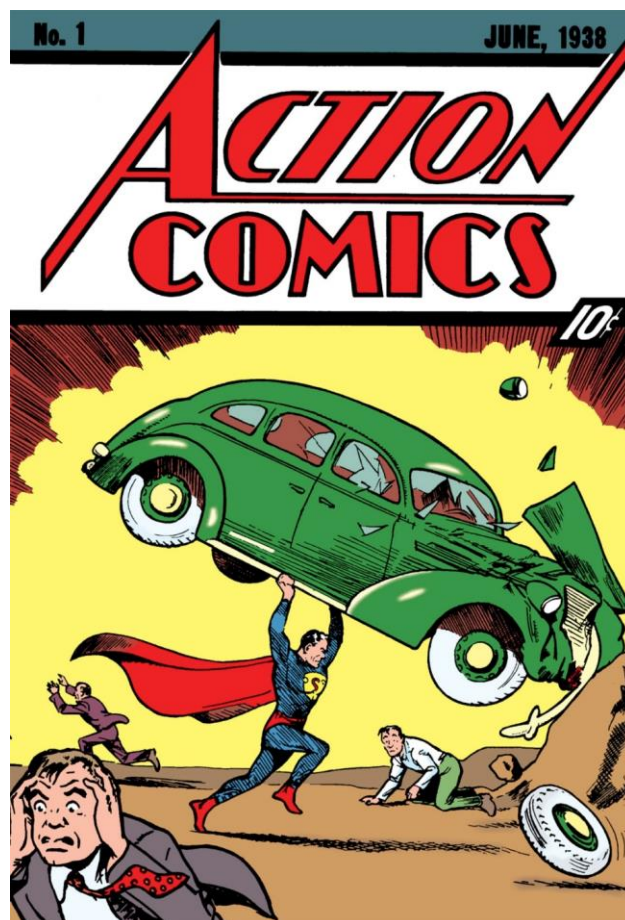


**Figure 38** Alex Raymond, *Flash Gordon* Sunday page, 1938, published in various newspapers by licence from King Features Syndicate





**Figure 39** Unknown artist, page from *Bathless Groggins* 8-pager, c.1940, offset printed and stapled volume, 8 pages, 14 x 10.5cm, private collection.



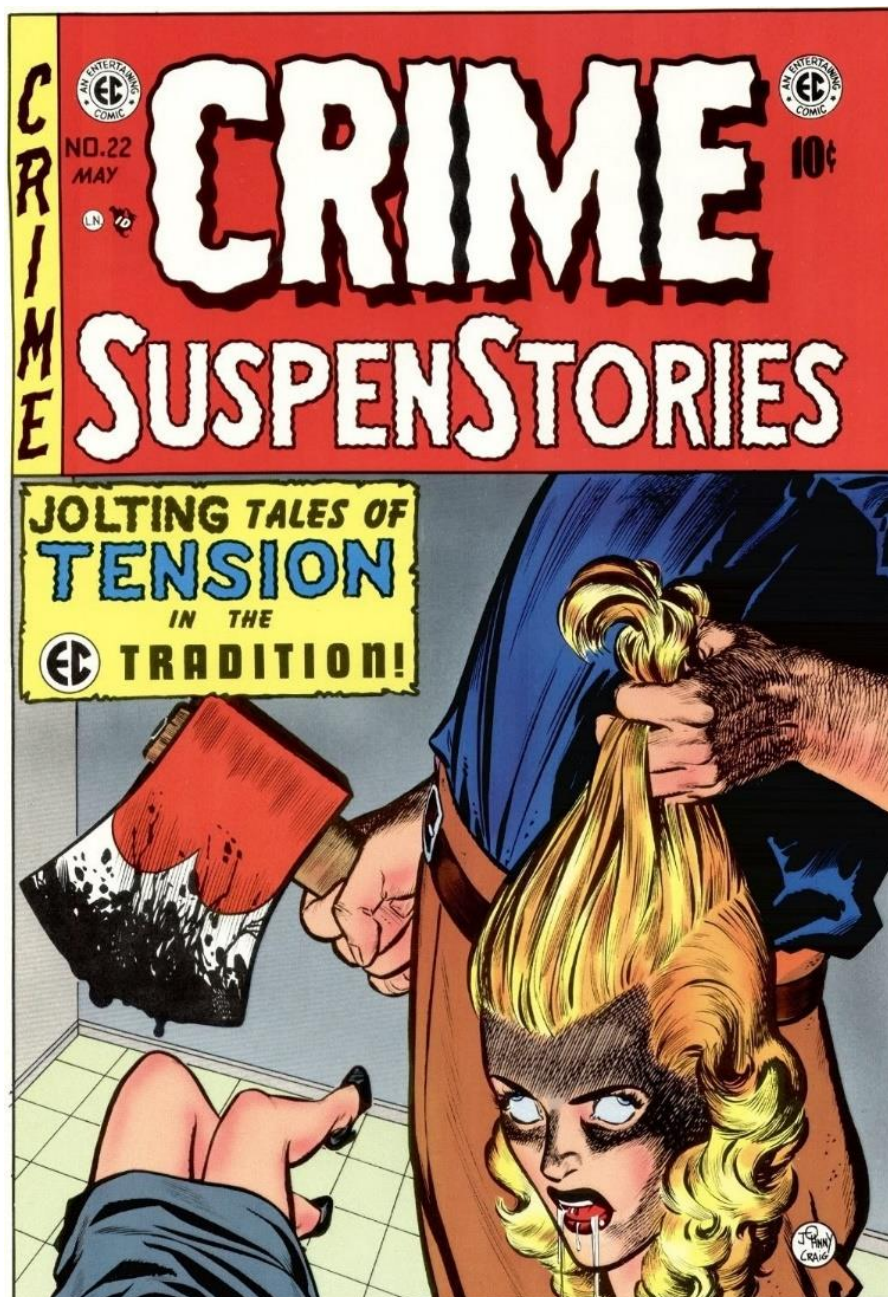
**Figure 40** Joe Shuster, cover of *Action comics* #1, 1938, published by DC Comics.





**Figure 41** Jack Davis, cover of *Two-Fisted Tales* # 30, 1950, published by EC Comics.

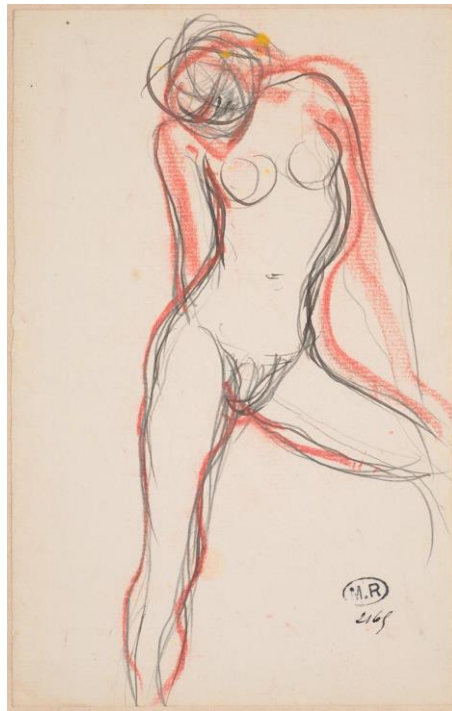




**Figure 42** Johnny Craig, cover for *Crime Suspense Stories* # 22, 1954, published by EC Comics.



**Figure 43** Marlene Dumas, *Dorothy D-lite*, 1998, ink & acrylic on paper, 125.5 x 70cm, De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg.



**Figure 44** Auguste Rodin, *Female Nude with Left Leg Outstretched*, c.1890, graphite, ink, pastel & pen on paper, 20.2 x 12.7cm, Musée Rodin, Paris.



**Figure 45** Marlene Dumas, *Porno as Collage*, 1993, ink on paper, six sheets, 40 x 31.5cm, Friedrich Christian Flick Collection.





**Figure 26** Marlene Dumas, *Models* (installation view), 1994, ink & chalk on paper, 100 sheets, 60 x 50cm each, Van Abbemuseum Collection, Eindhoven.



**Figure 47** Marlene Dumas, *Rejects* (detail), 1994, chalk, ink, collage & watercolour on paper, 60 x 50cm, from an ongoing series.



**Figure 48** Eadweard Muybridge, fragment from *The Human Figure in Motion* (1901), found in Francis Bacon's Reece Mews Studio.



**Figure 49** Marlene Dumas, *the Pilgrim*, 2006, oil on canvas, 100 x 90cm, private collection.





**Figure 50** Marlene Dumas, *Dead Marilyn*, 2008, oil on canvas, 40 x 49cm, Zero X Gallery, Antwerp.



**Figure 51** Marlene Dumas, *Black Drawings*, 1991-2, ink & watercolour on paper & slate, 111 drawings & 1 slate, 24.9 x 17.3cm, De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg.



**Figure 52** Hannah Wilke, *Intra-Venus Series #4*, chromogenic supergloss print, 181.6 x 120.7cm, edition of three, Hannah Wilke Collection & Archive, Los Angeles.



**Figure 53** Hannah Wilke, *Intra-Venus Hand no. 9*, 1991, gouache and watercolour on paper, 31.8 x 24.1cm, Museum of Modern Art New York.



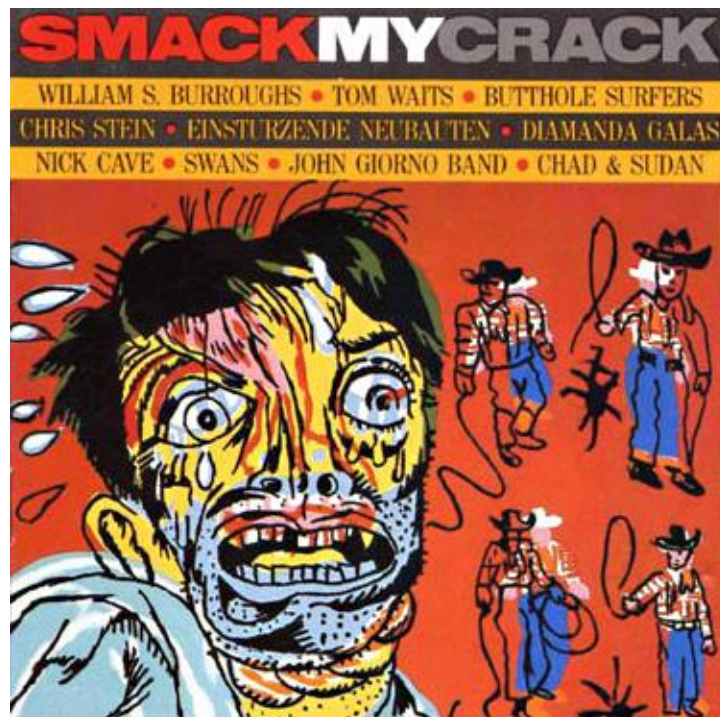


**Figure 54** Marlene Dumas, *Stern*, 2004, oil on canvas, 110 x 130.6cm, Tate, London.



**Figure 55** Marlene Dumas, *the Painter*, 1994, oil on canvas, 200 x 100cm the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



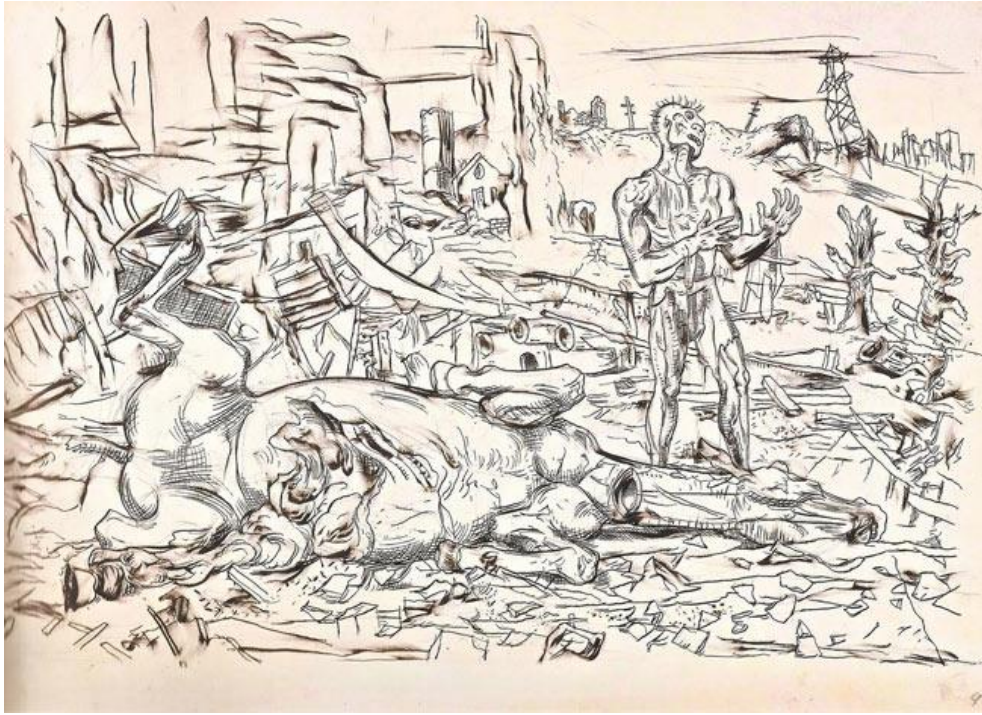


**Figure 56** Gary Panter, album cover for *Smack my Crack* compilation, 1987, distributed by Giorno Power Systems.



**Figure 57** Gary Panter, *Jimbo Cover*, 1982, mixed media on board, 35.6 x 53.3cm, private collection.



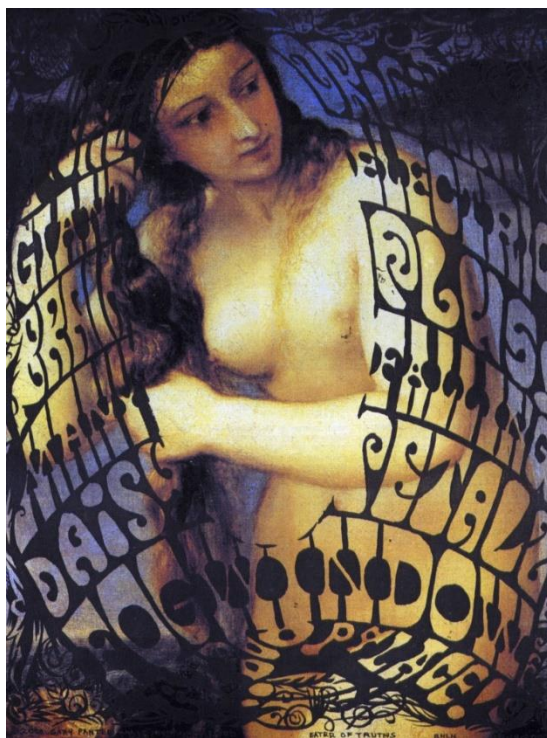


**Figure 58** Gary Panter, drawing for *Jimbo: Jimbo is Stepping off the Edge of a Cliff!*, 1986, ink on paper, 51.4 x 73cm, Collection of the Artist.



**Figure 59** Gary Panter, *Untitled*, 1995, acrylic on canvas, 243.5 x 152.4cm, private collection.





**Figure 60** Gary Panter, *Eater of Truths*, 2000, photocopy over magazine page, 28.7 x 22.2cm, private collection.



**Figure 61** Gary Panter, *Murphy-teen Terrors*, 2009, ink on paper, 15.2 x 20.3cm, private collection.





Figure 62 Jack Kirby & Mike Royer, page from *Demon #10*, 1973, published by DC Comics.

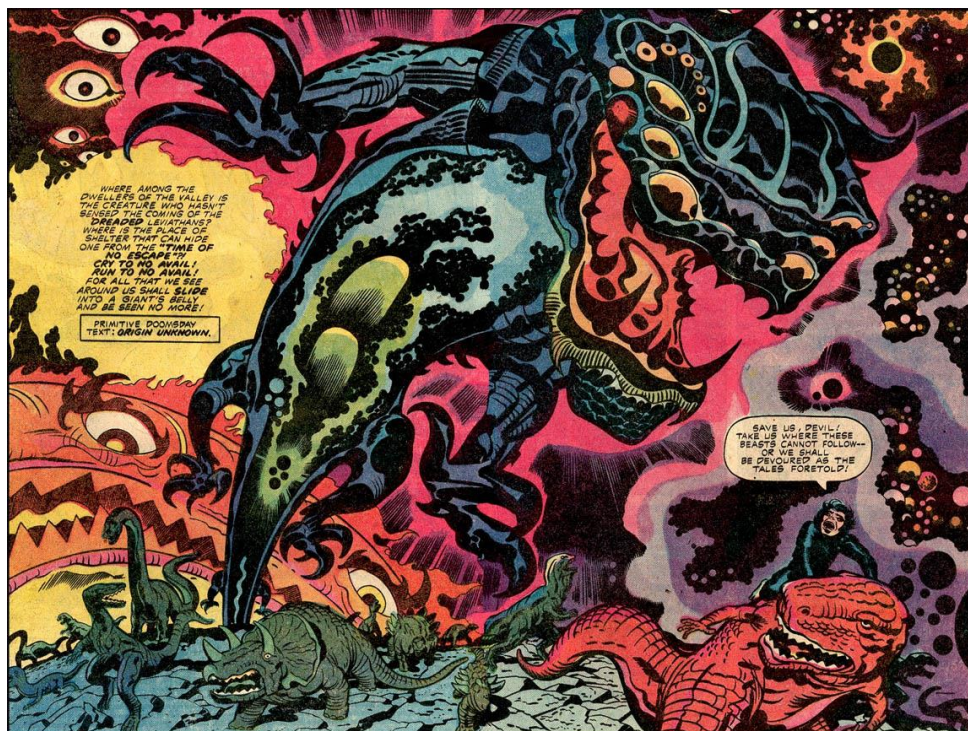


Figure 63 Jack Kirby & Mike Royer, page from *Devil Dinosaur #4*, 1979, published by Marvel Comics.

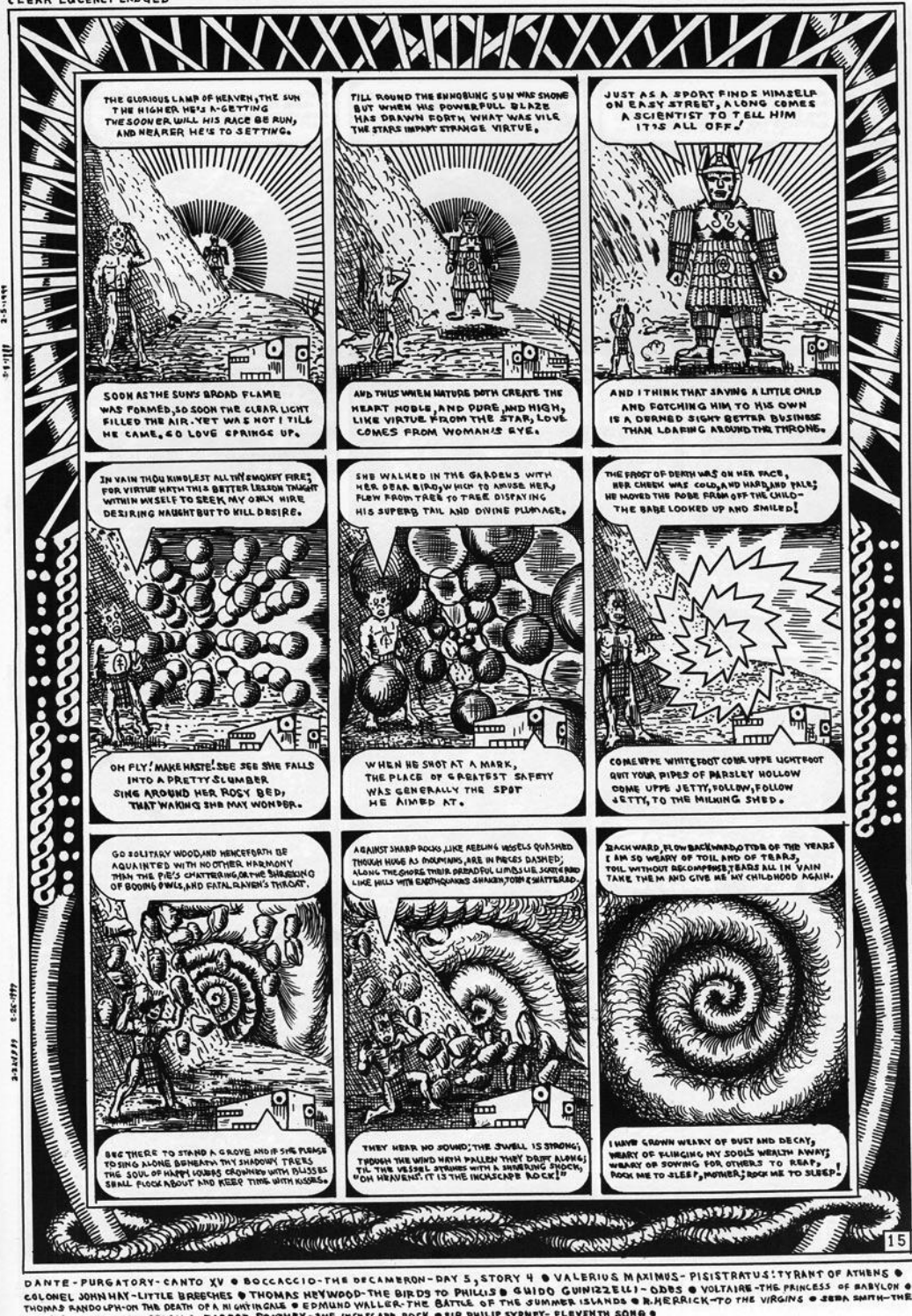
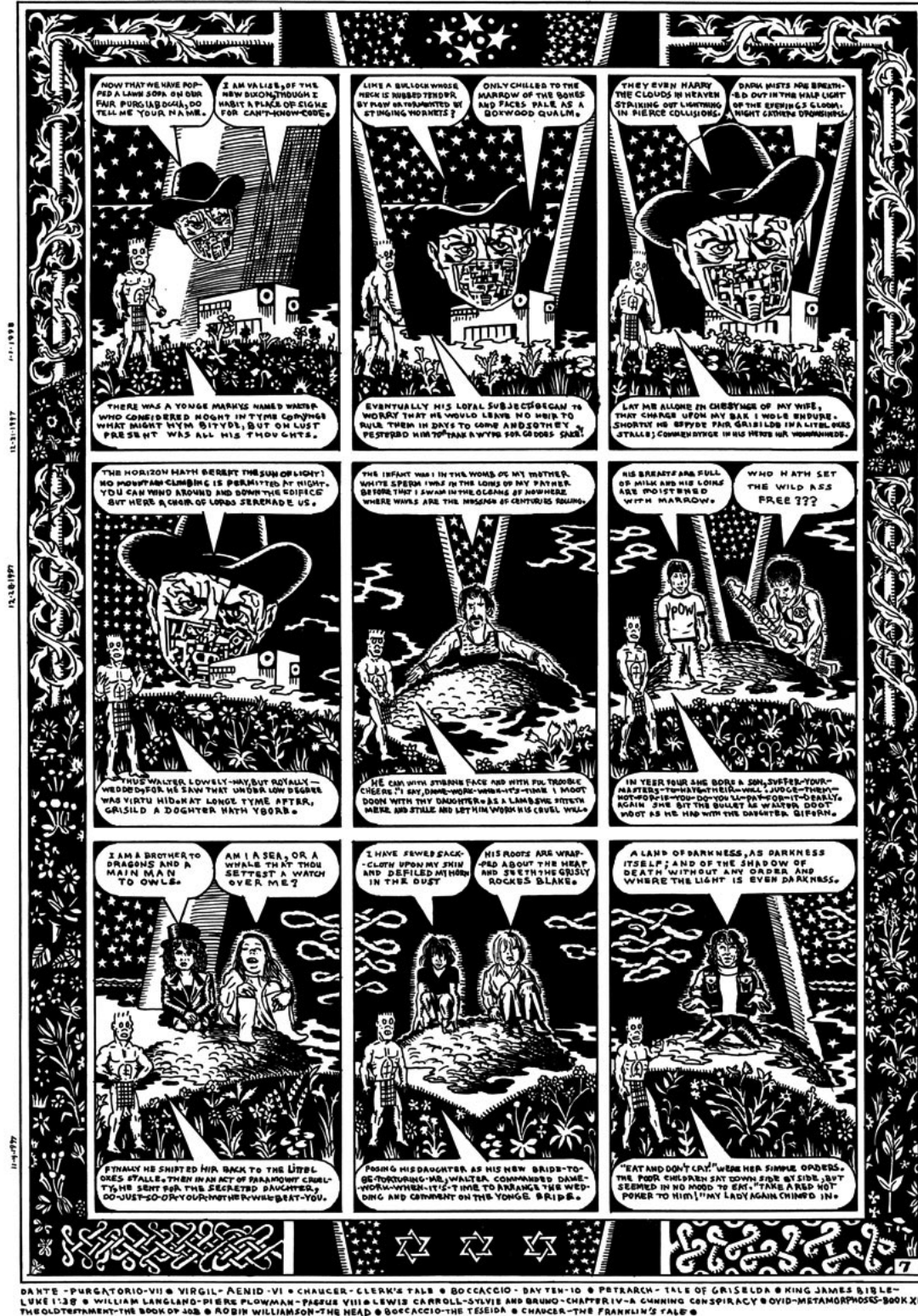


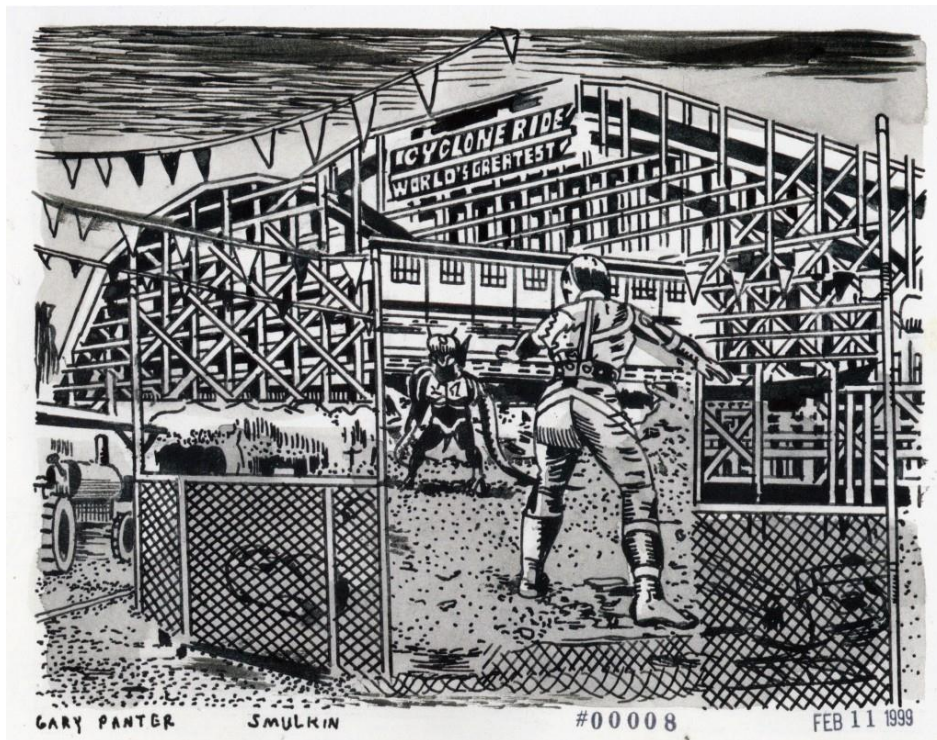
Figure 64 Gary Panter, drawing for *Jimbo in Paradise*, 1997 ink on paper, 58.4 x 40.6cm, Collection of the artist.



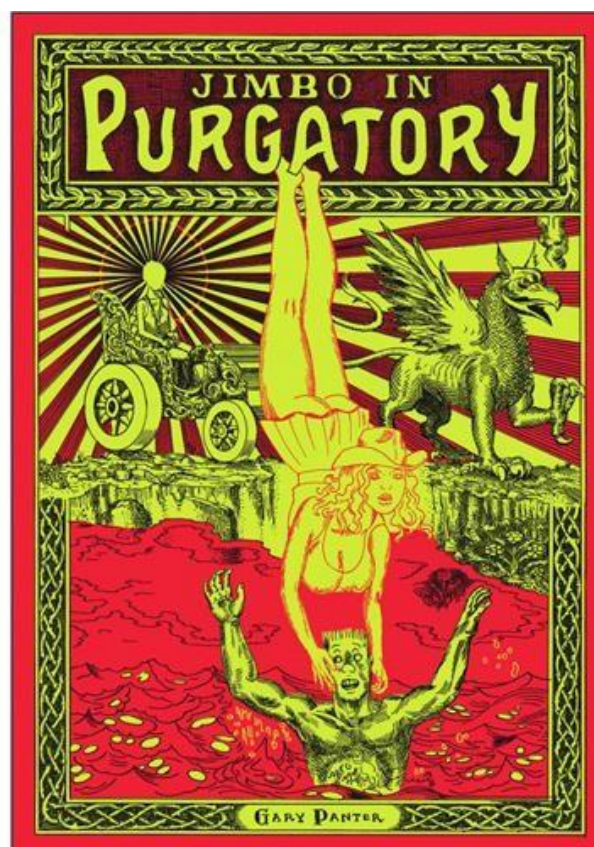


**Figure 65** Gary Panter, drawing for *Jimbo in Paradise*, 1997 ink on paper, 58.4 x 40.6cm, Collection of the artist.





**Figure 66** Gary Panter, *Smulkin*, 1999, ink on paper, 36.2 x 28.6cm, private collection.



**Figure 67** Gary Panter, cover for *Jimbo in Purgatory*, published by Fantagraphics Books, 2004.





**Figure 68** Gary Panter, *Tear My Flesh Off and Eat it* (journal drawing), 1985, ink on paper, 20 x 24cm, collection of the artist.



**Figure 69** Gary Panter, page from *Dal Tokyo*, 2012, published by Fantagraphics Books.



**Figure 70** Gary Panter, page from *Dal Tokyo*, 2012, published by Fantagraphics Books.





Figure 71 Gary Panter, page from *Dal Tokyo*, 2012, published by Fantagraphics Books.



Figure 72 Henry Darger, *Colonel Jack F Evans*, pencil, watercolour & collage on paper, 34.9 x 29.2cm, American Folk Art Museum, New York.

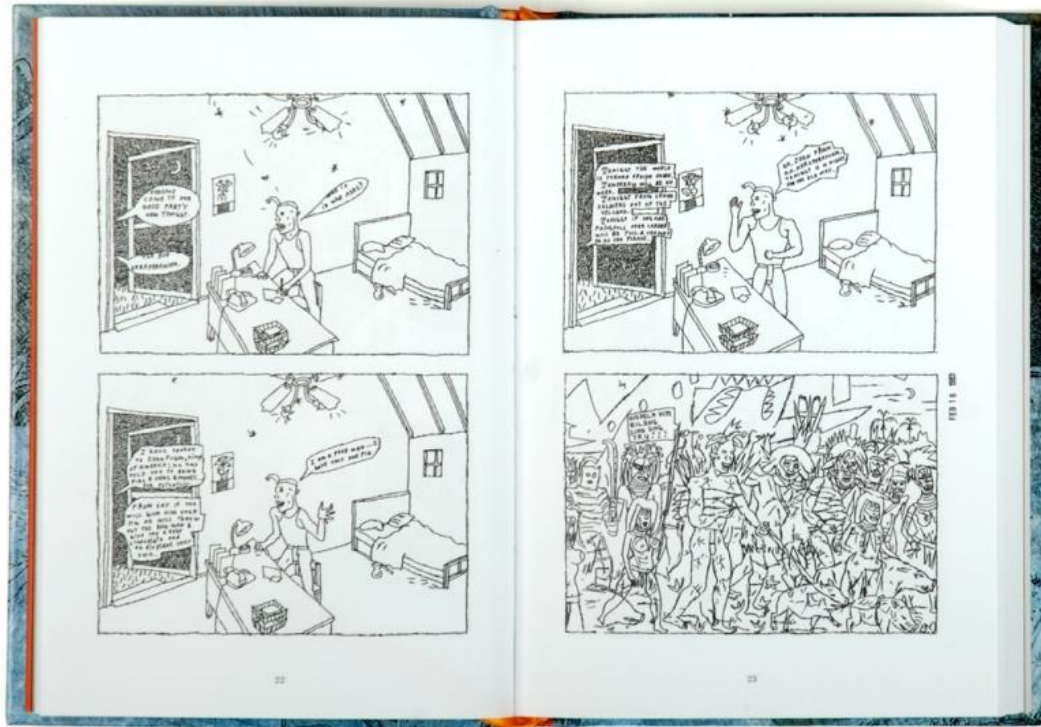


**Figure 73** Henry Darger, *At Battle of Drosabellamaximillian. Seeing Glandelinians Retreating the Vivian Girls Grasp Christian Banners and Lead Charge Against Foe*, c.1950, watercolour, pencil, carbon tracing and collage on paper, 48.3 x 120.7cm, American Folk Art Museum New York.



**Figure 74** Henry Darger, *At Sunbeam Creek. Are with Little Girl Refugees Again in Peril from Forest Fires. But Escape this also, but Half Naked and in Burned Rags/At Torrington. Are Pursued by a Storm of Fire but Save Themselves by Jumping into a Stream and Swim Across as Seen in the Next Picture/Their Red Color is Caused by Glare of Flames at Torrington. They Reach the River Just in the Nick of Time*, c.1950, watercolour, pencil, carbon tracing & collage on pierced paper, 48.3 x 120.7cm, American Folk Art Museum, New York.

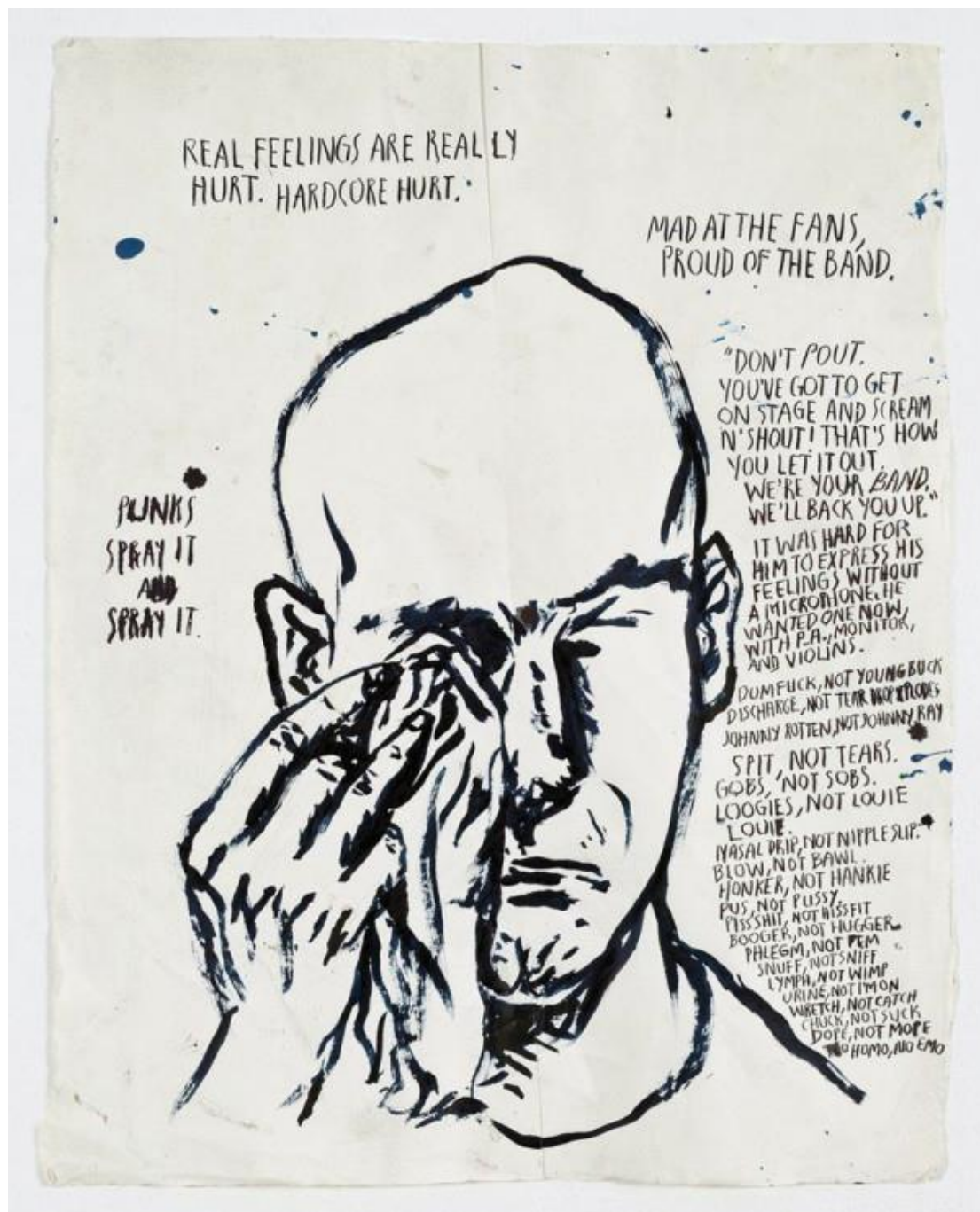




**Figure 75** Gary Panter, double-page spread from *Cola Madness*, 2000, published by Funny Garbage Press.



**Figure 76** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (I Work Upstairs)*, 2011, ink & gouache on paper, 180.3 x 131.1 cm, private collection.



**Figure 77** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (Real Feelings are)*, 2011, ink on paper, 58 x 46cm, CFA, Berlin.

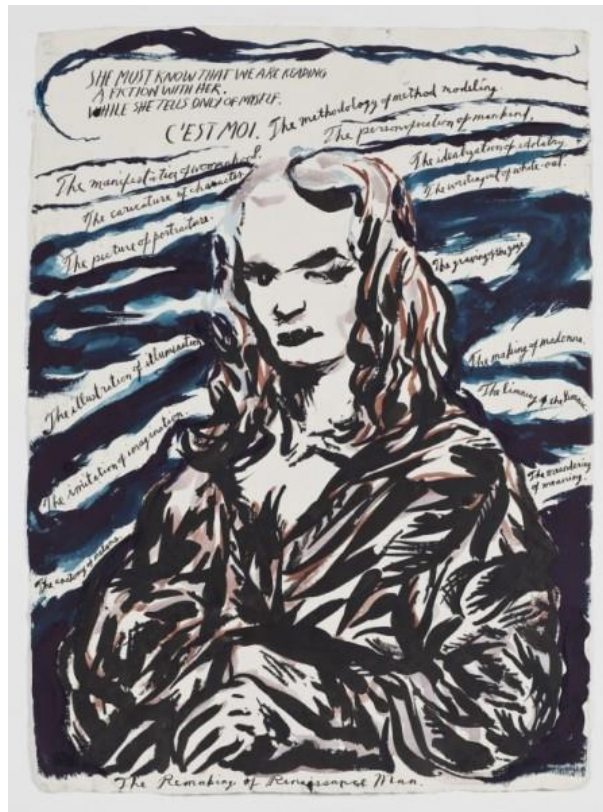




**Figure 78** Raymond Pettibon, installation view, 2000, Regan Projects, Los Angeles.



**Figure 79** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (His Boy Robin)*, 2005, ink on paper, 76.8 x 40.6cm, private collection.



**Figure 80** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (She Must Know)*, 2010, ink & gouache on paper, 76.8 x 56.5cm, David Zwirner, New York.



**Figure 81** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (When it is)*, 2011, ink & watercolour on paper, 57 x 77cm, CFA, Berlin.





**Figure 82** Raymond Pettibon, *Tripping Corpse #4*, 1984, self-published by the artist, private collection.



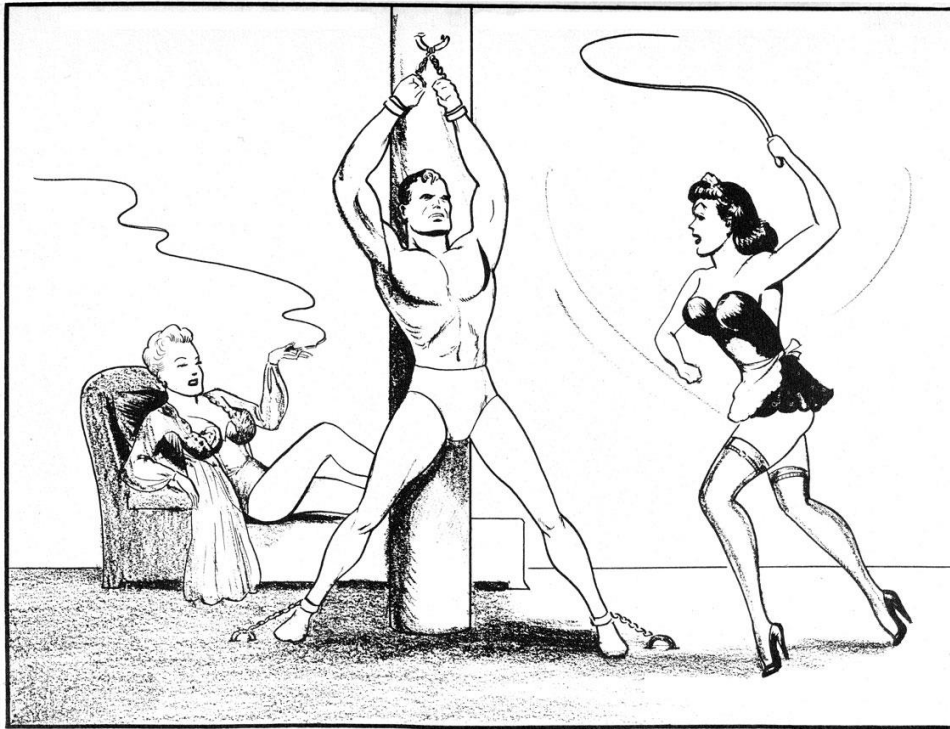
**Figure 83** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (My God, was)*, 1990, ink on paper, 35.6 x 27.9cm, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



**Figure 84** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (Batman Thinks He's)*, 1984, ink on paper, 36.2 x 46.4cm, private collection.



**Figure 85** Joe Shuster, *With Both Hands he Slapped and Cuffed the Soft Whiteness*, c.1954, published in *Nights of Horror* #6.



ESTELLE, BY SIGN, INDICATED THAT SHE WISHED TO HAVE THE MAID CONTINUE.

**Figure 86** Joe Shuster, *Estelle, By Sign, Indicated That She Wished to Have the Maid Continue*, c.1954, published in *Nights of Horror* #7.



**Figure 87** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (I am Prepared)*, 2011, ink on paper, 61 x 48cm, CFA, Berlin.





**Figure 88** Will Eisner, original drawing for *the Spirit Weekly*, 1950, ink & gouache on paper, 50.8 x 35.6cm, Collection of the Will Eisner Estate.



**Figure 89** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (You Hear That)*, 2011, ink, gouache & acrylic on paper, 76 x 112cm, CFA, Berlin.

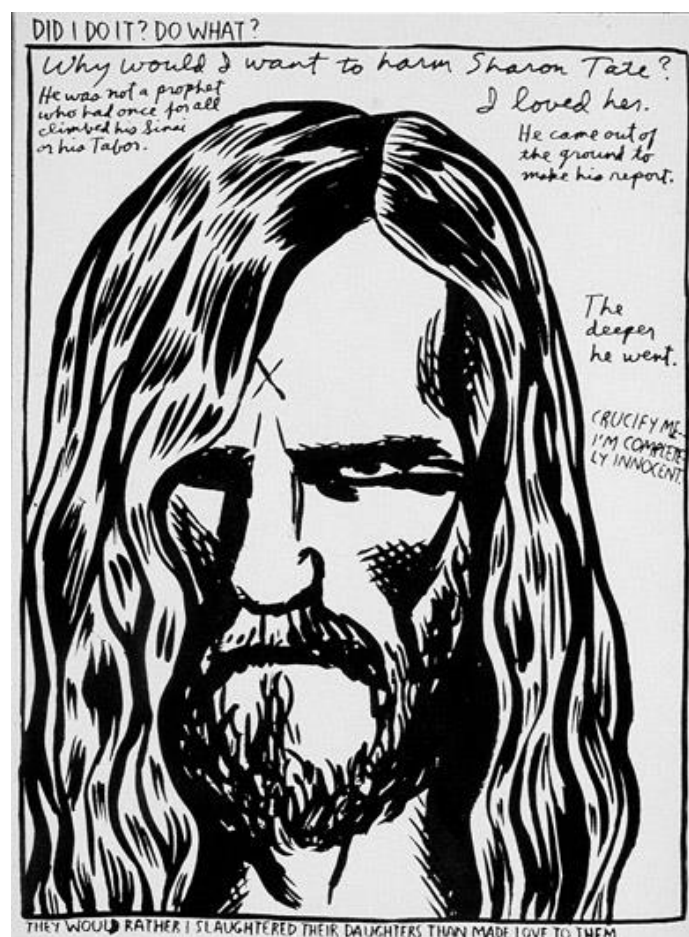








**Figure 91** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (As They Unfold)*, 2011, ink, gouache & collage on paper, 34 x 76cm, CFA, Berlin.



**Figure 92** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (did I do)*, 1987, ink on paper, 33 x 27.9cm, private collection.



**Figure 93** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (Such a Person)*, 1992, ink and watercolour on paper, 33 x 28cm, private collection.



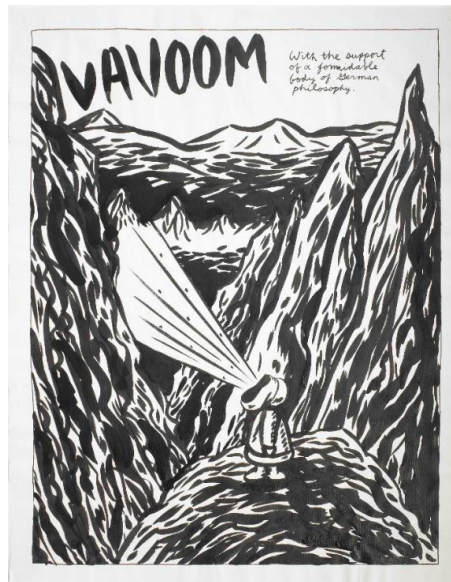


**Figure 94** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (Plot Thickened Clot)*, 1991, ink on paper, 31.4 x 31.4cm, David Zwirner, New York.



**Figure 95** Julie Mehretu, *Stadia II*, 2004, ink & acrylic on canvas, 271.8 x 355.6cm, private collection.





**Figure 96** Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (With the Support)*, 1987, ink on paper, 57.2 x 44.5cm, Collection of Mr and Mrs James Holmes.



**Figure 97** Neo Rauch, *Treason*, 2003, oil on paper, 255 x 199cm, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



**Figure 98** Thomas Houseago, *Baby*, 2009-10, plaster, iron, hemp, wood, graphite & charcoal, 259.1 x 228.6 x 204.5cm, Collection of Fredrick Nilsen.





**Figure 99** William Kentridge, drawing from *History of the Main Complaint*, 1996, charcoal & pastel on paper, 120 x 160cm, Smithsonian National Museum for African Art, Washington.

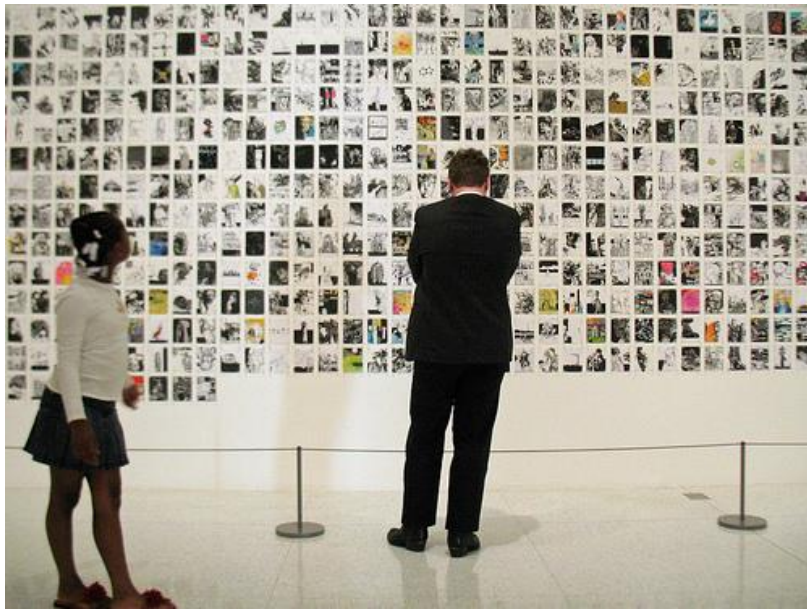


**Figure 100** Zak Smith, *Mandy and Viv Having Sex with Bits Blown Up*, 2011, acrylic & ink on paper, 76.2 x 101.6cm, private collection.

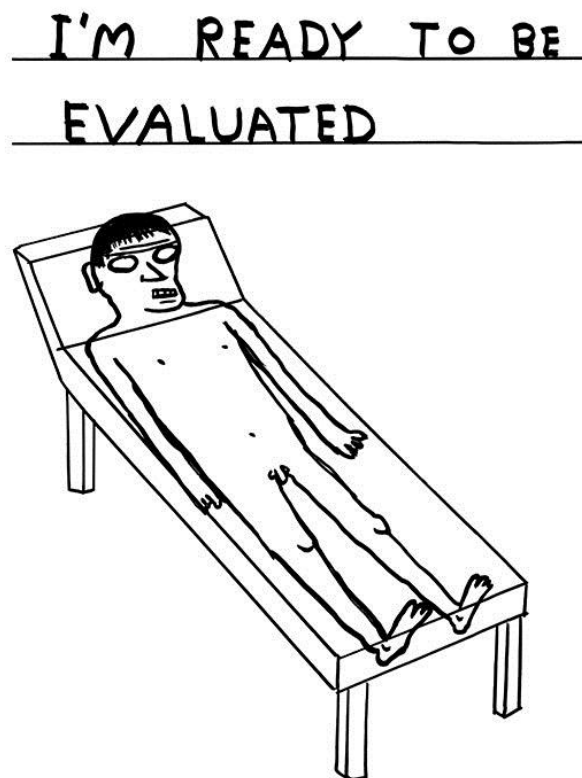




**Figure 101** Zak Smith, *Museum with Four Girls, Two of Whom are Looking at You*, 2010, acrylic on paper, 212.1 x 223.5cm, private collection.



**Figure 102** Zak Smith, installation view of *Pictures Showing What Happens on Each Page of Thomas Pynchon's Novel Gravity's Rainbow*, 2004, ink on paper with acrylic and mixed media, 755 parts, 14 x 11.4cm each, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.



**Figure 103** David Shrigley, *I'm Ready to be Evaluated*, 2013, ink on paper, published in *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin* # 46, 2013.





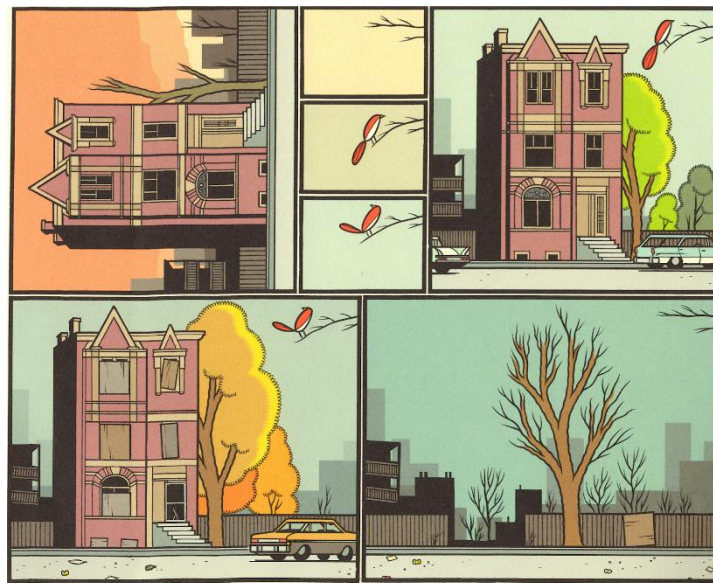
**Figure 104** Robert Crumb, page from *My Troubles with Women*, published in *Zap Comics* #10, 1980.



**Figure 105** Robert Crumb, page from *the Book of Genesis Illustrated*, 2009, published by Norton.

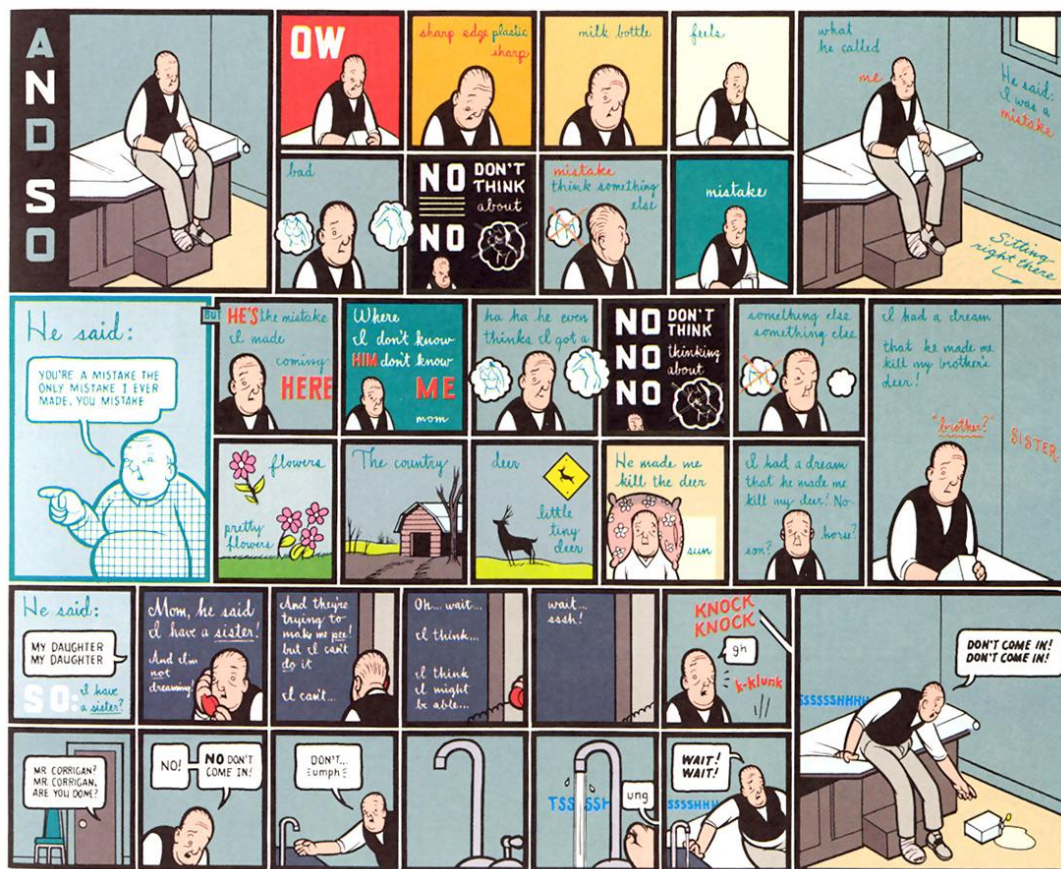


**Figure 106** Jonathan Meese, *Hot Earl Green Sausage Tea Party Barbie (First Flush)*, 2011, installation view, Bortolami, New York.



**Figure 107** Chris Ware, page from *Jimmy Corrigan: the Smartest Kid on Earth*, 2000, published by Pantheon Books.





**Figure 108** Chris Ware, page from *Jimmy Corrigan: the Smartest Kid on Earth*, 2000, published by Pantheon Books.



**Figure 109** Frank Quitely, panels from *Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery*, 2012, published by DC Comics.





**Figure 110** Frank Quidely, panels from *Flex Mentallo: Man of Muscle Mystery*, 2012, published by DC Comics.





**Figure 111** Jonathan McBurnie, installation view of *Moses / Amn't*, December 2014.



**Figure 112** Jonathan McBurnie, installation view of *Moses / Amn't*, December 2014.





**Figure 113** Jonathan McBurnie, installation view of *Moses / Amn't*, December 2014.



**Figure 114** Jonathan McBurnie, installation view of *Moses / Amn't*, December 2014.





Figure 115 Jonathan McBurnie, installation view of *Moses / Amn't*, December 2014.

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## **Appendix I**

### **Self Interview**

#### **So, first question... why conduct an interview with yourself?**

I borrowed the idea from Žižek's book *the Metastases of Enjoyment*, which features a fifty page self-interview as its appendix. It makes for fascinating reading, and allows a looser discussion about certain aspects of his many philosophical investigations. I am quite attracted to the idea of the self-interview as an avenue for discussing certain aspects of the creative process that are perhaps best left out of a thesis or academic essay.

#### **Such as?**

Well, for starters, the thesis, whatever its area, is modelled on a classical model of investigation that comes from largely scientific enquiry. This is fine, but I am not certain whether it is actually the best arena for the discussion of artistic practice. Personally I feel that the artist faces a general lack of cultural esteem in his or her work. I don't see artists as being perceived as particularly valuable citizens today, compared to practitioners of the sciences. And yet, despite the massive leaps science has made in recent years, we stand on the brink of complete annihilation as a species, and in no small part as a direct result of these scientific innovations in which we place so much cultural and intellectual stock. Could artists have done it better?

Perhaps not, but I don't think we will be given a chance to find out. At some point art seems to have been divorced from science, but we still seem to need justification in those terms, at least academically. I am not complaining so much as making clear that I don't think the artist's role is as simple as hypothesising and proving that hypothesis. As artists we are often asked to justify the unjustifiable. How many times have I been asked in an academic context why I draw? Many. And I can't answer that.

#### **There is something deliciously pretentious in interviewing yourself. It's just so gratuitously meta of you.**

It really is...

#### **You talk about collision in your work, collisions between high and low, good and bad, life and death... Why collision?**

Collision seems to be the only way I can manage to incorporate all of the things I want to say and investigate within my work. Collision implies violence, which is very important to my work.

#### **Explain.**

I suppose I mean violence as a broader concept, not only physical violence. We associate the word violence with physical violence because of the way it is discussed in the media in relation to war and to crime, but it really is a much more amorphous concept than that. For example, I find advertising quite violent when I am out and about. It is designed to be violent, to better penetrate your consciousness and your subconsciousness and sell product.

**'Product' is an interesting word. Where do you stand on art as product?**

It's funny, actually, how I see it. More and more, I have been considering ways of making art of value. Especially studying the methods of Gary Panter, there is so much potential for fun ways of making art more accessible without compromising or selling out. A common attitude I face from other artists is that because I sometimes use imagery derived from popular culture, I must somehow be selling out. I am lucky enough to sell the occasional work, which doesn't help their perception on the matter. But these same artists seem to be the ones winning art competitions and getting grant after grant. But I am considered the sell-out. It's very interesting to me, that attitude. I am more of a 'people's choice award' kind of guy. 'Hey, this guy has made something that looks like the thing it is supposed to be', etc. And then they look closer and think 'no, wait, this guy's a weirdo... now I definitely have to vote for him.'

**You haven't entered a competition in a while.**

No, not in a while. Last time I entered something, a works on paper thing, I didn't even make the shortlist, which had ninety names on it. All of these trendy artists slumming it, making bad drawings and photographs, because they couldn't do anything else. Artists who *never* draw. And they weren't 'good-bad', either, because good-bad is actually really hard to do, people don't realise. No printmakers in the exhibition either, which I was disgusted by. It was all just slumming painters and installation artists. That was the first competition experience for several years. Before that, I once entered six different competitions, and the same artist won five of them. Fortunately, he was actually very good. It's an interesting commentary on the politics of taste.

**You are working on your thesis right now, with a focus on drawing. Your historical selections cover a lot of territory, but there are some notable omissions...**

It must be noted that the history will be viewed through contemporary eyes. As such, historical work is primarily discussed with contemporary terminology- for example, what we now refer to as the *sketch*, myriad terms have been used in French, German and Italian particularly. That investigation alone could fuel an entire thesis. These terms describe differing variations on many artistic, procedural and technical definitions, and to define them all would

be folly, considering that the bulk of these terms are no longer used after the huge shifts in both conceptual and studio practices brought about by Modernism. So I have really tried to reduce it down to discussion that is directly connected to my own work and interests. It is also important that this thesis identifies the context between artists of yesterday and today through the context of contemporary practice, and remains accessible as such. For example, I know what an important figure Poussin is, but he just doesn't affect me as much as somebody like Rubens, so Rubens ends up with a bit of attention and poor Poussin gets barely a mention. But I have a limited amount of space. More difficult to omit are people that have influenced me personally.

### **Such as?**

Well my father for starters. I genuinely believe he is, at least for me, the greatest artist Australia has ever produced, as well as being one of the best printmakers in the world today. I am not bullshitting you. I can't even say the number of ways he has influenced me, but it not easy to include, it is too close. For example, just before, when I said I objectively believe he is Australia's best artist that is a little hard for a people to swallow, because it is so close. But I think the work speaks for itself. There is so much going on in that work, sometimes it hurts. There are other important characters that really exist on the fringes of Australian art that I don't think have ever really been given their due, so there is not so much out there to draw from. People like David Paulson, Ian Smith, Arryn Snowball, Christian Flynn, Julie Fragar, Miles Hall, Glen O'Malley. All very important to me, but too close. There were also many, many comic book artists that had to be omitted for reasons of space. Comics were so important to my development as an artist, and I have always consumed a lot of comic books. I wanted to be a comic book artist until my early twenties. Actually, I would still like to do that.

### **Speaking of comics, you use a lot of comic imagery in your work. How do you view appropriation?**

I see it as a valuable tool. In my current studio work, collage materials are usually gathered from *National Geographic*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vogue*, film, pornographic and bodybuilding magazines, art books, and comics. Selections are made according to visual interest, and contain an element that could possibly be adapted into the aims of a particular set of work. Some images, being too small or intricate, are stuck directly into a book intended for reference, a morgue, which is a common practice with comic artists. Morgues are assembled as fast referencing systems by artists, usually using visual groupings. Selections intended for collage are then cut out, ready for use, and stored in a bin. But there is a chance element also, with the gifting of materials intended for the collage bin (usually from other artists). Donated materials



for past collage have included photographs of the donor or loved ones of the donor, as well as family photographs, magazines and children's books and even art works and photographs of other artists, surrendered wilfully with no intention of shared authorship or collaboration with the final art work. A good friend of mine, Richard Walker, produces a lot of silver gelatin processed photographs, which are beautiful, but I end up with all of these photographs of his ex-girlfriends for my collage bin. He can't see them anymore, so he gives them to me, and says 'make them into Batgirl or something so I can't see her face'. So these images accrue their own little stories too. These appropriations allow me the freedom to explore, as well as distance myself from a clearly autobiographical reading.

### **How is drawing a response to the 'flood of images?'**

By drawing anything today, you are processing and responding to the digital world, because it just cannot be escaped anymore. It is incorporated into so many aspects of life, so to do something independent of that says a lot. And yet, drawing is also incorporate into so many of these ideas. The way ipads and tablets actually operate is much more similar to the way we draw than the way we write or type. Dragging a finger across a surface is a very, very similar activity; a form of metadrawing.

### **Metadrawing?**

I describe metadrawing as the discipline of drawing, or aspects of it, applied to other non-traditional media. For example, architectural programs, digital animation, storyboarding. All things considered, effort needs to be made in order to adjust or make distinct definitions of drawing and metadrawing. Pop works only as a precursor to Pettibon, Panter et al- the tensions between high and low have shifted dramatically, although they do still exist in some form. I also considered the exclusion of metadrawing, not for lack of importance, but for manageability, and discuss drawing primarily as an autonomous discipline, which has gained this autonomy through the shift in practice and the 'goal posts' of high and low by the advent of digital technologies. But then I figured that it was just the next step in the continuum, the next advance made against the backdrop provided by the increasing number of available digital technologies. The drawing discipline therefore resists the digital not through philosophical positioning, but merely by continuing to exist, yet at the same time it is incorporated into the digital programs so thoroughly, so the resistance becomes a moot point. It's all a matter of perspective.

### **How much of your work could be considered Autobiography?**

Well you'll note that I never, ever draw myself as such. So that, for me, separates my own story

from the narrative of the drawings, or feigns to. But it is hard to completely separate. A large part of my work comes out of a kind of lived experience, or reaction to lived experience. A lot of people have commented that I deliberately obscure any clear narrative, which is largely true, especially when they are reading each work as an individual piece. But I don't really see it that way. I usually work on many drawings at once, so there really is a sense of series, rather than individual works. Drawing therefore becomes a lightning rod for events of life, despite not being necessarily specific in its description or depiction of these events. The hero thus becomes a cipher himself. Possessing the great many contradictions of gender, masculinity, and even race, the hero is embattled not only on a narrative/moral level, but also on the level of metanarrative between texts and media. The hero is enabled, through their separation from reality, to engage with the world through violence. This kind of imagery is not necessarily what is considered politically correct, or even tasteful. Certainly, two muscular figures in what could be a frenzied death match or a passionate embrace stands apart from much of the non-objective, non-figurative work of the contemporary avant-garde. But few better ciphers exists to speak about violent physical experiences without turning to didacticism documentary. This kind of narrative, however, is rarely intended as the main drive of a work. More often, because of the intuitive and improvisational nature of studio process, such narratives are usually attributed after sufficient time away from the image. This allows a more objective reflection on the work itself, and possible interpretations of the imagery. Generally speaking, if works begin with a particular intention or message, the work suffers for it. Any didacticism takes a backseat to the actual making of the work. Instead, Leukaemia is used as a kind of inspiration for imagery rather than a starting point. After treatment, the human body became more central to studio investigations, particularly how the body operates and responds to massive physical stress.

### **Did this experience change the way you work?**

It did in that it made me aware of just how little time we actually have, so I really started to reconfigure the way I work so that I could work faster on more works. The drawing practice, being intuitive, is then consciously reconfigured to work complimentary to artistic habits and character, particularly the will to spend as many waking hours in the studio as can be spared. This has been addressed in the studio with rotating sets of work, so as not to allow a single image to stagnate in the studio by overwork. Consequently, the process of sketching a preparatory image has been re-thought, allowing the gesture and mark-making to retain its' vivacity, without stiffening or overwork. In turn, collage takes the place of preparatory work and these will sometimes be resolved works in their own right. This allows many works to be

rotated in the studio, allowing paint or ink to dry, and the works to breathe, if needed. All of these processes, which have been tried and tested in the studio allow some level of proliferation. It is this level of proliferation which demands a stringent editing process, not only for the sake of exhibiting, but how images work with each other, and what meanings they can have. For example, for a typical exhibition, around one hundred resolved works in order to select a grid of sixty to exhibit. These sixty works will not only need to work together as a composite, but they must deliver, at least from my own perspective, a coherent question, narrative or statement. This is where decisions made in the studio can have the most effect. Some of these studio works are completely premeditated, whereas others can be dead ends, near misses, and in some cases, 'happy accidents'.

### **Was being diagnosed with Leukaemia a significant event in terms of your work?**

In many ways, but not really the ones you would expect. Just to make it clear, yes I did make a lot of very cathartic, very autobiographic work during the months of treatment, and I can't stand all that stuff I did. I used drawing as a cure for boredom, isolation and claustrophobia and it came out in these autobiographical comics, vaguely aping the style of Robert Crumb, Daniel Clowes and the Hernandez brothers. Although I had always been an avid draftsman, this was intensified to obsessive levels, and I filled around fifty journals with drawings, comics, life studies and experiments in this nine month period. The further into treatment, the more vital I found it to describe the experience, sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically. I found most literature written by and for cancer sufferers almost unbearable, bursting at the seams with clumsy homespun rhetoric and self-help positivity. Somebody even gave me Lance Armstrong's autobiography, and if you've read it you can't help but think 'this guy is a complete arse hole'. The language is all 'win the race' and 'challenge the rock' and 'crush the losers'. Now it has been revealed that he was a steroid user, and he lost all his Tour de France medals. All this literature seemed unable to describe the broad spectrum of mental and physical challenges, focusing instead upon 'life scaffolding' and 'rebuilding foundations', as if the cancer and subsequent treatment was a write-off, a period of time that is best left behind. This seemed naive and even ridiculous to me. I was swept up in the melodrama and heightened reality of superhero comics, a genre I had not been actively engaged with for several years. The constant struggle and end-of-the-world turmoil resonated strongly with my own experiences with treatment. Mad scientists, genetic manipulation, cybernetics, mutation, massive physical traumas, radioactive elements and chemical accidents had somehow perversely become my everyday. Fear of disease is actually a fear of death- or more specifically, fear of a change of physical and/or emotional state, whether it is the state of death, or a different, less-abled state

of life. Resistance to disease is a resistance to inability, suffering and death. When speaking of disease, disease is reduced to militaristic terms- invasion, occupation, resistance, attack, defence, -or moralistic terms- lapse, relapse, falling, rising. Although a line is drawn between mental and physical illness, for practicality's sake, the two forms of illness are inextricably linked. The illness of one often follows the other. The brain is, after all, an organ.

### **So what changed?**

At some point after I was finished with chemo I came across Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*, which she wrote while undergoing treatment for cancer two decades earlier. The text highlighted and clarified ideas that I was grappling with during my treatment, and became essential to my practice. Sontag draws attention to the common use of military euphemisms by the medical community, particularly in the context of the detection and treatment of cancer. Cancer is a hostile rogue agent. Treatments are wars. The metaphor of the body as territory, or specifically a battleground, has had a great influence on my post-illness studio practice, and I have been using 'landscape', or 'widescreen' format paper for its' cinematic qualities as a response to that, so much so that it is just what I do now. I don't think about it. This idea of art making as a kind of physical and conceptual battleground is well-documented in other studio practices and writings, and fits in conceptually to the contradictory nature of drawing. A battlefield, or struggle itself, elicits associations with the finished/unfinished, private/public, high/low binaries inherent in the medium itself. Through these landscapes, a narrative is developed, although not explicit, and features various characters and ciphers that inhabit what I see as a self-enclosed and fully formed world. While these narratives may not take place in a battlefield specifically (although they often do), there is always a struggle being engaged within. The hero thus becomes a cipher himself. Possessing the great many contradictions of gender, masculinity, and even race, the hero is embattled not only on a narrative/moral level, but also on the level of metanarrative. These things the hero does, these things we want him to do, we want to do ourselves, or see in ourselves, and yet it is the antisocial forces in our world that enact this kind of violence. This kind of imagery is not necessarily what is considered politically correct, or even tasteful. Certainly, two muscular figures in what could be a frenzied death match or a passionate embrace stands apart from much of the non-objective, non-figurative work of the contemporary avant-garde. But what better cipher could I have ever found to speak about my own violent physical experiences without turning to didacticism documentary?

### **So is there a broader narrative that runs through your work?**

My practice is usually discussed in terms of narrative, the way my own life has unfolded, and how it has been reflected in my work. Usually my experience Leukaemia is the focal point. This year of my life obviously had repercussions through my practice, and was pivotal in terms of the themes I have investigated since, but this is a personal narrative, and as such it is something I have attempted to discuss using metaphor and cipher, to avoid cliché, didacticism and illustration. This kind of narrative, however, is rarely intended as the main drive of a work. More often, because of the intuitive and improvisational nature of my studio process, such narratives are usually attributed after I have had sufficient time away from the image. This allows a more objective reflection on the work itself, and possible interpretations of the imagery. Generally speaking, if I begin a work with a particular intention or message, the work suffers for it. Any didacticism takes a backseat to the actual making of the work. Instead, Leukaemia is used as a kind of inspiration for imagery rather than a starting point. After treatment, the human body became more central to my visual investigations, particularly how the body operates and responds to massive physical stress. David Wills' book, *Prosthesis*, was particularly enlightening in this instance, describing and explaining the sensation of pain through the author's father, who went through regular periodic fits of extreme pain in the 'ghost' of his leg, replaced by prosthesis. This passage put into words a kind of mantra that explained my own experiences brought about by an unexpected side-effect during my own treatment called avascular necrosis, which essentially broke down one of my hip joints due to low blood-supply, caused by medication, causing bouts of extreme pain, inhibiting all lateral movement in my right leg. Much like my stays in hospital, such bouts of intense pain encourage one to indulge more in the pursuits of the mind which includes, of course, art making. Through my life, my practice has been subconsciously configured, and post- art school very consciously reconfigured, to work in tandem with my own habits and character. That is, the will to spend as many waking hours in the studio as can be spared, hampered with a short attention span. This has been addressed in the studio with rotating sets of work, so as not to allow a single image to stagnate in the studio by overwork. Consequently, the process of sketching a preparatory image has been abandoned. This allows the gesture and mark-making to retain its' vivacity, without stiffening or overwork. In turn, collage takes the place of preparatory work and these will sometimes be resolved works in their own right. This allows many works to be rotated in the studio, allowing paint or ink to dry, and the works to breathe, if needed. All of these processes, which has been tried and tested in the studio allow some level of proliferation. It is this level of proliferation which demands a stringent editing process, not only for the sake of exhibiting, but how images work with each other, and what meanings they can have. For



example, for a typical exhibition, I would make perhaps one hundred resolved works in order to select a grid of sixty to exhibit. These sixty works will not only need to work together as a composite, but they must deliver, at least from my own perspective, a coherent question, narrative or statement. This is where decisions made in the studio can have the most effect. Some of these studio works are completely premeditated, whereas others can be dead ends, near misses, and in some cases, 'happy accidents'. This includes the use of white acrylic, gauche or correction fluid, which I use to alter images, build texture and layers. Correction fluid in particular operates beautifully with ink and ink washes, and is a nice visual link to both original comic book pages and to artists such as Franz Kline and Richard Serra, whose primal, violent works I greatly admire. Coming from a childhood where the drawing styles and skills of comic book artists were not only coveted but imitated, an adoption and eventual mastery of their tools was inevitable. Ink, brush, correction fluid, gauche and nib became my so-called weapons of choice. However, speed was always a factor- drawing the work first, then applying ink over the top is a time-consuming process, and in the world of professional comic artists, a two-person job. A decision to work straight in ink, using collage as a type of substitute compositional 'sketch' allowed a greater speed in image-making, as well as maintain a vivacity of line simply not possible when re-working previous pencil sketches. Thus, *Pentimenti* became my primary method of working, which allows a kind of *spretzzatura* (lively nonchalance). My work since has incorporated various ciphers, each one representing different parts of a broader autobiographical experience, coming to terms with each other and the environment they find themselves in. Usually this environment is post-apocalyptic, a ravaged outback that has been scorched and hammered, not unlike my tattered, post-chemo self. It is a raw physical and psychological space that needs to be repaired, reassembled and reconfigured, much like the violent cyborg. Interesting then that the ciphers that find themselves in these ravaged environs are most often engaged in acts of violence or passion. Dr. Laini Burton wrote of my compulsion to draw as a 'biological imperative'<sup>462</sup>, a graphomania that extended back to my extended hospital stays and beyond. Like the realization of these autobiographical possibilities of the violent body, my stay in hospital did not create my intense desire to draw so much as contextualizing it. In this often hermetic, sterile and solitary situation the complex arrangement of characters and narratives made sense, both creating (or in many cases adapting) a mythology in which wars were fought, enemies conquered, lovers sated and wrongs righted; an imagined reclamation, and re-writing, of the year of treatment. Leukaemia itself is represented by metaphor- after all, how does one depict an illness which has no obvious

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<sup>462</sup> Laini Burton, *Jonathan McBurnie's Precipice*. (Melbourne: Blindside, 2011), 2.

physical signs? The metaphor of the landscape as a ravaged body is a popular symbol in literature. A favourite of mine, Albert Camus' *The Plague* discusses notions of colonization. It is the story of a beachside community falling victim to an epidemic of Bubonic plague. Although the narrative is fictional, it is loaded with metaphor, and succinctly discusses the spiritual, societal and psychological effects of disease on a whole community, which is essentially colonized. Narrative can be effectively manipulated by presentation. Consider a set of fifty drawings, made the same month, exhibited together. These drawings will, by default, work together on certain levels because of the source materials, influences and inspirations that go through the artists head within a set period of time, along with the close proximity the works were completed. So, automatically, there will be threads that connect the fifty works. However, the configuration of presentation of the fifty works will affect their narrative greatly. The difference between the readings possible are broad- consider a hang of five sets of ten works compared to a dense grid of all fifty works, and then fifty works, all evenly spaced and somewhat solitary. Whether it is intended by the artist or not, five sets of ten will be read as five separate narratives, a grid of fifty read as one massive narrative, and equally spaced works read as fifty independent narratives, and needs to be considered. There is an element of narrative that cannot be avoided in representational art that is presented on one field, or plane, however, as in the works of David Salle or Jean-Paul Basquiat, this can be circumvented using index in a more iconographic fashion. Rather than decode works to clearly break down their signs and signifiers, I prefer to arm the reader/viewer with all the tools they will need in order to decode the images and draw their own conclusions and imagined narratives. Instead of identifying which codes are representative of what, I find it closer to the intended experience of the work to provide reader/viewers with basic information about the circumstances in which the works were created, rather than creating a definitive, 'fixed' text or narrative. This way of working allows me to work quickly and freely within an indexical drawing system. The advantage to this way of working is the image making process remains fluid and open to improvisation. While collage forms a composition for the image, this is open to deviation, depending upon visual problems that present themselves. In this way the actual making of the drawing itself retains a narrative of its own, particularly when traces of erasure and alteration are left underneath gouache, acrylic or correction fluid.

**You seem to be asked quite often what your stance on religion is...**

The idea of a mythical Australia is not a new one, and has been explored in both Aboriginal and European traditions, pre and post colonisation. The Dreamtime, a complete Aboriginal mythology of Australia is constructed with narratives about the land and the creatures, both

real and imagined, that inhabit it. This serves as both a historical and a spiritual narrative, and is woven into Aboriginal art, dance, music and oral traditions. In the west, Australia had a somewhat strange 'prehistory' - that is, it was known to exist before colonisation, but its displacement from the other continents, off-kilter assumptions about its size and inhabitants, and the sheer difficulty in navigating its surrounding oceans and actually locating the continent. This inspired myriad stories, illustrations and imaginings of this *Terra Australis* that were based on existing documents of other colonised lands, popular literature of the time, or guesswork. At any rate, Terra Australis, or 'New Holland' as it was commonly named, was populated by strange creatures and uncanny humanoids. It is this idea of *Terra Australis* from which the *Precipice* series grew. *Precipice*, at the time of writing a series of 114 drawings and counting, began as an attempt to contemporise the landscape in art, something I believed had been somewhat neglected and even begrudged because of its associations with colonisation and European painting traditions. The idea of a Western claim to landscape is in itself a fallacy- Aboriginal art itself often contains geographic and cartographic information in a hybrid of abstract and representational mark-making, not to mention the myriad of Eastern traditions that include landscape among their subjects. A typical drawing of the *Precipice* series begins with a drawing from a photographic reference source of cliff faces, planes, dunes, rocks, mountains and valleys- anything that resembles a primal, uninhabitable Australia visually. The drawing is then pushed into slightly fantastical territory by extending and altering the landscape as I desire. This can be purely improvisational, or by grafting another image to the first. The end result, though based on some kind of reference material representing real space, is the creation of a landscape that doesn't exist outside of the image, a metaphysical space that was in theory free of connotations of colonisation. However, upon further consideration, colonial connotations became difficult, almost impossible, to avoid. In response to this I began using photographic source imagery taken in Antarctica- a place free of indigenous peoples, and therefore in theory free of the many negative connotations of colonisation. Surprisingly, when described by line, the vast frozen planes and rocky cliff faces of Antarctica are reminiscent to those of Australia. This allows for infinite combinations of landscape, pushing the images into unidentifiable, yet familiar visual territory. These landscapes are sometimes populated, but often left bare, which contrasts with the mild horror-vacui of my more densely-populated work.

**So, in your work, Australia itself is a metaphor?**

Yes. The idea of a mythical Australia is not a new one, and has been explored in both Aboriginal and European traditions, pre and post colonisation. The Dreamtime, a complete Aboriginal mythology of Australia is constructed with narratives about the land and the creatures, both

real and imagined, that inhabit it. This serves as both a historical and a spiritual narrative, and is woven into Aboriginal art, dance, music and oral traditions. In the west, Australia had a somewhat strange 'prehistory' - that is, it was known to exist before colonisation, but its displacement from the other continents, off-kilter assumptions about its size and inhabitants, and the sheer difficulty in navigating its surrounding oceans and actually locating the continent. This inspired myriad stories, illustrations and imaginings of this *Terra Australis* that were based on existing documents of other colonised lands, popular literature of the time, or guesswork. At any rate, Terra Australis, or 'New Holland' as it was commonly named, was populated by strange creatures and uncanny humanoids. It is this idea of Terra Australis from which the *Precipice* series grew. *Precipice*, at the time of writing a series of 170 drawings and counting, began as an attempt to contemporise the landscape in art, something I believed had been somewhat neglected and even begrudged because of its associations with colonisation and European painting traditions. A typical drawing of the *Precipice* series begins with a drawing from a photographic reference source of cliff faces, planes, dunes, rocks, mountains and valleys- anything that resembles a primal, uninhabitable Australia visually. The drawing is then pushed into slightly fantastical territory by extending and altering the landscape as I desire. This can be purely improvisational, or by grafting another image to the first. The end result, though based on some kind of reference material representing real space, is the creation of a landscape that doesn't exist outside of the image, a metaphysical space that was in theory free of connotations of colonisation. However, upon further consideration, colonial connotations became difficult, almost impossible, to avoid. In response to this I began using photographic source imagery taken in Antarctica- a place free of indigenous peoples, and therefore in theory free of the many negative connotations of colonisation. Surprisingly, when described by line, the vast frozen planes and rocky cliff faces of Antarctica are reminiscent to those of Australia. This allows for infinite combinations of landscape, pushing the images into unidentifiable, yet familiar visual territory. These landscapes are sometimes populated, but often left bare, which contrasts with the mild horror-vacui of my more densely-populated work. This series of work draws heavily upon the research of Bernard Smith, which examines the metaphysical space that *Terra Australis Incognita* inhabited and was subsequently altered and incrementally brought into the Western, scientifically quantifiable space we now know with each discovery, map and biological illustration.

**Returning to the studio, and to autobiography, what do you mean by 'drawing as a lived experience'?**

Drawing acts a lightning rod for events of life, despite being unspecific in its exploration of these

events. Autobiographically, it is not illustrating the narrative so much manipulating, editing and subverting the narrative. As such, events are provided as a context with which to view and decipher certain drawings, although these events are often partially or wholly fictionalised, or 'adaptations' of the real narrative, much like the movie-maker's 'inspired by a true story' disclaimer. I think I am making a work with a particular intention in mind, but often I won't *really* be able to understand the whole story for some time. Often, I will come back months or years later, and I can immediately see what the work was about. You psychoanalyse your younger self.

**How do you approach the pop culture in your work? That is to say, there is so much out there, how do you decide on what to use?**

I suppose that on some level it has to call out to me, just like any art form. There is something in there that you respond to. A big part of the violence, the collision. Tension. Seeing things together we do not ordinarily see changes them, and changes their context. Rupert the Bear hanging out with Mickey Mouse is going to have a very different reading to Rupert the Bear hanging out with Jenna Jameson, or a Helmut Newton model or something. It is interesting, actually, just how drawn to comic book and pornographic imagery. You can have a massive scene with people from films, magazines, real life, *National Geographic*, whatever, and if there is just one comic book character, way off in the background, and people will see it in front of everything else.

**Is there any popular culture that you dislike?**

Oh, there is *so much* to dislike. I have always found that if there isn't a quality there, an appealing aesthetic or something, I can't even stick around long enough to try. For example, people adore Beyonce. Right now, she has a lot of pop culture cred, even with people that don't particularly like her music, they like the mythic figure that is Beyonce. I understand this, but truth be told, I absolutely cannot deal with her music, which really affects the whole experience for me. Staying on the topic of pop music, however, I enjoy Lady Gaga, for example. I find the music actually very arresting and self-aware, which opens up the other aspects of her brand, the Lady Gaga construction. *Then* you can enjoy the costumes, and the interviews, and so on and so forth, but without that entry point, it's just hype.

**So there needs to be an entry point somewhere.**

Yes, definitely. For example, people know I like reading Superman, or Batman, so they might buy you a Superman comic for your birthday but the fact that it has Superman in it doesn't guarantee quality. The writer might be a hack, the artist could be terrible. That's one thing I



really dislike about popular culture fandom generally, and the recent mainstreaming of comic book culture specifically, is that there are a lot of uncritical obsessives out there. They decide they're really into Spider-Man or something, and suddenly every Spider-Man object is this coveted item, and nothing else is any good. It's terrible, and ignorant, and a little sad.

### **Are any of these recurring characters of pop culture in your work 'you'?**

Yes and no. I bring up certain ciphers when I want to discuss a particular idea. The Minotaur is a symbol of the animal that exists within the labyrinth that is the construct of gender and society, so he comes up when I'm pissed off. The Cowboy is a symbol of masculinity, so he appears in a lot of existentialist work, or when I am poking fun at myself for making such nonsense. Ned Kelly of the destruction of the Australian mythology, Judith as feminine strength, Jesus as doomed ideology and the ever-cheapening cultural value of the artist and so forth. They all have their place. In these terms, the narrative that runs through this work is both personal and specific, but open enough to be interpreted by outsiders. Rather than decode works to clearly break down their signs and signifiers, it is preferable that studio works arm the reader/viewer with all the tools they will need in order to decode the images and draw their own conclusions and imagined narratives. Instead of identifying which codes are representative of what, it is closer to the intended experience of the work to provide reader/viewers with basic information about the circumstances in which the works were created, rather than creating a definitive, 'fixed' text or narrative. This way of working allows a more fluid process through an indexical drawing system. The advantage to this way of working is the image making process remains fluid and open to improvisation. While collage forms a composition for the image, this is open to deviation, depending upon visual problems that present themselves. In this way the actual making of the drawing itself retains a narrative of its own, particularly when traces of erasure and alteration are left underneath gauche, acrylic or correction fluid, which form a parallel physical narrative.

### **You spend some time exploring the metaphysics of comic books...**

The definition of metaphysics is difficult to make clear, as it is by its own nature a somewhat abstract concept, an idea of the space between things, rather than of the things themselves. Applying metaphysics to drawing and to narrative is an apt use, as it does ably demonstrate the way these kinds of objects and their inherent processes operate in a clear fashion- that is, we can see them in operation, and we can view the outcome afterwards within the narrative of the process of drawing itself, as well as the narrative depicted by the drawing. Comics are great for metaphysics, because it is all laid out in front of you, but there are things weaved between the

images, and between the pages. You as the viewer/reader can see multiple increments of time, and even multiple narrative strands, right in front of you simultaneously, which opens up many possibilities for self-reflexivity to the form.

### **What is your relationship to comics at the end of the day?**

I read them a lot. I have been working on and off on a graphic novel for several years, but it really does take a back seat to exhibiting. It brings me back to the idea of collision. It is a relationship that has always been difficult to balance. Comic book imagery has evolved out of a place where printing processes were very crude, so the art work had to be made as bright and dynamic as possible in order to transcend these limitations. So when comic imagery is collided with imagery from art, from film, from mass media, it can really take over, even next to big budget film imagery. Dynamism is in its blood, so it invariably draws the eye to it. So people really notice that part of my work more than anything else, which doesn't necessarily sit well with me. There is a lot of tension between these forms and idioms, so I try to turn this into a point of interest, rather than a problem.

### **Beyond the formal qualities of comics, what draws you to them?**

Comics have a kooky way of breaking the world down into a manageable and understandable narrative. Realism in comic books has never interested me so much- in fact it usually strikes me as quite pretentious. Of course, the superhero genre can be incredibly pretentious also, but I think you can sidestep it because of the inherent ridiculousness of the stories. You don't exactly go looking for the same thing in an issue of *Savage Dragon* as you may a Chaim Potok novel. People that saw the last Superman film and ranted all over the internet about how much property damage Superman and his foes wreaked on Smallville and Metropolis were really missing the point. I for one do not look to superheroes for realism. Realism in a superhero comic is different from realism in a film is different from realism in a novel. Within my work, comic book imagery has been somewhat unavoidable, being an entry point into drawing in general, coupled with several years of cell and stop motion animation experience. This impacts on studio practice in several ways which can be viewed as advantages or disadvantages, depending upon one's perspective. For example, both comics and cell animation require a clear, consistent line made by a steady hand, in order to maintain a consistent tone throughout the work in question, usually a team effort of at least three artists for comics, and often hundreds in the case of feature-length cell animation. This practice helps develop a chameleonic drawing ability, adaptable to many styles, media and techniques, which in its way harks back to the classical art education, where a student learns through mimicry and imitation. This versatility

helps the act of drawing operate simultaneously as metadrawing, as the varying styles and media are collided through the studio act. Also importantly, it develops a confidence and steadiness in hand, developed through cell animation, which requires between twelve and twenty-four drawings per second of animation.

### **Comic books have not always enjoyed the esteem they do today...**

Comic books exist within the region that was previously a site of tension between high and low. Although this is no longer as pronounced, it is still a site of tension because of its form, which is constantly reformulating hybrids of image and text, as well as a now well-developed internal metaphysics and cognitive systems. Comic books operate using a similar visual language to film, and the commercial and fine arts, yet has characteristics specific to the medium, maintaining its own presence as a form well into the digital age, responsible for various digital innovations of its own. Comics must therefore be defined as a parallel form of drawing which, like film or literature, is used in the intertextual reference matter of the fine arts, despite being rarely engaged within and of itself as a form to the same extent in this context. Digital technologies are speeding the realisation of the cyborg state, which I think is also very fertile ground for newer media like comics, animation and games.

### **What is it about the heroic figure that you are drawn to?**

Doesn't the use of the heroic figure in popular fiction, and in this I include the antihero, whose methods and motives are somewhat confused, and yet still they are prone to acts of heroism, point to a desire by humanity to do good, or at the very least believe that the actions of the individual can bring change to the status quo? Or, conversely, does it point to humanity's complete inability to do so? The heroic figure can serve as a sad reminder that we are, in so many ways, powerless to put any such change into effect. In this light, the exploits of the heroic figure are equal parts fantastic and self-delusional. Flawed, like humanity. The superhero is really a pretty problematic figure, especially if you consider the precursors. The western cowboys and outlaws were very prototypical of the kind of 'justice' the superhero can mete out. The KKK also had a scarily similar worldview to many superheroes: they perceive a wrong being perpetrated, and don a costume in order to 'fix' this problem with violence. And violence is rarely a solution.

### **Back to drawing. Can it compete with the speed of digital media?**

Considering the speed with which digital media is upgraded (and upgraded automatically), this in itself alters the speed at which culture is consumed, and therefore this speeds the rate at which 'new things' need to be discovered, and everything is sped. This impacts upon the

quality of finish of art- faster, more slapdash approach, the quick fix, is given advantage over the deliberate, the rigorous, the considered. High and low is collided together with increasing frequency and decreasing quality. The centre is destabilised and the fulcrum of cultural production can be moved to a place more convenient for capitalism. So really, drawing cannot compete in the sense of quantity, although you can work at competitive speed compared to other disciplines. However, in terms of quality output, drawing has an edge in terms of immediacy. The drawing discipline depends upon a certain amount of thinking, learning and testing as you go. The more you draw, the more fluent you become with certain formal elements- these become inbuilt and you stop having to try to incorporate good compositional strategies, or colour theory, or whatever. It is the place between theory and practice, and drawing is ideally suited to navigating this space, as it is both within and without, simultaneously. There is so little between you and the work.

**You seem to use a lot of these ciphers to discuss things that you couldn't discuss in the context of autobiography...**

Pain becomes a challenging concept to investigate. Personally, at this point the only remedy could be a hip replacement, itself a traumatic procedure. Such prostheses are themselves interesting links between the science-fiction of film and superhero comics, real-world medical innovation and art history and cyborg theory. The attempt to describe the sensation or experience of pain, itself a somewhat abstract feeling, is a challenge. The associated studio work of this thesis s incorporates various ciphers, each one representing different parts of a broader autobiographical experience, coming to terms with each other and the environment they find themselves in. Usually this environment is post-apocalyptic, a ravaged outback that has been scorched and hammered, not unlike the tattered, scarred, post-chemo self. Lengthy stays in hospital did not create an intense desire to draw so much as contextualizing this desire. In this often hermetic, sterile and solitary situation the complex arrangement of characters and narratives made sense, both creating (or in many cases adapting) a mythology in which wars were fought, enemies conquered, lovers sated and wrongs righted; an imagined reclamation, and re-writing, of the year of treatment. Leukaemia itself is represented by metaphor. After all, how does one depict an illness which has no obvious physical signs? This metaphor of the body as a ravaged body is a popular symbol in literature. Albert Camus' *The Plague* discusses notions of colonization. It is the story of a beachside community falling victim to an epidemic of Bubonic plague. Although the narrative is fictional, it is loaded with metaphor, and succinctly discusses the spiritual, societal and psychological effects of disease on a whole community, which is essentially colonized. A somewhat morbid fascination with the Bubonic plague led to

the use of another important cipher, Saint Sebastian, the plague saint. Saint Sebastian, who refused to renounce his faith, was sentenced to death, and unwillingly became target practice for archers. Pierced with dozens of arrows, Sebastian miraculously survived, called the leaders of Rome to task for their crimes against humanity, and was this time beaten to death and thrown into a sewer... now martyred, the saint became a symbol for those suffering of plague, which was often represented by arrows from the heavens in Renaissance art.

### **What is your relationship to digital technology?**

It is a tenuous relationship. I can see the obvious advantages to many digital at the same time I am not sure that I am really wired that way. A 'PC Native' is somebody that has grown up with this kind of technology readily accessible their whole life, and you are considered PC Native if you were born in 1984 onwards. It may sound far-fetched, but think there is something to it. I was born in '83, my brother in '85, and let me tell you, he runs rings around me in any kind of digital arena, whether it is video games, word-processing, whatever. So I suppose I understand its appeal, but at the same time that's not where the juice is for me. For me, a computer and a drawing tablet could never replace the disorder of the studio.

### **And what is your next project?**

I have many projects that I want to really get into, including a graphic novel, which has been ticking over for a long time, as well as a screenplay I have been fiddling with. I also have a desire to work something up for the stage, possibly involving music. Maybe a play or an opera, but I think these things would be more collaborative. There is absolutely no way I could perform something like that, even a play, so that presents many obstacles to overcome. But there are always obstacles.



## Appendix II

### Exhibitions and Publications, 2011-2014

#### Solo Exhibitions

- 2014 *Moses I Amn't* (final postgraduate exhibition), Graduate School Gallery, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney
- 2013 *Kingdom*, Alpha Gallery, Sydney
- 2012 *Mega Ballads*, Graduate School Gallery, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney
- 2011 *Precipice*, Blindside, Melbourne

#### Group Exhibitions

- 2014 *Summer Exhibition*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2014 *The Phantom Show*, Australian Galleries, Sydney
- 2014 *23 Degrees*, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane
- 2014 *Drawing Now*, Despard Gallery, Hobart
- 2014 *Drawing Abroad*, Gallery Eight, Sydney
- 2014 *The Art of Sound*, Caboolture Regional Gallery
- 2014 *You Worry Me*, the Hold Artspace, Brisbane
- 2014 *Landscape Too*, Airspace, Sydney
- 2014 *New Contemporaries*, SCA Galleries/Kaldor Projects, Sydney
- 2014 *Art Month Exhibition*, Alpha Gallery, Sydney
- 2013 *Bastards*, Skunkworks Artspace, Sydney
- 2013 *Translations*, Verge Gallery, University of Sydney & Verge Gallery, Sacramento
- 2013 *I See What You Did There*, Alpha Gallery, Sydney
- 2013 *Dot Gif: Life in the Project*, DNA Projects, Sydney
- 2013 *Special Moves*, MOP Projects, Sydney
- 2012 *The Re-invention of Gravity*, Verge Gallery, University of Sydney
- 2012 *Eon*, Alaska Projects, Sydney
- 2012 *Interstate Romance*, Pseudo Space, Sydney
- 2012 *Illustrations of Form, Figure and Sexuality*, Brunswick Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 2012 *13.0.0.0*, Paper Plane Gallery, Sydney
- 2012 *Supervillains*, Paint & Print Gallery, Townsville
- 2012 *Play*, Pseudo Space, Sydney
- 2011 *2011 Sketchbook Project* (touring exhibition), Brooklyn Art Library, Austin Museum of Art, 29th Street Ballroom at Spider House (Austin), SPACE Gallery (Portland), The Granite Room (Atlanta), Hillyer Art Space (Washington), Mercer Gallery (Monroe, NY), Form/Space Ateller (Seattle), Madrone Studios (San Francisco), Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago), Full Sail University (Winter Park, Florida)
- 2011 *Christmas Exhibition*, MOP Projects, Sydney
- 2011 *Christmas Exhibition*, ATVP Gallery, Sydney
- 2011 *Drawn Again*, Brunswick Street Gallery, Melbourne
- 2011 *Secret Pint*, Paper Plane Gallery, Sydney
- 2011 *Unleashed*, Redcliffe City Gallery, Redcliffe

2011 *Inaugural Pseudo Space Exhibition*, Pseudo Space, Sydney

### **Selected publications**

- 2015 *Julie Fragar: New Paintings*, Eyeline issue 82
- 2015 Simon Hanselmann: Active, Self-Googling Artist Sneaky online
- 2015 *The Delicate Beauty of Kirsty Bruce*, Sneaky online
- 2015 *Ultra Violence: the Brutal Brilliance of Comic Artist Chris Weston*, Sneaky issue 16 and Sneaky online
- 2015 *The Killer Art of Sharon Goodwin*, Sneaky online
- 2014 Yvonne Todd, Catalogue magazine (*Into the Wild* issue)
- 2014 *Mash-Up: an Interview with Gary Panter*, Sneaky issue 13
- 2014 *Just the Right Amount of Hectic*, Sneaky issue 12
- 2014 *Street Art Versus Graffiti*, Sneaky issue 12
- 2014 *Decadence, Sex & Death: Mimi Kelly*, Sneaky issue 12
- 2014 *Interview with Ray Cook*, Sneaky issue 11
- 2014 *POPCAANZ 2014 Conference Proceedings*, Popular Art Journal of Australia and New Zealand
- 2014 *Brooke Carlson's Traces*, Catalogue essay
- 2014 *Sexy, Sexy Paintings (Miles Hall and Sam Quinteros)*, Sneaky issue 10
- 2014 *Jean-Michel Basquiat*, Catalogue magazine, Winter 2014 issue
- 2014 *Drawing Abroad*, essay by Luke Strevens, Gallery Eight
- 2014 *Explicit Materials: the Art of Leah Emery*, Sneaky issue 8
- 2014 *Destroyer of Worlds*, Sneaky issue 7
- 2014 *The Art of Violence*, Sneaky issue 6
- 2014 *Conversation with Ron McBurnie*, Landscape Too, MOP Projects
- 2014 *Special Moves*, exhibition review by Adam Geczy, Eyeline issue 80
- 2014 *Interview with James Jirat Patradoon*, Sneaky issue 5
- 2013 *Formless, Oceanic, Unknowable: the Transmutations of Nat Koyama and Lucas Davidson*, Addition Gallery, Brisbane
- 2013 *POPCAANZ 2013 Conference Proceedings*, Popular Art Journal of Australia and New Zealand
- 2013 *Everybody Loves a Rebel: Reflections on Jane Hawkins and Rhonda Payne's 'Any Wares'*, Umbrella Studios, Townsville
- 2013 *Special Moves*, MOP Projects
- 2012 *The Re-invention of Gravity*, essay by Markela Panegyres, Verge Gallery and University of Sydney
- 2012 *Emergency Death Pill*, Soft Space Gallery
- 2012 *Interview with Jonathan McBurnie*, by Daniel Smith, [www.noirnotebook.com](http://www.noirnotebook.com)
- 2011 *Antithesis* vol. 21, University of Melbourne Press
- 2011 *Jonathan McBurnie's Precipice*, essay by Dr. Laini Burton, Blindside

### **Conferences**

- 2014 POPCAANZ 2014, *The Psycho, the Pervert and the Weird Kid: Eroticism and Representations of Drawing in Contemporary Film and Television*, Hobart

2013 POPCAANZ 2013, Drawing the Apocalypse: a Biological Imperative, Brisbane

## **Complete Works 2011-2014**

### **2011**

**NB: For reasons of brevity, works have been listed in sets. For names of individual works, please refer to [www.jonathanmcburnie.com](http://www.jonathanmcburnie.com). Please note also that works completed between the time of the publication of this document and the examination will be included in the final document. This is estimated to include some 50-100 further works.**

*Time to Trawl the Shadows for Meat*, 21 works, collage and acrylic on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Precipice*, 25 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 76.5 x 27.5cm.

*Mountain Fresh*, 25 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Merge to Form Devastator*, 103 works, ink, acrylic, correction fluid and collage on paper, various dimensions.

*He Called it a Baptism of Fire*, 7 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 76.5 x 27.5cm.

*Fires, Post You*, 24 works, correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Another Land, Another War*, 18 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 55.5 x 39cm.

### **2012**

*Worst Christmas Ever*, 18 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*The Rhythms of Heartbreak and Death*, 18 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 27 x 35cm.

*The Heat Helps the Madness*, 21 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*The Duke*, 20 works ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Sexual Encounters inside a Gallery Space*, 11 works ink and correction fluid on paper, 55.5 x

39cm.

*Golgotha*, 9 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 55.5 x 39cm.

*Fear Satan*, 9 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 55.5 x 39cm.

*Cowboy Time*, 10 works, ink, gouache, acrylic, pencil and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

## **2013**

*Get to France*, 29 works, ink, watercolour, gouache and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Get a Root out of it*, 5 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Sexual for Elizabeth*, 8 works, ink, gouache, watercolour and correction fluid on paper, 108 x 39.5cm.

*Bastards*, Continuing series, ink, acrylic, gouache, watercolour and correction fluid on cut paper, various dimensions.

*Wanker's Doom*, 16 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 100 x 35cm.

*Looks too much Like Art*, 13 works, collage, permanent marker and biro on paper, , 27 x 35cm.

*Kingdom*, 8 works, ink, acrylic, watercolour, pencil and correction fluid on paper, various dimensions.

*I'd Fight Any Man for You, if Only You Wanted Me to*, 18 works, ink and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*I am Fun Sexy and Worm Heart*, 45 works, ink, biro, permanent marker, collage and correction fluid on paper, various dimensions.



*Cop Dad*, 38 works, ink, watercolour, collage, biro, permanent marker, biro, correction fluid, graphite, gaffa tape and acrylic on paper, 27 x 35cm.

## **2014**

*Vulture Street Tragedian*, 6 works, ink and watercolour on paper, 55.5 x 39cm.

*Gnostic Gospel*, 14 works, ink, correction fluid and gouache on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Hexon Bogon*, 33 works, ink, watercolour, gouache and correction fluid on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.

*Goth Loaf*, 4 works, ink, watercolour and correction fluid, 76 x 28cm.

*Death Death Death*, 4 works, ink, watercolour and correction fluid on paper, various sizes.

*Cocaine Savant*, 16 works, ink, watercolour and correction fluid on paper, various sizes.

*Precipice (the Flesh of Lost Summers)*, wall drawing, 3.5 x 7 metres.

*A Slave, then Prison, then the Madhouse, then the Grave*, 10 works, ink, correction fluid and watercolour on paper, 42 x 29.5cm.