

DRAWING NARRATIVE



Laylah Ali

William Crow

Amy Cutler

Marcel Dzama

Jeff Gauntt

Kojo Griffin

Drew King

Craig Kucia

Elaine Lynch

Robyn O'Neil

Chris Oliveria

Shahzia Sikander

Jane South

**The
College
of
Wooster
Art
Museum**

Ebert Art Center

The thirteen artists in *Drawing Narrative* isolate an emotion, place, or moment in time using universal and recognizable images to “draw” narrative from the scene or figure. Possibly a reaction to the overtly politicized agenda of identity-based art of the 1990s with its forcefully prescriptive agendas, these artists—working in a range of media such as drawing, painting, printmaking, collage, paper constructions, and animated short films—adeptly scrutinize the modern-day cultural frontiers of race, gender, and the implications of an increasingly non-linear digitally connected universe.

Half of the artists in *Drawing Narrative* participated in the last two Whitney Museum of American Art Biennials—a major forum for emerging trends in contemporary art—and they all represent a relatively recent pulse in contemporary art comprised of mostly younger artists influenced by the do-it-yourself approach to zines and the visual language of cartoons, comix, Japanese *anime*, animation, children’s books, and the graphic novel. Using such “lowbrow” styles, however, only heightens the impact of their embedded commentary.

Fundamentally, a narrative depicts some aspect of the world as shaped by



Elaine Lynch
Superheroes, 2003
charcoal, blotter paper
32 x 22 inches
Courtesy the artist

human beings. The basic human impulse to formulate information into a “story” figures prominently in all cultures, whether written, visual, or oral, and many of the works in this exhibition portray a moment on which either side resides the beginning and end of a nascent story.

Often conveying an underlying sense of anxiety and uncertainty about the world in the 21st century, these artists are like early explorers who visually “captured” seemingly objective information about their particular moment in time. However, such “ethnographic moments” are always filtered through personal experience. Whether animal or tree-headed people, women sewing

Amy Cutler (below)
Tiger Mending, 2003
etching, aquatint, chine collé
9 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches
edition of 12
Courtesy the artist and
Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York



Shahzia Sikander (cover)
Afloat, 2001
silkscreen on Thai mulberry paper
34 x 23 1/2 inches
edition of 35
Collection The College of Wooster
Art Museum 2005.37
Gift of The Burton D. Morgan Foundation,
Akron Ohio

Jane South
Untitled (urban strip-London), 2005
cut and folded paper, mixed media
24 x 48 inches
Courtesy the artist and
Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York



William Crow

Untitled (from the *Ordinary Adornment* series), 2004

color-aid, watercolor, gouache, wallpaper, ink,
museum board
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

tigers together, or small figures marooned in bleak snowscapes, these artists have stories to tell and points to make as they utilize the double-edged potential of familiar images to portray the subtle nuances and complicated issues of contemporary existence.

Roughly divided into four groups, the first includes the abstracted narratives of Elaine Lynch (Cincinnati, OH); Jane South (Brooklyn, NY); and William Crow (New York, NY), whose drawings, constructions, and collages might be “read” in any number of combinations. Shahzia Sikander (New York, NY); Amy Cutler (Brooklyn, NY); and Marcel Dzama (New York, NY) take as their reference point the ambiguity and pathos found in myth, domesticity, and children’s books, and Laylah Ali (Williamstown, MA); Kojo Griffin (Atlanta, GA); and Chris Oliveria (Los Angeles, CA) focus their narratives on the psychology of the

figure. The fourth group, Robyn O’Neil (Houston, TX); Drew King (Cleveland, OH); Craig Kucia (Miami, FL); and Jeff Gauntt (Brooklyn, NY), explores the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Akin to the associative literary forms found in poetry, the abstracted collages and drawings of Elaine Lynch, Jane South, and William Crow are organized around a generally open-ended visual structure. Using silhouettes, pop-culture icons, and paperdoll cutouts, Elaine

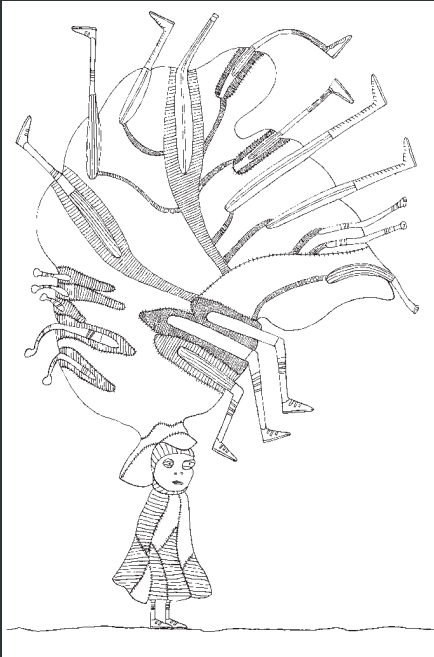
Lynch fashions stories that float in space, linked by beads or stripes to create either calm or chaos against which she isolates ideas about what comprises feminine beauty. Jane South’s paper constructions do not appear to have a hierarchy of information—the reader/viewer determines the entry and exit points of her Rube Goldberg-like paper sculptures. However, there is a precarious balance in South’s all encompassing and playful erector-set like constructions, with each part variously suggesting architecture, cages, grills, and two- and three-dimensional doodling.

Like South, William Crow’s collages are non-linear narratives, which, according to the artist, are “mutable and unfixed.” Drawn into his accumulations of fragmented imagery, the viewer is invited to explore “the territory between narrative and meaning.” It is almost as if Crow’s fragments are comic book thought balloons where random connections obliquely collide and plant the seed for the next thought or story.

Marcel Dzama

Der Selbstzestorer, 2004
unique silkscreen, ink on paper
22 ¼ x 20 ¼ inches
Courtesy the artist and
David Zwirner, New York





Laylah Ali

Untitled, 2002

ink on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
Courtesy the artist and
303 Gallery, New York

In a different vein, cultural history, myth, and children's stories invite and provoke interpretation and strange possibilities in the prints of Shahzia Sikander (cover image), Marcel Dzama, and Amy Cutler (pp. 1-2). Mining the myths of her native Pakistan, Shahzia Sikander is one of the few artists in this exhibition who plies the terrain of the migrant by depicting a highly personal view of shifting identities. Raised Muslim, she bases her work on the historicism of Indian miniature paintings and combines Hindu and Muslim images of women—such as the Muslim veil and Hindu multi-armed goddesses—to reflect the entwined histories of India and Pakistan.

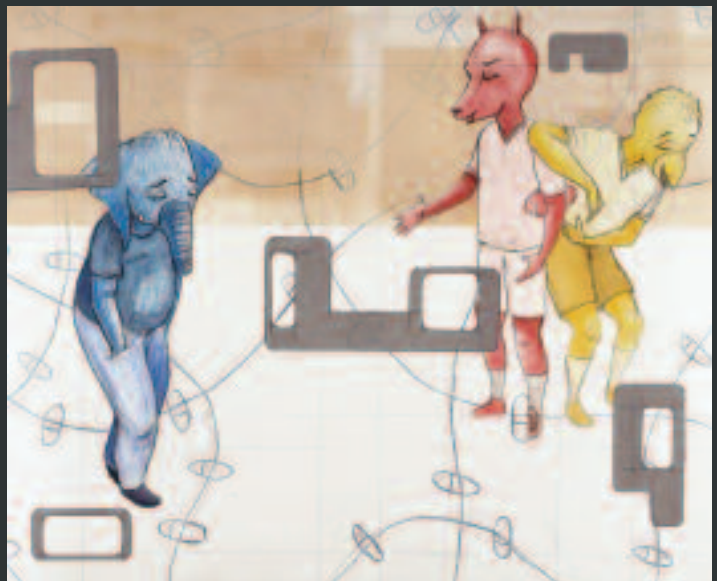
Canadian Marcel Dzama's drawings and prints are known for his cast of

characters that include talking trees, superheroes, bunnies, monsters, and children drawn in a style reminiscent of folk artist Henry Darger and children's book authors Beatrix Potter and the Brothers Grimm. In the silkscreen *Der Selbstzestorer*, 2004, Dzama

meticulously lines up his characters like soldiers at the ready to combine into new stories that evoke larger cruelties where children are involved in warfare and nightmares become reality.

Similar to Dzama, Amy Cutler's etchings and drawings are storybook-esque, and like Sikander, dissect the female archetype. In Cutler's sepia-colored etching *Tiger Mending*, 2004, four women improbably sew together tigers that are damaged. Once whole, however, one wonders if these tigers will devour the very hands that mended them. A visual metaphor commenting on the traditional role of women, Cutler's *mise en scènes* are familiar places where women attend to surreal domestic duties.

Focusing on the psychology of the figure, Laylah Ali, Kojo Griffin, and Chris Oliveria's drawings, prints, and paintings feature comic-like characters generally devoid of context yet rife with narrative potential. Usually modest in scale, Laylah Ali's paintings and drawings distill her narratives within psychologically rich portraits. The figure in *Untitled*, 2004, defies easy explanation and features a small figure effortlessly holding aloft a headpiece (or is it a thought balloon) of



Kojo Griffin

Untitled, 2003

monotype, chine collé
30 x 38 inches
Courtesy the artist and
Cheryl Pelavin Fine Art, New York

half-figures with their legs and feet dangling out. To decipher the narrative, one might first consider the sex of the figure and then determine if the cape-draped being supports or controls the figures embedded in the headdress/thought balloon. Simply drawn with ink on paper, this blank-faced person may or may not be as innocent as he/she appears.

Like Ali, Kojo Griffin's prints and paintings also investigate the psychology of the portrait. In his anthropomorphized fairy-tales, animal-headed people (or are they people-bodied animals) inhabit either a blank space or rest on an abstracted surface at odds with the perspectival rendering of the figures. Serving as surrogates for human emotions, they might reflect human imposed stereotypes about animal characteristics. In Griffin's monotype *Untitled*, 2004, the bird and wolf team up to mock the presumably overweight elephant. The downcast eyes of the elephant indicate sadness. Leaving much open to interpretation, Griffin firmly places this ostensible story about childhood scars in the memory of the viewer.



Chris Oliveria

Untitled, 2005 (detail)

oil on wood panel

8 x 6½ inches

Collection Aimee Chang and
Becky Escamilla, Los Angeles
Courtesy Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery,
Los Angeles



Robyn O'Neil

Two Gathered on a Hill, 2004

graphite on paper

40 x 32 inches

Courtesy the artist and
Clementine Gallery, New York

Another artist exploring power relationships and the classic struggle of good and evil is Chris Oliveria. His carefully painted cartoon characters feature single figures caught in a moment of decision, or groups of interlocked, struggling figures dotting the vacuum of a blank landscape. In his highly detailed paintings, Oliveria portrays, according to the artist, "dominant surface dwellers kept in and out of balance by oppressed subterranean dwellers."

The last group of artists—Robyn O'Neil, Drew King, Craig Kucia, and Jeff Gaunt—reflect on humans and their relationship to nature. Pitting her human protagonists against the sublime vastness of nature, Robyn O'Neil's men in the wilderness suggest epic tales. Working with graphite on paper, O'Neil's drawings are reminiscent of both science fiction comics and textbooks from the 1950s. In her snowy scenes bordered by pine forests, either

something has already taken place or will shortly. The drawings have ominous portent, but the titles, such as *Two Gathered on a Hill*, are emptied of dramatic tension and suggest what the artist has said her art is about—people going about their life.

Also creating an uneasy narrative tension, Drew King's paintings and paper cutout silhouettes of isolated figures tell their stories much like shadow puppets where few surface details are visible and where the viewer is left the freedom—and task—of embellishing the texture of both the image and the narrative. In these starkly black and white scenes, such as *Channel*, 2004, figures gaze at each

(essay continues on page 7)

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Dimensions h x w x d

LAYLAH ALI, Williamstown, MA

1. **Untitled**, 2002
ink on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
2. **Untitled**, 2002
ink on paper
16 1/2 x 11 3/4 inches
All works courtesy the artist and
303 Gallery, New York, NY

WILLIAM CROW, New York, NY

- 3-5. **Untitled** (from the *Ordinary Adornment* series), 2004
color-aid, watercolor, gouache, wallpaper, ink,
museum board
dimensions variable (each)
All works courtesy the artist

AMY CUTLER, Brooklyn, NY

6. **Birding**, 2003
etching, aquatint, chine collé
9 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches (image)
edition of 12
7. **Tiger Mending**, 2003
etching, aquatint, chine collé
9 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches (image)
edition of 12
8. **Rug Beaters**, 2003
etching, aquatint, chine collé
9 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches (image)
edition of 12
All works courtesy the artist and
Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York, NY

MARCEL DZAMA, New York, NY

9. **Die Verlorenen Seelen**, 2004
unique silkscreen, ink on paper
22 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
10. **Der Kreis Der Wollust**, 2004
unique silkscreen, ink on paper
22 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
11. **Der Selbstzestorer**, 2004
unique silkscreen, ink on paper
22 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
12. **Der Kreis Der Varräter**, 2004
unique silkscreen, ink on paper
22 1/4 x 20 1/4 inches
All works courtesy the artist and
David Zwirner, New York, NY

JEFF GAUNTT, New York, NY

13. **We Watch the Skies**, 2003
acrylic on wood
60 x 120 inches (two panels)
14. **Faithful Companion**, 2004
acrylic on wood
72 x 96 inches (two panels)
All works courtesy the artist and
Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, NY

KOJO GRIFFIN, Atlanta, GA

- 15-16. **Untitled**, 2003
monotype, chine collé
30 x 38 inches (each)
- 17-19. **Untitled**, 2004
monotype, chine collé
20 x 16 inches (each)
All works courtesy the artist and
Cheryl Pelavin Fine Art, New York, NY

DREW KING, Cleveland, OH

20. **Channel**, 2004
oil, tar, gesso on paper
27 x 34 inches
21. **Central Park Reservoir**, 2004
acrylic on cut paper
18 x 24 inches
22. **Deconstruction**, 2004
folded paper
12 x 14 inches
23. **Forest**, 2004
print from cut paper
8 x 10 inches
All works courtesy the artist

CRAIG KUCIA, Miami, FL

24. **when a thousand miles wasn't that far**, 2004
oil on canvas
60 x 60 inches
Courtesy Private Collection, Akron, OH
25. **riots and hope were lost in the story and death of every romance**, 2005
oil on canvas
72 x 72 inches
Courtesy Private Collection and SHAHEEN
Modern and Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH

ELAINE LYNCH, Cincinnati, OH

26. **So Fresh, So Mild**, 2003
charcoal, blotter paper
32 x 22 inches
27. **I Would Love To Be Your Next Miss America**, 2003
charcoal, paper
32 x 22 inches
28. **Lana, Linda**, 2003
charcoal, paper
32 x 22 inches
29. **Superheroes**, 2003
charcoal, paint, paper
32 x 22 inches
All works courtesy the artist

CHRIS OLIVERIA, Los Angeles, CA

- 30-34. **Untitled**, 2005
oil on wood panel
8 x 6 1/2 inches
30-32. Courtesy of the following collections:
Aimee Chang and Becky Escamilla, Los Angeles,
CA; Jeff Dauber, San Francisco, CA
Laurie Lazer and Darryl Smith, San Francisco, CA
35. **Untitled**, 2005
oil on canvas
30 x 36 inches
All works courtesy the artist and
Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery, Los Angeles

ROBYN O'NEIL, Houston, TX

36. **Two Gathered on a Hill**, 2004
graphite on paper
40 x 32 inches
37. **They Walk, Fall, Contrive, and Die**, #26, 2003
graphite on paper
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
38. **They Walk, Fall, Contrive, and Die**, #24, 2003
graphite on paper
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
39. **The Prelude to a Solid Hope for Something Better**, #8, 2003
graphite on paper
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
All works courtesy the artist and
Clementine Gallery, New York, NY

SHAHZIA SIKANDER

40. **Afloat**, 2001
silkscreen on Thai mulberry paper
34 x 23 1/2 inches
edition of 35
Collection The College of Wooster
Art Museum 2005.37
Gift of The Burton D. Morgan Foundation,
Akron, OH
- 41-42. **Maligned Monsters I and II**, 2000
aquatint, sugarlift, chine collé
22 1/4 x 29 3/4 inches
Courtesy the artist and
Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, NY

JANE SOUTH, Brooklyn, NY

43. **Untitled** (urban strip/London), 2005
cut and folded paper, mixed media
24 x 48 x 12 inches
- 44-47. **Drawing Animations**, 2001
DVD-NTSC
8 x 10 inches
All works courtesy the artist and
Spencer Brownstone Gallery, New York

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appreciation and gratitude are extended to the artists in this exhibition whose art has so much generative potential and who so elegantly and eloquently excavate contemporary circumstances.

A number of galleries located in Cleveland, Los Angeles, and New York City graciously facilitated the loan of works to this exhibition. We thank the following for their assistance: Simone Montemurno, 303 Gallery; Leslie Tonkonow, Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects; Gillian Ferguson, David Zwirner; Cheryl Pelavin, Cheryl Pelavin Fine Art; Brett Shaheen, Shaheen Modern and Contemporary Art; Lizabeth Oliveria, Lizabeth Oliveria Gallery; Abigail Messitte, Clementine Gallery; Teka Selman, Sikkema Jenkins & Co.; and Erin Krause, Spencer Brownstone Gallery. In addition, we thank two private collectors in Cleveland and Akron for the loan of Craig Kucia's paintings, and the artists who made their work available for exhibition.

At Wooster, the museum staff worked under tight deadlines to make *Drawing Narrative* happen. Appreciation for jobs well done go to Doug McGlumphy, Museum Preparator, for his illuminating exhibition design, and Betsy Wagers and Joyce Fuell for their unflinching administrative support. Additionally, college students Sarah O'Leary '06 and Missy Offenhauser '06 worked diligently on the excellent education resources associated with *Drawing Narrative*.

Lastly, but certainly not least, a very special thank you to The Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation, Hudson, Ohio, who so generously supported the exhibition, associated events, and educational materials. The Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation was established in 2001 by Margaret Clark Morgan and her husband, the late Burton D. Morgan. The Burton D. Morgan Foundation, Akron, Ohio, provided funding for the Burton D. Morgan Gallery, one of two galleries that comprise The College of Wooster Art Museum's public facilities.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

DRAWING NARRATIVE

October 28–December 9, 2005

The College of Wooster Art Museum

Ebert Art Center

Sussel Gallery and Burton D. Morgan Gallery

This exhibition was generously supported by The Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation, Hudson, Ohio.

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1220 Beall Avenue, Wooster, Ohio 44691

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Jeff Gaunt
Faithful Companion, 2004
acrylic on wood
72 x 96 inches (2 panels)
Courtesy the artist and
Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

other across the watery chasm. Here, specific actions or emotions seem puny against the sublime vastness and power of nature, yet succinctly evoke a sense of isolation in an increasingly mobile and digitally connected world.

Finally, Craig Kucia and Jeff Gauntt explore the subject of nature itself in their paintings on canvas and panel. While Kucia paints lush vignettes of woods and woodland creatures, Gauntt anthropomorphizes and critiques the human-centric point of view towards nature. Craig Kucia's painting *in when a thousand miles wasn't that far*, 2004, features raccons on a limb at night, lit by the moon and a spotlight against the impenetrable blankness of the unknown blue night beyond. In Jeff Gauntt's *Faithful Companion*, 2004, a cartoonish, shoe-clad tree promenades with its branches/arms catching, cupping, and yet spilling an overflow of green liquid. The tree/person holds the liquid resource, yet allows the overflow run through its branch/fingers. While many cultures imbue nature, or the unknowable, with supernatural life forces, Gauntt's sparsely leaved walking tree speaks to shared resources from the tree's perspective.

Essentially, all of the artists in this exhibition use three basic strategies to connect with their audience. As artist/narrator, they purposely remain ontologically distant from their invented worlds and do not impose personal biography into the story that they are telling (with the possible exception of Sikander). Secondly, the playful style seen in much of the work heightens the

Craig Kucia

when a thousand miles wasn't that far, 2004

oil on canvas
60 x 60 inches

Private Collection, Akron

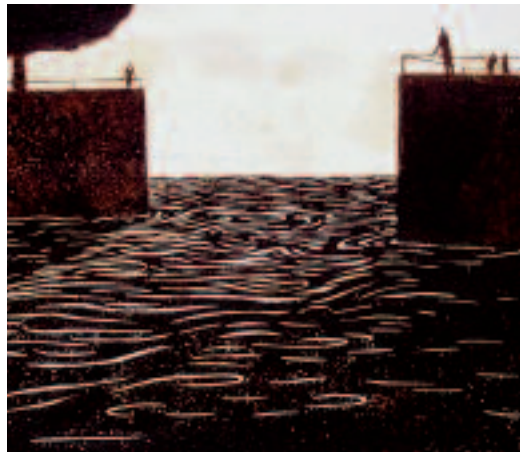
Courtesy SHAHEEN Modern and Contemporary Art, Cleveland

Drew King

Channel, 2004

oil, tar, gesso, paper
27 x 34 inches

Courtesy the artist



emotional impact of the artist's commentary. And finally, yet perhaps most importantly, these artists draw the viewer into the story by using our hard-wired impulse to shape oral, written, and visual information into a narrative. It is at this point that there exists a very private moment when one realizes that in puzzling out what we are seeing and

creating a "story" to fit it into, more than anything, that story reflects our own memories, personal history, biases, prejudices, and assumptions.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

