

KUDOS ON THE YEAR

Ours are yours...

You have great exhibits with variety and quality. I particularly like that you are open to showing works from artists locally, nationally and, I believe, worldwide.

– M. Heider, Cincinnati

It was a really positive experience to be at the opening and meet you and your crew, it's a such a special place. I don't think my work ever looked better than on those walls. It was also really interesting to see Cincinnati... – Kirstine Reiner, California (season 6 solo exhibitor)

I wish there was a Manifest here. – Beth Shortt, England

As a practicing artist looking for venues to show my work, I find that your catalog production, as well as the experimental criteria of your group exhibition themes, make your venue very appealing to participate in. – Clement Yeh, Montreal

The catalog looks great! It is so rare, especially during these economic times, for a gallery to go to the trouble and expense so I'm very grateful to you and the staff and Manifest for your continued commitment and effort. – Robert Lansden, Louisiana (season 6 exhibitor)

I almost leaped through the ceiling when I saw that my drawing was used for the frontispiece of the book. Thank you... I want to also write to say thanks for your work throughout the entire project. I am an adjunct professor (at SUNY Purchase), and I am currently curating my first exhibition for A.I.R. Gallery, a non-profit space that was opened in 1972. I am writing to say that I think I can appreciate the amount of work that went into making the book so very beautiful, and of such a high caliber. I also want to thank you for being so communicative through the process. As I sit here taking a short break from my project, I take heart knowing you guys are out there working equally hard, and that, in this case, I was on the receiving end of the work. It makes me that much more inspired to serve the artists in my curatorial exhibition. – Jennifer Wroblewski, New York

I just wanted to write and let you know that I read and appreciate the new revision of Manifest's mission statement. You have established an important hub for the creative spirit there and it is exciting to see and read about all of the artists and activity surrounding it. I often wish I was still in Cincinnati... to be involved with the artist group you have built around those life drawing sessions. I can't imagine the energy in that studio - it must be thrilling. – Steve Ziebarth, Cleveland (Associate Professor, Baldwin-Wallace College)

I just looked at the drawing book and was quite stunned. I had no idea, really, how exceptional it was going to be. I have boxes full of drawing exhibit catalogs and brochures and everything imaginable - and most of them are competent and momentary - but this book is a BOOK, and full of brilliant drawings. – Craig Marshall Smith, Colorado (INDA 4 essay author)

Thank you so much for the Manifest INDA book! It is outstanding; totally exceeding my expectations. What a wonderfully put together creation. It was worth the wait. I am so impressed with the work of all the artists in this publication, that I am humbled to be a part of it. – Mary Lee Ruff, Virginia

I noticed that your show called "Burb" mentions (thank you!!) the number of artists who were chosen to actually exhibit. Out of 147, there were only 15 who showed work. You are one of the ONLY galleries I have seen which is open about this! - Lane

Thank you for your considerate and well thought out letter. As you well know, artists very often receive perfunctory responses to their submissions. I am impressed with you and the quality of Manifest Gallery and intend to submit my work to future calls. Thank you again. – G. Miller

I am a former Cincinnati resident and am happy to see the quality of work you are bringing to the city! – S. Kaminski

I want to let you know that I stopped by the gallery last night to see the show. Even though I was about an hour early for the gallery hop and your assistant Director, Administrative Assistant and volunteers were busy preparing for the opening, they took the time to talk with me about the show and gallery. I really appreciate that they did this for me, when they didn't need to. It made me feel very welcome to your space. Kudos to you and your staff for a great show and for being so helpful. Keep up the good work!! – Patrick Mauk, Gallery Manager, Dayton Visual Arts Center

I am just recently aware of your drawing center, and am extremely impressed by the instruction that it offers as well as the quality of your instructors. I hope that the trend continues, as I and a few others are trying to generate this level of figure instruction and drawing appreciation in Indianapolis... I will tell [people] about your drawing center and its workshops as it is one of the best I've seen in the region. – Vandra

Pictures must not be too picturesque.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

WHY DRAW?

by Tim Parsley, Assistant Director and Drawing Center Studio Program Coordinator

Recently a woman who was looking at one of my drawn portraits turned to me and asked incredulously, "How do you draw a nose?" Not sure whether or not her question was rhetorical, I simply smiled in response. She persisted: "No, really. How do you draw a nose?" I realized she was serious – she really wanted me to tell her, then and there, how to draw a human nose! The problem was, I didn't know how to answer her. And I teach people how to draw! Noses even!

I believe part of the problem I had answering her came from the nature of her question: it was too independently and suddenly specific. By this I mean that it came from a conception of drawing that is more or less divorced from what drawing actually is. Revealed by her incredulity is the romantic notion that artists are magicians and that what we do is comprised of a series of up-the-sleeve secret tricks that are good for vowing audiences, but when revealed, de-mystify the moment with their pragmatic simplicity ("Oh, now I see how it's done."). Inherent in this conception about drawing is the idea that in order to draw something, "First you do this, then this, then this... add a little of this... and voila! you have a nose!" I'm sure Bob Ross is to blame.

How to explain what drawing is all about? How to convey that drawing is more than just the accumulation of a set of technical skills that add up to the illusion of magic? That it is the result of an entrenched discipline of searching, discovering, failing, succeeding... through the tip of a pencil? That it is more about the pursuit of drawing a nose than actually drawing it? I think I answered her with a limp, "Well, you just focus on the abstract parts and piece it together..." At this, she gave me a flat look.

Perhaps the problem with the question about how to draw a nose is its starting point. The question should not be "How do you draw a nose?" but rather, "Why draw a nose?" For people who draw regularly, this is a question we are more at home with – and can answer more fluidly. "Why draw?" gets more at the ongoing, investigative process behind a drawing. It taps into the life of drawing that is the context for specific drawings.

We draw in order to see. To the non-drawer, this is counterintuitive and seems to place an interfering activity between the eye and the object seen. After all, if the goal is seeing, why not just look? But to draw is to slow our seeing, think about our seeing, and hopefully, over time, understand what we are seeing. John Berger puts it well:

"For the artist drawing is discovery. And that is not just a slick phrase, it is quite literally true. It is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again; or, if he is drawing from memory, that forces him to dredge his own mind, to discover the content of his own store of past observations."

Through this immersion into the act of drawing regularly, of creating drawing after drawing, the artist soon forms a trail of understanding. Just pick up an artist's sketchbook and walk through the searches, detours, dead ends, and discoveries to see that drawing is a personal journey more than a technical production. Berger confirms, "A drawing is an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event – seen, remembered or imagined."

This can be a painful process for the artist. It can unearth our artistic weaknesses. At the beginning of a drawing class I warn my students, "Drawing will reveal your weak points as an artist. Trust that this is a good thing." Canonical advice to the person who draws: You draw a good nose by drawing a thousand bad noses.

"For me, drawing is an inquiry, a way of finding out – the first thing that I discover is that I do not know. This is alarming even to the point of momentary panic. Only experience reassures me that this encounter with my own ignorance – with the unknown – is my chosen and particular task, and provided I can make the required effort the rewards may reach the unimaginable. It is as though there is an eye at the end of my pencil, which tries, independently of my personal general-purpose eye, to penetrate a kind of obscuring veil or thickness. To break down this thickness, this deadening opacity, to elicit some particle of clarity or insight, is what I want to do." – Artist Bridget Riley

The discipline of drawing is a painfully wonderful practice. Over time, it has the potential to create more than great works of art; it can create great artists. Lashing ourselves to the sheet of paper, through a humble pencil, locates our focus on the transference of visual information between the drawing and that which is being drawn. We become the bridge, reaching across the expanse and bringing back, recording with each stroke what has been seen. Doing this enough times will change you. I am not waxing hyperbolic when I say that drawing is a transformational activity. Navigating the space between the drawing and the thing-which-is-drawn means we form a relationship with both. This cultivates an outer and inner awareness of the world we inhabit. Through drawing, we don't just notice – we see.

Of course, enough of this seeing, and we might actually create some nice drawings too. But this is not primarily the point of drawing. The point – the why of drawing – is to submit ourselves to the kind of practice that attunes us visually to the world around. As artists we are charged with the responsibility to see things clearly and report back what we have observed. This cannot be done at a glance.

Our drawings, then, are the evidence of our looking. They are the trail left by our journey. Or, as Peter Steinhart puts it in his book, *The Undressed Art: Why We Draw*:

"It is not the finished drawing that counts. It is the time spent outside oneself, of which the drawing is merely a record, the ticket stub in your pocket after the concert."

How do you draw a nose? I suppose there are technical answers to this question. After all, noses are drawn – and usually drawn in a certain way.

Why draw a nose?

This is a more relevant question.

To see. To understand. To become the kind of artist whose drawings are born out of a life of looking.