

DRAWN TO THE WALL V



JUNDT ART MUSEUM  
SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 12, 2013

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY  
SPOKANE, WASHINGTON





## KURT MADISON

*"It's so fine and yet so terrible to stand in front of a blank canvas."*

- Paul Cézanne



In the end, they're just sections of wall. Some plywood, some plaster, a coat of white paint. Completely ordinary, completely utilitarian. At the Jundt Art Museum, these five sections of moveable wall are normally used to mark gallery space and to support hung works of art. But every three years or so they briefly become canvasses – marvelous tabulae rasae for an exceptional exhibit. And right now, their drawable qualities are being evaluated by a handful of artists.

"It's surprisingly toothy," says one, smoothing her hand across a pale surface. Another digs through his bag of drawing supplies for whatever will make the best line. So far, nobody seems intimidated, although the monolithic canvas

spaces are – at 8 by 11 1/2 feet – a lot of artistic "real estate" to fill. It's late April and the artists, Margot Casstevens, Elaine Green, Kurt Madison, Roger Ralston, and Carl Richardson, still have plenty of time to plan, experiment, and dream.

The *Drawn to the Wall V* exhibit, from September 6 to October 12, offers a challenge that is simple, but not easy: the group has two weeks to get their images up on their assigned piece of wall. The show will be open to the public for just over a month, at which time the artists will paint over the work they've done and return the wall to its original blank state.

The impetus for the *Drawn to the Wall* series comes from the 1995 short documentary *Jim Dine: A Self-Portrait on the Walls*. The film observes how Dine reacts to a potentially disastrous problem: the German gallery that invited him to exhibit can't pay for his works to be shipped. With only six days to work, Dine and an assistant painstakingly recreate his drawings right on the gallery's walls. The documentary is mesmerizing – not only in capturing the finished work (enormous self-portraits, the sweeping lines of various birds) but in showing the human struggle to get the job done. The work is as taxing physically as it



## CARL RICHARDSON

is emotionally. Dine goes through knee pads and finger bandages, uses broom handles, bread, and even a wash of Pepsi to get the charcoal lines properly blended. The works fill the walls of the Ludwigsburg gallery space, but only for a short six weeks. In the end, as will happen with the current *Drawn to the Wall* show and the four before it, the work was all painted over and only exists now in memory and in film.

The *Drawn to the Wall* artists are luckier than Dine in that they collectively have less space to fill and more time to prepare. Five months before, the artists met with Interim Director Karen Kaiser to learn more about the exhibit, both in terms of its philosophy and its practicalities. Kaiser explains how the working process should go:

"You'll have two weeks. You'll come in and fight over the spaces where you're going to work," she smiles, half-kidding. "Everyone will have their own studio *space*, as it were, and the galleries will be closed to the public during the two weeks that you'll be working, but it's by no means private." As Kaiser continues to talk about the artist's work spaces, Sharpies and paper go around the room. The artists are recording their signatures for the show's brochure, since the exhibit's art doesn't exist yet. The work will be intensely physical, Kaiser warns: there will be three ladders to share, but the artists are welcome to bring in their own, or even scaffolding if it helps. They can also bring in additional work lighting. The discussion moves to materials and while the concept of *Drawn to the Wall* allows for paint or even sculptural elements, it's clear one group of media *isn't* welcome at the party. "No oil paints or pastels," says Kaiser. "They are nearly impossible to fully paint over." The artists start volleying questions at this point.





Roger Ralston

## ROGER RALSTON

"Has anyone used silverpoint?" asks Green, who recently took a class on Drawing Materials and Tools in the 17th Century at the British Museum. Madison extols the virtues of General's Chunks, actual hunks of charcoal that he says give "an intense depth of color." "How about airbrushing?" asks someone else. "Those are all okay," says Kaiser. "Anything that can be physically removed or sanded down should be okay."

The conversation turns to a discussion of the walls themselves, and what they're like to work with. "How dense is the wall?" wonders Casstevens, her eyes bright with tactile possibilities. "It's plywood covered in wall board," says Kaiser. "You won't need to drill it but you can't push pin it either." This is an important point as in previous years some artists have used three-dimensional methods to "draw" on the surface with string and fabric. Ralston

comments that he's not used to drawing in such a large scale; Kaiser responds that there's nothing that says you have to use the entire space. Richardson asks, "Has anyone laid the wall down to draw on it?" As the artists ponder the logistics of this, Kaiser explains that it's next to impossible – each wall is more or less anchored with three feet of sand inside. They can be moved – with difficulty – but not laid down.

And then the best question of the meeting suddenly comes from Green, who's decided to go back to media and materials: "Are live creatures allowed?" There is laughter but Green isn't entirely kidding. She talks about the kinds of tracks a small animal might make, or how it could be part of an installation if caged. "We've never had anyone do that before," says Kaiser. While Green's fellow artists laugh and suggest what kinds of live animals might best "draw" on the walls, Kaiser makes the hard decision: no animals.





# Elaine Green

## ELAINE GREEN

As the artists walk through the museum's gallery space, the mood is convivial. It helps that most of the artists, many of whom are on the faculty at Spokane Falls Community College and Eastern Washington University, know one another. There is good-natured ribbing and some excitement as a few of the artists actually draw on the walls – discreetly – to test the materials they might be using five months from now. Kaiser says that the process of working on *Drawn to the Wall* fosters a real sense of camaraderie. "It's like summer camp," she says. "The space is closed to the public but the artists are definitely not working alone. You learn to share equipment and material, and to bounce ideas off one another."

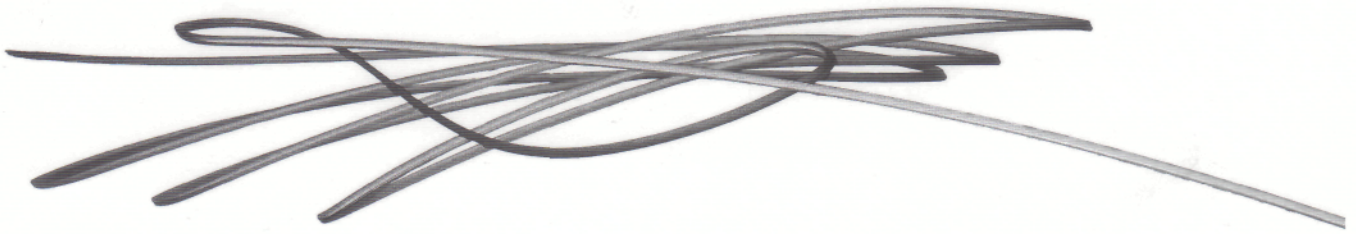
What's interesting is that nobody seems intimidated, either by the prospect of working under deadline or by the size of the walls themselves. The walls are enormous, and when they're standing apart from the other walls in the gallery they suggest nothing so much as the portentous dimensions of the monoliths from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.



"They might not be intimidated now," Kaiser admits when I ask her about it privately later. "But that often comes later when they come in to work for the first time." She says that the last few days in particular can be extremely stressful as planned images don't work out and materials sometimes prove recalcitrant.

It's an incredible amount of planning, and effort, and hard physical work for something that isn't intended to last. The artists will, at the end of the show, remove the images they've so carefully crafted. The sanding and painting over they'll be doing as part of the exhibit's contract will be an act of intentional erasure. But the erasure is far from total. In the

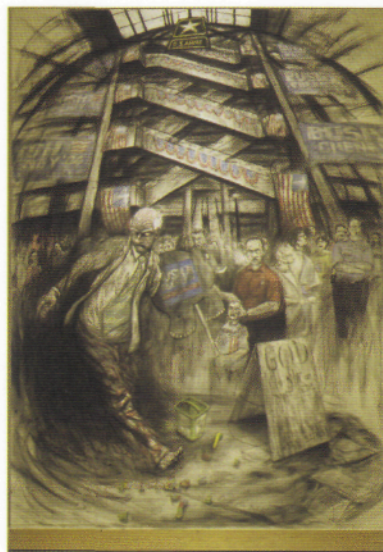




## MARGOT CASSTEVENS

end, the experience of *Drawn to the Wall*, both for the artists and the observers, lives on, whether it's in a callus from rubbing charcoal to create big shadows or a photo of the resulting art snapped on someone's iPhone. Although the art doesn't "last" in the physical, historical sense, it will persist in memory, in conversations, in photography, perhaps even film. *Drawn to the Wall V*, for all its "leave no trace" end philosophy, will definitely leave something behind. What will it be?

Sheri Boggs  
Guest Essayist, 2013



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### IMAGES:

**COVER:** Gina Freuen (Contemporary American), *Self-Portrait Obscured*, 2007, DTTW III, Charcoal, wood & pit fired stoneware, printed & waxed mulberry paper

1. Ken Yuhasz (Contemporary American), *Odd Planets*, 2007, DTTW III, Latex paint, found objects, and neon and argon filled tubing

2. Allie Kurtz Vogt (Contemporary American), *Altar: There Is a Time and Season for Every Purpose*, 2004, DTTW II, Pastel and charcoal with attachments

3. Bradd Skubinna (Contemporary American), *Shot Through*, 2004, DTTW II, Plastic with plastic tape

4. Richard Schindler (Contemporary American), *In Memory of a Free Spirit*, 2007, DTTW III, Sumi ink, walnut ink, charcoal, and graphite with handmade paper

5. Scott Kolbo (Contemporary American), *Jeremiah at the Mall: The Prophecy of God's Impending Judgment Against the City on the Hill*, 2004, DTTW II, Acrylic, charcoal, pastel, colored pencil, plywood and photocopies