


By Chris Vitiello 

Why do people stop drawing?

As kids, most of us drew all the time, compulsively filling notebooks with cats and superheroes, tanks and ponies. Shaking out the cramps in our hands, we lost whole afternoons in the minute details of a cityscape or the repetition of tiny patterns. But then we grew up and left drawing behind.

The Nothing That Is
CAM Raleigh
409 W. Martin St., Raleigh
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www.camraleigh.org
Through Sept. 7

The Nothing That Is is a sprawling, joyful exhibit at CAM Raleigh that collects work from more than 85 artists who never stopped obeying the impulse to draw. In many cases, they have followed it well beyond the traditional limits of the form. It's a mistake to call *The Nothing That Is* merely a drawing show. Curator Bill Thelen, founder and director of Raleigh gallery and collective Lump, wants to hit the reset button, reconnecting viewers with the essential impulse that he prefers to call "mark-making" and "gesture."

Video, sculpture and photography hang in dense clusters beside drawings in every medium. The show is organized in five "chapters." The first, "DDDRRRAAAWWIIIINNGGG," is the largest, filling CAM's main floor. New York City's Jason Polan co-curated this chapter and contributed the large vinyl drawings that hang on the museum's exterior. His quick, expressive hand—think Keith Haring after five espressos—can also be seen in the zine-like program notes, where he drew all the works in the chapter.

Thelen curated the other chapters himself. "Conceptual Approaches" collects work with a theoretical relationship to drawing; "Movement" screens drawing-based video; "Locals Only" gives five North Carolina artists, including David Eichenberger, Chris Musina and Tedd Anderson, a small solo show; and "Open Source," with its title written on the museum window looking out onto Martin Street, indicates a variety of remote community projects that are part of the show.

"DDDRRRAAAWWIIIINNGGG" and "Conceptual Approaches" provide the biggest highlights. The former evokes a drawing studio in which everyone just pins their work to the wall.

"I wanted that salon-style feel because there are so many different strategies in this chapter," Thelen says. "We can put a highly technical drawing next to a very quick gestural drawing, and they're having this dialogue with each other."

Drawings by different artists hang in clusters, curves and stacks. There is no wall text. We aren't given any titles. The artists' names are penciled directly on the wall in spidery handwriting. This might grate on the purist as intentionally amateurish, but this show is more for the kid who doodles endlessly on the cover of her Trapper Keeper.

If you're expecting to see a lot of pencil or ink, look out. Several abstractions stand out for both imagery and materiality, including a dark, congested drawing in mascara by Mollie Earls that could have been pulled off a Lascaux cave wall. Vibrant tempera works by Casey Cook recombine her visual vocabulary of zigzags and phallic curves. Christopher Thomas' charcoal scroll is unrecognizably based on a close-up image of a compost pile. And Joy Feasley's work hangs with the drawn side facing the wall—instead, we see, through the paper, the imprint of the implement she used to draw it.

When ink is used, it's not always the ink you expect. Look closely at drawings by Allyson Mellberg and Jeremy Taylor to see how differently the paper takes their handmade walnut-based inks. Look even closer at Tricia Keightley's precise technical drawings, easily mistaken for printouts from a computer drafting program, to marvel at her freehand control.

Heading downstairs into the show's conceptual chapter, a persistent mechanical noise grows louder, drawing you to Kellie Bornhoft's kinetic sculpture, "Swept." A push-broom on a motor endlessly brushes a patch of sod on the gallery floor. Bornhoft states her primary concern as pointing out the disconnection between suburban life and the environment—the mark made upon the sod is one of damage, not care.

Sometime *INDY* contributor Amy White also displays a sculptural work. "Further Adventures in the Realm of the Static and the Vital" is a shelf of ceramic tablets with drawings in their glaze. Part of a body of diverse work that connects the origin of life to clay, White's tablets also deeply link handwriting to individual identity.

Similar works by Becca Albee and Joy Drury Cox implicate handwriting's subservience to the printed word. Cox removes all the text from forms such as a death certificate, a timecard and a credit report, leaving only the lines and checkboxes. Albee's "Radical Feminist Therapy" elides the text of Bonnie Burstow's textbook of that name, leaving only Albee's underlines and marginalia. Cox presents the form as a space of institutional control that forces standardized behavior, while Albee shows how the printed book provides a space for dialogue and original thought.

Thelen challenges visitors to make connections back to drawing throughout the conceptual chapter. The folds of Stacy Lynn Waddell's "Damages Emergency Blanket" lend urgency to the gestures that made them, while elin o'Hara slavick's colorfully drawn maps of bombing sites such as Pakistan and Bikini Atoll draw you in with their beauty in order to jar you with their military imaging.

Thelen is interested in drawing as a social practice, and would be pleased if the show were to inspire you to participate in "Open Source" community projects such as Vegan Snake Club, The Drawn, CAM Young Artists Advisory Panel, Greensboro's Elsewhere, Team Lump or the Taco Bell Drawing Club, Polan's participatory project.

"He just shows up at a Taco Bell, puts [the location] on social media and draws with whoever shows up," says Thelen, who bonded with Polan through collaborative drawing sessions. "You forget that you're 'making a drawing.' It's such a nonhierarchical situation. You could be with a world-famous artist, a three-year-old and a soccer mom, and there are no boundaries between any of you."

This article appeared in print with the headline "Off the wall."