

Unfinished Because Unfolding

Anne Scheid meditates on the landscape and the body in luminous drawings that blur the distinctions between the self and the other, the exterior and the interior, the seen and the unseen.

■ By Maureen Bloomfield

Unlike some artists who work in dry media, like colored pencil and pastel, and maintain that their works are paintings, Anne Scheid resolutely calls her works drawings. It's not a pedantic distinction. "It's important!" exclaims the artist in a jovial but unapologetic way. "When I was a junior in college, I had to choose whether to go into drawing or painting. Of course, the majority of my friends went into painting; it's more visible, it fills the museums, etc., but I wasn't drawn to painting. What I was drawn to was my hand making marks. Seeing the hand on the surface, seeing the marks that I made, and seeing how I was moving to be a part of that surface—that was what stirred me." Even when Scheid was studying the history of art, she felt less attachment to paintings. "When I studied the classics—Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo—their drawings were what excited me, because that's where I could feel close to them. When I described it to myself,

I thought I could see the artist's hand. At the time my decision to go into drawing was intuitive—I wasn't as articulate—but I chose what I was excited about and that was drawing."

For her newest cycle of works, Scheid starts by drawing on site, currently at Yosemite National Park, which is just an hour away from her home in Fresno, California. Each of her drawings is inspired by a place. She goes somewhere like Bridal Veil Falls in Yosemite, sits on the ground and fills pages of her sketchbook (Strathmore 400 drawing paper) "until I'm done, whatever that means."

For the next phase in the process, the artist draws the model from life. The way Scheid works, the model becomes not just someone who poses but someone who collaborates. Scheid's current model, Laura Goldstone, is herself an artist. Scheid explains how they work together: "Somehow, from the process of drawing a landscape, I've arrived at a sense of direction. I can't name what or how—it's all intuitive. Laura by now is in my studio. Because I've done so many drawings and have worked so long with a landscape I feel close to, I can direct her in the pose I'm looking for. It's not specific. It's more like feelings: For instance, I say, 'This one is going to be about birth.' Laura will assume those poses, and I'll do some gesture drawings on a separate sheet of paper until I find the pose that feels right. One reason I like working with Laura is that she can take my cryptic, vague directions—like 'I need something that's kind of falling down and not balanced and it feels kind of scary but there's comfort in it'—and she'll go, 'Oh, OK!' Once I find the pose, I tell her to hold it as long as she can. At this point I'm doing gesture drawings with charcoal powder; I'm using my hands. The process is

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Arcanum (Caves at Pismo Beach) (charcoal, 39x29)



exhilarating because I haven't a clue as to what's going to happen."

The process Scheid describes is similar to the way a choreographer works—prompting dancers to express a feeling and then working with the movements they come up with. "Another thing I love about Laura," says Scheid, "is that she's both adventurous and self-sufficient; she gets into poses that are kind of scary—scary in the sense that if she held them for too long, she could get a kink in her neck. I can't be worried about her or I wouldn't be able to work, so I just say, 'You're on your own.' I set the timer so I have a sense of how long it's been, and she'll commit to a certain amount of time and then she'll say, 'Anne, I have to take a break now,' and I say, 'I'm going to keep working; you go take care of yourself.' We work autonomously, which is wonderful. Many models can't do that; they're not involved, but I suspect that for Laura, it's a creative process, as well."

In the West, drawing is often defined as works in charcoal, graphite, colored pencil or Conté crayon on paper. In Chinese and Japanese art, there's no distinction between drawing and painting, maybe because the primary instrument is a brush and the primary medium is black ink; a classic painting can be devoid of what we would call color (the Chinese feel that black ink contains all the colors). For Scheid, the definition of drawing is broad: "Anyone who leaves his or her marks on a surface is drawing." Museums, of course, have to categorize works, and one way to do that is to separate works on canvas or wood from works on paper, but for Scheid the support is immaterial. "Drawings can be on cement, on a wall, on a cave, on the ceiling. You can make a drawing with paint on canvas. Cy Twombly (American, 1928–) might call himself a painter, but he has a drawer's heart." Scheid's materials are primarily variants of charcoal. In addition to powdered charcoal, she uses vine charcoal and all kinds of compressed charcoal—"the black, black stuff," some charcoal pencil, and in one of the drawings there's powdered graphite. The occasional white marks may be a white Rembrandt pastel or a white Conté crayon.

If a drawing lets you see the artist's hand, it usually also lets you see the process—the fits and starts, the erasures, the wayward, preliminary or inspired line that conveys energy and reveals how the artist saw and reevaluated what he was seeing (and feeling) over

The constant draftsman

Of the more than two hundred sketches and drawings of Michelangelo (1475-1564) that survive, the earliest ones are in pen and ink; the later, in red and black chalk. Some restorers surmise that the artist mixed wax with powdered chalk found throughout Italy and formed the pigment into sticks. For these drawings, Michelangelo preferred white or off-white papers with smooth textures.

Even during his last days, before death at the age of 88 in Rome, he drew with a tremulous hand, writing in his notebooks: "What spirit is so empty and blind, that it cannot recognize the fact that the foot is more noble than the shoe, and the skin more beautiful than the garment with which it is clothed?" A fine book is Hugo Chapman's *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).



St. Anne, the Virgin and Child; male nude and head in profile (pen and ink, 13x10) by Michelangelo

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time. Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954) left smudged lines and visible erasures in his work, as did Richard Diebenkorn (American, 1922–93); their works are less about the product than the process of the painting. Their translucent surfaces are palimpsests, wherein the viewer can trace the journey of the painting. This way of looking at art may be called modern or post-modern, but it's the age-old and, indeed, the only way to look at drawings.

An alternate aesthetic is espoused by artists who work diligently to cover up the process—the lines or marks they consider mistakes—so that the viewer is presented with a "finished" work whose surface betrays neither turmoil nor hesitation. Of those artists, Scheid



Incarnate Torrent (Lewis Creek) (at left; charcoal, 39x30), Corporeal Lana (Canyon de Chelly) (below; charcoal, 38x28) and Material Pool (Angel Falls) (at bottom; charcoal, 27x38)





Embodied Maelstrom (San Joaquin River)
(charcoal, 28x39)

Meet Anne Scheid

I'm sort of a disciple of drawing," says Anne Scheid. In addition to showing her work in solo and group shows, Scheid has created three installations that required her to draw on a museum's walls. The resulting work, by its nature ephemeral, was painted over at the conclusion of the show. "Jim Dine inspired me," says Scheid. "He did a series in Germany because a museum wanted to give him a show, but the director couldn't afford to have the works shipped over. Dine's wife, who's a filmmaker, did a film about "the happening" of the piece—the making of the drawings and then their destruction. I liked the idea of creating an environment where people walk into the drawing."

Scheid has a bachelor of fine arts degree from Edgecliff College and a master of fine arts degree from the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning. She's had solo exhibitions at the Fresno Art Museum, Malton Gallery (Cincinnati) and Loras College (Dubuque, Iowa). She designed sets for an opera, *Bambi*, which premiered at the Kadel Theatre in Seattle, and for a dance, *Monster Feminine*, which marked the 25th anniversary of City Dances at Fresno City College (California), where she teaches drawing.



PHOTO BY MICHELE BELANGER-McNAIR

says, in exaggerated disbelief, "They cover it up!" That's their intention!" It goes without saying that making the surface "perfect" or "finished" is not Scheid's objective. When she teaches her college classes in drawing, she tries to impart that lesson. "My students tell me they had to start on a new piece of paper because they couldn't completely wipe the drawing down or couldn't totally erase and get rid of it, and I say, 'No, no, no! You've missed the point! Those ghosts are part of the sense of time. Those ghosts let your viewer see where you've come from.'"

The aesthetic that insists that the process is part of the meaning of a work is, of course, manifest in other than the visual arts. A jazz pianist, listening to the musicians he's jamming with, can alter the melody or play with the tempo because the group is making music not primarily performing it. In a similar way, American poets like Frank O'Hara (1926–1966) and John Ashbery (1927–) let the reader in on the composition of the poem, as the poet starts with silly, everyday meanderings and then arrives at a language that encompasses the trivial and transcends it. Is the creative process in such cases a matter of will or of inspiration? Both, Scheid would say. In order to arrive at

inspiration, you have to put your time in; you have to wait. "You have to be in a place of not knowing," says Scheid, "in a place of darkness, because you don't know; you're trying to *find*." In order to be ready when and if you feel a spark of inspiration, you have to be in the studio (or at the piano or typewriter), you have to have established the habit of work. This habit of work is essential to Scheid's life as an artist. "When my students tell me, 'I didn't feel like drawing,' I say to them, 'So what. You draw no matter what you feel like.'"

The first works I saw of Anne's—about 20 years ago—were vibrant, gestural landscapes in pastel, where the forms were implied by line, not filled in as shapes. The style of Scheid's more recent work is both linear and gestural. The darkneses are multilayered and luminous, and the white space functions as it does in Chinese painting, as a blankness that is resonant, not empty. She describes her work of the last few years as "looking for a way in which the human form relates to the elemental—earth, air, fire, water. I haven't found it, but this current body of work (on view in this article) feels closer than I've ever been. After working steadily for a year and a half, this is the first time I've come close to finding a way to combine the figure with earth and air and water in a way that wasn't literal, wasn't trying to

create an illusion or attempt some kind of reproduction. What I want is for the earth and the figural elements to have a unique, even profound interrelationship."

Though it's manifested in an entirely different way, such a relationship is at the heart of the Asian aesthetic and, indeed, of ancient Chinese and Japanese painting where rivers and mountains, as well as waterfalls and clouds, are iconographic elements that comment on man's place in nature. While in Scheid's works the landscape and the figure are in some ways mirrors of each other, the landscape elements in Asian painting are vaster than the tiny presences of women and men. Living in California, Scheid is close to those influences; she often visits the excellent Asian museums and galleries in San Francisco and Los Angeles. And one of her favorite artists, Junko Chodos (Japanese-American, 1939–), lives in Long Beach. Other favorite artists are Li Huayi (Chinese, 1948–), Pat Steir (American, 1940–), Jim Dine (American, 1935–), Anselm Kiefer (German, 1945–) and William Kentridge (South African, 1955–).

Having achieved a measure of fame and a number of devoted collectors, Scheid made a decision a few years ago to stop setting show dates and go, as it were, underground. "I was in a place where I didn't want to keep doing what I'd done," she says. The pieces

that resulted are all large scale in charcoal on paper, often incorporating elements of collage. These splendid works bear titles that point to their origins. Each title notes the image and, in parentheses, the name of a place. The drawings then become repositories of feeling, bearing witness to a state of mind and to the landscape that inspired or reflected it. The figural elements are fragmented and at times concealed; they move in and out of the ground and, at times, the picture plane. During the course of my conversation with Scheid, she realized a way she could resolve what had been perplexing her: how to present these works. Could their sometimes jagged edges be accommodated under glass in a frame? Should they be mounted on a wall as an installation? Or the way she chose: to show them with the wood support so that an aspect of process, so integral to the work, would not be covered up. *A*