

Untitled Letter
by Brian Jungen

I stopped drawing in 1998. I abandoned it in favour of sculpture, which was fairly new to me at the time and gave me a charge that drawing never did. And yet, I had been drawing since I was a child, so when I stopped at the age of 28, I assumed I would return to drawing as an art-making format at some point.

From about the age of 12, I had started drawing imagery from mass media and had stopped drawing from my imagination. I think this transition had to do with the power that television and print media had on my adolescent brain, as well as the influence of my peers. I used drawing as a way to escape where I was living (Northern BC) and to transport me to what I was seeing on TV (mostly Southern California, Hawaii and New York City). By the time I moved to Vancouver at 18 to go to art college, I had started to use drawing as a device to ask questions about who I am as a Native Canadian, and as a nerdy gay guy with one foot in the city and one foot still stuck in the mud of Northern BC.

After art school I moved to New York City and spent roughly three years there. I drew because I had no money and no space to do anything else, and I was able to find some comfort in a small community of folks who were active in drawing at that time. I met Nicole Eisenman then, and her wall-drawing project had a profound influence on me. The brief time I hung out with Nicole convinced me that drawing could be a means for political and artistic freedom, and that I should take it more seriously. She and I shared a style of drawing, yet her work had a deep resounding quality as she put far more effort into her work than I did at the time. I left NYC to get serious about art.

When I was back in Vancouver, I started to draw on the cheapest materials I could find so that I could pump them out and wheat paste them on buildings around my studio, which was in the Downtown Eastside. Geoffrey Farmer and I shared that studio and we used drawing as a way to push each other, to see how extreme we could take it. I used images from stacks of National Geographic Magazines, and I would sometimes alter the figures to sexualize them, creating explicit tableaux of queer/Native aggression. I was interested in the tools of anthropology and how the West looked at the non-West. These drawings were almost automatic, full of overlapping line drawings. I made hundreds but very few exist today. I was interested in playing with stereotypes of Native folks but adding queerness to the mix and putting this work literally out in the streets. I wanted the images to be directly available to the public without the mediation of exhibitions. This led to my on-the-street solicited drawing project, which was my first attempt at installation art and the beginning of my departure from drawing.

So now I am 47 and I am drawing again, and it hasn't been easy. It is difficult for me to get excited about drawing, but it is elemental to the development of all of my thinking in art. I use drawing as a means to an end, an end other than drawing. For this new series, I am using the paper as a three-dimensional element, as a tool in the mark making process. Folds appear where I turn the paper on itself, to use it as an edge for pencil crayons. In some places there are images on both sides of the paper, but only one side is exposed.

I want paper to be present. Drawings are, after all, on a surface that exists in the world of objects.

I am also returning to mass media as a source material, only now I am using images from gay dating apps. I want these drawings to reflect who I am at this point in my life. I like that these apps provide endless source material and that men in remote places like Northern BC can share a little (or a lot) of themselves with the world. Social media is where we are at as a society, and its lure is that it enables us to be closer to each other. But I am afraid that we are becoming further apart. It only takes seconds to post or delete a selfie; these drawings will last longer. Perhaps these drawings can share a little of the loneliness, humour and celebration that resides in all of us.

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- Written for the launch of a new series of drawings produced for Wood Land School: *Kahatenhstánion tsi na ʔetiaterē ne Iotohrkó:wa tánon Iotohrha / Drawing Lines from January to December*