

Divergent Consistencies

The Studio and Community Art of Hugh Merrill, 1969-2009

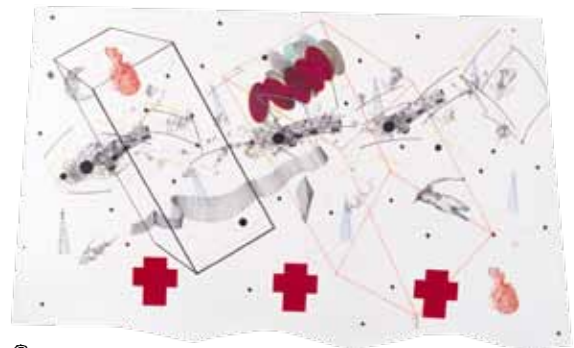
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www.leedyvoukos.com www.hughmerrill.com 816-686-8626

Drawings 2005-2009: From a Conversation on Drawing

Rebekah Callaway and Hugh Merrill



1.



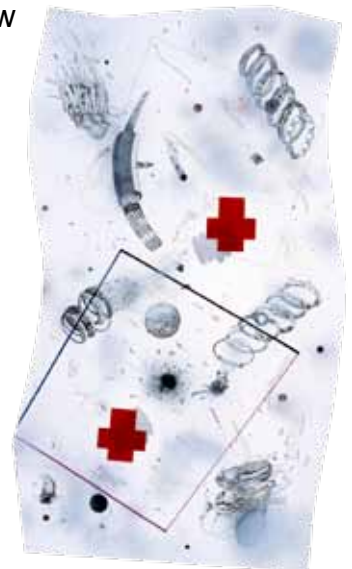
2.

Merrill concludes that drawing can be understood and investigated as a dictionary of marks that allude to a history of drawing languages, dialects and idioms. Each language stands for a past

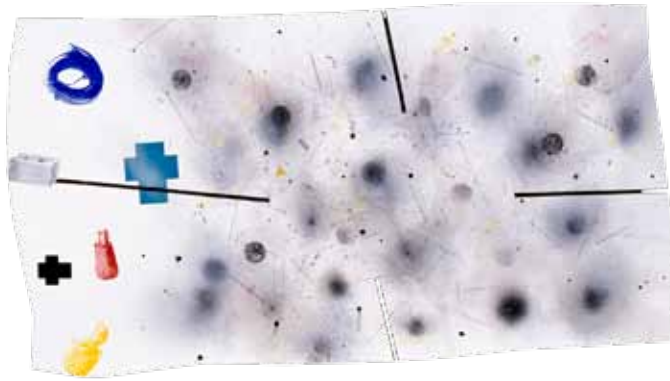
cultural perception. Each mark is a reference to how it once functioned and how meaning was signified in the past. The present use of a mark, no matter how innovative and “new,” always references its past function and history. “In short, to draw Mickey Mouse in the engraved language of Durer and to redraw Durer’s *Knight, Death and the Devil* as a Japanese brush and ink work is to say less about the content of the subject than the rebirth of the mark making system.” (Merrill)



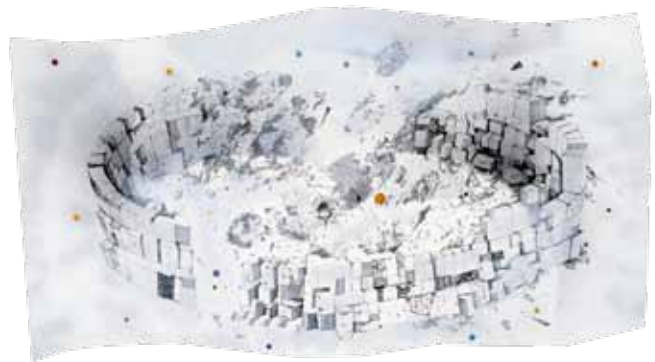
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Merrill's interest in drawing lies both in the ability of the subject to act as a symbolic metaphor and to see drawing as a history of mark making that progresses toward new readings. He uses drawing



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pens to reference a marking system in the style of old copper engravings illustrates and describes forms both architectural and natural. It references a scientific system of description, a format of drawing, which has been used in western culture to tell the "factual truth" about objects and events for primary use by engineers, doctors, educators and scientists.

It is a form of drawing purposely void of personal and passionate gesture, striving for rational specificity.

Merrill's use of the language of descriptive "truth telling," revealing objects that float aimlessly in and through an undifferentiated space, contradicts their factual

integrity. The underlying theme of the use and function of landscape space, the built environment, nature and commodities is played out in a space of vast cosmic proportions.



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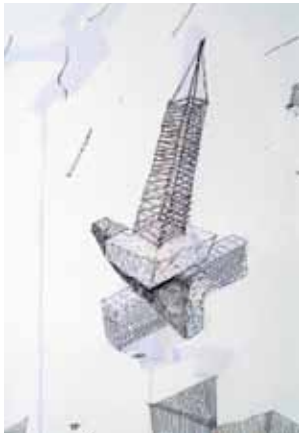
The interest Merrill has had in the landscape and ecological pressures has informed his work since the *Western Garden* etchings from the 1970's and 80's, but the physics of two dimensional space in the drawings begun in 2004 is much more complex. Nature is in constant change, and Merrill creates a space that is not anchored by time, place, atmosphere or light. The space also references the investigations of Al Held's paintings and drawings from the 1970's and 80's. These works were marked

by a tilted grid, cubic forms, and the reversal of positive and negative spaces, which slowly unfold

and spin off the picture plane, floating into the viewer's space. The forms in Held's work seem to be in constant change; they are symbolic of grand cosmic designs and timeless movements described through physics. Merrill uses these qualities to place nature and man-made architectural structures in an animated motion. Even the most stable of objects, natural or synthetic, mountains or pyramids, are floating on unsubstantial sub-straits, and they are unsupported by foundations equal to their mass and persona.



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The drawing languages combine Al Held's pictorial physics with Edward Tufte's research into visual communication. Merrill uses these mark making and pictorial systems to fill the void with disconnected houses, stone walls, fortresses, Indian baskets, mountains, landscape forms, clouds, burning piers, commercial products, jewelry, wooden watch towers, planets and molecules. All well described and detailed but floating as disconnected forms unrelated to time, function and place.

Merrill describes and comments on his recent drawings, 2009:

"The architectural structures, and pyramids are miss-constructed and poorly engineered stacks of blocks unable to support their own weight. Many are topped with watchtowers as if the imaginary society that produced them needs to look further into the uncertain future. They are social forms, personal lives and the best rational plans of mankind all assured collapse. They float in an immense unconcerned space, they alert us to our own instability and fragility as individuals, societies and (laughing) most recently our economy."



12.

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| 1. Bankers cinch 24x40 drawing and silkscreen on paper | 7. Rap Brown Dreaming: 2006 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper |
| 2. blood for-----: 2005, 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper | 8. Oceans 2007 42x28 drawing/silkscreen on paper |
| 3. chosen few : 2005, 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper | 9. Float World Install university Neb 2005 |
| 4. death of luxuria: 2005, 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper | 10. Drunk tiger 24x40 24x40 drawing and silkscreen on paper |
| 5. held tight and redundant: 2006, 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper | 11. Drawing detail |
| 6. hortus conclusus: 2005 36x68 drawing/silkscreen on paper | 12. Drury 50x42 drawing and silkscreen on paper |