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## Back to the old drawing board; Ancient art form made new again: [ONT Edition]

Goddard, Peter. **Toronto Star** [Toronto, Ont] 13 Aug 2005: H12.

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### Abstract (summary)

This and other pieces are about the drawing process more than about the art itself. It's drawing as process, in the brain as much as in the hand, that matters most in "Just My Imagination," as curated by the London, Ont.-based MMB collective of David Merritt, Kim Moodie and Sheila Butler.

New technology recharges old media; witness the rejuvenation of radio via the computer, iPods and the rest of digital technology. Same with drawing. By now it's evident the degree to which new drawing derives from TV (post-The Simpsons) as well as from 'zine culture. Perhaps that's why the least surprising thing in "Just My Imagination" is Jason McLean's *The Final Frontier* (2004), with its doodly sci-fi squiggles that would make for a fabulous illustration but that don't have much impact on the wall.

It's drawing as process, in the brain as much as in the hand, that matters most in "Just My Imagination" at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, which features Ed Pien's *Water Gods Playing Tricks* (2003), above, and [Alison Norlen]'s obsessive *Untitled* (2004), right, among others.

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### Full Text

If one were to read the critics - and sometimes it can't be avoided, like getting your shoes muddy - you would have been warned off two group shows in town as if they were toxic dump sites. And drawing seems to be the cause of it.

In one upmarket daily, you would have come across a sound trashing of "the horse they rode in on," at Wynick/Tuck Gallery. Among "the worst offenders" here is artist David Armstrong Six, whose watercolours "look like a bored whiz kid's notebook scribbles."

In the other upmarket daily, "Just My Imagination" at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art was thumped because its core idea - that drawing has become somewhat marginalized in contemporary art practice - seemed to be "a fearfully shaky supposition."

Since both critics are pretty good, they're probably right. What's more interesting is the way something as familiar as drawing - something nearly impossible to do well - is getting under everyone's skin.

Like, it's not exactly Robert Mapplethorpe depicting someone eating a banana or anything. It's drawing, right? It's the one common ground for about 2,000 years' worth of artists. Kids do it regularly, alone. In music, we'd be talking about playing your scales.

Even the fact that there's such a lot of it these days is getting to be old news. We've witnessed hitherto ghettoized comic veterans such as crotchety Robert Crumb emerge as genuine art stars - Crumb having his own mini-show at the recent 54th Carnegie International in Pittsburgh last year - and the emergence of new, drawing-only art stars such as Marcel Dzama and the Royal Art Lodge boys.

("Drawing has thrived in Winnipeg," says artist Cliff Eyland about his and the Lodge's home turf, "because it is the town that conceptual art forgot.")

The critical raves following the opening of "Peter Paul Rubens The Drawings" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York earlier this year were unmatched by most recent shows of any kind anywhere.

The latest wave can be found in "Just My Imagination," which features the spectacularly off-putting *Parasite* (2004) by the talented Luanne Martineau, a great dangling spidery installation made of felt and silk organza that suggests the inside of a chain smoker's lung.

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Lest this point weren't driven home deeply enough, there's Raphaëlle de Groot's video installation *Third Person, Drawing Session* at the University of Western Ontario (2004). Surrounded by drawn studies and quick sketches on the walls, the artist is shown on several TV monitors struggling with a paintbrush in a costume that looks like it came from a Grade 7 recreation of the movie *The Fly*.

The show has its share of flat-on-the-page stuff, most notably with *Substitute for the Prayer Wheel* (2004), from the slash and crash brain of John Scott and with Alison Norlen's obsessive *Untitled* (2004), a mad swirl of gray and dark blue that's too much of not a great thing. Mostly though, drawing has lifted itself beyond two-dimensions.

New technology recharges old media; witness the rejuvenation of radio via the computer, iPods and the rest of digital technology. Same with drawing. By now it's evident the degree to which new drawing derives from TV (post-The Simpsons) as well as from 'zine culture. Perhaps that's why the least surprising thing in "Just My Imagination" is Jason McLean's *The Final Frontier* (2004), with its doodly sci-fi squiggles that would make for a fabulous illustration but that don't have much impact on the wall.

You draw a lot more meaning out of McLean's *The Valley Beneath the Sun* (2004), while wearing the accompanying earphones plugged into the electronic-music soundtrack by McLean and Jeremy Schmidt of *Sinoia Caves*. Listening and looking at the drawing overlap wonderfully, like reading while plugged into a MP3 player.

Drawing taps into an attitude, too, something that doesn't pop up on any aesthetic radar. Today it taps into the nerdy, go-it-alone rebel, brainy but anti-intellectual, cool to the point of silliness and emotionally up in the air. (The title of "Just My Imagination" could well come from a quote in the catalogue from critic Hubert Damisch, suggesting that drawing "evokes what is missing in what it is showing.")

Add all of this together, and new drawing feels an awful lot like minimalism that never went to university.

This feeling continues at Paul Petro Gallery.

Chantal Rousseau's Two Doves (2005), from the Historiette (little story) series, is a looped, hand-drawn video, so spare in action and detail that's it's almost not there. I liked it but had no clue why.

Upstairs, Mark Laliberte's (((vvvvvvv))) (2005) DVD video projection is a loop of hand-drawn city images, with lots of sharp contrast in heavy, threatening black la cartoonist BEK (Bruce Eric Kaplan) at The New Yorker or Ontario's Seth. I liked it, too, and I knew exactly why. This could be action wallpaper for anyone who just can't get enough urban bustle.

"Just My Imagination" is on to Aug. 21 at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, 952 Queen St. W.

"The horse they rode in on," curated by Kelly Mark, has been extended to Aug. 27 at Wynick/Tuck Gallery, 401 Richmond St. W., Suite 128.

Mark Laliberte and Chantal Rousseau close tomorrow at Paul Petro, 980 Queen St. W.

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#### Illustration

It's drawing as process, in the brain as much as in the hand, that matters most in "Just My Imagination" at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, which features Ed Pien's Water Gods Playing Tricks (2003), above, and Alison Norlen's obsessive Untitled (2004), right, among others.

Credit: Toronto Star

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