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Pam Rosenblatt

Artist Rachel Hammerman discusses complex “mindscape” drawings and minute worlds of clay figurines



On one drizzly Saturday, August 18, 2012, WHLR arts editor Pam Rosenblatt entered a popular Watertown restaurant and settled down at an empty, small, round three person table nestled in a corner near an inactive fireplace. The restaurant was filled with people drinking coffee and eating bagels and sandwiches. The time was 10:45 a.m. and Pam was glad to see artist Rachel Hammerman arrive fifteen minutes later with artwork in hands. Rachel and Pam spent the following 40 minutes discussing Rachel's artwork and craft. In the next few pages, Rachel tells us in her own words all about her ink drawings, clay figurines, and artistic perspectives. Here's what Rachel spoke with Pam about:

My name is: Rachel Hammerman. I went to school in Western Massachusetts – Mount Holyoke College. And I graduated Mount Holyoke in 2004. Went back to New York for four years then came here in 2008. I lived in Somerville for two years. And then I went to Wayland almost two years ago.

I think I saw the call for the Arsenal Center for the Arts exhibit “30 Under 30” in January 2012 or maybe it was December 2011. I always scour the art pages for the calls. And I was eligible. I'm now the 30 in the “30 Under 30”. I'm the 30. I'm at the tip of the scale. There are two rounds to this exhibition. The first round opens on October 4, 2012. And the second one starts [this winter]. I'm in both rounds.

I guess I always did art. I didn't really realize that I took it seriously until college. I studied Studio Art. I did my junior year abroad in London. And I went to the Slade School of Art. I went there for a year. So that's my education. I had a little bit in every discipline: drawing, sculpture, painting. And I did them all pretty equally at the time. Now mostly I do drawing. But that's my background.

As a youngster, I never really had any career aspirations. And not that I fell into art, but that's always been going on. So I could always do art. And I never had a professional idea of what to do.



It's funny. You asked about art during childhood. Clay. That's what I did in my childhood. I did a lot of figurines. Then I didn't do them for probably 20 years because I did them as a child. Then I started playing around with them a couple of years ago. Then I went into a little frenzy doing [clay figurines] just as a break from the drawing. And now I take [clay] somewhat seriously.

And the figurines [that I make] are all figures – people no animals. I have no hard and fast rule about what type of person. I will say they tend toward playfulness not seriousness.

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Sometimes I remodel [the clay figurines]. Yes, I remodel them. They're soft, not put in a kiln. And sometimes, because they're not fired, they'll droop or something. So I guess they're a little vulnerable that way. It is important to me, perhaps I should say *for* me, that art be somewhat vulnerable, somewhat susceptible – to what and why exactly, I suppose depends on the person who does or does not like what he or she is looking at.

I currently use modeling clay called Claytoon. I started out literally using Play-Doh (you know, the childhood toy). But then I found that over time it does harden and cracks. And it gets this crystal film all over it. It's really gross. So then I stopped using it. So I used Plastalina modeling clay for awhile. That was really hard on my hands. And the Claytoons – that's my latest clay compound. It's probably between Plastalina and Play-Doh. It's usually in the children's section in any art store.



I started doing the ink drawings in my senior year at college. I was working on a sculpture at the time. The sculpture was all about balancing glass and clear plastics. And it took forever. And I started – the project was overwhelming – so I started drawing the planes of glass as I wanted them to sit. And I became as interested in the drawings as I was in the sculpture.

And then the drawings were easier to do. My reasoning was that after graduating from school you don't have a studio anymore unless you can pay for one. And even then you have to travel there and get all of the right equipment. But drawing, you can always carry drawings with you. You don't need a studio. So I switched over to that genre.

I've done blue ink drawings. And I started doing red. Now, I'm mixing them. But, when I got focused on this type of drawing, then it became necessary to fixate on the bare minimum to explore the actual drawing. The lines themselves – the



structures created by the intersections crossed and the tension, maybe call it the excitement, from the parallels that never will. The specific color didn't really matter. It was sort of arbitrary that it was blue. And then I liked that it was blue because you get attached to things after awhile, you know.

And then I did blue ink drawings for like three years, four years. And then I said, "You know, let me switch colors!" Originally,

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I literally had a blue pen there. And I liked the way the pen drew ... And I like the ball point pen because you get a nice range of tone and I had a lot of control over it. So I found this particular pen that I like. And it was blue. So that's how [I started drawing with blue ink].

My drawings just evolve. Well, it depends. At different times I've done things differently. Sometimes I have something in mind, and then I let it carry. And other times, I have nothing in mind at all. And one line sort of lands to another to another to another. So it is sort of like 'Automatic Writing'. You know, something looks right and then something looks off. So then you fill in where it's off.



The truth is that while the lines look straight, they probably aren't! If I took a ruler up to it, I don't think it would be so straight. Because it's only relative to itself, it appears to be straight ... No, I don't have a background in architecture, but my brother's an architect!

The paper I use is just acid-free archival, just a little off white. And I call the pieces ink drawings – blue ink, red ink. I usually have some elaborate title for each one. These drawings are sort of mindscapes, like landscapes.

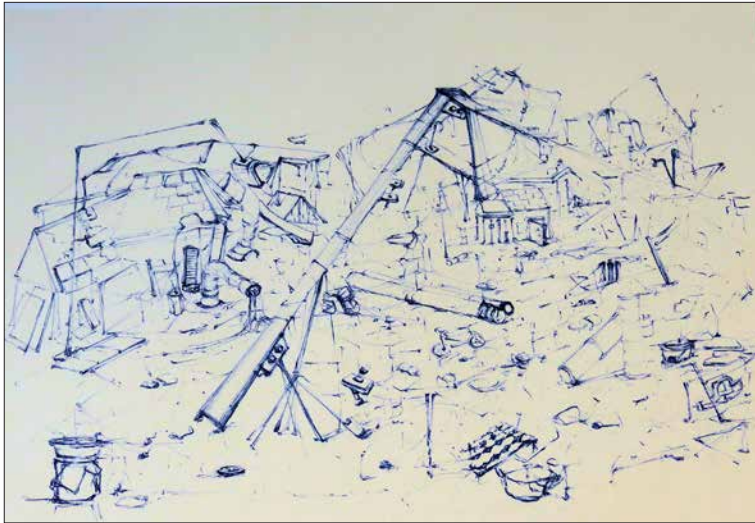
I also do red ink drawings of people. Sometimes blue. It doesn't really matter. I usually just do them on the subway or wherever – the T. And they're very small. One inch by 2 inches, maybe. I never exhibited them. I just drew them as an activity. It keeps my eye sharp – it's like an exercise.

I'm not one of those people who – like an Al Hirshfeld – who can just draw the way that the object looks in one whole swoop. My way is more that I can fix in on an image. When I'm trying to draw an object, it takes me a lot of lines to figure out where the line is supposed to be. I suppose that's the way a lot of people have drawn in the past, but they make a finalized image and maybe [people] don't see all of those adjustments. But the way that I do it, you can see all of those adjustments. And they all create one image. And who I draw? There are no rules. If I feel like drawing someone, I do.

To me, what's interesting about drawing isn't really the color of it. It's really more figuring out how do I get that person on the page. How can I fill them out? So whether it's blue or red or whether it's multi-color, that's not



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interesting to me right now. I'm more interested to calculate in how I get them [situated].

Neither my ink drawings nor clay figurines are created with story lines. I mean, the clay is very different than the ink. They're very much more representative so they're playful. And there's no story necessarily. But you can recognize a character, maybe, and its environment.

Whereas the drawings, they're more the story you bring to them – if you want to. Or you just like the way it looks. But I

don't necessarily have a story.

I like a lot of the Old Masters Italian Renaissance drawings. I like Rembrandt. More contemporary, I like Paul Klee. There's a sculptor who is working today called Sarah Sze. I like her work. I like a lot of people's work.

I've exhibited my artwork at a couple of times in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Kathryn Schultz Gallery was the name of the gallery. It is part of the Cambridge Art Association. My work has been shown in Peterborough, New Hampshire and in Boston. I only really started exhibiting my work within the past two years.



To people just entering the field of art, I don't know. I guess my advice is simple: If you like it, you should do it. If you want to do it, do it. If you enjoy it, you enjoy it.



Thank you. Thank you for the interview.