

Drawing Acts *Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation*

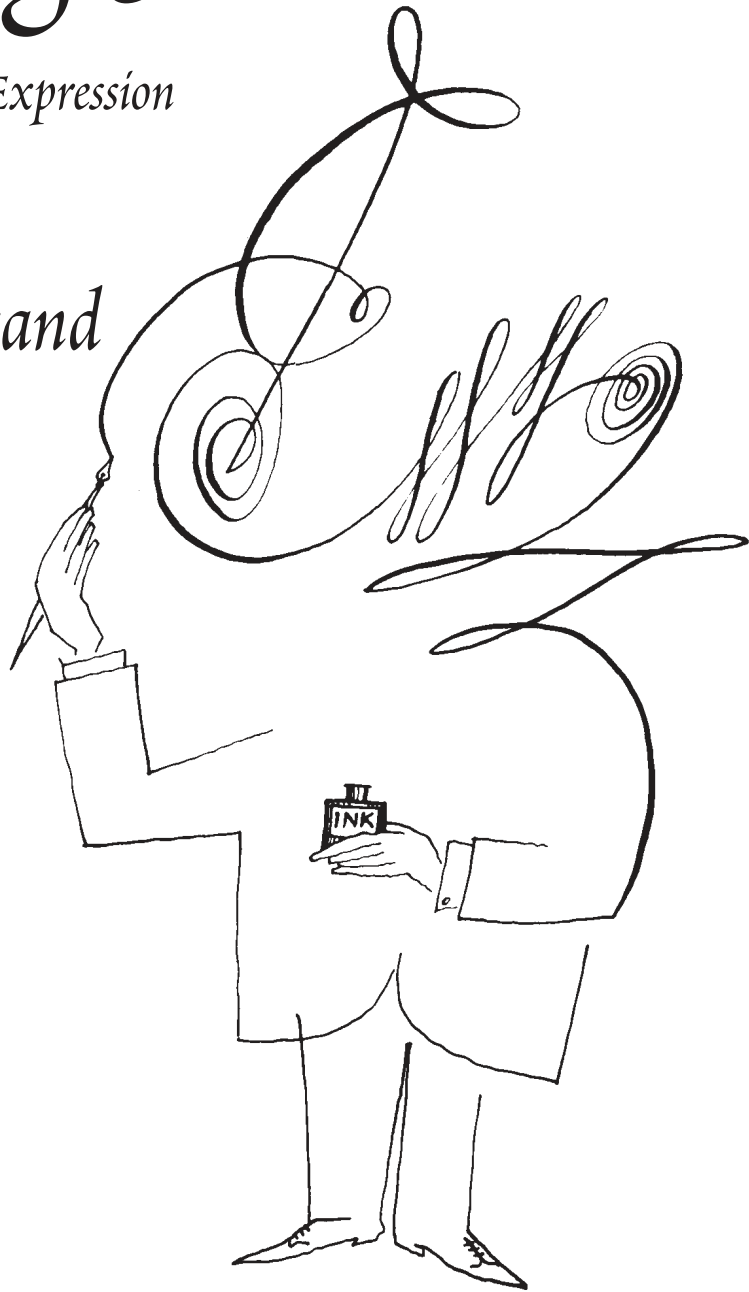
Drawing Acts is about drawing, as both art and act. Taking the study of drawings beyond the traditional agenda of connoisseurship, David Rosand explores the significance of the making of drawings, the meaning in the line of the draftsman, and the re-creative dimension of critical response. The book focuses on drawings by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Piranesi, Tiepolo, and Picasso, as well as on the history and theory of the medium itself. It seeks to establish new foundations for the criticism and appreciation of drawing, which is generally considered the most revealing record of artistic creativity, offering the most direct expression of the artistic self.

David Rosand is Meyer Schapiro Professor of Art History at Columbia University, where he also serves as chairman of the Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery. Elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he is also a foreign member of the Ateneo Veneto in Venice. Best known for his research on the art of Venice – through publications such as *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*; *Titian*; *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*; and *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*. He has also published in the area of modern art, notably *Robert Motherwell on Paper: Drawings, Prints, Collages*.

Drawing Acts

*Studies in Graphic Expression
and Representation*

David Rosand
Columbia University



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In memory of my father

Johan Herbert Rosand

1904–1997

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Preface

drawing *n.* 1. The act or an instance of drawing. 2. The art of depicting forms or figures on a surface by lines. 3. A portrayal in lines on a surface of a form or figure.

Act, art, image: the several, related meanings of *drawing* offered by a standard dictionary of the English language (*American Heritage*) suggest the range of experience implicated in the word. That experiential range – from marking to viewing, creation to interpretation – is the object of these studies in the phenomenology of drawing. My concern is to expand the discourse on the art, to encourage a kind of sustained criticism that acknowledges the profound implications of tracing a line, of recording the motions of a hand, of making an image by direct extension of the body.

The study of drawings – “old master” drawings – has long enjoyed its own tradition, a tradition of connoisseurship, focusing, above all, on questions of attribution, dating, and function. That tradition, however, can seem terribly hermetic at times, closed to all but the officially certified in practice. Drawings, for good reasons of preservation, are kept locked in cabinets, guarded by their curators or keepers. This protective attitude has effectively kept them segregated, objects somehow precious beyond the paintings or sculptures they often prepare. Drawings, however, are generally assumed to reveal more about the creative process and the personality of the artist than those more finished products; they should therefore present a particularly profound challenge to critical interpretation. And yet, instead of being subject to continuing critical scrutiny they are briefly exhibited, attributed, catalogued – “published,” as we say – and then reconsigned to the darkness of their solander boxes.

My hope is to open the discussion to a wider and deeper range of critical issues,



to bring drawings back to the center of the discourse on representation, image-making, and self-expression. Such issues, of course, have always been fundamental to the appreciation of drawing, latent in the discourse of connoisseurship and its assumptions of the presence of the artist in his mark. By the first century Pliny the Elder, recording the studio lore of ancient Greek artistic tradition, rehearsed not only the etiology of painting in the drawn outline but the professional anecdotes that testify to a sophisticated awareness of the particular qualities of the line itself. Two lines emerge from Pliny's accounts that, together, epitomize the functional range of the drawn line as representation and expression: the line of Parrhasios, inflecting itself into space, and the line of Apelles, a sign of the presence of the artist himself. These alternatives establish the poles of graphic signification, of the line as illusion or reality, a reference to a fictional object of representation or the indexical trace of its own creator. Indeed, looking back over the history of drawing to Book xxxv of Pliny's *Natural History* only confirms that the formal semiotics and the phenomenology of our own century offer legitimate critical access to the art of the past.

The following chapters hardly pretend to offer a full introduction to the history and techniques of drawing. Rather, by concentrating on individual artists and problems, they aim to explore that range of issues implicit in graphic imaging. While seeking to move critical discussion beyond the inherited agenda of connoisseurship, I recognize that any expansion of the discourse must inevitably build upon the achievements of that tradition: its accumulated visual wisdom, its sensitivity to the complex workings of line, and its theoretical assumptions, namely, that the drawn mark stands as permanent record of the act of drawing and, ultimately, of the actor, the draftsman. The legacy of connoisseurship is not to be found in any single volume; the great connoisseurs were practical critics, not aesthetic theoreticians, and their true contributions are to be found in their attention to individual artists and individual drawings. Precisely such concentration on a particular drawing – attending to its constituent marks and graphic systems, responding to its particular interpretive challenges – leads to the kind of visual focus necessary to sustain any more ambitious critical enterprise.

That enterprise must engage the image dialectically. Criticism is in large measure a re-creative act, a rearticulation of the artist's activity, a retracing of gestures, of impulses and retractions. The connoisseurs of the past always assumed they were in dialogue with the artist, who revealed himself through his touch; the challenge was to discover the man behind the mark. That challenge, it seems to me, remains, even if we may no longer be comfortable with the traditional vocabulary; terms like "genius" or "taste" no longer seem adequate to the deeply personal complexities we sense in drawings by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, or Rembrandt. That a drawing is a revelation of the self may be an axiom we share with traditional connoisseurship, but the very notion of the self can hardly be taken for granted in our century. Nor can we remain satisfied with the Cartesian duality that maintained a continuing Platonizing transcendence in traditional commentary. As the



direct record of motions of the body, a drawing inevitably takes us back to the drawing hand, to the body of the draftsman, in a kinesthetic circuit. Critical responsibility requires us to acknowledge the corporeal dimension of our response to a drawing, to the visible activity traced on the surface. Only then, by effectively retracing that activity in our imagination, can we participate in the experience of the drawing, that is, follow the imagining hand of the draftsman.



Having developed over the course of many years, these studies were initially tested in the lecture hall and seminar room; several generations of Columbia students, undergraduate and graduate, have collaborated in various ways in that development. My efforts at exploring a phenomenology of drawing first went public in 1977, when the late Agnes Mongan invited me to present a paper titled “Rembrandt’s Reach and Other Observations on the Phenomenology of Drawing” at a session on drawings at the annual meeting of the College Art Association. That short paper grew, was presented on other occasions, a version published by the Drawing Society, and eventually emerged as Chapter Seven of this book. Chapter Three, on Leonardo, was first formulated as one of the Franklin Murphy Lectures delivered at the Spencer Museum of Art of the University of Kansas in 1986, and which were published as *The Meaning of the Mark* in 1988; it was further elaborated as a Special Lecture on Psychiatry and the Arts at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in 1993 and as a Julius S. Held Lecture at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. The drawing of Michelangelo, the subject of Chapter Six, was the theme of a paper presented at the 26th International Congress for the History of Art in 1986; it too was expanded through presentation on a number of subsequent occasions – as a University Lecture at Columbia University and another of the Julius S. Held Lectures in 1993. Aspects of “*Disegno: The Invention of an Art*,” Chapter Two, were presented as a public lecture at Columbia in 1993 and in a paper to the international congress on Leon Battista Alberti in Paris in 1995. Parts of Chapter Eight, “The Antic Line,” were tested in an inaugural lecture at Columbia in 1996.

Many of the ideas in these studies, then, have already received preliminary public airing, and I am grateful to my hosts for the invitations to present my evolving ideas and to the audiences who responded with helpful criticism: to the late Robert S. Liebert, M.D., and the Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research at the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University; to the Drawing Center, the Drawing Society, the Frick Collection, the Department of Fine Arts of Harvard University; and to the New York Studio School and the University of Texas. I am especially grateful to Elizabeth Cropper, whose invitation to participate in a session at the 29th International Congress for the History of Art in 1996 encouraged a synthetic paper on “Remembered Lines,” which led me to see beyond the horizon of the present project; her cochair was Paul van den Akker, whose own explo-



rations into the history of drawing instruction assured me of a most responsive and sympathetic colleague.

The fullest public presentation of my ideas and the sharpest and most productive critical response took place in Paris in 1995 at the Centre d'Histoire et Théorie d'Art of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, where I offered a series of seminars under the title "Dessin/dessiner: Vers une phénoménologie du dessin." My hosts on that occasion were Daniel Arasse, Hubert Damisch, and Georges Didi-Huberman. To them, their colleagues, and their students I owe my deepest gratitude for providing a most challenging forum for testing ideas and exploring critical approaches to the study of art.

My art-historical study of old-master drawings began many years ago with the late Janòs Scholz, in a seminar held in the studio of that great collector and generous human being; it was there that, as a young graduate student, I first began to feel my way into those creations of past draftsmen, to touch old paper and to listen to it sing. That last phrase was echoed by another of my early mentors, until his death also my dearest colleague and friend, Michelangelo Muraro, who had a special feeling for the materiality of art. Among my Columbia teachers, two in particular guided me toward a clearer understanding of the many meanings of drawing: Julius S. Held, whose book on Rubens's drawings stands as a model of the most sensitive interpretive scholarship on the art and whose studies of Rembrandt demonstrate most profoundly its humanity, and Meyer Schapiro, who taught one the deepest meaning of the mark – both were true draftsmen in their own right. Charles de Tolnay, in a seminar many years ago, led a beginning graduate student into the world of Leonardo drawings and gave him the courage to confront them; I am sorry that I never thanked him properly.

Other friends and colleagues have guided me by the examples they have set and by their personal commitment: James Ackerman, whose encouragement and support over many years has meant more to me than he may have known; Stephen Addiss, who shared long and enlightening hours with me before his beloved calligraphy; Daniel Arasse, who has always challenged me by the critical intelligence of his own work and by his probing questioning of mine; John Elderfield, who has quietly enlarged our critical vision in the field of drawings; Michael Fried, who has long been exploring the phenomenological dimensions of image-making, and Leo Steinberg, who has articulated the manifold qualities of the drawn line with enviable sensitivity and precision. Each of them has shown me a way. Finally, I owe a very special debt to an artist who so generously shared ideas, experience, and friendship, as well as his art: Robert Motherwell talked art as eloquently and feelingly as he made it, confirming the meaning of the mark as personal expression.

Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1985–86 and 1991–92 enabled me to spend time in the drawing collections of Europe, just looking – and I am grateful to the curatorial staffs of those collections for facilitating my study of the drawings in their care, and especially to Jane Roberts, then curator of the print room at the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. In 1992, the legendary



supportive hospitality of the Rockefeller Foundation's Study and Conference Center at Bellagio afforded ideal time and place in which to write a draft of an introductory chapter.

For an embarrassingly long time I have owed this book to my children, who have been waiting for it with loving, if unrestrained, impatience, and to my wife, whose patience was of necessity greater and whose understanding, encouragement, and constant support helped bring the project to fruition. Above all, I have owed this book to my father, my first drawing master, to whose memory it is dedicated.