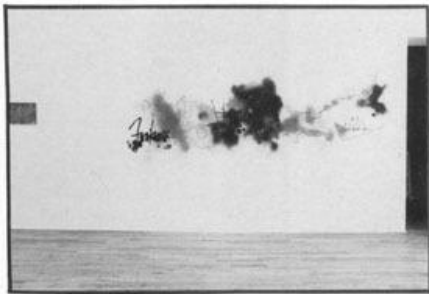


# New York



PRINT April 1982

Donald Kuspit of "New Drawing in America" at The Drawing Center



Installation view of "Critical Perspectives" room curated by Edit deAk, showing work, left to right, by James Nares and Futura 2000.



John Digby, *Camel*, 1981, collage, 6 1/2 x 5'.

the psychosocial as well as artistic issue of the day.

If we look at the exhibition as a whole, there are no winners. Underneath the exuberance, one must distinguish between old settlements (Burnham, Howell, Masheck, Plagens, Tucker) and new frontiers (Cohen, deAk, Lawson), even if some of the new frontiers are in danger of becoming suburban and some of the provincial settlements have an urban flair. I personally am sympathetic to Lawson's muted appeal to Melpomene, and less temperamentally in tune with deAk's language of hype, however pointed the art it dramatizes in fact is. But I respect the fact that they both present an art that is not comfortable with itself—it is being comfortable that makes one passé—and so can be exploratory and heuristic. I see Burnham's artists as all too comfortable in their self-indulgence, Cohen's *Energism* as on the way to complacency, deAk's artists as full of savage dissatisfaction not unrelated to past modes of dealing with frustration, Howell's performers as self-satisfied, and Lawson's artists as full of muted dissatisfaction and in search of inner purpose (there's lots of outer purpose in deAk's choices). Masheck's artists are the finicky princesses of an unpretentious abstraction, who choose to sleep on the pea to feel uncomfortable and committed; Plagens' artists offer us a muscle-building but finally comfortable abstraction, and Tucker's artists use comfortable modes to express social discomfort. The exhibition is a grand panoramic display of old actualities and new possibilities of art—of old nonconformities that have become conformist art that has a

conformist look struggling toward dealing with nonconformity. One is never far from the other.

#### "New Drawing in America"

This was another kind of group show, the first half of an exhibition of drawings by 174 artists (one work each). To me it posed a problem: the lack of profile of drawing today. Drawing has acquired a multitude of uses and lost definition as a medium. This is perhaps an unavoidable consequence of the so-called expansionist esthetic and the multimedia approach, with their implicit synthesis of all in all; but they seem increasingly a matter of diminishing returns. The sense of vision that their variety of combinations initially evoked seems lost. Somewhere between the alternative, purist approach, with its high-abstraction results, and the expansionist acceptance of diversity and visual irony, there has to be a renewed sense of the modesty of drawing. It was traditionally a source of exploratory tentativeness or idealized impulsiveness and immediacy—simultaneously preparatory and instinctive, however much each of these aspects might be isolated and absolutized. The drawing existed in relation to a painting, a sculpture, an architectural project; it was the first sign of intensity and intention. In this exhibition, drawing tends to be pursued as an end in itself, as a medium having a certain effect on an image already conceived as finished. Many of these images are intriguing (or seem so—I viewed some works not yet hung by their catalogue photographs only). But I don't really see what they have to do with drawing, except materially. It is only by a haphazard extension

of the term that John Billingham's paper-and-cardboard box with seashells on it or Armand Conine's papier-mâché relief can be called drawings.

Many of the images are noteworthy, although it is not clear what calling them drawings does for them. I like the images offered by Baldo Diodato, Mark Innerst, Jane Kaplowitz, Thomas Lawson, Nachume Miller, Graham Nickson, and Lydia Viscardi, among others, for their psychological impact and technical clarity. I like those of Sarah Canright, John Digby, Jak Katalan, Christopher Knowles, Kevin Larmon, Kurt Ossentfort, and Percy Scott, among others, for their lively materiality. I can even be tolerant of the academicism and generally nostalgic look (in terms of style or observation) of Roland Ayers, Eric Ying-Lam Chan, Guy-Dorian Cristol, Katie DeGroot, William Garbe, Sherri Hol-laender, Thomas LoCicero, Gerald Pryor, and Nancy Ring, among others. But none of these have that sense of making a beginning that drawing is all about. There are certain exceptions—Paul Neagu's drawing for a sculpture project, for example; but most of the work here exploits the drawing medium to give a sense of inadvertency to an already preconceived image, as in Grover E. Mouton's treatment of Wall Street. There is all too rarely that sense of fresh discovery that goes with drawing. The panoramic multidimensionality of the show as a whole was rewarding, however, and a kind of compensation for all the other troubles one might have had with it.

#### HANS NAMUTH

This was a meretricious show; it was

about the selling of artists. It was even meretricious stylistically, with the forwardness of the color in these photographic portraits and the posturing of the artists who are their subjects. Why write about it, then, why not let it pass unnoticed into oblivion? Because it is a symptom of that adulation of the artist as a "phenomenon" that Clement Greenberg long ago condemned in the treatment of Picasso, but which is still prevalent. It is a symptom of art's condition as entertainment, and very much a part of that social order of events in which popular entertainers celebrate themselves. For that reason, I think I should mention none of the artists, who already have enough publicity, but rather deal with the disease. Its symptoms are familiar; the greats are grouped together in a pantheon which not only has about it the aura of hierarchical exclusivity and idealization, but also conveys the sense that all the work that issues from it, whether good or bad, is a sign of genius. And that is just the point: to make one overlook the work, or at least not seriously evaluate it. The work becomes secondary to the persona created by the photograph, which through its visual hype converts a fallible, mortal artist into an infallible creator. The worship and self-worship of artists, and the cult of creativity, can be fatal, for they prod the artist into delusions of grandeur. Finding significance in their own persons, these artists hardly seem to have to worry about significance in their art. In the end these pictures are about privilege, wealth, and the upper-classness open to a few star artists. This may all seem platitudinous, but what it speaks to remains seriously rampant. Of

## "New Drawing In America"

### The Drawing Center

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