

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

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FOUR DRAWING SHOWS TO SEE NOW

*Works on paper from the Renaissance to the
age of Donald Trump, at the Morgan Library
and the Drawing Center.*

By Andrea K. Scott

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Andrea Mantegna's "Three Standing Saints," made circa 1450.

Courtesy Thaw Collection; The Morgan Library & Museum

The practice of drawing in Europe is as old as the lines in the caves at Lascaux, but there was a major change during the Renaissance: works on paper became valued on their own terms, not just as records of the visible world or illuminations of manuscripts but for offering an intimate glimpse into how artists think. In other words, the history of drawing as we know it runs on a parallel track with the annals of patronage. In the almost unbearably excellent exhibition “Drawn to Greatness: Master Drawings from the Thaw Collection,” which opened last week at the Morgan Library & Museum, you can trace the development of the medium, from the mid-fifteenth century to the end of the twentieth century, through the eye of one passionate patron: Eugene Thaw, who is now ninety years old. Make that two patrons: it was Thaw’s wife, Clare—who died earlier this year, at the age of ninety-three—who urged him to start buying art. This was before they were even married and while she was working as an assistant at the gallery he ran on Madison Avenue. The Thaws donated four hundred and fifty drawings to the museum; a hundred and fifty are here, from a sublime pen-and-ink drawing by Andrea Mantegna, made around 1450, sketching three vantage points of a sculptural saint, to a black-and-white Ellsworth Kelly construction, from 1976, which is as simple and miraculous as an eclipse. Best of all, for every Rembrandt, Goya, Picasso, and Pollock (or Fragonard, Monet, Cezanne, and Matisse), you’ll make a discovery, like the 1596-1602 ink-and-watercolor study of a Boschian bird in the company of a hyper-real toad, frog, and dragonfly, by the Netherlandish Jacques de Gheyn II, or the landscape, made circa 1828, by the English visionary Samuel Palmer, whose subtly anthropomorphized oak tree rivals any weirwood in Winterfell and is enough to hold a “Game of Thrones” fan enthralled until Season 8 airs.



Judith Bernstein, "Cabinet of Horrors," 2017.

Courtesy Judith Bernstein / The Drawing Center

Now that you're up to speed on half a millennium's worth of works on paper, head downtown to the Drawing Center for a triple-header on the medium's current state of affairs. The intrepid Judith Bernstein, who has lived and worked in Chinatown for fifty years, most of them in utter obscurity, fills the main gallery here with "Cabinet of Horrors," a screed against Donald Trump in the form of big acrylic paintings on paper, installed against screaming orange walls. Subtle it's not—in the five-foot-tall "Capital Trumpenschlong," the U.S. Capitol building flies a flag from a cock-and-balls pole—but Bernstein has been protesting abuses of power with such visions of manhood since 1966, when George Wallace was the governor of Alabama. It's gratifying to see the art world *finally* catch up to her. Read Mickalene Thomas's interview with the artist in the accompanying catalogue and find out why she's been an unsung hero to generations of feminists.

Few artists could hold up to the gale force of Bernstein’s installation. The good news for Eddie Martinez is that he’s one of them. The curator Claire Gilman invited the Brooklyn-based painter to re-create a wall of his studio that has been accruing his abstract drawings since 2011. (It occupies all four walls here.) There are about two thousand drawings all told, from idle doodles to sketches for paintings, and the cumulative, very happy effect is of being inside the artist’s brain. The Surrealist technique of automatic drawing meets the chutzpah of a hand that’s been known to tag walls with spray paint. Martinez has been swapping in new works as the show goes along, upping the ante on drawing from life—this is drawing as living.



Eddie Martinez, “Sound Bath,” 2015.

Courtesy Eddie Martinez / Mitchell-Innes & Nash / Timothy Taylor Gallery / The Drawing Center

Downstairs from the Bernstein and the Martinez exhibitions is a selection of works from the Drawing Center’s 2016-17 “Open Sessions” residents. Two high points: Slinko, a Ukrainian artist based in New Jersey, whose ink storyboard drawings suggest a collaboration between Raw Comix and Thomas Piketty, and the exquisitely intricate watercolor-and-pen drawing “Princesses,” by Jennifer May Reiland, a fairy tale unafraid to spill its guts.