

# whitewall

CONTEMPORARY ART AND LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

## KARL HAENDEL: REDRAWING

By Simon Watson  
Winter 2008

Karl Haendel makes monochromatic graphite drawings and installations based on preexisting photographic images from family albums, front-page political news, and rock iconography. He renders his ghostly, meticulously crafted graphite drawings with radical shifts in scale and then installs them salon-style so that they constantly refer to one another.

For "I Need Work," his recent solo show at Harris Lieberman Gallery in New York, Haendel presented a selection of works that had both personal and collective resonance. The show's title playfully refers to the importance of his daily studio practice, his psychological dependence on work, and his view of the artist as laborer. It was his most autobiographical exhibition to date: He took images from the political landscape of the 1970s, such as the Democratic National Convention, along with family snapshots, a letter addressed to his father, Jewish baseball heroes, his desktop, and his own scribbles. In one particularly poignant drawing, he asks his father a long list of questions: "Did you have any friends who died in Vietnam?" "Were there any black kids in your school?" ...

Haendel credits Gerhard Richter with inspiring him, but although Richter experiments with stylistic versatility, Haendel's style remains relatively consistent. His stated objective is to expose the relativity of truth, hence he pillages from popular culture or borrows and repeats fragments of phrases (for example, "Jesus Laughs"). And his work also clearly echoes the work of New York's Conceptual art traditions of the 1980s, including the punk sensibility of Robert Longo's "Men in the Cities" drawings, the dark richness of Troy Brauntuch's drawings, and the devil-may-care attitude of Richard Prince's redrawn cartoons. But through all of these references Haendel stands independently, dragging the eighties into the fractured world of the 21st century.

More than a mere human photocopier, Haendel creates drawing installations that have a truly haunting and sensual quality. He sweeps together the flotsam and jetsam of America's fractious social and political history with reveries from his personal history (family, childhood, and artist's studio) to form a poignant and powerful vision of these disturbing times.

Los Angeles-based artist Karl Haendel has been exhibiting continuously since graduating from UCLA with an MFA in 2003. He has shown three times at Anna Helwing Gallery; had a solo Focus exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles; and has exhibited in group shows in New York at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Center for Curatorial Studies, at Bard College (the CCS show "Uncertain States of America" went on to travel to Astrup Fearnley Museum for Modern Art, Oslo, and the Serpentine Gallery, London). Most recently Haendel had his first New York solo show at Harris Lieberman Gallery.



How did you get out of going to Vietnam? Were there any alcoholics in our family? Did your Bar Mitzvah mean anything to you? Did you ever think of killing yourself? How did you feel knowing everybody who lived near us had more money? How important was it for you to marry a Jew? How many women have you slept with? Did you ever cheat on mom? Were there any black kids in your school? How did you feel about Martin Luther King? How about Joan Baez? Did you ever march on anything? Did you ever come across cocaine? Did anybody ever try to convert you to Christianity? Have you ever eaten foie gras? Did you ever wonder if you were gay? What did you talk about on your first date with mom? What sports were you good at as a kid? Did you ever go to a hooker? Did you ever have anal sex with mom? Do you often think about dying? Did you ever shit your pants? Why did you decide to have children? Were you ever depressed as a young man? What if I came out retarded? What did you think about Nixon? Did you have a favorite sibling? Does it feel to you that time is speeding up? Did you ever fuck a black girl? Why haven't you gone to Israel? What charities do you give to? Did you ever wish you chose a different career? What did you want me to be? Did you have any friends who died in Vietnam? Did you wish you were taller? Did you ever get into a fistfight? When did you stop feeling like a boy? Do you read the letters I send you? Did you ever disappoint your parents? Do you ever wish your life turned out differently? What are your regrets? What makes you cry? Do you think you are good looking? Do you often want to fuck other women besides your wife? Did you ever jerk off while thinking about one of my girlfriends? When were you the happiest? How did you learn to cook? Why were you so angry all the time? How close did you come to hitting me? Did you ever vote for a Republican?

Karl Haendel

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Questions for My  
Father #2

2007

Pencil on paper

61 x 45 inches  
All images Courtesy of the artist  
and Hans Lieberman, New York