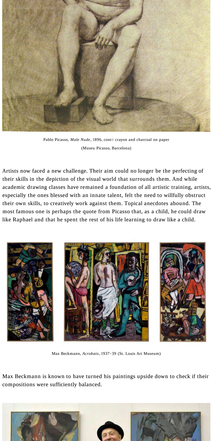
C.G. BOERNER
DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

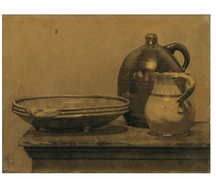
Distraction / Abwechslung
15 November 2021

Once the "making and matching" that Ernst Gombrich describes in his 1960 study *Art and Illusion* as the essence of artistic development had led to the consummate duplication of what we see within the perspectival picture frame, an endpoint was reached. The underlying paradigm of constant progress came to an impasse and the question arose where to go from here. It gained further urgency through such new media as photography which seemed predestined to take over what for a long time had been one of Art's most prominent roles, namely that of realistic representation. As a result, the picture plane was fragmented by Cubism, and abstraction emerged as an alternative way of image-making. What ensued was a lively dialogue between figurative and non-figurative art throughout the twentieth century.



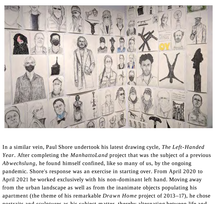
Pablo Picasso, *Male Nude*, 1896, conté crayon and charcoal on paper
(Museu Picasso, Barcelona)

Artists now faced a new challenge. Their aim could no longer be the perfecting of their skills in the depiction of the visual world that surrounds them. And while academic drawing classes have remained a foundation of all artistic training, artists, especially the ones blessed with an innate talent, felt the need to willfully obstruct their own skills, to creatively work against them. Topical anecdotes abound. The most famous one is perhaps the quote from Picasso that, as a child, he could draw like Raphael and that he spent the rest of his life learning to draw like a child.



Max Beckmann, *Acrobats*, 1927–28 (St. Louis Art Museum)

Max Beckmann is known to have turned his paintings upside down to check if their compositions were sufficiently balanced.



Georg Baselitz in front of *Portrait Elke I* and *Du, Portrait (Frauke Dahlem)*, both dating from 1969 and among his first upside-down paintings (gifted by the artist and his wife to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on the occasion of its 150th anniversary in 2020)

What could be described as a tactical move on Beckmann's part, Georg Baselitz made into a strategy, not only presenting his compositions upside down but also painting them that way. It is often observed how this distracts from the paintings' subject matter by shifting the viewer's attention toward their non-representational qualities. Yet it also fundamentally impacts the creative process by establishing a conceptual distance between figurative contents and the picture plane.

Willem de Kooning, *Still Life (Bowl, Pitcher, and Jug)*, ca. 1935, conté crayon and charcoal on paper
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

The young Willem de Kooning excelled in the classes of his teacher Johannes Gerardus Heyberg and his drawings produce astoundingly precise still-life and portrait drawings that were, in his own words, "like photographs, except more romantic." He felt the need to create resistance to his own facility by fixing the pencil on a stick and drawing with his non-dominant hand.

In a similar vein, Paul Shore undertook his latest drawing cycle, *The Left-Handed Year*. After completing the *Manhattan/Land* project that was the subject of a previous *Abwechslung*, he found himself confined, like so many of us, by the ongoing pandemic. Shore's response was an exercise in starting over. From April 2020 to April 2021 he worked exclusively with his non-dominant left hand. Moving away from the urban landscape as well as from the inanimate objects populating his apartment (the theme of his remarkable *Drawn Home* project of 2013–17), he chose portraits and sculptures as his subject matter, thereby alternating between life and its artistic condensation in various ways of spatial stasis.

Shore came to drawing later in life. His early creativity was sparked by a silversmithing class in high school. He then made sculpture and paintings for himself before enrolling in the fine arts program at Eastern Michigan University where one of the first classes he took was, quite literally, "Drawing 1." (For his MFA he went on to the famed Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, MI.)

Shore had to master drawing through constant study and practice—which is probably also the reason why he is an excellent drawing teacher. This makes it all the more intriguing to see him revisit this experience, voluntarily handicapping himself by using his left hand, yet being nonetheless simultaneously informed by a decades-long experience of what drawing is and can do.

The comprehensive selection from the 180 works executed during his "left-handed year," which complements his current showing of *Manhattan/Land* in the Blackburn 20|20 Gallery at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in Manhattan (through Saturday, November 20), is bookended by the first and last work belonging to this project, Studio835's statue of Abraham Lincoln from 2021 that stands on the steps of the New York Historical Society on Central Park West.

Observing the "improvement" between the two is only one of the rewards awaiting any visitor of Shore's exhibition. Shore states that when he began this experiment, he looked at untrained artists for inspiration, only to quickly realize: "But of course, I'm not an untrained artist." So instead, while unable to avoid constant improvement and refinement, he reminded himself of the saying "No matter, where you go, there you are." Ultimately, it is the exploration of this new terrain, characterized by the unfamiliarity of creating outside of what he felt comfortable with, where the true fascination of his project lies.

Paul Shore @ Blackburn 20|20 Gallery

Paul Shore
Left-Handed Year

Blackburn 20|20 Gallery
The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts
525 West 19th Street, 7th floor
New York City

presented by C.G. Boerner & Jonathan Miller Spun Fine Art

through November 20, 2021
Noon to 6pm Tuesday through Saturday
and by appointment with Jonathan Miller Spun 646-234-1043

Masks and proof of vaccination required for entry

Copyright © 2021 C.G. Boerner. All rights reserved.