

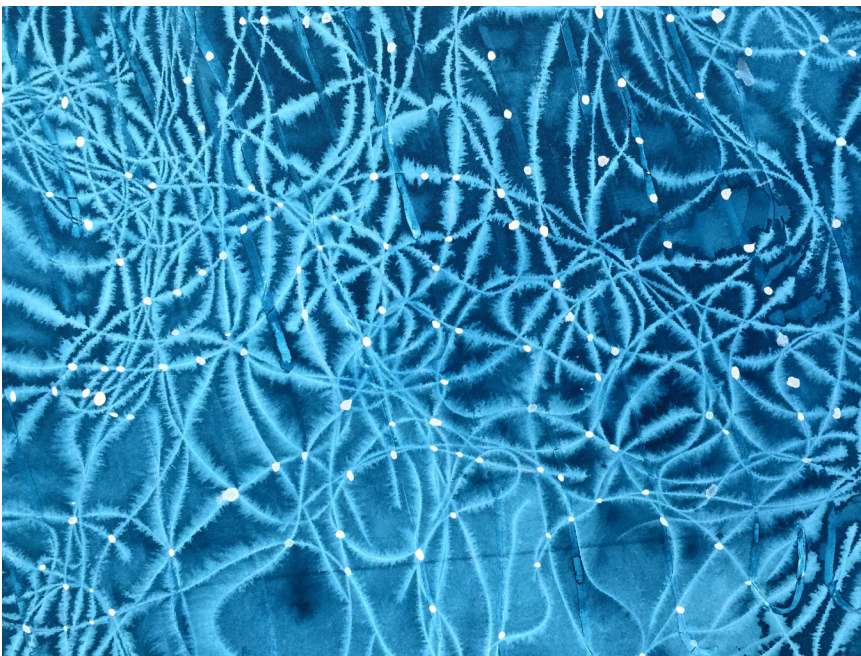
# brutjournal

\* Founder & Editor: Edward M. Gómez \*

outsider art • art brut • the unclassifiable • the avant-avant-garde

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*A work by Bastienne Schmidt, in which the artist used watercolor and randomly placed string on paper to create an abstract composition that is dense with luminous lines. Photo courtesy of the artist*

## ART-MAKING: KNOWING WHEN TO DRAW THE LINE

### FOR SOME ARTISTS, IT ALL BEGINS WITH A LOVE OF DRAFTSMANSHIP

by Edward M. Gómez

Who remembers high-school geometry class? A line is infinite in length, but a line segment has a fixed measurement. A ray is a line that extends infinitely in one direction from a particular point. Lines drawn from point to point in groups of three or more points form shapes. And let's not even get started on trapezoids, rhomboids, and hypotenuses.

A point or a dot might be the most basic mark anyone can ever make, but a group of contiguous points or dots creates another fundamental kind of mark — a line. Ever since, in prehistoric times, caveperson A walked next door to the home of caveperson B to ask for help drawing a bison or a bird on his or her own cave's interior walls, humans have understood the expressive power of line to decorate, to depict subjects in the perceived world, and to represent the imaginary.



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Laura McManus, "September Fields" (detail), 2018, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 48 x 48 inches. Photo by Bill Westmoreland

Paul Klee, the pioneering modern artist whose entire oeuvre is a joyous celebration of draftsmanship — and color — once observed, "A drawing is simply a line going for a walk." Klee, who must have been a good geometry student, also noted, "A line is a dot that went for a walk."

Wassily Kandinsky, that other early formulator of modern art's outlook and ethos, wrote a book, *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, which was first published in 1926. In New York, in 1947, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and its Museum of Non-Objective Painting (which later became the Guggenheim Museum) republished Kandinsky's book in English as *Point and Line to Plane*.

In it, the Russian-born Kandinsky, whose abstract works aimed to capture and express a spiritual quality, wrote, "The geometric line is an invisible thing. It is the track made by the moving point; that is, its product. It is created by movement — specifically through the destruction of the intense self-contained repose of the point. Here, the leap out of the static into the dynamic occurs."

Instinctively, artists like Kandinsky and Klee, and legions of others who came before and after them, understood that drawing — in essence, the making and skillful manipulation of lines — was the very lingua franca of the visual and design arts.

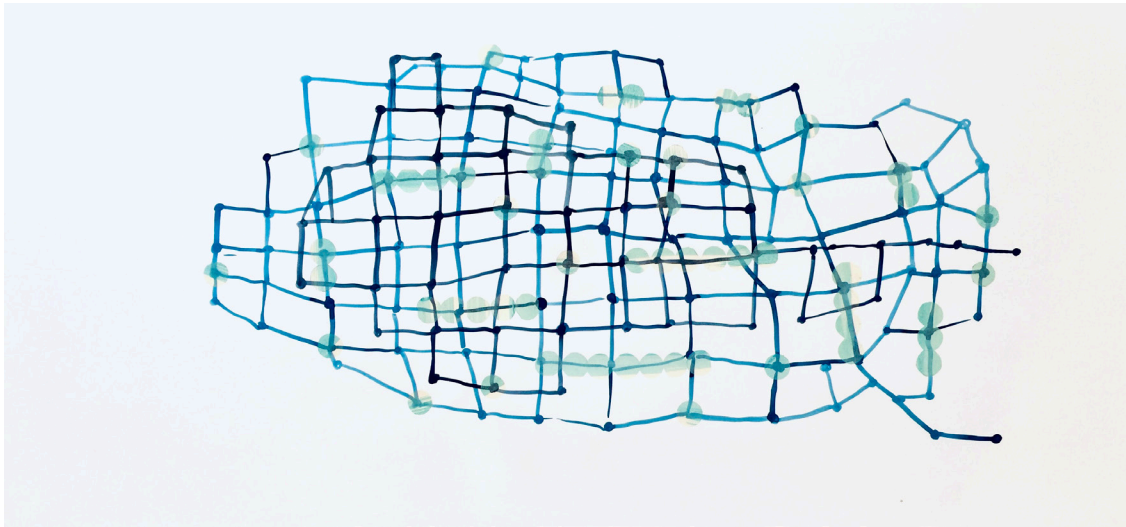
Lisa Remeny, "Ari Drawing Me, Drawing Her," 1979, ink on paper in sketchbook, 8 x 10 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist



However, over the last several decades, at least in many art schools in the United States, traditional emphasis on drawing and so-called basic art-making skills has been overwhelmed by the influence of idea-driven conceptual art, which often has effectively “dematerialized” the art object. It has also been affected by postmodernist critical theory, which has devalued or even dismissed the value of an artist’s draftsmanship, craftsmanship, and technical proficiency in the handling of his or her materials, while pooh-pooing the notion of individual authorship of works of art.

In effect, today, when so many artists, dutifully following pomo’s dictates, still merely “appropriate” and “recontextualize” their source materials, to practice skilled draftsmanship — to create something fresh, new original with one’s own hands has become something of a radical act.

Recently, **brutjournal** caught up with four artists for whom drawing plays a central role in their art-making. They include **Bastienne Schmidt**, **Lisa Remeny**, **Laura McManus**, and **Jon Waldo**. They shared with us their thoughts about the fundamental function of drawing and line-making in their work.



*An untitled, mixed-media work by Bastienne Schmidt. Photo courtesy of the artist*

### **Bastienne Schmidt**

A German-born artist whose father was an archaeologist, today Schmidt is based in a town on the east end of Long Island. She also spends time in New York City, where she is represented by Ricco/Maresca Gallery. An inveterate experimenter, Schmidt enjoys exploring the art-making potential of the humblest materials, from scraps of fabric to ordinary string. She says, “My art is very process-based.” She adds that “it is very freeing to make mistakes,” because unexpected developments in the studio can “inform my next steps as I work on a new piece.”

In addition, Schmidt told **brutjournal**:

“I was always drawing as a child; it was a comfortable world for me to retreat into. I grew up in Greece as the daughter of an archeologist, and we spent three months in the summer on the island of Samos. There, the dividing line between the sky and the water was the first line that impressed itself on me. I drew it thousands of times.”

“I studied painting and photography in Italy, at the Accademia Belle Arte Pietro Vannucci in Perugia. Arte Povera entered my mind in those years and, since then, it has influenced my art-making process. There were two opposing thoughts in terms of art education in Perugia; one was very traditional, and one very conceptual. It was sometimes confusing, but I learned from both.”





Lisa Remeny, "Annette is Resting," 2001,  
ink and watercolor on paper, 11 x 12 inches.  
Photo courtesy of the artist

"I like to draw and I am in love with lines, so [they are] always part of my practice. I believe in an emotional, 'felt' line that can be drawn, photographed or sewn. I believe in soft geometries. Drawing and thinking are very connected for me. Drawings don't have to be precious; they can be pretty much anything."

### Lisa Remeny

Based in Coconut Grove, a famously green, coastal neighborhood in the south of the greater Miami area, Lisa Remeny is a painter and maker of drawings. She studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now the California College of the Arts) in Oakland, where she focused on filmmaking, photography, and printmaking; later she moved into oil painting, essentially teaching herself its techniques. In a video interview, Remeny, who is known among her artist friends as a talented cook, noted while whipping up a batch of fresh hummus, "The one constant throughout my years as a student was drawing classes."

Remeny's work, and that of Jacqueline Gopie, is featured in *Color Our World*, a two-artist exhibition on view through October 19 at the Green Library Gallery at Florida International University in Miami.

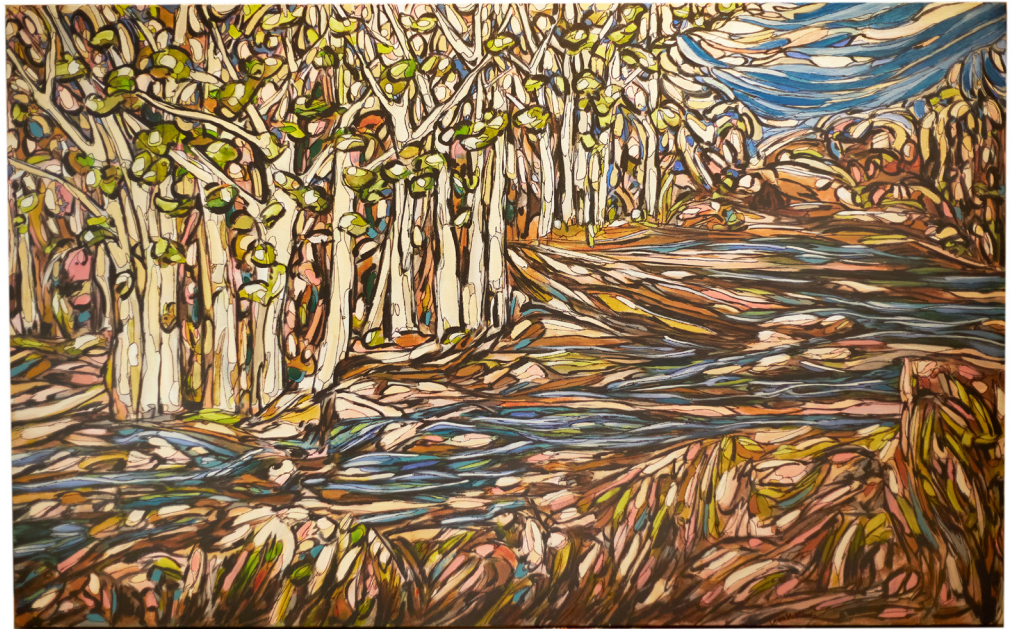
### Remeny told **brutjournal**:

"I began making drawings as far back as I can remember. As a child, often I became so involved in my creative process that a capital punishment for wrongdoing was to have my crayons taken away from me!"

"My maternal grandmother was one of my earliest art coaches. Later, in high school, my art instructor introduced us to blind contour drawing. Ever since then, I've continued employing it as a stylistic method in my mixed-media works on paper, whose images, on occasion, I've interpreted and transferred to canvas. Sometimes, when I begin a new painting, I draw in a hyper-realist way on the canvas, referring to source photographs I've shot myself. That's another kind of drawing altogether."

“When I’m drawing, I’m not really conscious of my thoughts, but the act of blind contour drawing requires deep concentration on one’s subject – without looking at the paper. I have no idea what I’m thinking other than ‘Keep your eyes on the prize.’”

“Looking back at art history, it’s clear that drawing was always the foundation of so much art-making. Not that long ago, while mentoring one of my young relatives, I forced her to develop her drawing skills. Now she’s doing more in the digital realm but she does have the skill if she should ever wish to draw – gasp! – the old-fashioned way. I feel that drawing is key, and for me, it’s everything. Yes, today you might say that, given current trends in art education and the market, to be so committed to drawing is something of a radical act. I wish that drawing were not thought of in this way, though.”



Laura McManus, “The Grove,” 2021, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Photo by Bill Westmoreland

### Laura McManus

Laura McManus and her husband Jim McManus are both artists. After living for many years on the island of Tortola in the British Virgin Islands, where they operated their own restaurant and where they still show their work at the Old Customs Building (a gallery), more recently they moved to Hancock, a small town in upstate New York situated on the east bank of the Delaware River. There, they founded The Camptons Kitchen and Gallery, an art space and farm-to-table café.

Laura McManus told **brutjournal**:

“I began drawing in my late teens. I was very much into nature – camping, fishing, swimming – and music (I played piano and flute). Always outdoors. I always liked drawing, but it didn’t become a main pursuit until later.”

“I graduated from the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia, in 1989, as a painting major. There, we had a very extensive foundation in drawing of all kinds. Everyone was required to understand the fundamentals of drawing. Our curriculum was heavy with drawing classes.”

“As we grew into our respective majors, during our last two years, [this training] continued even further. The aim: to understand all aspects of drawing – from life, from nature, the human form, mechanical drawing, computer-aided drawing, portraiture. We gained an understanding of composition and of how to communicate with drawing in many ways.”

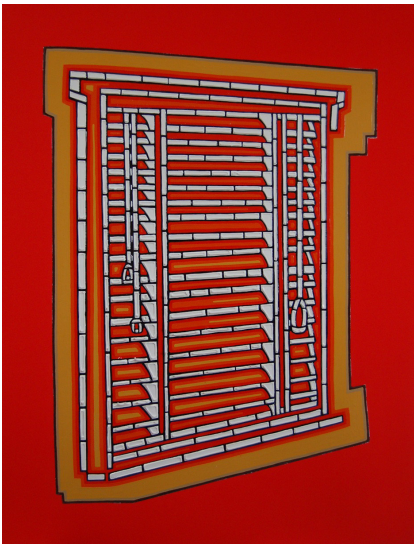




*Laura McManus at work in her studio in Hancock, New York. Photos by Bill Westmoreland*



*Jon Waldo, "Window (Red)," 2011, acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 40 x 30 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist*



"I worked as a mural and wall-texture artist for years and I feel I've used every aspect of drawing, from understanding how to read and make notes on a blueprint to working with building contractors and designers or making quick studies to share with a client who has a vision but may not be able to express it."

"In my own paintings, drawing has been an important mainstay. I'm interested in how color and line work together, in how to make things pop, move, and dance. I enjoy the texture of a line against a shape and I strive to make paintings that have a certain weight and that also express movement, as in nature. All of my compositions are connected by a line, just as, in nature, everything is connected."

"I do not think about drawing in a technical sense when I go to the canvas. I start with a rudimentary drawing or composition, an idea, a starting point, and then I allow music and my mind to take over as I lay in color and line. It's definitely a release for me to get to the canvas as I'm feeling a range of emotion from life."

"I always enjoy seeing art that shows evidence of an artist's hand and mind in the work. The making of it. The artist's thought process. The sense that an artist created a piece from the ground up. I'd like to see more work being shown that has this kind of weight."

### Jon Waldo

For many years, Jon Waldo, an artist who uses a stencil-making technique he developed himself to make paintings with richly textured surfaces, has lived and worked in New York City, in downtown Manhattan's Lower East Side district. (See his report in this issue of **brutjournal** about a homeless artist's installation-art project in this neighborhood that recently provoked controversy.)

Waldo grew up in Connecticut and studied at Pratt Institute, the well-known art, design, and architecture school in Brooklyn. As a young artist, he was influenced by punk music and the punk aesthetic in graphic design, by American folk art, and by vernacular ceramics.

A natural draftsman, Waldo translates his line drawings on paper into stencils, through which he pushes paint with his brush to create the thick lines that define the central motifs in his often boldly colored compositions. For all his art's gentle evocation of the spirit of Pop, there is nothing ironic or detached about Waldo's regard for his subject matter. In a certain way, an air of wistfulness wafts through much of his work.

Waldo told **brutjournal**:

"As an only child, I spent many hours drawing. My imagination offered solace — and escape."

"At Pratt, I majored in painting. My most interesting classes were seminars, especially the ones led by Ernst Benkert [a founding member of Anonima, an artists' group established



*One of the artist Jon Waldo's stencils, derived from one of his own line drawings, which serves as a tool for making paintings. Photo courtesy of the artist*

in 1960 whose participants downplayed the individual authorship of their work] and Howard Buchwald [a maker of vibrant abstract paintings]. I could listen to them for hours and still never catch up.”

“We had drawing classes during our foundation year. Looking back, I’m glad that, at Pratt, they were required courses. It’s very difficult to manipulate physical materials and to try and make them express the ideas in your head without [first having received] any instruction.”

“Figuration — drawing from life or drawing perceived forms — is a way to engage with the world. I’m inspired by Henry David Thoreau’s study of natural phenomena and John Cage’s transcendence through listening. I created a collection of images — my own drawings — that I use as raw material for further work on canvas or paper. When I work, I feel more like I’m orchestrating musique concrète or composing visual poetry than painting or drawing, but the use of line is how I get there.”

“I doodle when I’m on the phone, making what tend to be shapes with volume and shadow, not line drawings. Drawing for me is like writing. Things slow down for me when I draw. I become more aware, more conscious. So the drawings and the stencils I make from them become loaded with memory and meaning.”

“I’m very appreciative of people who possess real skills and I’m less interested in the aestheticization of money or the art world’s attempts at virtue signaling. I think staying on the outside of all that has always been a radical thing to do.”

“For me, drawing and cutting stencil lines is a deliberate attempt to actively experience the moment, to feel wonder or amazement, to be deeply conscious of a moment in time. I try to consciously focus on everything that’s happening in the moment. As the avant-garde composer Pauline Oliveros, another artist whom I admire, once said, “Deep listening is my life practice.”



## Resources

Website of the artist Bastienne Schmidt: <https://www.bastienneschmidt.com/>

Website of the artist Lisa Remeny: <https://www.lisaremeny.com/>

Website of The Camptons Kitchen and Gallery, representing the artist Laura McManus: <http://www.thecamptons.com/>

Website of Linda Warren Projects, representing the artist Jon Waldo: <http://lindawarrenprojects.com/artists/jon-waldo/>

Wassily Kandinsky, *Point and Line to Plane* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Museum of Non-Objective Painting, 1947; English translation of *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, published in German in 1926); see a digitally photographed copy of the complete book here: <https://www.wassilykandinsky.net/book-pointlinetoplane.html>