



Anne Austin Pearce

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University of Central Missouri
Gallery of Art & Design
217 Clark Street
Warrensburg, Missouri 64093
660.543.4498
www.ucmo.edu/gallery
gallery@ucmo.edu

Gallery Director: Jeremy Mikolajczak
Essay: Sam Witt
Edited By: Nancy Weant
Catalogue Design: jj Higgins



Meeting halfway in a mad, mad, world.

The work of Anne Austin Pearce.

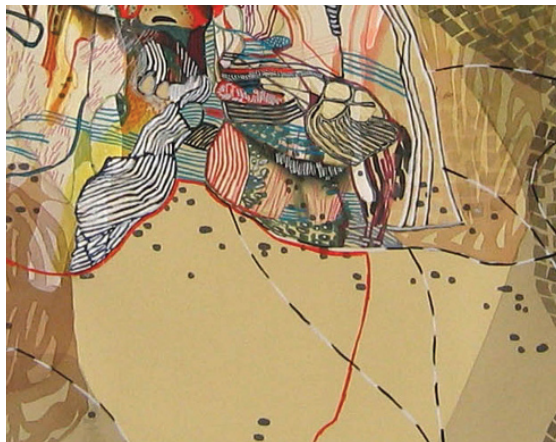
As Jack Kerouac wrote "... the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn." For me, Anne Austin Pearce embodies just that, a vivid and candid archive of a person fully engulfed in the heat of life. Through her many "saucy" encounters, her work is told through the visual record of the passing of time, life experience, and the revisiting of personal mnemonic history.

Pearce often references the removal of television in her adolescence to her reasoning behind her advanced imagination. Only allowed to watch the "Wizard of Oz" once a year, she was mesmerized by the ultimate dreamscape for an adolescent girl who is transported into a strange and wonderful world illustrated by seductive illusions. Losing herself in the escapism of the conscious mind, her work records the visual daydreams of an "adult" girl.

Once fully engaged in Anne Austin Pearce's work, a laundry list of visually and conceptually descriptive vocabulary comes to mind: mark-making, animalistic, dreams, fluid, form, psychosis, tribal, natural, satanic, human, female, womb, sexual, hollow, vacancy, collection, disease, narcissism, and so on. Working primarily in the two dimensional form, Pearce carves out through the vacancy a single animalistic figure or figures exhibiting an exquisite corpse. Filling the entities in mark after mark, pattern after pattern, she utilizes a tattoo-like effect, interleaving them through subconscious lines and patterns; vividly exploring the simulated wild beasts of her own psychosis.

Upon my initial introduction to Anne Austin Pearce, I came to the realization that her work was more than just visual haptic record on paper. Enigmatic in person as she is on surfaces, her vivacious, captivating, and constantly inquisitive persona defines the context to the production of her work. As a collection of images from the exhibition "Excerpts from the saucy series..." held at the University of Central Missouri's Gallery of Art & Design, this catalog can only document the purely visual encounter to that of its truly experiential component.

Jeremy M. Mikolajczak, Director
University of Central Missouri
Gallery of Art & Design





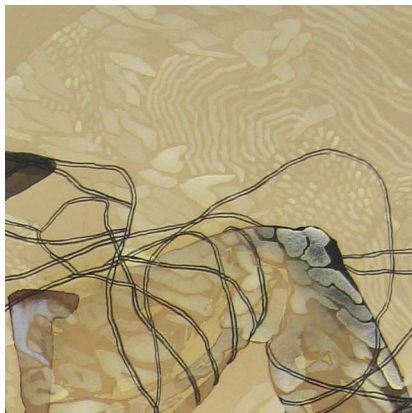














Catalogue Essay : Sam Witt

Terribilita: The Body Slaves

The Gravity and Distortions of Humanism in the Work of Anne Austin Pearce: What the Human Figure Becomes in the Corporate Age; or, The Birth of that Figure from Stone, from Ink, from Watercolor, from the Rainbow Skin of Motor Oil on a Puddle, from Heavy Water Flowing in Underground Rivers, Acid Rain and Plastics, from Precision Guided Smart Bombs and Katyusha Rockets to White Phosphorus Aerial Bombardments Blooming like Luminous Jellyfish in the Inky Night sky over Gaza City, from Carbon Dioxide Trapping Sunbeams and Landfills, to the Rising Sea levels and Clear cut Rainforests: the Human Body Stands Now with its Appetites at the Center of this Slash and Burn: We Have Birthed the Nightmare and Slowly We Turn Away, which is where Anne Austin Pearce Starts . . .

In the Aristotle episode of Ulysses, set in the Dublin public library, Stephen Daedalus elucidates to an audience of pompous and uninterested academics his theory of what made Shakespeare Shakespeare. In so doing, Joyce targets the precise source and catalyst of the artistic process, by having Daedalus deny that Shakespeare made a mistake when he married Anne Hathaway, the woman who was eight years his senior and whom he abandoned to become a playwright in London. "Bosch!" said Stephen rudely, "the man of genius makes no mistakes. His mistakes are volitional. They are the portals of discovery."

The portals of discovery. Perhaps I should define these terms in the context of the art in this catalogue. By genius, I simply mean the spirit of that moment one sees the world clearly and creates out of that clarity a witness to a significant moment; a witness, for instance, out of you and

me as we stand here looking at this work. By mistake, I mean that the act of creation belongs to the real world and emerges out of its physical laws, with all the limits of consciousness, the bridle of mortality, all the astonishing multiple variables of existence those proportions make possible. And by portal and discovery, I mean that a work of art carries us ever more deeply into our own world, and that we are transformed in the process. Anne Austin Pearce possesses all of these attributes, and her bafflingly intelligent, unapologetically black, sexually hysterical work, rooted firmly in the flesh — I mean the images you see before you now, the ones that are changing you even now as you behold them — should be proof of that. You stand now before these portals; you have brought your body and your mind, all relevant pressures to bear on this work, right here and now, and the work bears witness to you as much as you might bear witness to it. In short, look, step through this portal, and look. Look and be remade.

Our job, as living witnesses to Anne Austin Pearce's work, is to work backwards from that distorted frame she's thrown open to us, by means of her own suffering and innovation and talent, in order to place ourselves in that image, walk through the portal and find ourselves for an unflinching moment in the actual world. Art doesn't necessarily show us ourselves — sometimes it shows us what we are not, by definition — but along the way, it often affords us a glimpse of what we are, however elliptically, however it might refract our own images. And did I mention that it's beautiful — that it makes the terrifying and the sad and the horrific digestible because, you guessed it, the nightmare, drawn and painted in watercolors and graphite, is pleasurable, funny, dark, intriguing, lovely, moving? That's how Pearce manages to get us to look at what we might not want to see, at what we've become; that's how she gets us inside the work of art, where the images are painted on the inner lining of the placenta, on the cave walls; that's the aspect of all this that's transformative. That's right: from the colors, from the curves of a hip sloping into a female thigh to the very entrails of color, from the opened yet sleeping eyes of a figure who lies at a great depth, cheekbones, right down to her enormous foot, to the matrix of a bone-like web that's been painted to the surface of the paper, on top of the figure itself, links of a giant chain, coral, the whispered voice of the artist speaking along each painting . . .

Before we begin to discuss the fact that the human body has steadily demented and distorted in reality as much as in art or advertisement, commensurate with the rapid and geometric pace of what we call "progress," (with a nod to Benjamin and the Angel of History) — cite, respectively, in each of these arenas, obesity, heroin chic, and the work of Anne Austin Pearce as shining examples. Thus mistake, or accident,

defines art as a parallax reality; when Pearce establishes these bodies and distorts them in frame after frame, her origin is therefore revealed, changed, distorted. It's a kind of relativity; the light that reaches us in fact reveals a glimpse of the vanished star in some distant corner of the universe — or are we the ones in the distant corner of the universe? Are we the ones who vanished long ago? That's the pull that artists establish between one another; it can almost invert relations of time and distance — and that reveals a lot about the physical world. What if the lines and figures we draw were to connect isolated moments in time and distance in much the same way the universe is under threaded by super strings?

Let's say that Pearce reveals the human figure to be both beautiful and hideously deformed at once; only she can get that balance, that paradox, exactly right, without making a mockery of it. As a consequence of that, her origin itself bends into something we hadn't seen before, a newly discovered human body. A creation. It is, quite literally, how one artist keeps the work of another alive and changing, how one artist creates the work of another, even if that artist was born centuries later. It's also how the connective tissue between the actual, material world and the world of commerce, the "real" world, gets stretched; it is how art shows us our own bodies, walking away from us and what we've wrought, without looking back. Indeed we are, as Benjamin tells us, blown back away from the central catastrophe of our own making, into the present moment, unable to see what awaits us. If you can't see that now, with the polar ice caps melting as they are before our eyes, new strains of bacteria and disease about to evolve past the capabilities of our vaccines, with the Ninth Ward under water, the honey bees disappearing, the glacier at Continental Divide melting like the ice leftover after a party, with the seas emptying of fish — if you can't see these things now, then I can't do anything for you here ... but maybe the work of Anne Austin Pearce can.

Maybe you just might come to recognize yourself and your world in the images in the pages of this catalogue. You might even be standing before the work itself. If so, recognize yourself and step through the portal. Look, step through; let yourself be changed, if only in a moment of naked recognition.

I might also point out something radical and fundamental, something structural about Pearce's work: the figure is almost always a female figure, which raises certain questions, to which there might not necessarily be answers. Is she a lover? A sex worker? A wife? A model? One's

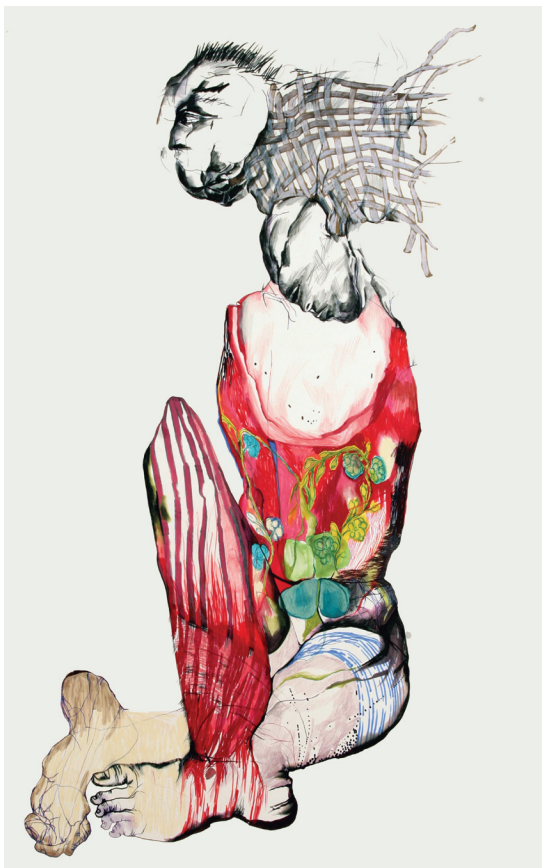
student? One's mistress? A slave? Your boss? A kind of fetish? A teacher? A physical creator, birthing the world, caught and dissolving in those birth pangs? Or a kind of sexual human sacrifice? Is she all of these things at once? Is she a mother in Buenos Aires or Mumbai, or a god? (Consider, in this light, some of Michelangelo's female bodies, which amount to one of the great flaws in the body of his work: they are simply male bodies with breasts attached. Talk about distorted.) Once again, the image reveals a kind of koan, a Zen riddle, a question that reveals another question with a third buried within that. Once again, I'm looking in the mirror, expecting to see one thing, expecting to see the "perfect" human Adam, with arms spread, or reaching out to touch God's hand, and instead, it's a woman I see reaching back to me; instead, we get these: Bulletproof Torso, Tied Up and Down, in which a fully grown woman floats in her own amniotic fluid, about to be strangled by an umbilical cord that has entangled her, The Accident ...

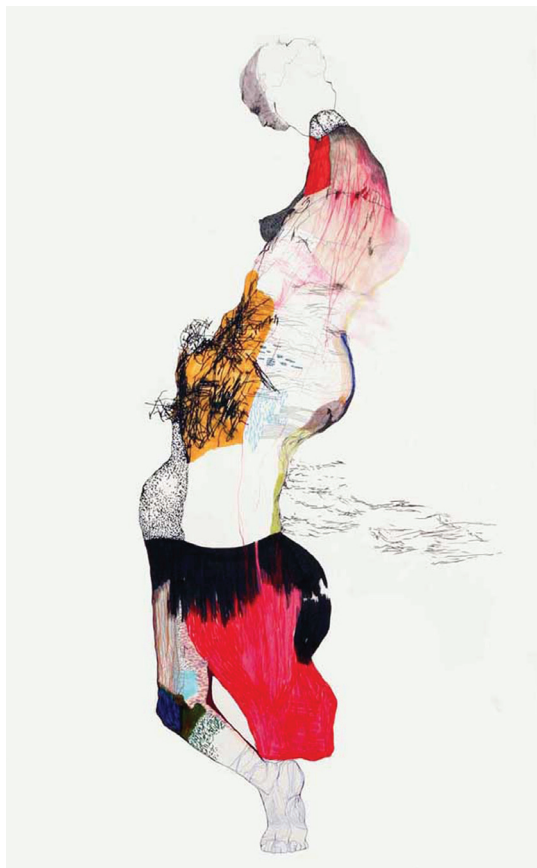
It's the human figure in the work of Pearce that connects her, in my mind, substantively, to the great figurative artists of the past, starting from our own contemporary moment — Lucian Freud, Emily Driscoll, Francis Bacon, to name a few, moving backwards through the great figurative Modernist painters, who contended with humanism and the body as a kind of burden, or a mystery that had to be unraveled, a curse, a spell, a victim of terribly despotic and mechanized force — here the Nazi planes swoop in over Guernica to drop their bombs, and the mothers swallow their fists whole while the horses lift their muzzles and scream; here the prisoner in a blazing white shirt spreads his arms before a firing squad in The Third of May, 1808, only to reveal himself as the source of light in the painting — all the way back to the figure of the David, and Michelangelo standing before that huge piece of marble that so many sculptors had been afraid to touch with their hammer and chisel. For him, at least in that moment, the human body was a field of potential discovery and invention, radiant with possibility, something to dissect and crawl back through and recreate anew in all its tissue and muscle.

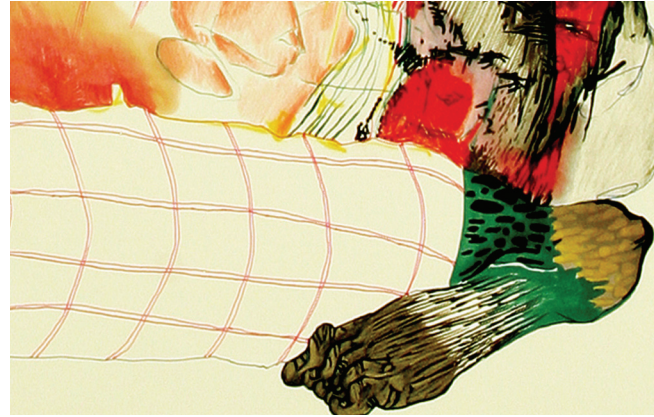
Call it the real cost to the human body, the beginning of our moment, with its terrible human figures so devastated it almost hurts to look at them, her own figurative distortions, the ones you can see right in front of you as you walk through this gallery or flip through the pages of this catalogue: they are like translations of this humanist ideal that are so relevant to our age and its devastating appetites, its landfills, plastics, its superstorms, its flooded cities, from the melting polar ice caps to the Ninth Ward underwater; the human body is still at the center of this vision; but now it has been twisted, distorted, smeared, deformed by the gravity of the body's own appetite. But instead of the water level

dropping in the basin, and a human figure emerging out of the stone and cold light, a distorted human figure continues to sink as the polar ice caps melt and the sea levels rise. I mean this literally, as Anne Austin Pearce means it; in the world of Pearce's vision, it isn't the environment or a disappeared species or square miles of clear cut rainforest, but the body that stands as the greatest victim of our excesses. Not because Pearce's work is anthropocentric; it's in fact a kind of retributionary logic; everything has come full circle in this world. Think of Da Vinci's perfect male body, dissecting the center of a perfect circle; along with the David, it's the perfect symbol of that Renaissance, humanistic harmony, which is where Pearce's vision starts and ends; now consider some of the figures from this show, and in that context perhaps you'll understand that these images haunt me tonight as ghostly inversions of that humanist ideal, rendered appropriate to our own distorted, twisted contemporary moment, right on the brink of catastrophic climate change and an urban landscape which is rendered formulaic and homogeneous in the extreme, in mall after mall, strip mine after strip mine, even as tons and tons of carbon fill the atmosphere, trapping sunbeams, and therefore the polar ice caps continue to melt.

This isn't the subject of these works of art, of course; it's as if the body itself were being plundered by its own excesses, stripped away, warped, and if you consider the likely nightmarish scenarios in the coming decades, you'll come to this conclusion, as I have, in a moment of clarity that is the terrible gift and birthright of this art, that is cold as the icy seawater being injected into the gulf streams: our children and grandchildren might well be the greatest victims of our own imbalanced relationship to the world. The human figure might very well be crucified by our own unearthly appetites; you might, in fact, be looking at images of your own children and grandchildren as you look at Pearce's work.



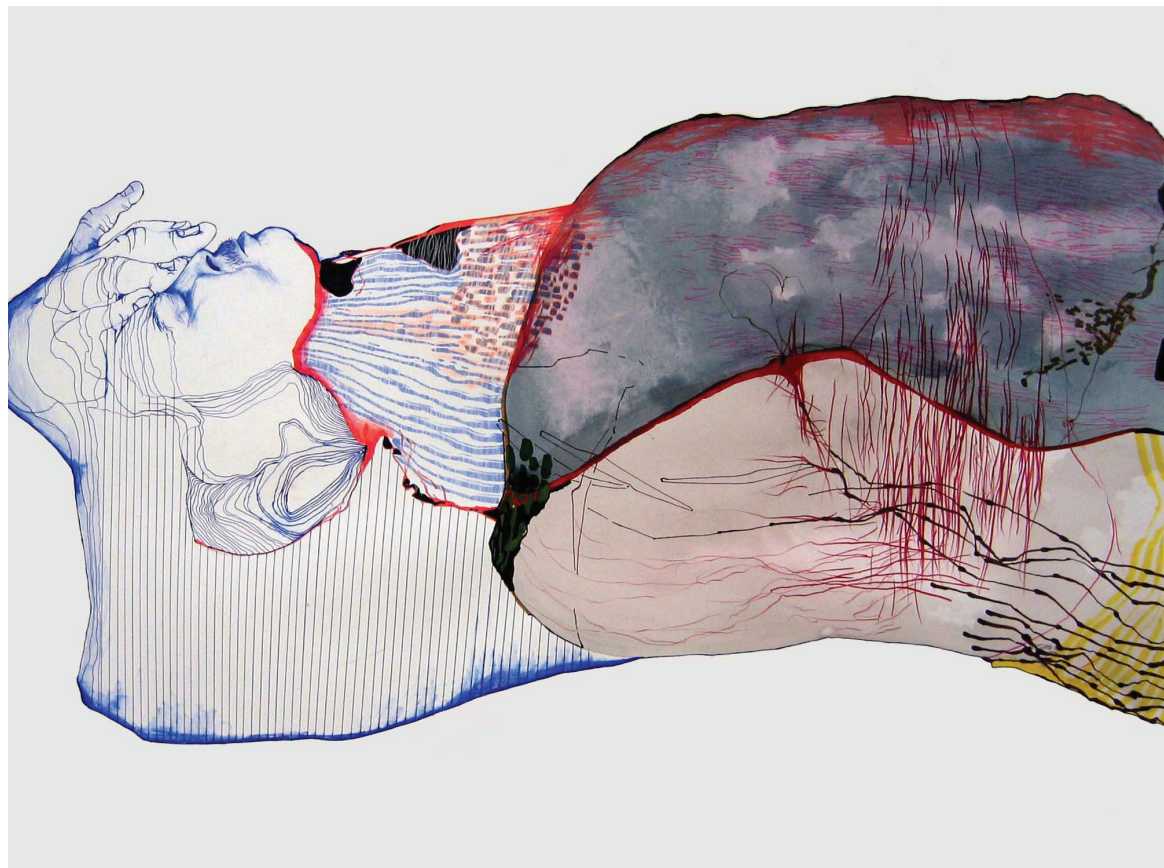


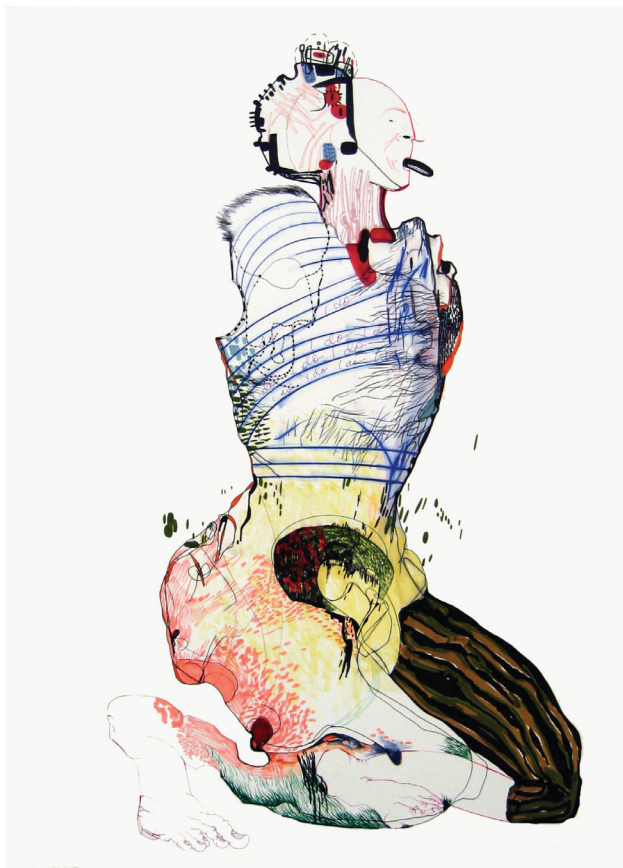
















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1 Humours: At The Fair

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
18" x 22" [cover]

2 Humours: Kiss (Detail)

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
40" x 26"

3 Humours: Kiss

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
40" x 26"

4 Humours: Walking

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
26" x 40"

5 Humours: Thoughtless

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
22" x 22"

6 Humours: Visit in May

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
22" x 22"

7 Humours: Mental Exfoliation

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
22" x 22"

8 Humours: Tied Up and Down

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
22" x 22"

9 Humours: Tied Up and Down (Detail)

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
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Ink, Acrylic and Pencil On Paper. 2008
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Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2007
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12 Saucy: Swarm

Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2007
26" x 40"

13 Saucy: We Believe It (AKA, Contour Heads)

(Detail) Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2007
26" x 40"

14 Saucy: We Believe It (AKA – Contour Heads)

Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2007
26" x 40"

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Ink, Acrylic and Pencil on Paper. 2006
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16 Saucy: Dainty

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil on Paper. 2006
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17 Saucy: Oh Cunning Doctor

Ink, Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2006
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18 Saucy: Black Tongue (AKA -I DO, I DO, I DO)

Ink, Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2005
22" x 30"

19 Saucy: Marcus

Ink, Pen and Colored Pencil on Paper. 2006
48" x 48"

20 Saucy: Rotten Gut

Ink, Acrylic and Pencil on Paper. 2006
22" x 22"

ANNE AUSTIN PEARCE

www.anneaustinpearce.com

Anne Austin Pearce was born in Lawrence, Kansas in 1968. She studied at the Kansas City Art Institute and Brighton Polytechnic before receiving her BFA from the University of Kansas in 1990.

Anne then went on to James Madison University, where she received her MFA with an emphasis in drawing and painting in 1996.

She currently lives and works in Kansas City, Missouri.

COLLECTIONS

Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Becky Brown, "Chris Domenick and Anne Pearce: Drawbridge", Brooklyn Rail, Brooklyn, NY, September 8, 2008

Malewsky, Nick, "Locate/Navigate is all over the map", Kansas City Star, Kansas City, MO, February 28, 2008

Bonetti, David, "West meets East as KC artists show their work here", St. Louis Post Dispatch, St. Louis, MO, Mar 2007

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Zimmer, William "Show Revels in Innovative Use of Materials," The New York Times: New York, NY, March 1, 1998 (review)

SELECTED SOLO & GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2008

NEW NOW Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS

Excerpts From the Saucy Series University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, MO

Humours Unit 5 Gallery, Kansas City, MO

Drawbridge Work Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

KC in LA Milo Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Kansas City Flatfile H&R BLOCK ARTSPACE, Kansas City, MO

Locate/Navigate La Esquina, Urban Culture Project, Kansas city, MO

50th Annual Delta Exhibition Townsend Wolf Gallery, Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR

The Drawing Center Viewing Program, New York, NY

2007

Rhetorical Black Holes International Listening Conference, Frankfurt, Germany

IN TANDEM: Cain and Pearce Epstein Gallery, Jewish Museum, Overland Park, KS

Top to Bottom: Genetic Confetti 1912 Gallery, Emory & Henry College, Emory, VA

Patterns of Behavior Unit 5 Gallery, Kansas City, MO

Paper Dolls pulp / paper & art, Omaha, NE

ART NOW MIAMI BEACH Sherry Leedy Gallery, Kansas City, MO

TRUCK: KC/ST LOUIS EXCHANGE White Flag Projects, St. Louis, MO

Art Against Aids Illinois Institute of Art Gallery 180, Chicago, IL

2006

Wound Up Unwound Lewis Art Gallery, Millsaps College, Jackson, MS

Critics Select The Shore Institute for the Contemporary Arts, Longbranch, NJ

2005

New Work: From the Saucy Series

Sluech Gallery, West Virginia Wesleyan University, Buckhannon, WV

The Usefulness of Beasts MoMO Studio, Kansas City, MO

