

Gretchen Bennett
H E L L O
2.28.2008-4.12.2008



GRETCHEN BENNETT's RESUME:

EDUCATION

- 2001 MFA, Rutgers University, Visual Arts Department, New Brunswick, NJ
1998 Independent Studies, Prague Academy of Applied Arts, Prague, CR
1983 Art Center, College of Design, Advertising Design Program, Pasadena, CA
1982 BFA, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008 Hello, Howard House Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
2006 AMO ART, Inaugural exhibition, You'd Be Home Now, Waitsburg, WA.
The East River Project, collaborative installation with Yann Novak,
Seattle, WA and Brooklyn, NY
2005 Landscape Flair, Howard House, Seattle, WA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 Western Bridge, Kit Bashing, Seattle, WA
San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, San Francisco, CA
Kirkland Arts Center, Help Me, I'm Hurt, group show curated by Suzanne
Beal, Kirkland, WA. September-October
2006 Lucky Day, San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, San Francisco, CA.
Drift, Bronx River Art Center, curated by Eileen Torpey, Bronx, NY
Coupling IV: Secret Handshake, Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
Howard House Artists, Seattle Art Museum Rental/Sales Gallery, Seattle,
WA
2005 AOK-PDX , PDX Gallery, Window Installation, Portland, OR
Willard Espy Foundation residency, June
Release & Capture , Kirkland Arts Center, Kirkland, WA
Gretchen Bennett and Elizabeth Schula, Ten63, Long Island City, Queens,
NY.
2004 Ambrosino Gallery, Cake Walk, Miami, FL.
Bronx Museum, AIM 24, Bronx, NY.
Art In General, Window Installation, Sticker Sticks, New York, NY.
SOIL Gallery, Topography of Home, Seattle, WA.
Tribeca Loft, The Very Rich Hours, New York, NY.
2003 Make Do, 5" x 7" exhibition space in the Organ Review of the Arts, Sex.
Lust.
You, Portland, OR.
Smack Mellon Studios, Custom Fit, DUMBO, Brooklyn.
2002 Center On Contemporary Arts, Pacific Northwest Annual, Pack, Seattle,
WA.
PS122 Gallery, Gretchen Bennett and Suzanne Walters, New York, NY.
2001 Rutgers University, MFA
Thesis Exhibition, New Brunswick, NJ.
2000 PS122 Gallery, Installation, Pack, New York, NY





Gretchen Bennett, *Dusk (Last Days)*, Prismacolor pencil on paper, 13" X 19.25", 2008

BILLY HOWARD INTERVIEWS GRETCHEN BENNETT By Instant Message. February 2008

Billy Howard: When did your interest in the contrast between urban and rural culture develop?

Gretchen Bennett: When I moved to Brooklyn to go to school, I lived on the south side of Williamsburg where there was a concentrated amount of trash blowing around the streets, and bits of nature constantly pushing up through cracks in the sidewalk. I realized that looking across the East River towards lower Manhattan felt a lot like looking at the Cascades and Olympics from Seattle. Then I just started forming new ideas of nature and urban settings.

BH: What were these early ideas?

GB: I began seeing a fallen branch of a city tree as part of the natural world, and I had the impulse to repeat it. Along with that, there was a huge sticker culture in my neighborhood, and I began collecting and later reconfiguring these into the branch shapes, again, as a way to repeat them. I also saw nature in the trash blowing around; some of it resembled dog forms – two hole punches looked like eyes, and so on, and I became interested in collecting these. I was also reading a lot about the domestication of the dog, and other related things at this time.

BH: Were these the works shown at SOIL that I saw? Or was this earlier?

GB: Yes, these works were shown in a number of places: at SOIL here in Seattle; at the Bronx Museum, where I had an AIM residency; at PS122, where I was included in a two-person show with Suzanne Walters; and in a one-day yearly exhibition called "Drift".

BH: I really liked how those works were so full of bits of icons that we see all over our streets, and there was a wonderful contrast between these fragments and the symmetrical branches applied directly to the wall. Could you talk a bit about what you were you reading at the time?

GB: I was reading a book called *Defacement* by Michael Taussig, that Hanneline Rogeberg told

me about when I was at Rutgers. I also read *Dialogue in the Void*, a conversation between Beckett and Giacometti, as well as *Nest Magazine*, *The Arcade Project*... I was also reading an interview with Kiki Smith, where she talked about drawing things, bugs, that would then manifest themselves in her life and studio. I think about this, as I definitely become more aware of something once I begin researching it; suddenly it begins to appear everywhere. In addition to reconfiguring things, I've been thinking a lot about sampling, iconic images in the stickers I used in my drawings are very powerful on their own, but it's interesting to think about how they can be transformed. I am also trying to do this with the Cobain drawings.

BH: Exactly. As we move away from a moment in time or an era they become more vivid in certain ways. The stickers are iconic and are placed upon objects that are very mundane but then become more noticeable and transformed. The Cobain drawings are incredible in that way - many years have passed since that time, but the images from that era still move us and resonate very strongly with people.



Gretchen Bennett, *You Know You're Right, You've Never Been Right*, Prismacolor pencil on paper, 20" X 27", 2008

GB: I know, I sometimes feel strange that they resonate so much with me, and I know I am not the only one thinking about this right now. I saw Michael Azzerad's "About a Son" and thought of it as my model for tone, for making something that it is conversational and straightforward in tone.

BH: I want to get back to the current work and the images - they are in themselves iconic, just as Gus Van Sant sampled poses in his movie about Kurt Cobain. Can you talk about your sampling and the tenderness that these drawing invoke?

GB: The aspect of the light in the YouTube screen grabs changes everything. And the posture and gesture become very important. In "The Melvins are Alive" the stage lights on Kurt Cobain's red plaid shirt make me think of fire or blood. The van Sant images in stills capture a certain posture too. There are silhouettes of the actor Michael Pitt that really seem like studied reflections on



Kurt Cobain's body language and stage presence. And they do seem intimate, like something found. This is a lot of the way I really like to work. It's interesting and very exciting that certain postures become like patterns. The digital moving images contain similarities to the film stills.

BH: It's interesting that the technological advance of YouTube is the glass through which we gaze at a time that I think of being very much about the last moment before we all were dependent on technology

GB: Yes, it is historic, and yet, you can find so much catalogued there, much the way Wikipedia seems very well tended. It's an archive, and its newsy, but I definitely spent some time transported back into the late 80's and the 90's while exploring the site. Krist Novoselic made a tribute film, which he presented on the MTV music awards, not long after Kurt died, and it was there on YouTube. I also found a great attachment to a Vaselines video of "Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A



Previous page: Gretchen Bennett, *When you wake up this morning, please read my diary. Look through my things, and figure me out*, Prismacolor pencil on paper, 22.25" X 30", 2008
Above: Gretchen Bennett, *Like a Setting Sun*, Prismacolor pencil on paper, 26" X 35.5", 2008

Sunbeam". It was a note with a very conversational and straightforward tone, it read: "just so everyone knows, this band wrote the original, nirvana covered it under different title. Both are equally good so stop fighting and calling each other names. Thanks." This points out that now it may not be known that they were very much for each other, supportive of each other.

BH: Right - and this is a nod to that process of rekindling specific iconic images. It's very Pop to me. Or riffs on a theme. Can we talk a bit about the actual process of making the images.. The part that happens after you absorb them from YouTube

GB: Yes, I got the image of the show in my head, somehow fully formed, and I started searching YouTube and collecting an archive of images to work from. This process is sort of like taking snapshots, and then editing through them. I converted them to slides, projected them and drew from the projections. The process has been pretty abstract, but the results are sort of heroic, in that there is a figure as the focus of each piece, each drawing is a piece of a narrative.



Gretchen Bennett, *Have a Hangover*, Prismacolor pencil on paper, 22.25" X 30", 2008

BH: How are you laying down the image? Is it line-by-line?

GB: In a way. I'm using Prismacolor pencils in a wide range, to copy the light and form of the image. The light is particularly important and usually ends up as almost blank white paper. I'm forming the work in mostly vertically strokes.

BH: The result is really very beautiful, and the wonderful way you've captured light is captivating me.

GB: I love the word riff, by the way.

BH: The term riff is so musical and it seems right on in this conversation about your work and this era and Cobain

GB: Eve Sussman used it to describe "89 Seconds at Alcazar" and its relationship to the painting *Las Meninas*, and it's nice that it comes from music. I've had to show some restraint in drawing, in order to keep the light in the drawings, and I've tried to preserve the impression that there is noise in the images.

BH: It reminds me of a pianist playing at Benaroya Hall, they're masterful, but the music isn't theirs. Rhetorically, whose images are these?

GB: Yes, if I understand you, you are talking about receiving. I feel like a transcriber, and that is the way the work goes smoothly. As for music, it's so lateral in its movement, it's like leaving a sticker trail; it becomes part of what it sticks to, it belongs to a collective. I guess it goes back to the Vaselines vs. (or not) Nirvana.

BH: It's also like Bob Dylan who is a brilliant songwriter, but sometimes others can do his songs better. Or capture a different essence of the song, lets say.

GB: That reminds me of folk singing, wasn't that a way of storytelling, varying according to region? The songs did not have specific ownership, but the versions did. Then Dylan's recordings put an end to this, in a way, while perpetuating it in another.

BH: They certainly brought them to a larger audience.

GB: Because his recording was so big and spread so wide, that other versions were buried. I think that turns around though, and other versions seem refreshing.



Gretchen Bennett, *Bonus Track (Alice Malice)*, PrismaColor pencil on paper, 13" X 20", 2008

People like Patti Smith and Paul Anka and Kiki and Herb and Rodney Graham have covered "Love Buzz" and "Teen Spirit" in interesting ways. Maybe I'm a cover artist, too.

BH: Graham is genius.

GB: Yes, Graham is. I saw his Aberdeen slide show, where he went to Aberdeen and took photos of the place, in the late 90's or so. It was at the Chelsea Dia.

BH: So as you leave your trail do ever sample yourself?

GB: Well, I have a little ways to go, before that happens. That seems to take longevity. U2 used to seem earnest, and then they seemed ironic, then earnest again. But they've had a very long and rich career.

BH: Do you have a street name?

GB: Dutch, but keep that a secret, please.

BH: Really? I like it a lot better than Bono or the Edge :-)

GB: Thank you, it's a childhood nickname. That's another thing I really appreciate about Cobain's lyrics - they are so personal.

BH: Getting back to Aberdeen, I think Grunge may have been the last breath of being completely "off the grid" in the sense that it captured a raw time where music and a cultural phenomenon happened in a region. And I think it's interesting that YouTube has become a way to look back into that time. Something we probably didn't imagine happening back then.

GB: Well, things do seem less regional now. That's good and bad. Things are more easily accessed, but on the other hand, something very strong and unusual was allowed to happen because it was regional. That came from a very specific culture, of punk, low self-esteem, creativity.

I think all things Nirvana present a global idea, but on the other hand, it's nice to live with it, here in Seattle, and I lived here then. That's part of it for me, a reclaiming of a very personal history. I've seen Krist Novoselic in Seattle at times. It's weighty for me that he is here, that this is his home. That they are people and came from here, and that I'm here. I like very much hearing that many artists are exploring this subject matter, outside of this place. In *The Stranger*, Sean Nelson wrote about "About a Son" being a record of this place and about how it formed Cobain. I like that aspect.

GB: It think it's a good way to end. Take it easy, Billy!

BH: Sweet

GB: XO

BH: XO ❤️

GB: 🙄

BH: 😊

GB: 🌈

BH: 💋

GB: ⭐

BH: 🧑🏻

GB: 🧑🏻



Gretchen Bennett, *Blue Like Nevermind (Last Days)*, PrismaColor pencil on paper, " X 20", 2008



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