



**Brian Boulton's
Untitled, 2008, part of
Vancouver's Drawn festival.**
COURTESY OF WINSOR GALLERY

AVENUE SKETCH ARTISTRY

Questions & Artists

Last month, a Canadian teen won \$25,000 in a speed-texting competition. Yet despite what cellphone companies would like us to think, it ain't time to give up pencil-and-paper just yet. After all, when it comes to image-based correspondence, sketching can still be state of the art. That's what Drawn, a new Vancouver festival, is trying to prove as it kicks off this week. Here, festival co-organizer Robert Kardosh makes the case to Leah Sandals for why doodling is still divine.

Q *Why put on a festival about drawing? It might seem to some people like a pretty antiquated art form.*

A While drawing is a very old form, it's also a very new form. For a long time, drawing was considered part of the process of art-making, like a means to an end. Painters would use drawing to create compositions, and architects would use drawing to visualize buildings.

It's only recently, perhaps in the past 10 or 20 years, that the idea of drawing as an important medium in its own right has taken off. Now it's something that can be appreciated as a finished product, like a painting would be.

Also, drawing as a medium is so direct; it's primal. We have such a fascination in our society with technology, and I think the converse of that is that people appreciate drawing because it is so basic. It's the flipside of our fetish for technology; in an increasingly mediated world, drawing seems to mediate less.

Q *There's a wide range of styles in the festival — from photorealist copies of newspaper clippings to loose, colourful views of landscape. What makes them all drawings?*

A Drawing is a very diverse medium, and one of the purposes of the festival is to celebrate that diversity. People might have a certain idea of what drawing is, but it can actually be many things. Still, I would define drawing as "using lines to create images."

Q *Speaking of diversity, the festival includes "public drawing performances." What does that mean?*

A One group of artists is taking inspiration from an iconic 1886 photograph. The photo shows Vancouver city councillors meeting in front of a tent after city hall burnt down in a big fire. The artists are creating a replica of the tent and they're covering that in canvas, which they will draw on in public, at Maple Tree Square in Gastown. Spectators will be invited to make suggestions.

The purpose of this type of thing is to expand people's ideas of what drawing can be — it can be a kind of performance art. We also wanted to take drawing out of the gallery context because a lot of people might not be completely comfortable going to galleries.

Our launch will also have a live drawing performance with seven artists creating large-scale drawings over a period of four hours. We don't know what to expect but we think it will be a lot of fun.

Q *Many art schools still make students take drawing, even if they're going into digital arts or photography. Why do you think that is?*

A I think it has to do with the fact that this is how we visualize. Drawing has always been the foundation of anything, whether it's painting or design. You have to be able to draw your thoughts before you can begin translating them into some other medium.

Q *I guess that's why, whenever a famous new building opens, we see cocktail-napkin sketches of the building produced as a souvenir item?*

A Yes. And everybody draws as children — everybody has an experience of it.

Q *But even if we all draw as children, many of us stop as we get older. Why?*

A I guess after a certain age we divide into artists and non-artists. I think as children we're all artists, in a sense, because we all need to begin visualizing and making sense of the world. And the way we can do that immediately is through drawing.

As we grow older, I guess we learn other ways of making sense of the world. Still, there are studies on the importance of drawing and the development of intelligence at an early age — it's a central part of the learning process, as important as learning the alphabet.

Q *Do you have a favourite drawing?*

A *India Suite* by Jack Shadbolt is an incredible and important work. That might be my answer.

■ The Drawn festival kicks off this Saturday across Vancouver and continues to Aug. 8 (drawnfestival.ca).

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