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*The Syracuse Scholar/
Everson Museum of Art*
Drawing National

John L. Sellers

John L. Sellers, codirector of the Drawing National, is professor of Visual Communication, head of the Advertising Design Program, and chairman of the Independent Study M.F.A. Degree Program at Syracuse University. He was art director of the *Scholar* from fall 1980 until fall 1984, when he became editor.

Drawing is the most intimate visual art. It is the medium that most artists start with, whether using a pencil, crayon, or toe in the sand; that almost all use as shorthand in planning other works of art from sculpture to painting to architecture; and that many stay with as an end in itself.

This Syracuse Scholar/Everson Museum of Art Drawing National was designed to investigate the emergence of drawing as an independent art form and to celebrate Syracuse University's status as the first institution of higher learning to grant a degree in studio art.

That *Syracuse Scholar* has chosen to cosponsor this Drawing National and to publish the results in a special issue should come as no surprise. In the *Scholar's* inaugural issue, the late William Wasserstrom, the first chairman of the Board of Editors, set our course: "What we must not fail to convey, however—what has never been in dispute—is fidelity to the labor of creating an interdisciplinary magazine of ideas, a magazine in which the arts assume a featured place, and to the task of establishing *Syracuse Scholar* at the very center of endeavor, at the very heart of the heart of this most notable and improbable university."¹ And when the first editor, Paul Archambault, turned over the reins to the second editor, Peter Goldman, he wrote, "If the *Scholar* continues to stimulate discussion . . . ; if it can stir up controversy, ire, or astonishment; if it pursues its way as a point of encounter and friction and combustion of arts and ideas fueled with energies inside and outside the university, it will persist in being true to its purpose."²

It was with these changes in mind that Peter Goldman and I started discussing possible directions for the *Scholar* to take during Peter's tenure as editor. We had always had an art feature but never an issue devoted solely to art. Peter wanted to have such an issue and he wanted it to have importance. We discussed the possibilities and our limitations and,

1. "Yes, Another Journal,"
Syracuse Scholar 1
(Winter 1979–80): 8.

2. "Passing the Baton,"
Syracuse Scholar 3
(Fall 1982): 5.

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realizing that full-color reproduction would be prohibitively costly, decided early on to limit works to black and white. Since we wanted the issue to be “fueled with energies inside and outside the university,” we talked in terms of a national competition of some sort. Peter took our preliminary ideas to John Perreault, then curator at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, and together they arrived at the logistics and the rules of a national drawing competition to be judged by Perreault, Nancy Hoffman, and Clement Greenberg and to be cosponsored by the *Scholar* and the Everson. This cooperative venture would culminate in a special issue of *Syracuse Scholar* and a traveling exhibition originating at the Everson Museum of Art.

The results of that collaboration may be seen in this issue and in the exhibition, which opens at the Everson on 1 November 1985. Although both John Perreault and Peter Goldman have moved on to other challenges, we are indebted to both of them for their initial direction in this endeavor. Special thanks are due to Gabriel Pereira who succeeded John Perreault and became my codirector in charge of the exhibition, then Dominique Nahas who succeeded Pereira.

Over 6,000 separate 35 mm. slides were submitted to the competition in suites of four by some 1,500 artists residing in the United States. The judges spent two entire days reviewing the slides in an effort to select the final 20 suites that make up the exhibition and the special issue. John Perreault wrote, “Miraculously, half the winners were chosen unanimously; the other half each received two votes. All three of us were impressed by the quality of the entries and our choices were difficult ones. What we have produced is a fairly representative survey of current drawing modes expressed, we hope, by exceptional examples.”

Exceptional examples indeed.

The extraordinary range of drawings selected by the judges includes cool, detailed pictorial representations; abstract, calligraphic overall patterns in which edge is almost insignificant; and highly structural designs in which the slight dislocation of a single element would destroy the composition. The vigor displayed in this flexibility of intention and execution shows us that drawing, for now at least, is not dominated by a school or “ism” but is healthily continuing to break ground in every direction.

Early in the planning of this Drawing National I suggested that it become a quadrennial event. Whether it does or not will be the decision of others, but I would like to see a continuing event that, through the *Syracuse Scholar*, would enable art historians to assess the state of the art on a regular basis.