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Line, Pattern, and Theme: Drawing as Exploration

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"Chess," drawing by Anthony Toney.

Line, Pattern, and Theme:

Drawing as Exploration

Anthony Toney



Anthony Toney studied painting at Syracuse University, where he received his B.F.A.; and at Teachers College, Columbia University, which awarded him a doctorate. He has been teaching at the New School for Social Research for many years. Dr. Toney has won numerous awards, and his work has been shown in national and international exhibitions including the Corcoran Gallery, the Carnegie Institute, and the Whitney Museum. He is the author of several books, among them *Painting and Drawing* (Prentice-Hall, 1978). A mural by the artist may be seen on campus in Bowne Hall.

The sketch above is a self-portrait.

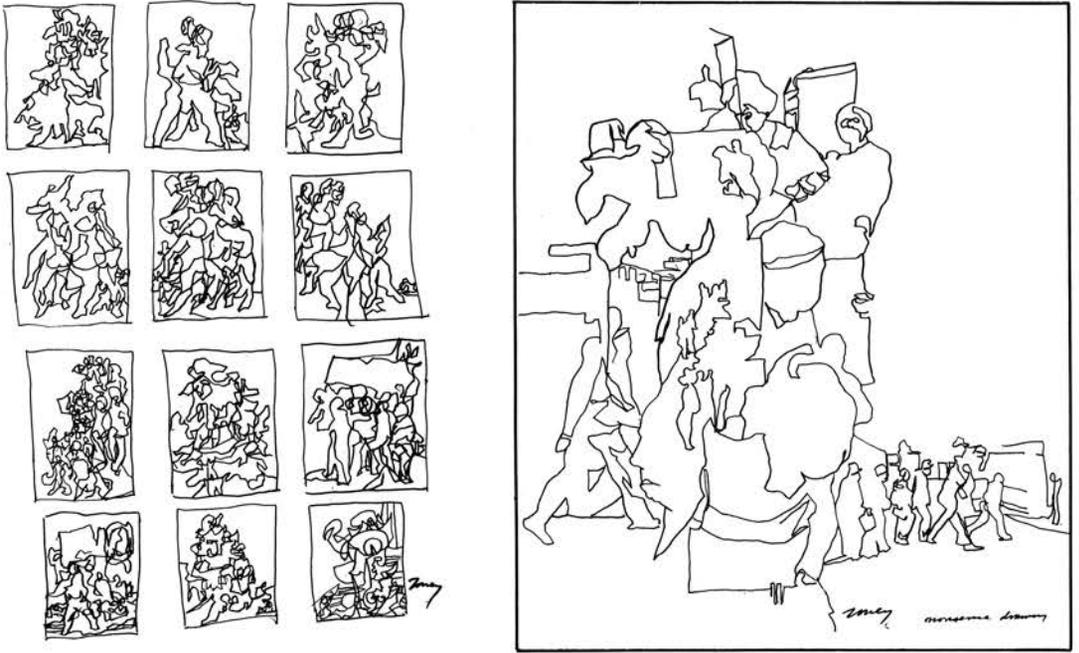
Since my last New York show (ACA Galleries, February 1981), I have been sorting out some ideas in my drawings. Usually, before there is any resolution in the drawings, I begin compulsively to paint and start numerous canvases of all sizes. I react to my previous work, seeking difference or elaboration; but it is difficult to extend or pierce the boundaries of what I am personally willing to accept as a painting.

I am allergic to a single style or subject; opposing tendencies recur. In some works, interwoven planar movements are stressed, while in others, areas are larger and flatter. But realistic goals remain, despite either emphasis. A painting or drawing for me is a synthesis of sensuous impact, haunting associations, symbolic richness, natural references, even possible description, and an inventive organic structure in which each plane has its orchestral necessity.

I search for both intimacy and epic sweep; the size of works varies considerably. Stimulating resources include the range of autobiographical, visual, and other experiences. A partisan on social issues, I deal with such matters in many canvases, and my convictions inherently require confrontation, reevaluation, testing, and reconstruction. Though ideological, I remain visually responsive. The movement of line and other recurrent differences forming pattern and thematic sequence is a language endlessly rich, limited only by the scope of experience. I love paint, particularly oil paint, linen canvas, as well as associated media. I identify with the feeling and texture of paint and its myriad possibilities.

Today we share a rich stream of opposing traditions. Influence is unavoidable, but the contradictions make possible a considerable independence that can take many forms. Unusual juxtapositions of opposites or the cross-fertilization of images make possible a multiplicity of meanings and their freshness.

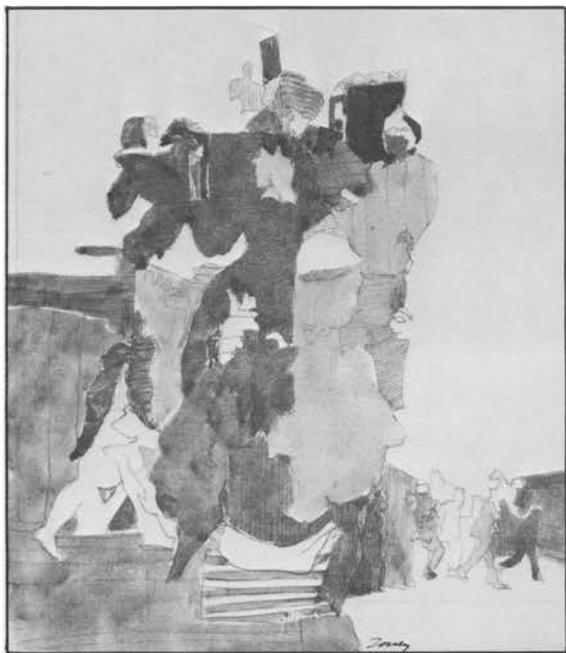
At this time I am again stressing line, using surprises in as mean-



ingful a way as I can contrive. I am still haunted by the possibilities of several related techniques. One extreme can be called designed nonsense: The line skips over many unplanned surfaces as an undescriptive and fragmented linear stream of consciousness. The sensitive improvisation in fake writing is similar, but designed nonsense is colored by the residue of images.

A similar web of movement and shape can stem from a context more consciously chosen. While the juxtaposition of various whole images can lead to significant discovery and powerful communication, the *consolidation* of visual fragments may more easily transcend the artist's habit threshold. As the line touches and proceeds over adjacent surfaces, haphazardly jumping and often connecting unexpected differences, the artist can still remain consciously in control of distances and directions so as to provide variation within a governing continuity. One part makes another necessary, requiring in turn the next, until there is a functioning whole.

The linear drawing can be self-sufficient. Usually elaboration with value, texture, and space differences is necessary; one can add more than line from the outset. The relationship of positive and negative shapes has its own fascination. Each approach attains its own result. In any case, accidental formations can reveal unexpected associations,

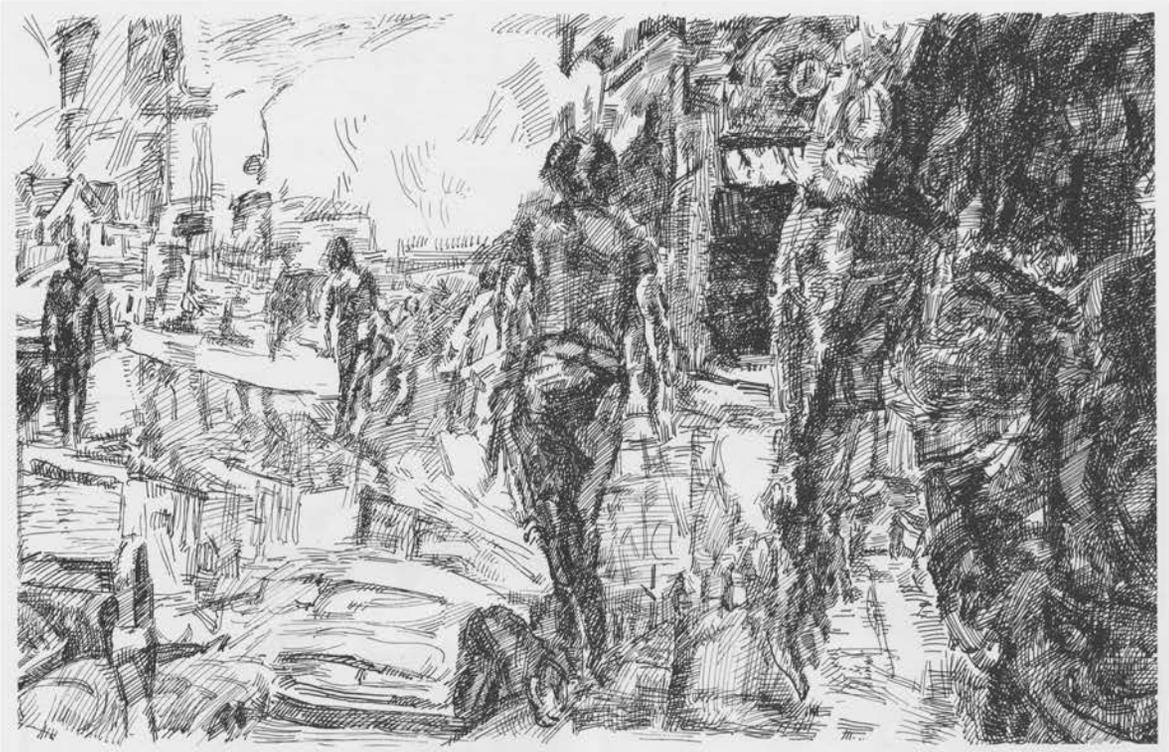


metaphoric echoes of buried memory.

Although pre-sorting material for a drawing can provide a more conscious unity, the less-contrived approach is checked by the artist's own habit structure. Seeming nonsense can become intelligible and inspired, while conscious planning may lose itself in ambiguity if its contradictions remain too even.

In the present group of drawings I seek a more effective way of expressing the longings, fears, and faith in solutions that struggle can bring. I would make an art that inspires, strengthens, and impels us to our best actions. I would celebrate the unity of natural process and the conscious striving that its contradictions compel. Obviously I am not a purist. But I must have a oneness, a resolution that becomes essentially simple despite complexity.

The creative process eventually requires me to *paint* the fuller development that is possible, though drawing seems more conducive to rapid and expanded exploration. Before this present period I would have made a series of beginnings on canvas and trusted endless repainting to weave an intelligible invention. I hope that this new period of concentrated drawing will clarify and perhaps expedite my next group of paintings. Drawing has always had its own pleasures for me. I understand again that its role can be enlarged.



"West Soho," drawing by Anthony Toney.

"Yonkers," drawing by Anthony Toney.

