

D R A W N

Drawn: 30 Portraits

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It is often said that drawing is the most intimate visual art form. Drawings can be made rapidly, on a small scale, using simple materials and without the need for a studio space, a press or a foundry. Thoughts and observations can be recorded almost immediately, ideas tested and explored, compositions planned, and problems solved. Drawing is where artists begin and for many, it remains a constant and important part of their practice. The perceived intimacy, for viewers, comes both from this direct relationship between artist and artwork – the uninterrupted line from eyes to brain to hand to paper – and the fact that drawings very often represent a new thought, a new observation, a new encounter.

The intimacy of a drawing can be both heightened and diminished by the presence of a human subject. An active, sometimes collaborative sitter, with whom the artist might have a pre-existing relationship, can create distance between drawing and viewer, as we become outsiders looking in, witnessing a single scene within a longer story. Often, we can guess at the circumstances in which a portrait has been drawn, taking clues from pose, setting, colour palette and style, but we remain aware, as observers, that there are dynamics at play that we can never fully understand. But human faces, bodies and feelings are universally relatable. Portraits can elicit deep emotional responses, even from those who know nothing about the sitter, and seeing another person through an artist's eyes can provide a deep insight into the way in which the artist views the world.

As this exhibition demonstrates, both portraits and drawings come in many forms, perhaps never more so than in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries when both have been approached in increasingly diverse ways. Artists make drawings for a variety of reasons and with varying levels of finish, from sketches in pencil, charcoal or ink to finished works in pastel or watercolour, intended for display. For the most part, portrait drawings are more informal than portraiture in other media. They tend to be made on a smaller scale and are more often the result of a private moment than, for example, a painting in oil on canvas. Traditionally, when we think of portraiture, we think of faces, of posed bodies and of a mutual, often transactional, contract between artist and subject, but portraiture has expanded beyond this definition. The drawings brought together here include images of people who were unaware they are being represented, abstracted figures, models in the guise of someone else, and, in the case of Eduardo Chillida's *Manos*, a move away from the usual focus on a sitter's face.

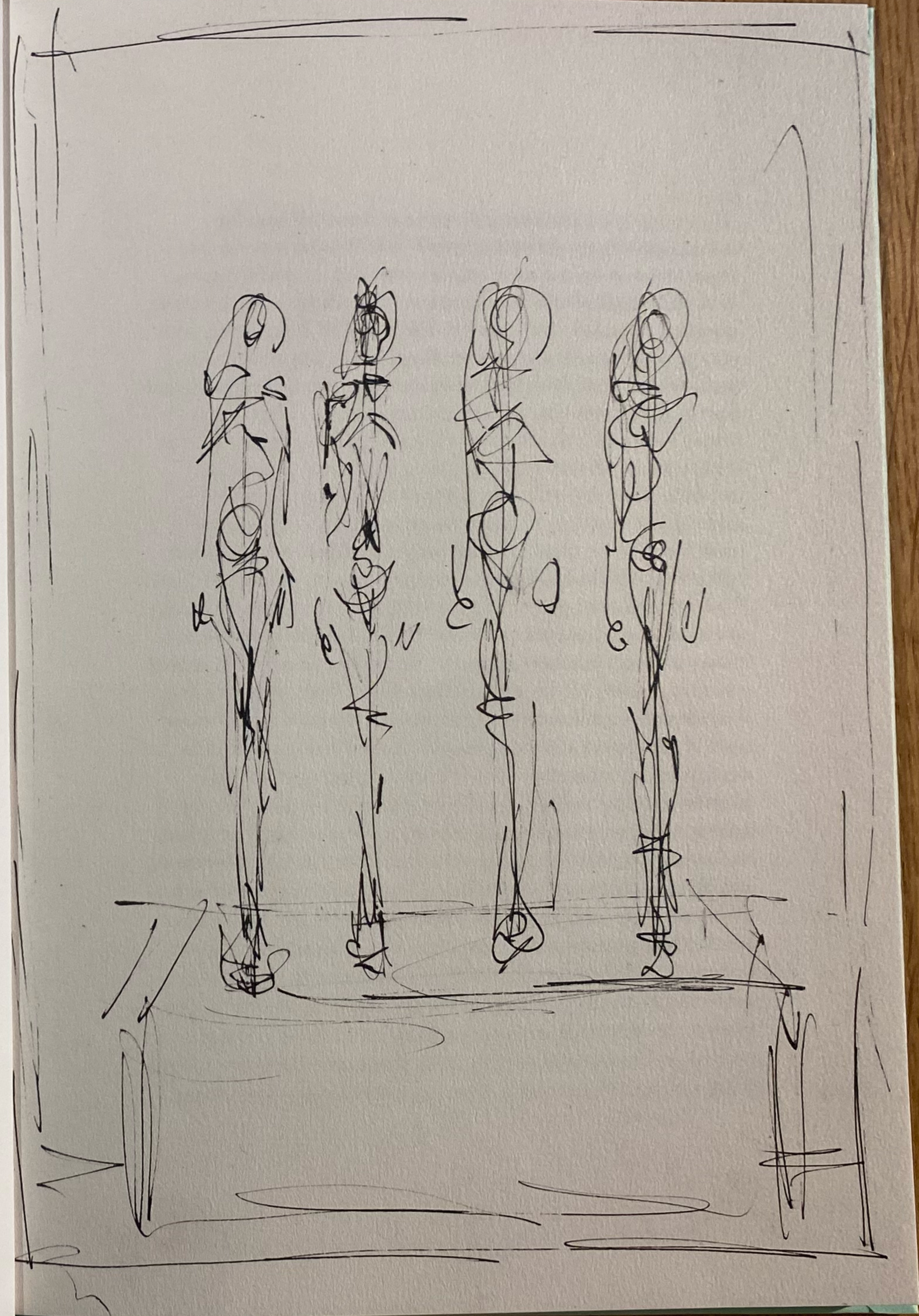
Although the traditional hierarchies of art forms have become increasingly irrelevant in recent times, artists throughout the twentieth century rarely chose drawing as their prime mode of expression. Despite this, drawing, as a practice, is often the foundation on which an artist's work is built. Drawing can begin a creative process, untangle a knot or provide respite from other forms of making art. Chillida, who was better known as a sculptor, created a body of hand drawings over many years, which allowed him to explore space, volume, movement and three-dimensionality, while Matisse often made drawings in order to solve compositional problems that he had encountered in his paintings. Matisse's reliance on drawing increased in the second half of his career, when the practice became less about finding solutions and more central to his creative process. For many artists, drawing serves as a form of exercise, a regular activity that keeps ideas flowing and generates new ones. Some artists draw as a matter of routine.

The Colombian-born artist José Antonio Suárez Londoño began to create daily drawings in 1997, a habit he shares with British artist Maggi Hambling. Others have dedicated set periods of time to make only drawings, including Michael Landy, who, in 2008, made pencil portrait drawings every day for five months. Landy also turned to drawing as a process of personal and creative renewal: after destroying all of his possessions as part of his 2001 work *Break Down*, he created 'Nourishment', a series of delicate 'portraits' of weeds growing on the streets of London, which he developed into a series of etchings.

The Surrealist artists recognised the potential of drawing to unlock an idea. Aiming to access the subconscious, artists such as Joan Miró utilised automatic drawing, creating instinctive, unpremeditated marks on a page from which they would develop an image. Miró's distinctive visual language of biomorphic forms and simplified, childlike imagery grew out of this practice. Others have found the spontaneous nature of drawing to be useful in similar ways. The American Abstract Expressionist painter Willem de Kooning made many drawings throughout his career, all of which fed directly or indirectly into his finished compositions. Adopting processes akin to the Surrealists' automatism, de Kooning sought to express his unmediated thoughts by removing layers of control from his image-making. He would draw, for instance, with his weaker left hand or while he was watching television without looking at the paper. This function of drawing as a means to find the unknown, was described by Bridget Riley in 2009: 'For me, drawing is an enquiry, a way of finding out – the first thing that I discover is that I do not know'.² For this reason, drawings often record a transitional moment in an artist's career: the discovery of a new motif, the development of a new style, a new approach to form or colour.

For artists for whom drawing is a regular, if not a daily, practice, the people around them can provide ready subjects. A prolific portraitist, Lucian Freud depicted friends, lovers, members of his family and people he found interesting, often portraying the same sitter again and again. An existing relationship between artist and subject almost always heightens the emotional intensity of an image, as artists consciously or unconsciously infuse an image with the psychological undercurrents, sexual energy, power dynamics and other tensions that impact their connection with that person. Freud's early portraits, which tend to be closely cropped and focus on a sitter's head, are particularly highly charged, especially his drawings in which emotion and mood are expressed through stark linear features. Freud understood that his images of those closest to him served as double portraits, revealing something of both his sitter and himself. This duality is made explicit in his 1947 ink drawing *Flyda and Arvid*, in which his then wife Kitty Garman is depicted in profile, head only, her large eyes looking straight ahead across the plane, while a partially obscured Freud appears behind, his one eye looking past Kitty and directly at us; both appear troubled. Celia Paul, who has also made many portraits of close friends and family members, has described herself as an autobiographer rather than a portrait painter, acknowledging the implicit self-portraiture in her images of others including her mother and sisters. Imbued with an emotional intensity that can often feel melancholic, Paul's portraits and self-portraits remain relatively constant in their tone, even as she moves from sitter to sitter, suggesting that it is she rather than her subjects who determines the pervading mood. In contrast, the mood of Picasso's portraits of his wives and lovers varies greatly, but those images are also shaped largely by the artist's own emotions. Indeed, Dora Maar, Picasso's partner between 1936 and 1944 and the model for the series 'La femme qui pleure', felt the portraits were primarily about Picasso rather than herself.

The function of a portrait drawing can vary widely. Some, as we have seen, serve as explorations of the self or of an artist's relationships with other people, while some are made as studies, or exercises intended to provide creative stimulation. Some are intended as private images, produced as gifts, tokens of affection or to serve as a memorial, and others serve a more practical purpose, fulfilling a clear role in an artist's wider process. The prolific portraitist Frank Auerbach, for example, begins the process of making a painted portrait by drawing his sitter from life. Like Celia Paul, Auerbach maintains a small circle of recurring sitters, some of whom he has drawn and painted repeatedly over several decades. The familiarity of a subject can remove the need to focus on likeness and allow an artist to pay more attention to form, texture, tone and light, leaving room for greater experimentation. Using pencil, crayon, charcoal or paint, Auerbach sketches his portraits on paper, forming an image out of rapidly drawn, jagged lines that dance around each other and intersect. The intense creative labour involved in his drawings is often evident through signs of erasure, rubbing, reworking, patching, and the multiple layers through which his images are composed. Giacometti's imprecise, voluminous drawings have a similar kinetic energy. A prolific draughtsman, the Swiss artist made many preparatory sketches but also developed a practice of drawing his own sculptural works retrospectively, to reflect on compositions that he had already created. The drawing in this exhibition, for example, references his 1950 sculpture *Quatre figurines sur piédestal*, which was inspired by four naked women in a Paris brothel viewed from a distance. Perhaps this exploration of his earlier work is a self-portrait in itself, an examination of a former creative moment undertaken in order to decide where to go next.



In contrast to the preparatory studies of Auerbach and the introspective drawings of Giacometti and Chillida, many artists make stand-alone drawings that are intended for public display. In the mid-1990s, Paula Rego began to make large-scale narrative drawings in pastel, which she has described as 'like painting with your fingers'. The American artist Kara Walker has also made large-scale pastels in recent years, including a series of allegorical portraits of Barack Obama and epic scenes the size of grand history paintings. The versatility of drawing allows artists such as Walker, for whom drawing is a primary medium of expression, to create these striking compositions that can compete with painting and sculpture to gain a viewer's attention, as well as small pencil or ink drawings that require a viewer to move closer rather than stand back. Drawing has also been important for David Hockney, who has approached the medium in many different ways and made many portraits of friends, lovers and public figures in a variety of media including pencil, ink and coloured pencil. In recent years his drawing tool of choice has been an iPad. After a period in which drawing became unfashionable as artists sought 'newer' ways of making art, contemporary artists are rediscovering the medium as an exploratory one. Transferring the drive to push boundaries to the medium itself, they are redefining the field by making drawings using unusual materials like wax, glitter and hair, and embracing unconventional techniques such as burning, sewing and digital technologies. At the same time, contemporary artists are increasingly recognising the value in sketching and drawing from life and looking back to learn from the drawings of the past, a practice that is important to British artist Glenn Brown whose works frequently reference historical art. The possibilities for this ancient, contemporary and ever-evolving art form are endless and exciting. As Giacometti famously said, 'If one could master drawing, all the rest would be possible. Drawing is the basis of everything'.³

- ¹ David Hockney, quoted in <https://jesssmartsmiley.wordpress.com/2013/05/16/drawing-with-a-camera-lucida/>
- ² Bridget Riley, quoted in <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v31/n19/bridget-riley/at-the-end-of-my-pencil>
- ³ Alberto Giacometti, quoted in James Lord, *Dessins d'Alberto Giacometti*, Paris: Editions Seghers, 1971, p. 26.

Glenn Brown (b. 1966)
Drawing 2 (after Tiepolo)
Executed in 2023

