

A Drawing Like No Other



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MARILYN
BROUGHT BACK
TO LIFE IN
9,000,000 MARKS

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART

American University Museum

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Billy Pappas, Artist
Gary Vikan, Curator

February 7 - May 19, 2024

American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

Washington, DC

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Gary Vikan

The award-winning documentary, *Waiting for Hockney*, had its Tribeca Film Festival premier in April 2008 and shortly thereafter was screened in Baltimore as part of that year's Maryland Film Festival. The theaters were packed. I appear about two-thirds of the way down the credits, as “Museum Director, playing himself.” The film's subjects are the extraordinary drawing—and the remarkable artist—that are the subjects of this exhibition. And the highly unusual quest they represent.

Opposite: Fig. 1. Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.



Fig. 2. Billy Pappas at work on his drawing of Marilyn Monroe in his Choptank, MD studio.

Fig. 3. Billy Pappas studying his lips for his drawing of Marilyn Monroe in his Choptank, MD studio.

During my two decades as director of the Walters Art Museum, I had the privilege of meeting many interesting people, and among them, Billy Pappas. Billy, who is a graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art and still lives in Baltimore, came to see me at the Walters in 1996, when he was 29 years old, at the urging of a mutual friend. He was seeking my opinion on his current project (fig. 1).

Billy Pappas' story was at once strange and intriguing. It seems that Billy had by then been working pretty much nonstop for two years on a single drawing based on a reproduction of the famous Richard Avedon soft focus photograph of Marilyn Monroe from 1957. After those many months of work, Billy had only partially completed Marilyn's face. He described working seven days a week, sixteen hours a day, using nothing more elaborate than standard drawing pencils and two sets of magnifiers (fig. 2). He told me he was using live models, including his own face and lips, to load his drawing with three-dimensional detail impossible in





Fig. 4. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, circa 1510. Silverpoint heightened with white on brown prepared paper, 8.1875 x 5.8125 in. The National Gallery of Art, Rosenwald Collection. 1943.3.3699



Fig. 5. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), *Auguste-Jean-Marie Guénepin*, 1809. Graphite on wove paper, 8.25 x 6.4375 in. The National Gallery of Art. Gift of Robert H. and Clarice Smith. 1975.77.2

photography (fig. 3) all the time striving, he said, for a depth of resolution and a degree of verisimilitude never before attempted, much less achieved, in the history of art. I was stunned.

Billy Pappas, who was then waiting tables at a local restaurant, had brought his partially finished *Marilyn Monroe* with him that day in a large wooden crate. As he opened it, all I could think was that I didn't want to be present if his drawing were damaged. I didn't want my office lamp to fall on it, and I certainly didn't want to sneeze. This drawing was, after all, the very embodiment of many months of his life.

Billy Pappas was (and is) at once a truly gifted draftsman, an artist driven to the point of obsession, and a thoroughly articulate spokesperson for his unusual quest. This drawing is, for Billy, his equivalent of Charles Lindbergh's solo flight across the Atlantic. And at the same time, it is his bid to open a new frontier in drawing—in technique and in a level of realism that would supersede the greatest draftsmen of all time; the likes of Dürer from Renaissance Germany (fig. 4) and Ingres from 19th-century France (fig. 5), as well as the hyperrealist artists of today, whose creative cycles are measured in months, not years.

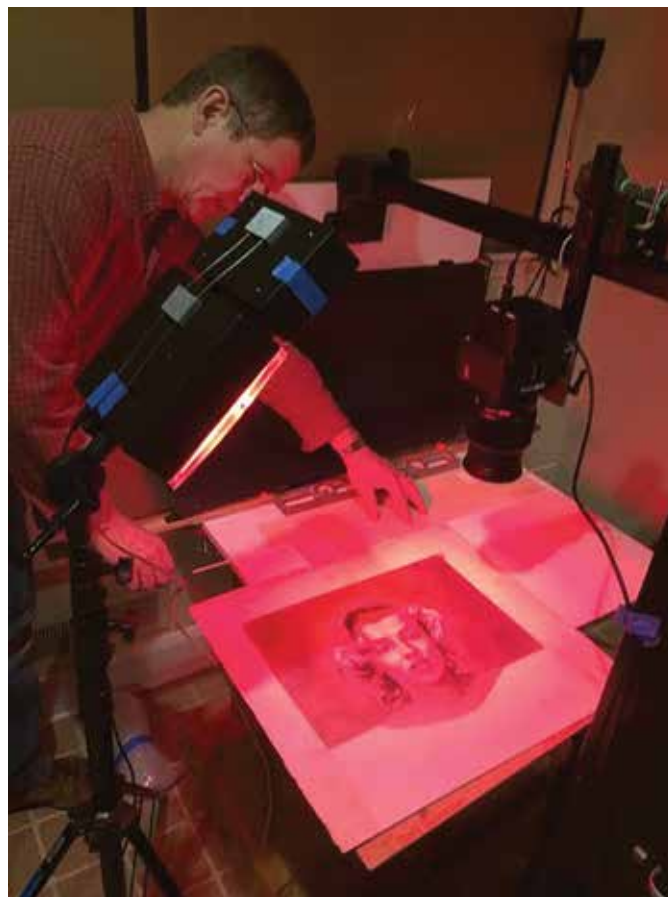


Fig. 6. Billy Pappas showing progress on his drawing of Marilyn Monroe to the author at the Walters Art Museum in the late 1990s.

In truth, I was challenged by Billy's achievement. The great draftsmen that I had encountered over my professional life as an art historian were all familiar, impressive, and easily compared, one to the other. And I eventually learned how to "read" them. Billy's *Marilyn Monroe*, on the other hand, seems to fall into an entirely different category, both in what it captures visually and in what it offers—and asks—of the viewer. Getting to know this drawing takes concentration and patience, for what Billy has created is a seemingly living being within and behind Avedon's photo. Marilyn Monroe brought back to life.

Every year or so after that Billy Pappas would stop by the Walters to show me his progress (fig. 6), until the drawing was completed, on January 2, 2003—eight and one-half years and nearly nine million pencil marks after it was begun. The precision and detail of Billy's completed work are so profound, its visual data so rich and deep, that to fully capture it digitally required the narrow band multi-spectral imaging techniques developed by Bill Christens-Barry for imaging of the Dead Sea Scrolls (fig. 7). Amazingly, no amount of enlargement could reveal a single, isolated mark of Billy's pencil. Why? Because just the pupil of Marilyn's left eye would represent thousands of marks.

Fig. 7. William A. Christens-Barry, PhD, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC, scanning Billy Pappas's drawing of Marilyn Monroe in his home lab in suburban Baltimore in 2017. Photo: Gary Vikan.



I wonder what we would make of this drawing if it had turned up anonymously, without Billy Pappas to tell us how and why it was created.

Around the time Billy was completing his drawing, I hit on the idea of getting Billy together with David Hockney in Los Angeles. Why? Because David Hockney believes that the great draftsmen in the history of art were using various mechanical, “camera-like” aids in creating their drawings: specifically, the *camera obscura* and the *camera lucida*. I was convinced that Hockney would be amazed at what Billy had accomplished with a pencil and magnifiers.

Billy Pappas finally got his audience with David Hockney in late October 2004 at Hockney’s home and studio on Mulholland Drive. I was lucky enough to be present that day with my camera when Billy and his drawing of Marilyn Monroe spent more than four hours with Hockney (fig. 8). There was David Hockney, a cigarette in one hand and a magnifying glass in the other, poring over Billy’s drawing with complete concentration. At one point he turned to Billy and asked: “How did you manage to draw those little white strands of hair on Marilyn’s neck?” And then, he got up to get a close look at the hairs on Billy’s neck (fig. 9), believing that they must have provided the model for Marilyn. “Simple,” said Billy, “What you see are not strokes of a white pencil, but the absence of precisely the amount of graphite to give the



Fig. 8. David Hockney studying Billy Pappas' drawing of Marilyn Monroe in his home studio in Los Angeles in 2004. They cover their mouths to protect the drawing. Photo: Gary Vikan.

impression of the presence of fine hair, using negative space to suggest something that in fact is not there.”

Ben Davis of *Artnet* wrote in his review of *Waiting for Hockney*, “Pappas has clearly done *something*, maybe even something great—you leave the film wanting to see the work in real life.” And he continued, “Isn’t pressing buttons in your head that you didn’t know were there exactly what art is supposed to do?”

From the day the Wright brothers got off the ground in their crude biplane at Kitty Hawk, it was inevitable that someone, someday, would fly solo across the Atlantic. Billy Pappas’ *Marilyn Monroe* was not inevitable. In this case, the artist invented his own enormous mountain, and then, over eight years, proceeded to climb it. Who, I wonder, will follow him?



Fig. 9. David Hockney and Billy Pappas discussing how Billy created the fine hairs on the neck of Marilyn Monroe in his drawing. They are in Hockney’s home studio in Los Angeles in 2004. Photo: Gary Vikan.

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Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe*, 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.

BILLY PAPPAS: STATEMENT OF PROCESS AND PURPOSE

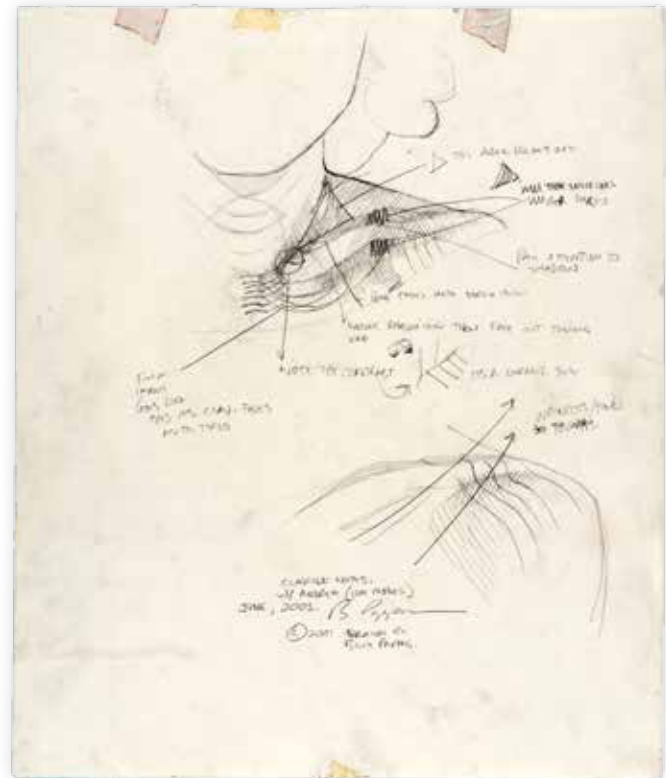
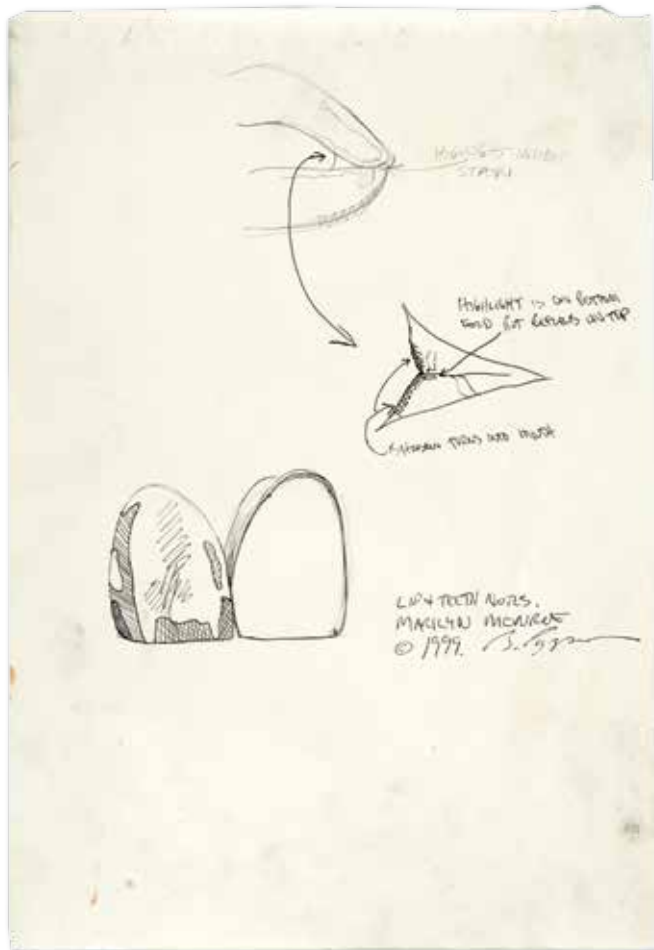
“...You get this pillow of air lodged
in your mouth and you noticed you
have not breathed for twenty seconds...”

– Lawrence Weschler,
reflecting on viewing Pappas’ portrait of Marilyn Monroe

I drew this while standing up, using graphite pencils, working under 7-12x magnification. In my left hand I held a magnifier, the right hand a pencil. Both arms had to be still, so I rested each in slings hung from the top of my drawing table.

Marilyn Monroe was my choice. I liked how she’s been the subject of countless artists, and her icon status would maximize my audience. The Avedon portrait chosen has no focus, making it perfect for my point of departure and mission.

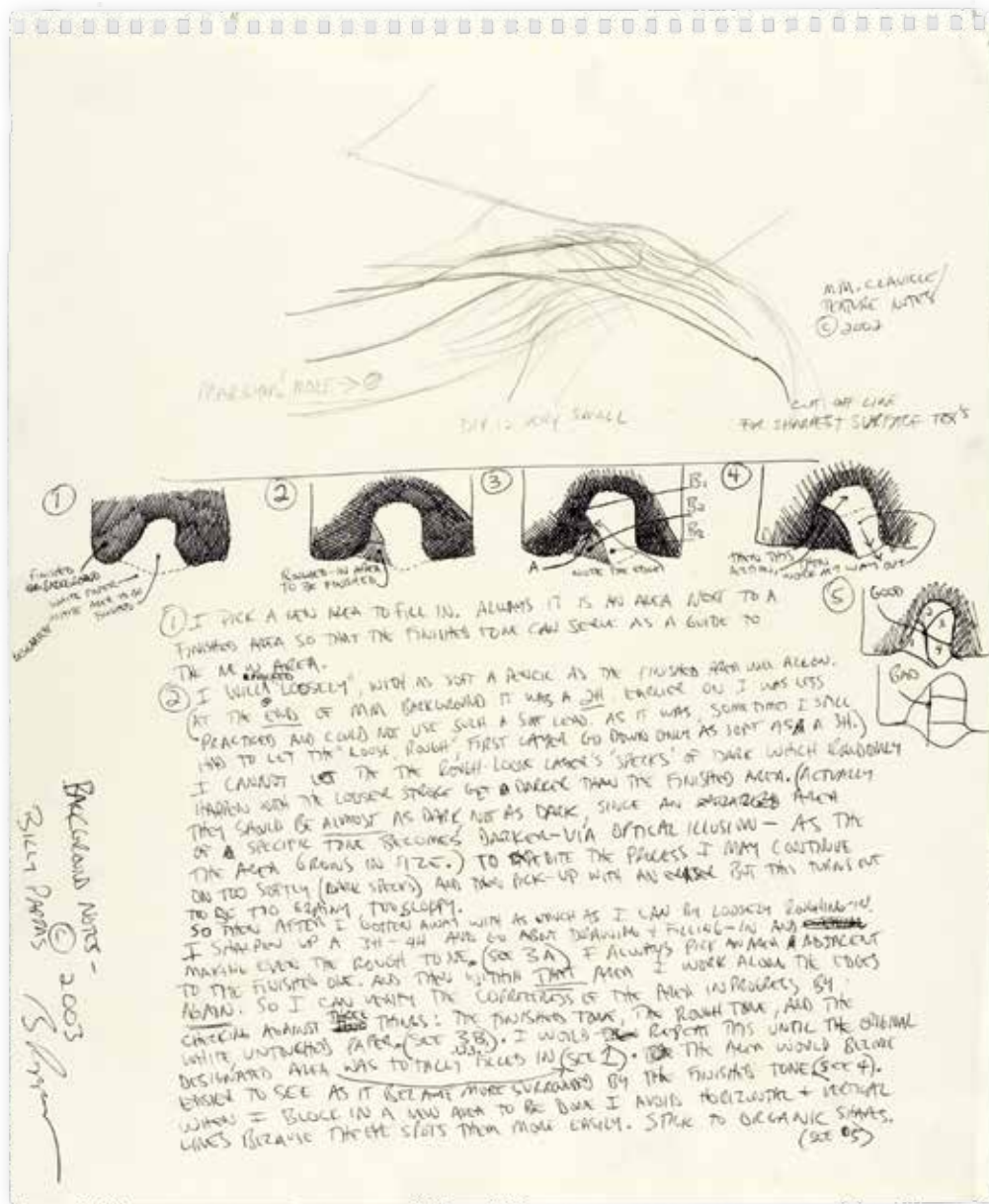
Then I took after life’s minutiae: the things and seemingly infinite surface textures unique to each of us. First, I amassed hundreds of photos of Marilyn. Then I used live models, including using myself as one. Live models gave me access to surface detail, which is the most salient feature of this work. For me, this is what gives life and presence, yet I’d never before seen captured what I see when observing another face or my own in a mirror. I learned the technique of Marilyn’s make-up artist and did the same to my face. Then I would draw from a hand-held mirror, alternating pencil and magnifier in the other hand. Only this way was I able to observe what I needed to draw. Said physicist/art theorist Charles Falco, “By incorporating three-dimensional information from live models, Billy has arrived at his own solution to this fundamental limitation of the photograph.” The rewarding end to working from life is being

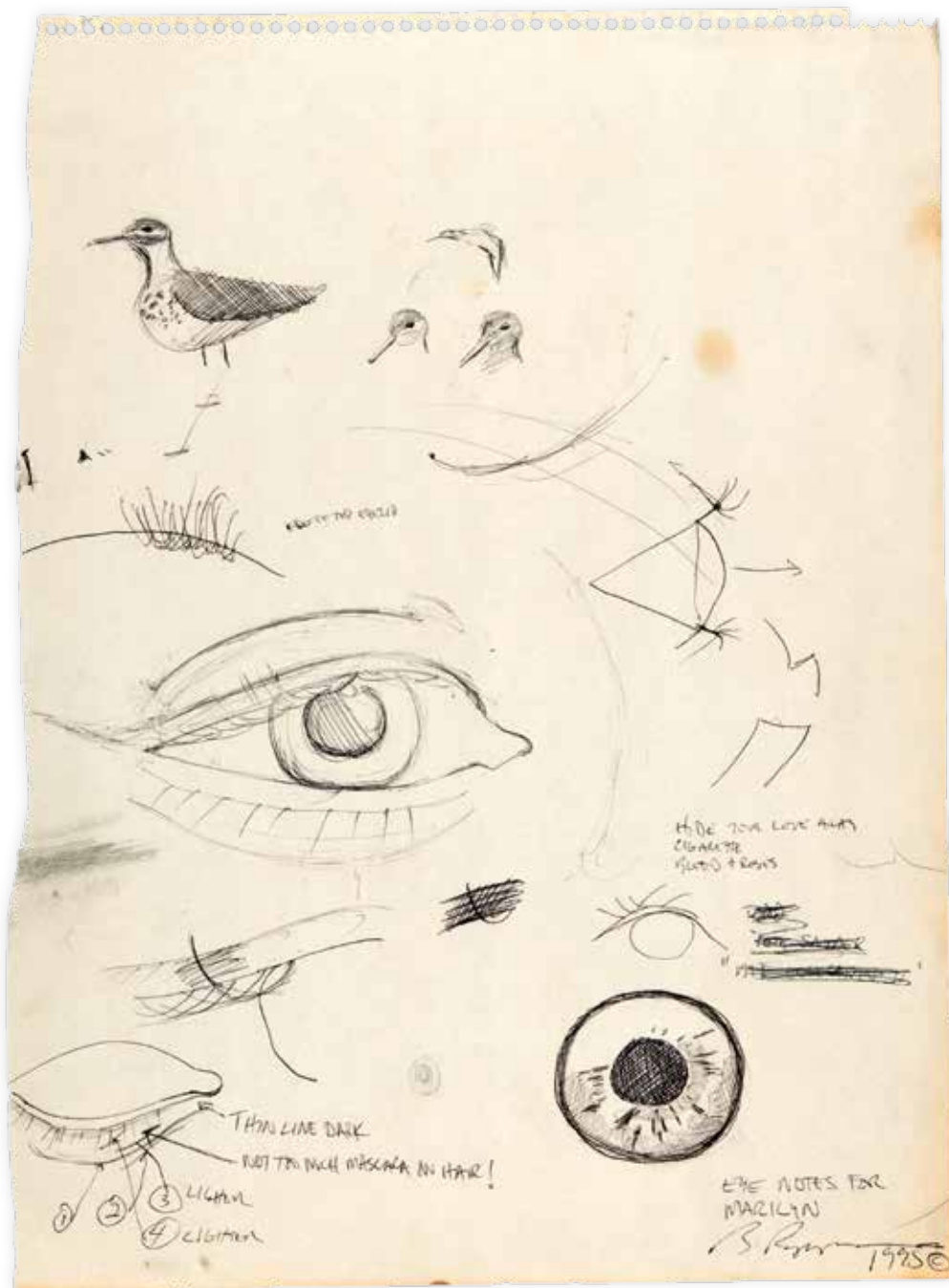


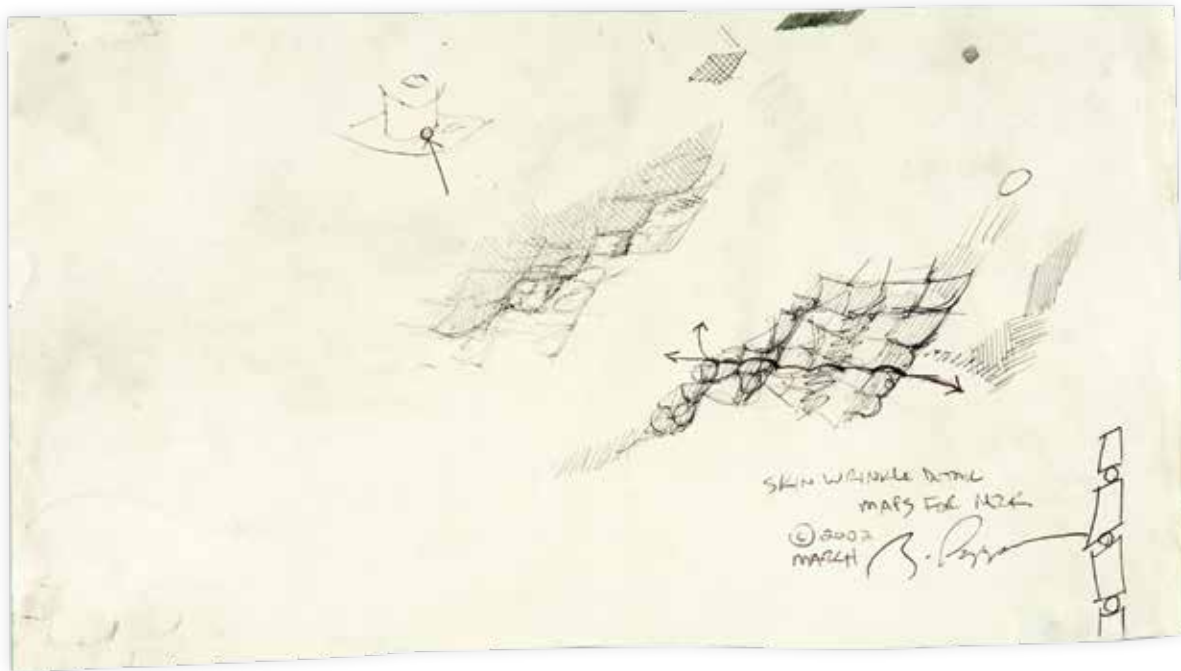
liberated from referencing two-dimensional images and crafting what comes to mind as our eyes focus and refocus on what is real. In short, as we *scrutinize*.

We know photography has its limits, despite its ubiquity and putative veracity. And the genres of painting derived from it—considered the tops of verisimilitude—always left me wanting to see more. I draw rather than paint, as anything applied with a brush is watery to viscous, i.e., it moves, as do the hairs of a brush upon contact. And there occurs a slight loss of control. Again, Charles Falco, “Eventually, with a Van Eyck, the detail only carries to a certain level—not as deeply as Billy’s does.” Graphite provides that I suffer no such loss. Pencil points don’t bend.

Edges. Edges and how to resolve them carry as much import for a naturalistic effect as hierarchy of tone. In play here are two types of edges. The first is one which defines and







separates characters within the form. For example, what happens where Marilyn’s lips (or anyone’s!) end and the face surrounding it resumes? Further, her eyes: *how* does the iris end and the sclera around it begin? I investigated these things. The second edge is where and how her figure’s outermost edge behaves against the space around it. Edges create atmosphere and electricity—both for the features of her face and her entire figure in space.

“You’ve drawn the human mammal,” observed Lawrence Weschler, creative non-fiction writer and former staff writer for the *New Yorker*, adding that *Marilyn Monroe* may qualify as the world’s most ecstatic scientific illustration. As a lifelong naturalist, my childhood was busy with books on herpetology, Roger Tory Peterson’s heralded field guide, etc. I was ever aware of Marilyn’s status as an icon being a distant second and hers as a primate being first. My keenness for detail comes from reverence for nature, pure and simple. In fact I would describe my approach this way: as much as is humanly possible, to obviate any kind of style at all and transmit life as two human eyes see it.

Throughout, I never settled for having resolved how I would draw something, say, the hair, and then merely distributed that formula across the required area of paper. To do so would have felt—and likely looked—rote and hollow. It is fair to expect that anyone performing a specific task for thousands of hours would improve along the way, right? For instance, Marilyn’s hair took two years. I see a change between the first-drawn lock of hair and what I would offer as the *best-drawn* lock of hair. The same for her skin and so on. There is the first of the skin—I had to start somewhere—and the last, the best. Imagine a truck spreading salt as it goes down a highway. By comparison, I moved like an icebreaker.

This kind of drawing was and is arduous, to this day straining my resources and faculties. But shouldn’t Great Art push, and flirt with insanity? I hoped to achieve and share visual truth by this portrait, aspiring to the peerless incisiveness achieved by biographer Robert Caro. I wanted to take a portrait where Lindbergh took the airplane, to take it out of bounds and give it the attention-commanding capability of a bombastic live performance.

Where are values like sacrifice, tolerating inconvenience, and postponed gratification today, amid our present culture of having everything immediately? *Marilyn Monroe* aims to introduce a new height, while honoring one of civilization’s oldest disciplines.

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BILLY PAPPAS, GERRIT DOU, AND “REFINED MINUTENESS”

David G. Stork

THE WORK

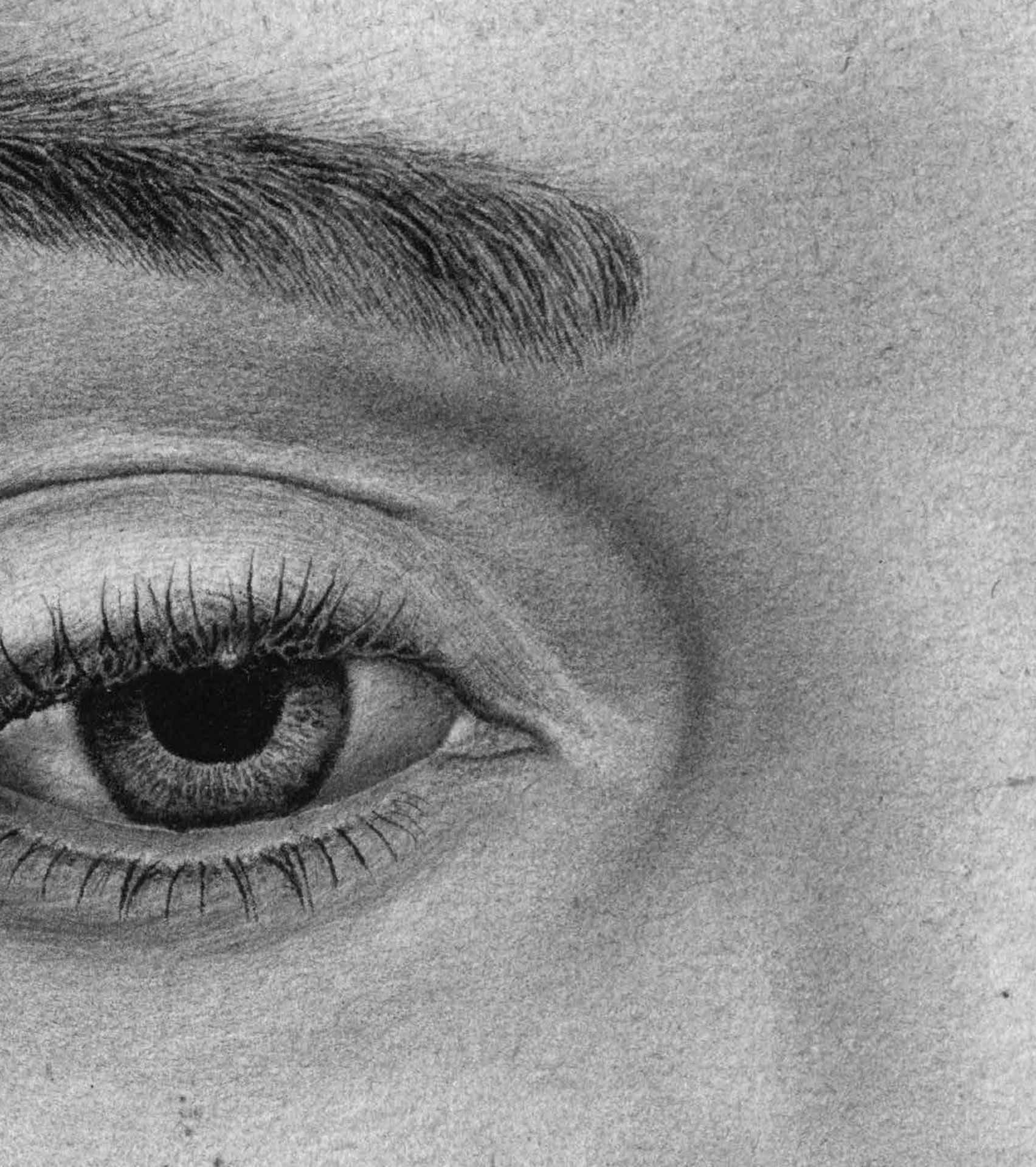
Billy Pappas' *Marilyn Monroe* (2003) is a drawing in graphite on paper, 40.6 x 56 cm, based heavily on Richard Avedon's photograph *Marilyn Monroe, actress, New York* (1957) as a referent. Monroe, then aged 30, had pranced, sung, flirted, and played around Avedon's studio in May, but at the end of the day, a bit tired, sat quietly in a corner, where the photographer took his iconic half-length portrait, which is rightly celebrated for capturing the introspection, the insecurity, the *person* behind the icon of the silver screen. The uniform gray background, her frontal almost passive pose, but especially her downcast eyes, unselfconsciously parted lips that show no indication of speaking, or having spoken, all draw us to speculate on her character, her thoughts, her feelings.

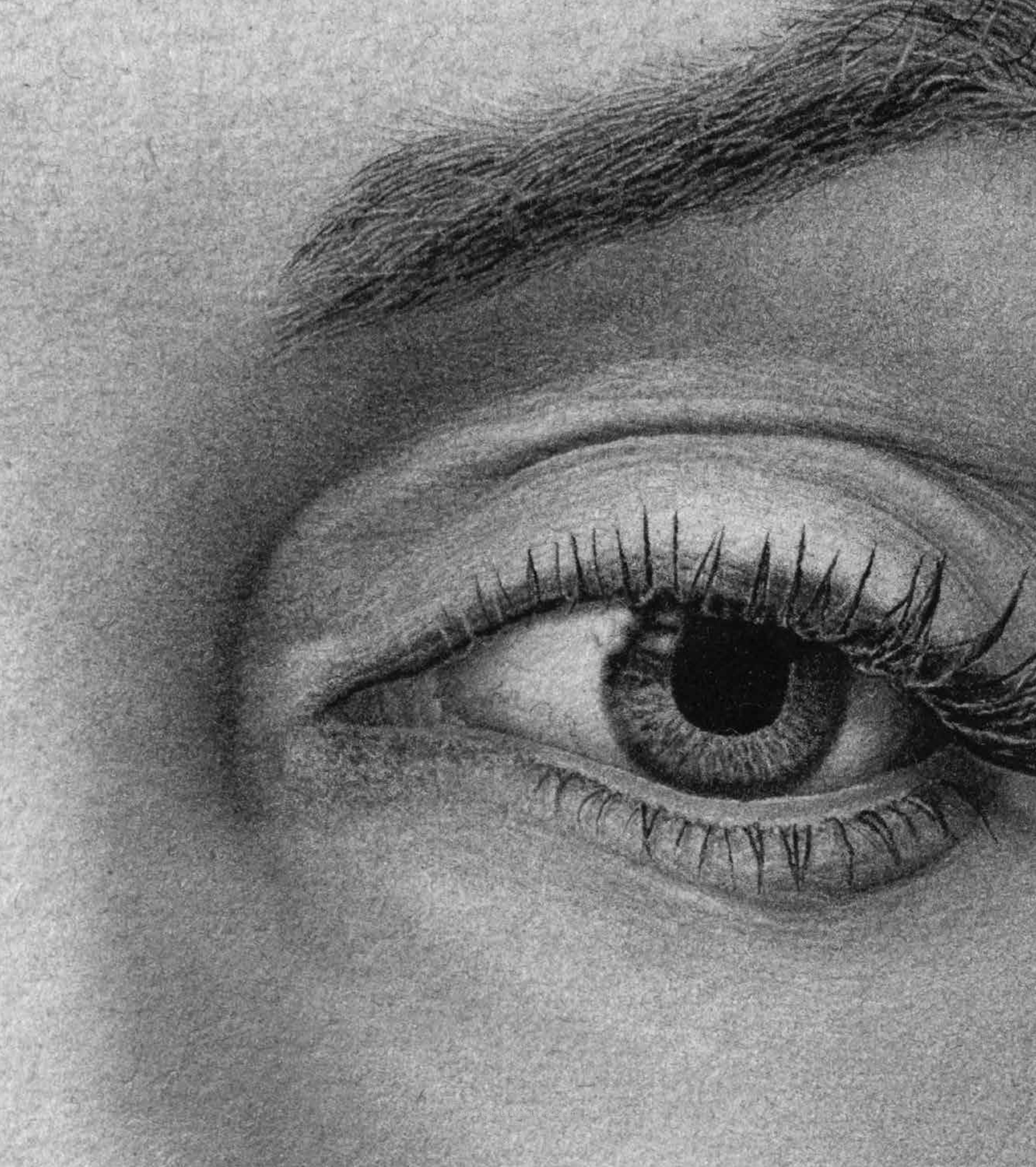
Pappas pushes further, though, and crops the image at the neck, retains the featureless background but omits the sparkly black dress straps and thereby strips the portrait to its bare essentials: no strong lighting, no recognizable setting, no partner, no props, no costume, no action, no color. While her beauty remains, this is not a work of flattery. Our knowledge that just five years after Avedon's portrait, Monroe would take her own life through an overdose of barbiturates draws us into searching for answers to not merely *who* but also *why*. Leonardo wrote, “The good painter has to paint two principal things, that is to say, man and the intention of his mind. The first is easy, the second is difficult...” and showed his mastery of the latter in all his portraits, most notably *Lady with an Ermine* and *La Belle Ferronnière*. So too, Pappas' portrait is like an x-ray of Monroe's mind. This drawing is as unadorned, concentrated, pure, and honest an image of a celebrity as has ever been created.

It is not simply the cropping, subject matter, and general design that reveal the actress as never before; the power of the work also stems from Pappas' unique technique and Herculean effort to render unprecedented detail.

Opposite: Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.







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PAPPAS' DEVELOPMENT

What in the artist's background might have led to the creation of this remarkable drawing? Pappas was born in New York and grew up in a working-class home in Baltimore, where the visual arts were not particularly valued; he showed an early talent and drive that ultimately led to studies at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. His early works included competent but undistinguished portraits and pencil drawings that mixed nature and domestic interiors, presumably executed in part from photographs. These small drawings display an understated humor where, for instance, frogs wear human-like expressions and are mirrored, as in a kaleidoscope, in the paper cut designs over the kitchen table. Such animal drawings would serve well as illustrations in a high-budget children's book, think an update of *The Wind in the Willows*.

THE ORIGIN OF MARILYN MONROE

Pappas was waiting tables in 1994 when he began *Marilyn Monroe*, determined to produce a drawing of unprecedented detail—beyond what might be apparent in Avedon's photograph and even beyond what others thought possible for the medium of graphite drawing. He was inspired by cultural figures who pushed their life missions to the extreme and were fundamentally self-reliant, such as songwriter-guitarist Pete Townshend of *The Who* and aviator Charles Lindbergh. Pappas worked nearly non-stop for several months at which time he spoke with Gary Vikan, director of the Walters Art Museum, who recognized the importance (if perhaps not the full scale) of Pappas' quest. Pappas secured financial support so he could devote himself full-time to the drawing. Pappas had, by then, demonstrated his monk-like discipline and established his glacial drawing pace of roughly 1 mm² per eight-hour day—about the area inside this o. It seems that nobody then did the simple arithmetic to establish how long the full project would take—over eight years or more than twice as long as Michelangelo took to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

Pages 26–29: Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.

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PAPPAS' PRAXIS

Pappas worked on *Marilyn Monroe*, his sole project, roughly eight hours per day, six days a week. He stood before the vertically mounted paper and wore, at times, a high-powered loupe or three stacked pairs of magnifying eyeglasses in order to see the extraordinary detail in his work. He found, however, that such optics made visible the tiny oscillations in his hand and pencil due to his heartbeat, so he retreated somewhat, lowering the magnification. He also used a sling to support his arm, lest it tire and twitch and thereby prevent him from executing precise, minuscule pencil marks.

Pappas used a hard graphite mechanical pencil and re-sharpened the tip after nearly every mark. Such a mark could be as small as roughly 0.0005 mm² or about 200,000 carbon atoms across. He consulted Avedon's photograph, other photographs of Monroe, micrographs of skin, and four live women and himself as models, primarily to capture the subtle details in hair, skin, pores, and moles. Although most of Pappas' drawing time involved viewing and working on an area the size of a period at the end of this sentence, on occasion he had to step back and “zoom out” to ensure that the work cohered stylistically over its full surface.

Pappas' praxis allowed him to overcome the inherent optical limitations of depth of field in Avedon's photograph, that is, the fact that objects at all depths cannot be simultaneously in perfect focus.¹ The human visual system does not suffer from limited depth of field; we naturally and automatically refocus our eyes (accommodate) so that wherever we direct our visual attention, that object is in focus. Both in resolution and depth of field, then, Pappas' drawing captures what Avedon's camera could not.

EXPERIENCING PAPPAS' "REFINED MINUTENESS"

Just one person can adequately view the drawing at a time, making the experience quite intimate. The only way to see and thus fully appreciate the detail in the drawing is to use a loupe or magnifying glass (I have spent hours studying an extremely high-resolution digital scan of the work on a high-resolution computer monitor which, while satisfying, cannot convey the physicality and the rich surface structure of the drawing). Each individual hair and eyelash is rendered as a full cylinder, including tapering. When the hair fills the field of view, it resembles a scuba diver's view of a bed of tube seaweed. The vellus hair, especially on her cheek at the right, seems to glow and is due to thin lines of the exposed paper, unmarked by graphite. The iris pattern is so detailed that it is likely computer iris recognition software, applied to the drawing, would confirm the sitter's identity.

Experiencing the work—in the flesh, so to speak—demands viewing from different distances or under a range of magnifications, and this leads to a perceptual phenomenon produced by several other drawings and paintings in the Western canon. Once we've seen the extraordinary detail—the modeling of a few eyelashes, say, or the gnarled surface of a mole—and then step back to view the work as a whole such that we cannot still see the full detail, we nevertheless remember that detail. Our perception is, then, a mixture of what we see, details we *have seen*, and details that we merely *think we may be seeing*. An analogous perceptual phenomenon occurs when viewing Georges Seurat's *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* from close (where the pointillist brush strokes are clearly visible) and from a large distance (where we can only remember having seen the individual brush strokes). We are drawn close to *Marilyn Monroe*, then pushed back, thinking we know what we see, then realizing we do not, much like the general public's unsettled understanding of the film star's persona.



THE RELATION TO THE USE OF OPTICS

Pappas' quest to secure an audience and endorsement from artist David Hockney, as recounted in *Waiting for Hockney*,² was an exercise in delay and frustration worthy of Samuel Beckett. Given Pappas' singlemindedness and perseverance, though, success was all but assured. In addition to Hockney's wide acclaim as a painter, set designer, and photographer, Pappas was intrigued by Hockney's extremely controversial claim that some early Renaissance artists directly traced optical projections and that this technique was the source of a novel "optical look" in art of that time.³

Hockney's tracing theory has been unanimously rejected by independent optical and image scientists, curators, and historians of optics and art, at least for the early dates he claimed.⁴ However, for decades a number of scholars have explored the weaker hypothesis that some artists may have *seen* projected images and that this influenced their art. The effect of photography on fine art painting in the 19th century was profound, leading to changes in composition (the "snapshot" compositions), the use of photographs as referents, the economics of patronage, and much more.

Optics is of course an essential component in Pappas' drawing, from Avedon's Rolleiflex camera to Pappas' stacked eyeglasses to the viewers' magnifying glasses (naturally Monroe's fame was entirely dependent upon still cameras for her early pinup career and upon complex movie cameras for her film career). Optics has affected the development of the visual arts, but except in a handful of cases, quite possibly in the 17th century and well established in the 18th century and later, only occasionally through artists tracing projected images, despite Hockney's well-publicized claims.

THE PLACE OF *MARILYN MONROE* IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DRAWING

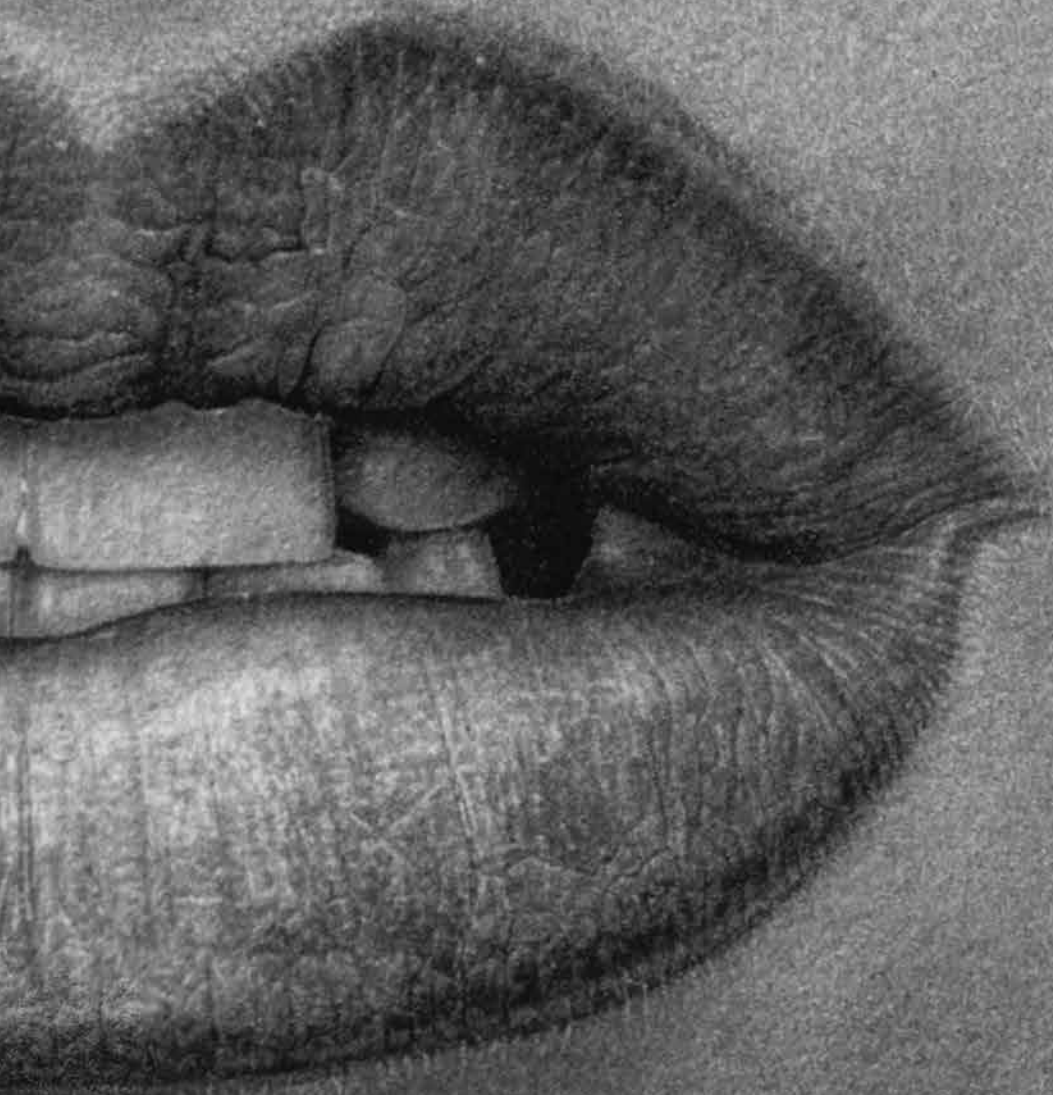
How does Pappas' achievement stem from broader trends in the development of art and art praxis? The most obvious precedents based on the resolution and fidelity to a photographic referent, are the photorealists such as Richard Estes, Robert Bechtel, John Baeder, Malcolm Morley, and early Chuck Close,⁵ as well as the hyperrealists such as Charles Bell, Tjalf Sparnaay, Glennray Tutor, and others.⁶

It would, however, be a mistake to focus on a few surface similarities between Pappas' drawing and the work of these artists. First, these artists worked in oil or acrylic. The thinnest paint mark these artists can make is far thicker than those Pappas makes because even a single brush hair is flexible, and paint is viscous, has surface adhesion, and spreads on the primed canvas. Moreover, the hyperrealists seek to add detail beyond that of their referent photographs but do so by relying upon knowledge of what the subject must look like at the smaller scale. When Malcolm Morley painted *Empire Monarch* from a postcard, the extra detail he added to the cruise ship came from his *knowledge* of ships, windows, water, and so on. The closer we inspect these paintings, the more we confirm what we know. In contrast, Pappas, through his fixity of purpose and use of optical elements, sees and then draws the details that elude the casual viewer and nearly all hyperrealists.

But Pappas' most salient difference with the vast majority of hyperrealists is in subject matter and stance. Most hyperrealists take a distant, ironic stance and generally render the inanimate, the popular—pinball machines, shiny automobiles, cityscapes, and such. Even Vija Celmins, who executes very detailed drawings from photographs, concentrates on referents such as astrophotographs of the surface of the moon or star fields. Quite a difference from Pappas' sober interest in, respect for, and empathy with his very human subject.

Pappas' treatment of Monroe is the polar opposite of that by the visual artist most widely associated with the film icon. While Andy Warhol's serigraphs are flat, repeated widely, show an almost careless spreading of inks, and are "industrial" and thus devoid of the artist's hand, Pappas' drawing is truly one-of-a-kind, executed at a pace Warhol could barely conceive and possessing a subtlety in modeling at the limits of the human eye and hand.

Opposite: Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.



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Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.







GERRIT DOU

A more revealing precedent is Gerrit Dou (1613–75), who was Rembrandt’s first student and enjoyed a high reputation for his extraordinary patience and detailed renderings in still lifes and faces. Dou would, at times, put on three pairs of eyeglasses—“even when he was young,” as reported by Joachim von Sandrart—so as to see the finest details, both in the subject and his painting.⁷ He may have used an optical device consisting of a square grid of thread over a concave mirror and a diverging lens as a form of telescope.⁸ Before working, he would sit motionless to let the dust in his studio settle before he would retrieve his brushes and paints, stored in a chest in order to keep them clean. One observer noted that he took five days to paint a single hand, likely just a few millimeters across—admittedly break-neck speed compared to Pappas, but still...

In 1641, Jan Janszoon Orlers described Dou as an “excellent master, especially as regards small, subtle, and curious things.”⁹ Writers marveled at Dou’s mastery of microscopic details—a “refined minuteness,” as noted by critic Simon van Leeuwen at the time. Contemporary critics felt that Dou’s works exceeded what anyone thought possible in painting and lavished praise for his works that so perfectly resemble nature that they did not reveal the artist’s methods. In short, capturing reality this way the best artists lose all marks of their own “hand.”

Billy Pappas, *Marilyn Monroe* (detail), 2003. Graphite on paper, 12.79 x 16.34 in. Courtesy of the artist. Digital image provided courtesy of William A. Christens-Barry, Chief Scientist, Equipoise Imaging, LLC.



MARILYN MONROE'S LEGACY AND DESCENDANTS

It is hard to predict how *Marilyn Monroe* may influence future arts—drawing in particular—and our broader understanding of art. Perhaps the work will find a home on the wall of a collector or a public venue such as the National Portrait Gallery. The monk-like dedication and sheer magnitude of the effort Pappas invested in that work ensure that only the most committed artists would dare follow in his footsteps (it also would help if they do not need a steady income from artmaking). The fact that the artist himself has not executed a second such portrait in nearly two decades reinforces this point.

It may turn out that *Marilyn Monroe* spawns no direct derivative works, no descendants, no children, much as the actress spawned none. The drawing may be the last in an evolutionary line, so to speak. If, alas, this is the case, we nevertheless have the remarkable record, and, like the actress who remains so present in our consciousness, we can admire it as a unique accomplishment and contribution to our culture.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Seeing the light: Optics in nature, photography, color, vision and holography* (2nd ed.), David S. Falk, Dieter R. Brill, and David G. Stork, Echo Point Press (2019)
- ² *Waiting for Hockney*, directed by Julie Checkoway; iDeal Partners Film fund, Littlest Birds Films (2008)
- ³ *Secret knowledge: Rediscovering the lost techniques of the Old Masters*, David Hockney, Viking Studios (2001)
- ⁴ "Did early Renaissance painters trace optically projected images? The conclusion of independent scientists, art historians and artists," by David G. Stork, Jacob Collins, Marco Duarte, Yasuo Furuichi, David Kale, Ashutosh Kulkarni, M. Dirk Robinson, Christopher W. Tyler, Sara Schechner, and Nicholas Williams, in *Digital imaging for cultural heritage preservation*, Filippo Stanco, Sebastiano Battiato and Giovanni Gallo (eds.), pp. 253–274, CRC Press (2011)
- ⁵ *Photorealism at the millennium*, Louis K. Meisel with Linda Chase, Harry N. Abrams (2002)
- ⁶ *Exactitude: Hyperrealist Art Today*, John Russell Taylor, Thames & Hudson (2009)
- ⁷ "The life and art of Gerrit Dou," Ronni Baer, in *Gerrit Dou 1613–75: Master painter in the age of Rembrandt*, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Yale University Press (2000)
- ⁸ "Gerrit Dou and the concave mirror," Philip Steadman, in *Inside the camera obscura – Optics and Art under the Spell of the Projected Image*, Wolfgang Lefèvre (ed.), Preprint 333, Max-Planck-Institute für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin, pp. 227–242 (2007)
- ⁹ *Description of the City of Leiden*, Jan Janszoon Orlers (1641)

AFTERWORD

Billy Pappas seemed to arrive out of nowhere, but somehow he was perfectly prepared to create a drawing like no other. I thought it might be useful to show what was happening elsewhere in the Washington area art world while Pappas was honing his craft, as a way of examining the artistic context from whence the artist arrived. I can see three precedents for Pappas' drawing *Marilyn Monroe*: I will call them the *Washington Color Pencil School*, *National Gallery Painters*, and *Figurative Minimalism*. All three groups were very different in intent and achievement, but may provide useful comparison information to help us understand and appreciate that Pappas' accomplishment did not appear out of thin air.

–Jack Rasmussen
C. Nicholas Keating and Carleen B. Keating Director,
American University Museum

WASHINGTON COLOR PENCIL SCHOOL



Carmen Almon, *Heaven #5: Death and the Drag Queens*, 1973. Color pencil on paper, 20 x 28 in. Private collection.

In March 1973, a group of students and friends of Washington Color School Artist Gene Davis thought it would be fun to exhibit together at the Corcoran Gallery of Art and call themselves the Washington Color Pencil School. The group, which included Carmen Almon, Lisa Brotman, and William Newman, among others, was part of a Surrealist streak in Washington that was about as far as possible from what the Washington Color School was doing.

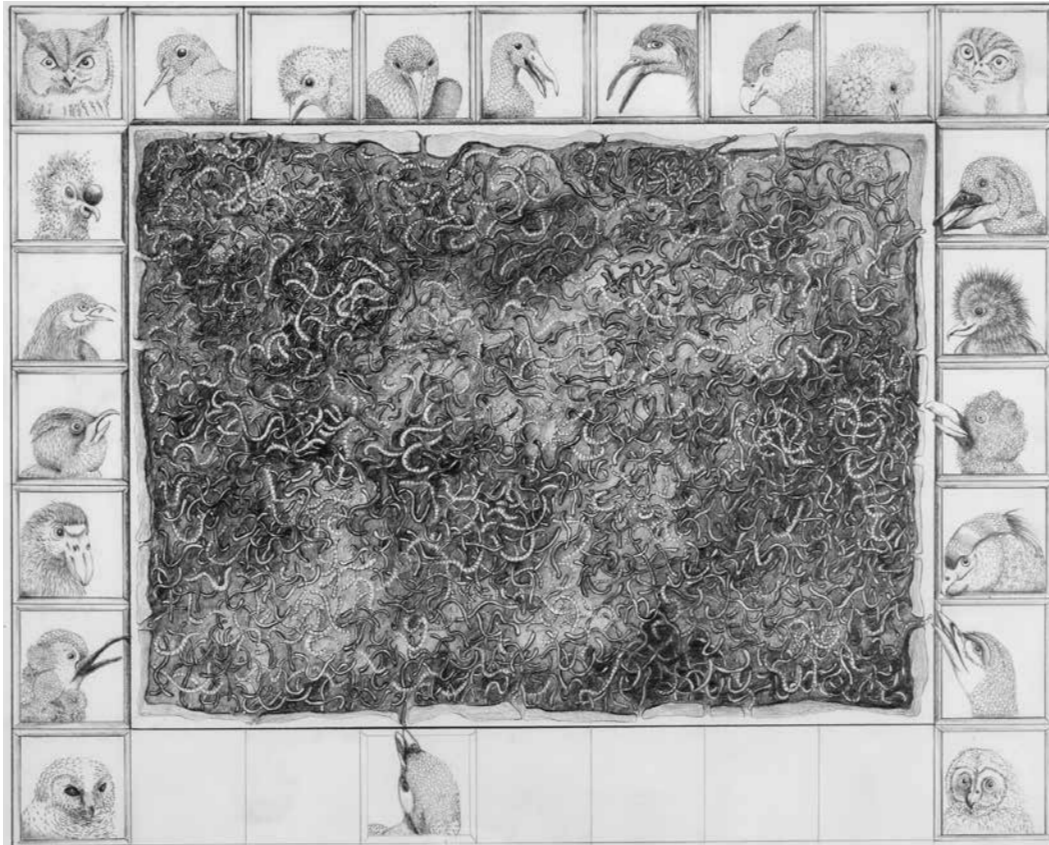
It was very rare to see any drawings associated with Color School artists, let alone any representational elements or any



Lisa Montag Brotman, *Surveying my territory*, 1977. Graphite on paper, 18.5 x 21 in. Courtesy of the artist.

subject matter at all. Gene Davis' stripes were the perfect expression of Washington Color School painting in the 60s through the 70s. His was the perfect corporate art; an art movement that did not have to be explained because it had no content.

As a charter member of the Washington Color Pencil School, Lisa Brotman has been crafting haunted, often alarming images of young women caught in the physical and psychological no man's land between childhood and adulthood. I have added the artist Margarida Kendall Hull to the Color Pencil School



Margarida Kendall Hull, *Manna, Manna*, 1976. Graphite on paper, 21 x 23 in. Courtesy of Lisa Brotman. Private collection.

grouping, as her work is quite in keeping with Brotman's vision and obsessiveness. In Hull's world, powerful women come up against natural and unnatural forces.

Lilith and Eve are just the best known of Hull's heroines, but her superb craftsmanship in the service of a wonderfully weird vision also argues for her inclusion in the National Gallery Painters category. Her drawings and paintings offer conclusive proof there are decidedly un-corporate spirits lurking beneath the surface of official Washington.



William Newman, *Anticipated - Motivation*, 1973. Color pencil on paper, 23 x 29 in. Private collection.

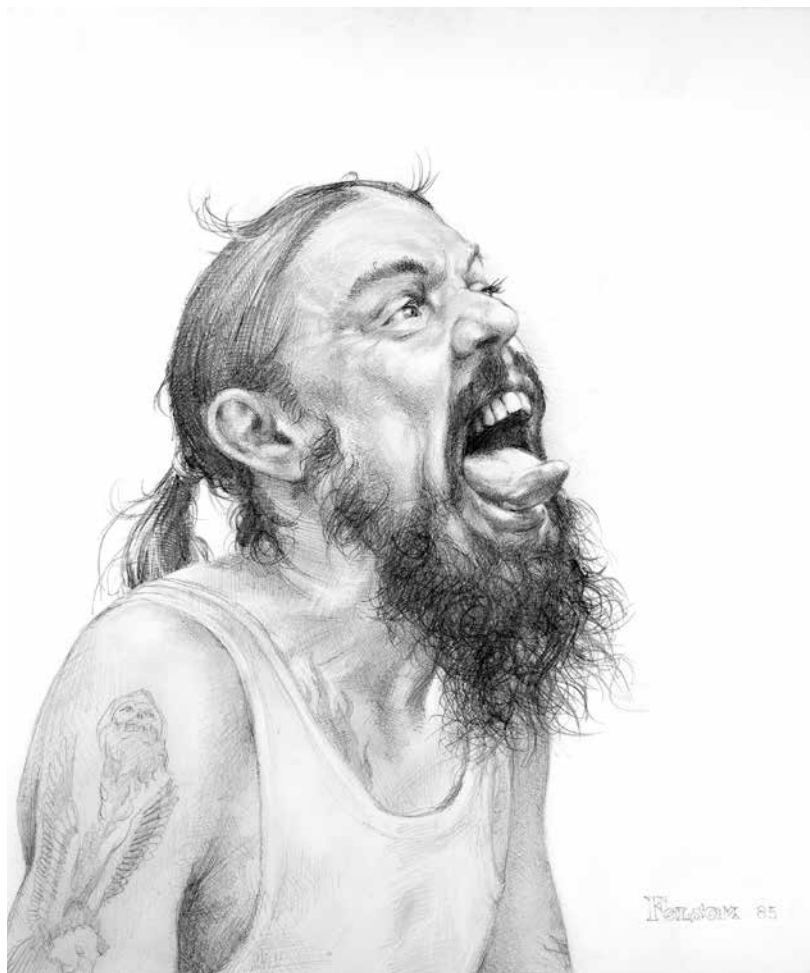
The final member of the Washington Color Pencil School to be singled out here is another of its original members, William Newman. His extraordinary skill and provocative subject matter tie him to the vision of Billy Pappas, at the same time indulging in the strangeness shared by Almon, Brotman, and Hull.

NATIONAL GALLERY PAINTERS



Manon Cleary, *Self Portrait Nude*, May 7, 1980. Graphite on paper, 19.75 x 16.75 in. Gift of Carolyn S. Alper.

In his 1997 article in *The Washington Post*, “The Museum is Their Muse,” critic Paul Richard explained why it is perhaps not surprising that Washington, a city of great art museums, should have produced so many superb figurative painters. Fred Folsom and Joe Shannon are represented here with Manon Cleary as artists gaining their inspiration from the abundance of great art in town.



Fred Folsom, *Mr. Atwood*, 1985. Graphite on paper, 19.75 x 16.75 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Fred Folsom's ambitious and amazingly detailed bar scenes like *Last Call (at the Shepherd Park Go-Go Club)* are religious triptychs in the guise of almost Boschian degradation and despair. They are loaded with symbolism and at the same time manage to be loads of fun. Folsom cleverly includes many figures from the Washington art world in its rowdy composition. *Mr. Atwood* highlights Folsom's beautiful draftsmanship.



William Woodward, Study for "Lust" (detail) *7 Deadly Sins*, 2014. Charcoal, sanguine, and white pigment on paper, 30 x 40 in. Private collection.

The looseness of William Woodward's painterly drawings is very different from Billy Pappas' hyper-real approach to *Marilyn Monroe*, but they share the same mastery of the skills and values exhibited by the other National Gallery Painters presented here, including Manon Cleary, Fred Folsom, and Joe Shannon.



Joe Shannon, *Myself modeling; with a sweet memory*, 1989. Charcoal and collage on paper, 30 x 22.5 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Joe Shannon was born in Puerto Rico and steeped himself in Old Masters techniques while working in museums most of his adult life. He supplemented his technical expertise with a painterly sensibility shared with William Woodward and his own unique penchant for controversial subject matter.

FIGURATIVE MINIMALISM



Clark V. Fox, *Portrait of Lila Swift*, 1973. Pencil on white paper, 22.5 × 15.125 in. Gift from the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Museum Purchase, Alice Graeme Korff Memorial Fund).

Clark V. Fox was formerly known as Michael Clark and, more recently, just Clark. He actually set up his easel in the National Gallery of Art and taught himself to paint and draw standing next to Old Masters works. Perhaps his experience working with Gene Davis at the Corcoran led Clark to very successfully marry his Post-Pop, Pre-Punk, Old Masters sensibility to the high craft of his Minimalist figurative paintings and drawings.



Kevin MacDonald, *Field with Trees*, 1977. Color pencil on paper, 16.25 x 23 in. Private collection.

Kevin MacDonald's drawings of empty suburban neighborhoods and interiors are the perfect figurative foil to the Washington Color School. Exhibiting with Clark V. Fox at Lunn Gallery in the 80s, Lunn provided them with stipends so they could work full time on their minimalist compositions. Still in the shadow of the Washington Color School's critical and commercial success, they adopted the formal rigor and the flat surfaces of the Color School, combined with its very opposite—the rendering of recognizable objects.



Joseph White, *After Raphael*, 1983. On paper, 21.25 x 17.25 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Joseph White developed a big reputation with hallucinogenic semi-abstractions when he arrived from the West Coast before slowly evolving into a figurative minimalist without peer. *After Raphael* may be the closest to the accomplishments of *Marilyn Monroe*, lacking only the extraordinary obsessiveness of Pappas that makes his contribution so unique.

ALPER INITIATIVE

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Billy Pappas,
February 2024

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A Drawing Like No Other



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