

DAVID BREUER-WEIL
GOLDEN DRAWINGS

Drawing is like breathing, the most natural form of making a work of art and the beginning of any painting or sculpture. A sketchbook is an extra limb, always there and a way of automatic thinking. Sitting in front of a sheet of paper with a pencil is a meditation. Drawing can be more than a quick sketch or study. You can spend a great deal of time over each drawing, devoting hour upon hour and working up the sheet until it is a profound expression, and this is a type of meditation that allows unconscious images to materialise. Drawing with charcoal or lead is the most ancient art - it connects us to the cave paintings where the first expressions known to us from early man depict hands, animals and other people. That instinct remains and comes to the fore in times of crisis and change, like the present moment.

These drawings are the visual embodiment of thought. They are filled with symbols, dreams, philosophies, fears and ideas. They are landscapes of the mind at a very particular and unique time. Sometimes you can turn fear, threat and tragedy into art. I had resisted gold because I considered it too decorative for much of my life. But here the gold is uncanny, intense, like the unusually radiant weather that was in England during most of the lockdown, quite unprecedented for this time of year, as if a different reality had descended on the world. Illuminating drawings with gold leaf is a complex and precise process. You have to draw the forms and plan the gold background, leaving outlines, painting in the ground in resin and then gently lay the gold leaf on the resin, any gust of wind blows the leaf away. You must let it dry and brush off all the excess gold in the open air – all the fragmented pieces of gold blow away, filling the garden, plants and trees with tiny gold speckles.

I spend hour upon hour at the table with the pencil and sheet of gilded paper. I tend to gild the sheets first thing in the morning, giving my days a routine. In the afternoons and evenings, I work with the pencil. Pencil is the most beautiful medium, creating tone and emotion.

When the whole of England began to shut down, shops, museums, restaurants, synagogues, churches and every venue closed, we were left to confront ourselves, and our families. The normal expressions of material and spiritual life changed overnight. Our spirituality went inwards. At this point the most ancient of media, making marks on a surface, took over. How do you express your innermost thoughts on sheets of paper? I am thinking of medieval manuscripts with their gold grounds that suggested otherworldliness. Manuscripts made during the fourteenth Century, an age of apocalypse and plague.

I first had symptoms of Covid-19 on March 20, 2020, two weeks after a trip to Maastricht. That very day, March 20, I started this series of Golden Drawings with ONE. Perhaps my feeling physically different had an impact on my work: these drawings have an otherworldly feeling to them, a sense of entering a different reality as if drugged by something that has never been experienced before. During the first six days I did six drawings, one each day. By the sixth day I was very frightened that the disease would deteriorate and that I would have to be taken away. Keeping drawing gave me a link, kept my head above water. Drawing became a lifesaver.

David Breuer-Weil

June 2020, London

ONE was a spontaneous work. Human, plant and organic forms emerge unconsciously in the process of drawing abstract forms. I draw because I want to cling to life and to art. It features a sphere, like the Covid-19 image, near a family that is turned upside down. I want to create beauty, but beauty that has depth of feeling and intensity.



TWO is a portrait of the inner mind. Man and woman, like Adam and Eve, dance on my head. The woman is inverted and together with the man she generates a new life. In the surrounding stratosphere other people outside the family appear to be a threat to the isolated family unit. Man, woman and child, the preoccupation of our minds whether we know it or not. Strip away all the trivial elements of life and you are left with the basics, man, woman and child.



ONE, 42 by 59.4 cm (top)
TWO, 42 by 59.4 cm (bottom)

*Strip away all the trivial elements of life and
you are left with the basics, man, woman and child*



THREE: We must remember that we are all part of nature, we are connected to the earth. In this drawing people grow out of the ground like plants, born into the light. The plants transform into strands of DNA. Nature is beautiful and filled with life, but a Covid-19 form also grows like a flower and comes close to a human figure that resembles my son, who also started to have symptoms, not being able to smell or taste at this time. My daughter married and moved abroad to Switzerland at the beginning of the year. I had thought of many visits to see her when I said goodbye to her. In this series of drawings figures have their hair connecting across distances. She is unique but also a version of myself, has my earnest walk. I cannot see her because travel is no longer possible. Who ever thought this could happen in the modern world? But in my drawings I visit the shores of the lake in Zürich where she now lives. Will I see her again?



FOUR: Still unwell. Coughing like mad, a weird metallic taste in my mouth. My lungs feel like they are filled with dust or talcum powder. I cannot taste my food. In life the most valuable things are the cheapest. The less we need things the more expensive they become. The most vital thing is air, our breath, and this is what is now most threatened. Air is free but our ability to breathe should not be taken for granted, it is a blessing. Then water. But without it we survive only a couple of days. Then comes food. This costs money and is of course vital. But I cannot taste it. Again, all my life I took the pleasure of tasting for granted, but it too is a blessing. Travel, shelter, each progressively more expensive. And then you get to luxuries. Not vital and the most expensive, and we have spent much of our life obsessed with these. But for now, we realise the value of breath, water, food and of course family.

THREE, 42 by 59.4 cm (top)
FOUR, 42 by 59.4 cm (bottom)

We are all part of nature, we are connected to the earth. In this drawing people grow out of the ground like plants, born into the light