

JULIA RANDALL

JULIA RANDALL IS IN LOVE WITH DRAWING, AND USES HER SEDUCTIVE TECHNIQUE TO CRAFT IMAGES THAT SUBTLY CHALLENGE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CORPOREALITY, DESIRE, AND THE NATURAL WORLD. SHE LIVES AND WORKS IN NEW YORK CITY AND CONNECTICUT. SHE CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.JULIA-RANDALL.COM

LADM: Much of your work portrays mouths and tongues in various ways, with other objects or simply by themselves. Tell us more about this. How did this idea first come about?

RANDALL: I doodle on a notepad a lot when I am on the phone. I make little images that combine machine parts and human fragments (think of a working drawing that an inventor might make as an idea sketch). My husband asked if I had ever tried drawing one of these doodles, larger, and more realized materially. An early attempt was Wheel of Fortune, a self-gratification device—an absurd cunnilingus

machine. It featured a large wooden wheel with tongues all around the perimeter, with handles you could crank, and an open seat perched on top.

Although it was humorous and the idea was sexy, the image fell a bit flat: the tongues were not realistically drawn—they were overly stylized. Although that particular drawing wasn't compelling, I could also see how the same image had the potential to be so much stronger, surreal, disturbing, and persuasive; I needed to draw with a verisimilitude that could challenge a viewer into suspending their disbelief, and possibly thinking the Wheel of Fortune could exist.

My husband suggested that I draw studies of my own mouth and tongue, as a way to learn how to draw this body part, which is both so public and private. Initially, I set up a mirror and a light source, and would spend hours posing for myself. It was hard on my body, and learning how to observe that intently was



extremely challenging. After several weeks, I began to use photography as a source material, in an effort to relieve the pain of posing.

After several months, I began to love the intense focus, and became fascinated by the way the mouth, disembodied, activates pictorial space; the tongue reaches into the viewer's space, and the mouth's cavity punctures the picture plane. The studies turned into a series, Lick Line. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the drawings were both salacious and humorous.

Seen as a group, they undulate and bounce, like musical notes or chatter. As a result, I am really compelled by the image of the mouth; it is the body's critical site, where we eat, speak, bite, kiss; it is both ferocious and tender. I am much more attracted to the mouth than any of the other "racy" parts of the body.

You've mentioned Dada as one influence on your work. What else influences and inspires you?

I tend to gravitate toward things that are obsessive, surrealist, studied, subjective, and emotional (as opposed to cool and cerebral). I also am attracted to art where the evidence of the hand is apparent.

I adore the Dutch/Netherlands painters (Memling, Van Eyck, Van der Weyden), Abraham Mignon (a fabulous 17th century still life painter), Hans Bellmer, Audubon, Louise Bourgeois, the films of Tim Burton, early Lucien Freud, Michael Borremans, the engrav-

ings and imagery from Diderot's Encyclopedie, cabinets of curiosities, almost anything from 18th century French decorative art, La Specola (a fantastic museum in Florence which exhibits superb wax anatomical models), Ron Mueck, the exhibition, Otherworldly, at the Museum of Art and Design in NYC, textile patterns, unusual snow globes, Nancy Spero, Lynda Benglis, Anonio Lopez Garcia, Meret Oppenheim, Joan Semmel, Dawn Clements, Jon Rappleye, the French Rococo period, other artists sketchbooks, Musee Dupuytren (a small museum in Paris, is part of a Medical School. It is entirely devoted to the collection and study of human pathology. It is both fascinating and very disturbing).

There seems to be an overarching theme of duality in your work: eroticism and repulsiveness, natural and unnatural, etc. Is this sense of duality something you're naturally drawn to?

In my work, the themes of desire, corporeality, longing and loss continue to surface; these "emotional biggies" are truly affecting, and unite us all. My own deeply significant, emotional experiences have always been multilayered, nuanced, and often filled with contradiction—never one-dimensional. If I am going to make art that aims to address the complexity germane to being a feeling human, then it seems natural for me to make drawings that echo this—that are meant to elicit a layered response.

Often, I see the duality after the fact;

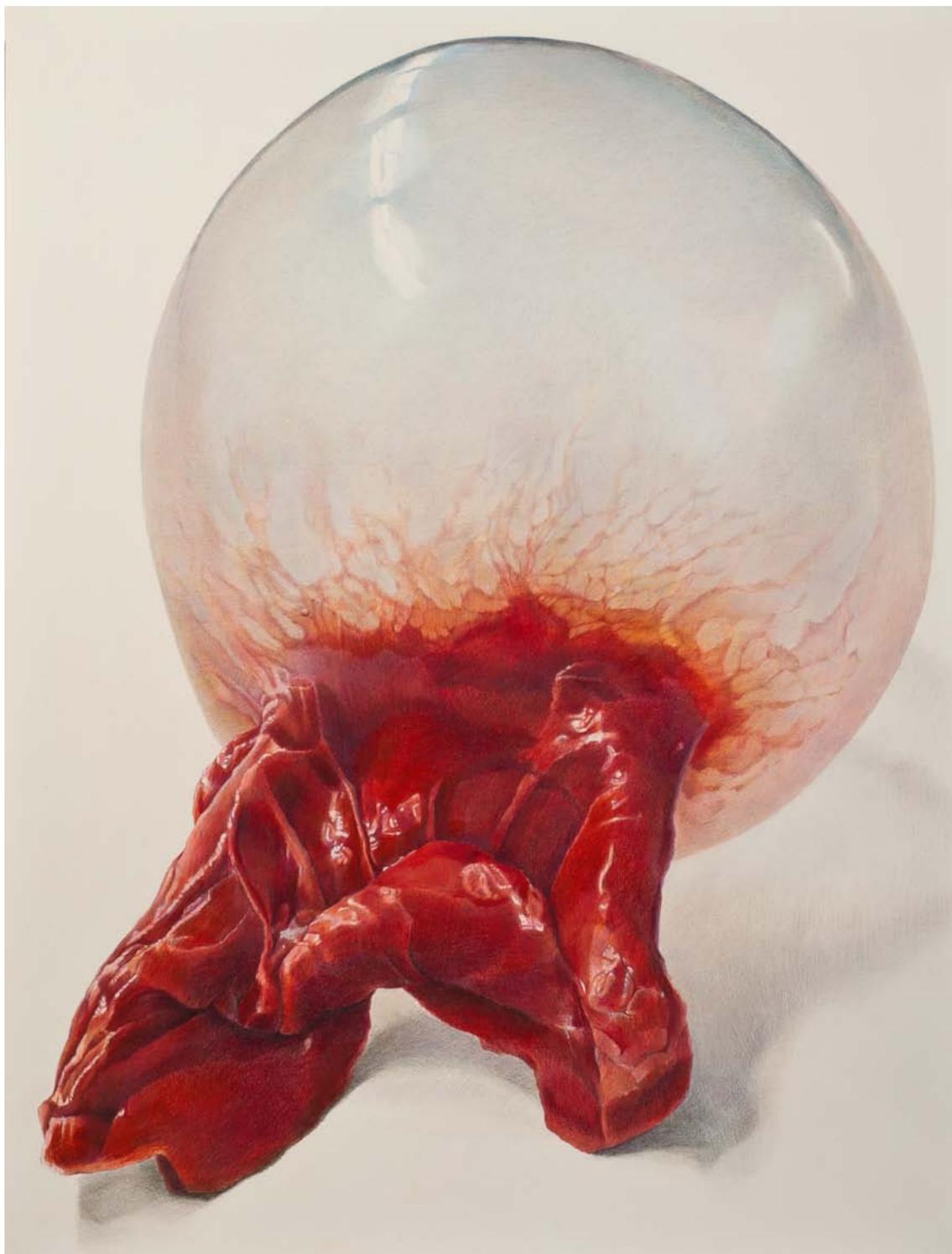
I get an idea for an image, and become fascinated by the possibility of seeing it realized through drawing. After the drawing has a life of its own, I can see if there is depth to the imagery.

In retrospect could I see the beauty and repulsiveness present in the hyperrealist drawings of the mouths in Lick Line. I was excited to discover the coupling of the erotic heat of the imagery, with the cold precision of medical illustration. Sexuality in real life is similarly complex—can be hot, often funny, sometimes gross. My recent series of bubblegum drawings also have this duality. Chewing gum initially connotes the whimsy and cheeky innocence of youth, yet the fragile, deflating, puckering skin of bubblegum also points to the susceptible human body, and the dreaded passage of time.

It is worth noting that my drawings don't always make the cut—I have a "failure folder," of beautifully executed, highly-labored drawings that operate only on one level, and don't transcend the seductive technique they were made with.

You've also mentioned about your love for drawing "imaginary hybrid contraptions designed for self-gratification and maximum autonomy." Do you feel we as humans are becoming more and more jaded to the point that we have to devise new and more "unnatural" ways of pleasing ourselves? Or are we perhaps just becoming more adventurous?

I am always a little reluctant to make





“Sexuality... can be hot, often funny, sometimes gross.”

assessments about humans in general, as we are such a varied bunch. I am sure there are plenty of folks out there who want/need to seek out new (“unnatural” or not) ways of finding their pleasure. I am not even sure that is a bad thing, as the word “jaded” implies.

The original impulse behind my contraption drawings is slightly different; I initially thought of these invented objects as sexual surrogates, funky, and funny/sad at once. Loneliness or disaffection seems to be at the core of this series. For example: the idea behind French Kisser (a drawing of a hybrid French-kissing device, made from an 18th century French wig, a harness, and an inward-facing tongue like a horses’ bit) originates from the desire to be kissed when one has no partner. The image underscores the absence of intimacy, hints at extreme need,

and lengths one might go to satisfy themselves. But perhaps this drawing could also be read optimistically—as the imagined ideal of total self-empowerment and self-reliance, and of the capacity to manage one’s own desires and impulses. It is fine with me if people take away different meanings from this series—I actually like when that happens.

Within the confines of legality, is there a point when a sex act goes too far, or is anything under the sun fair game and “okay” among consenting adults?

As far as I am concerned, as long as everyone at the party is a consenting adult, and not impaired/manipulated/exploited in any way, then all is fair game. Although mixing violence and sex makes me cringe a bit, personally.

What message do you hope viewers take from your work?

That is hard to answer—I am not certain there is a very specific “message” behind my work. I want my audience to have a multi-dimensional reaction to my images. I love seducing people into spending a lot of time looking at my work, but not only for the “wow factor” of my drawing technique. I am happiest when my work elicits mixed-feeling reactions, like, “this is a really beautiful drawing, but I feel disturbed by looking at it.”

Or, “this image is funny but also kind of sad.” Ultimately, my work is about being human and vulnerable, the pleasures and discomforts of living in our bodies, and trying to connect with others.

As an artist using colored pencil, you achieve a sense of photorealism in your work through a medium that can be



painstaking to use well. Tell us about the technical aspects of your work.

Originally I started using colored pencil when I began drawing the aforementioned studies of tongues; colored pencil allowed me to tighten up considerably, get much more detail and accuracy in my marks.

I work in very fine, translucent layers of colored pencil, very much like the glazing technique used in old master oil paintings. It is an extremely labor-intensive, slow, technique. My drawings appear very three-dimensional because you are seeing through lots of layers of color, plus the white of the paper shining through in areas.

Sharp pencils are a must for the highly detailed areas of my images, and I use a jeweler's head loupe to magnify what I am seeing. This magnification allows me to draw in greater detail than the eye will normally perceive.

Colored pencil is rather unforgiving and doesn't erase completely, so I do all my experimenting with different possibilities for imagery beforehand, in my sketchbook. Also I use Photoshop, but only as a "fast" way to see an idea—like sketching. I only commit to the labor of fully drawing an idea if I am unable to stop thinking about it, and my desire to see what the image will look like keeps

hanging in there.

What are you currently working on?

I have an upcoming solo show in New York City, at Garvey/Simon Art Access in November 2012. I am drawing like crazy, still fascinated by the bubblegum imagery, but trying to see how far I can take it—how many ways it can be visually reinterpreted.

Your house is on fire. What's the first thing you save, and what's something you let go?

Obviously, my dog, Lucy, and husband Andrew are tied for first place.

Then, the things I would most like to



save (but wouldn't be able to) are all of my books. I have many wonderful books collected over time, that I use for source material—books on insects, birds, botany, prints, anatomy, fashion, drawing, other artists, etc. Clearly, schlepping armloads of these is not very practical in a house fire.

More feasibly, I would grab my disaster “go bag”—no bottled water or batteries—which is already packed: the letters my husband and I wrote each other early in our relationship, photos, letters from my father and close friends from different times in the past, my passport, some funny keepsakes, etc.

I might also be uncharacteristically

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practical, and grab my back-up, external drive—so much stuff gets stored on my computer lately

What's your favorite book or story that you've ever read?

OK, that is too hard. Here are some books I have loved, in no particular order: *London Fields* (Martin Amis), *The Sweet Hereafter* (Russell Banks), *The Hours* (Michael Cunningham),

Life is Elsewhere (Milan Kundera), *The Brothers Karamazov* (Fyodor Dostoyevsky), *A Thousand Acres* (Jane Smiley), *Lolita* (Vladimir Nabokov), *My Name is Asher Lev* (Chaim Potok), *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (Siri Hustvedt), *In Cold Blood* (Truman Capote). I also love Michael Connelly's crime fiction.







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