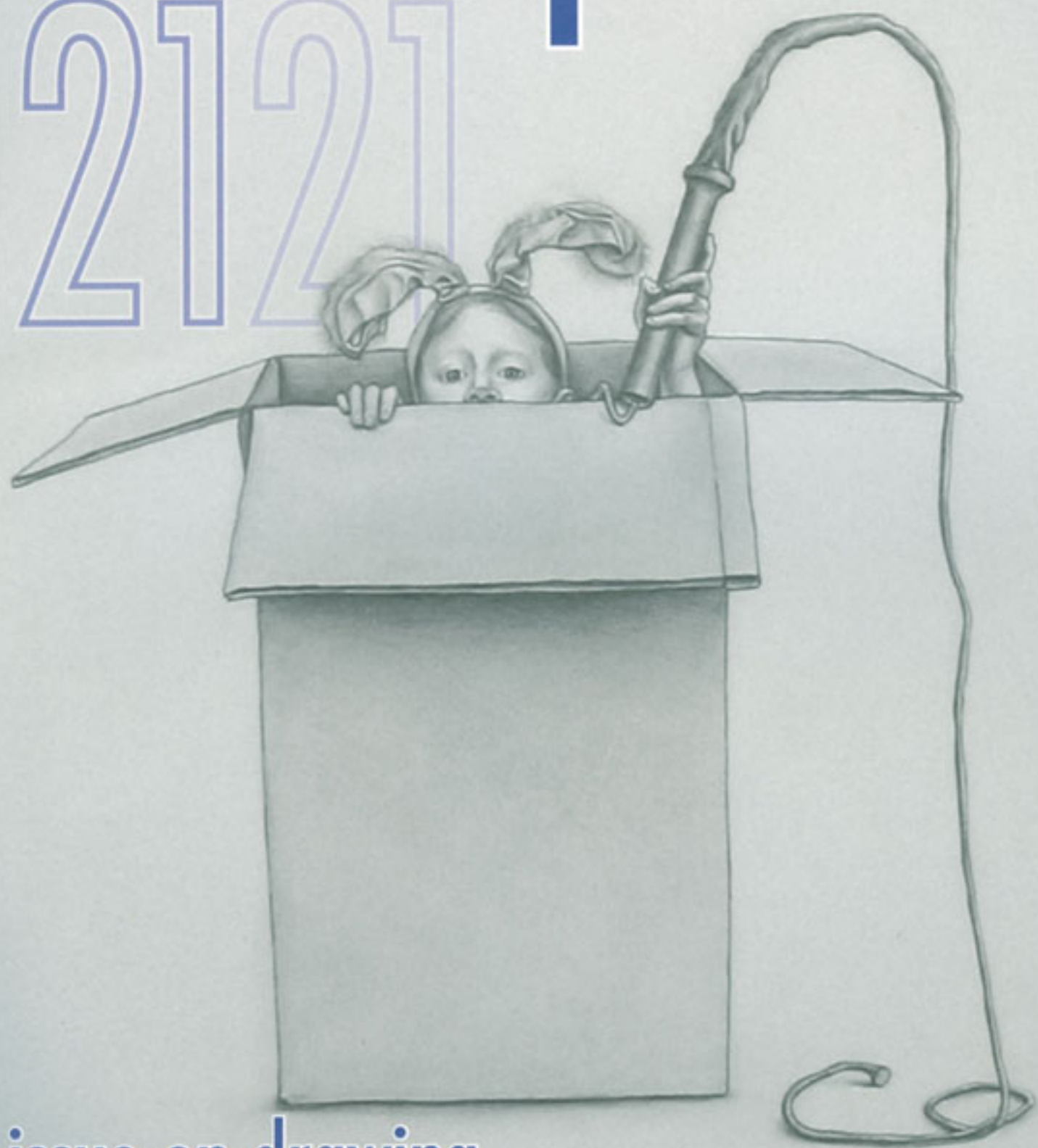


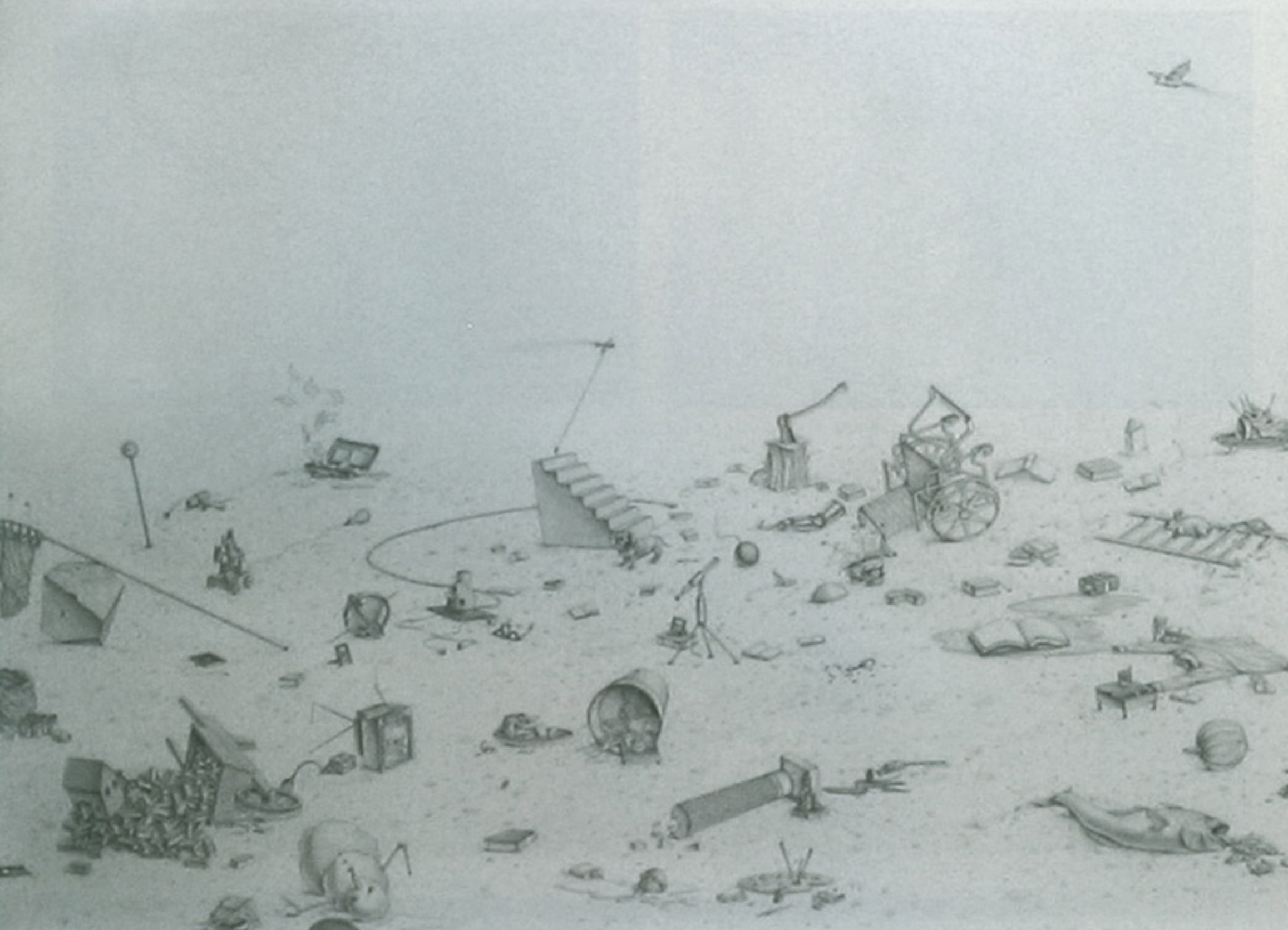
contemporary

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special issue on drawing

Joe Biel Stephen Brandes Olaf Breuning Alex Brown Annelise Coste Michael Craig-Martin
Roberto Cuoghi Tacita Dean Marcel Dzama Karl Haendel Cameron Jamie Chris Johanson
Dorota Jurczak Beatriz Monteavaro Frank Olive and Rudy Shepherd Dan Perjovschi
Alessandro Pessoli Werner Reiterer Matt Saunders David Shrigley Pablo Vargas Lugo



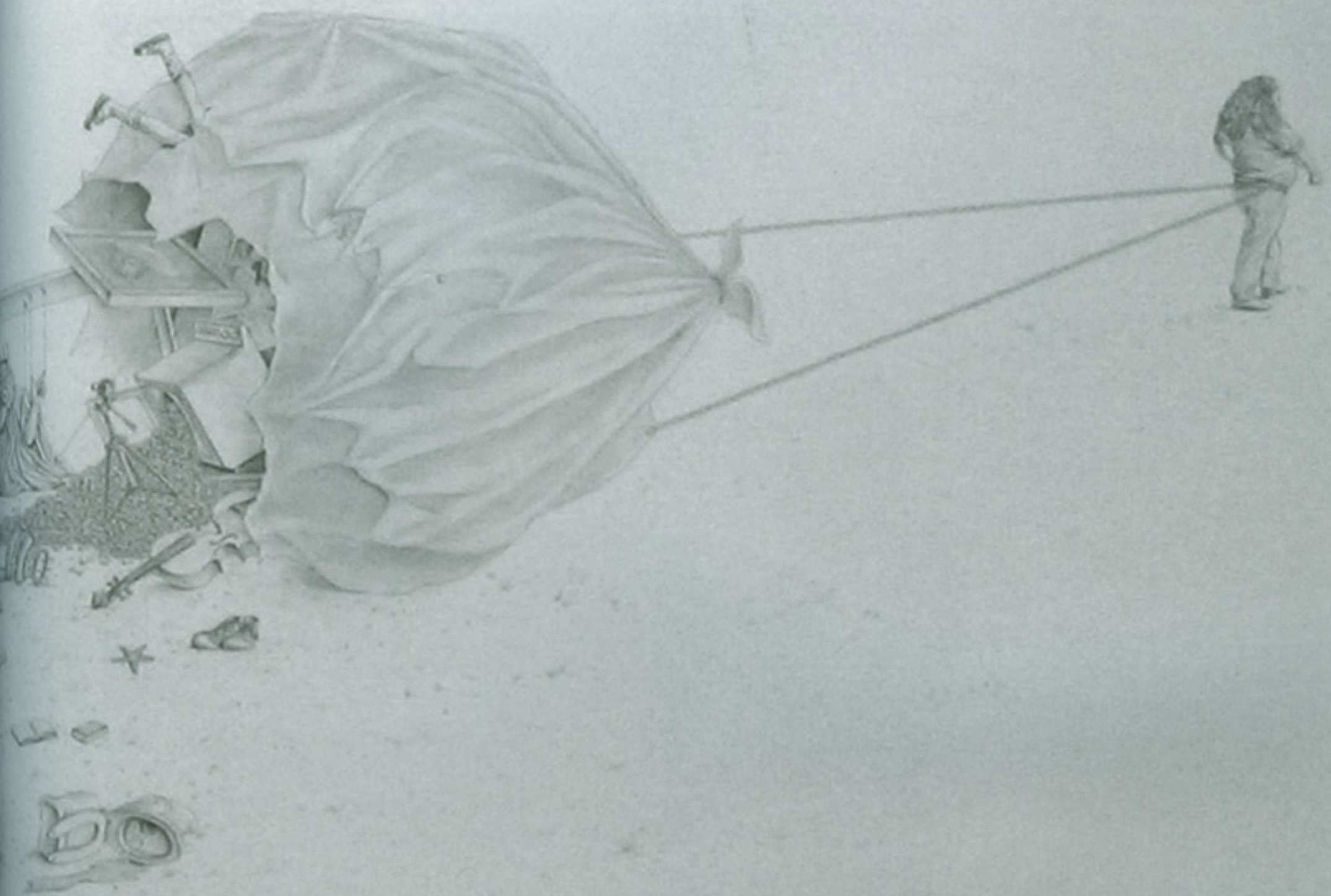
JOE BIEL

CLAYTON CAMPBELL

THE mark of the pencil, the warmth of the paper, the field of white space; these qualities have been dear to the heart of artists since charcoal and parchment came into being. They are the same qualities that attract Los Angeles artist Joe Biel. Since 2000, Biel has devoted his time to crafting a large number of outstanding pencil drawings. This July they will be on view at Goff and Rosenthal in New York.

There is something truly comforting about making marks on paper. It is elemental, familiar and it bridges pre-history to the immediacy of our moment. It is also really cheap, the costs for materials low. Anyone can find paper and pencil, or a marker and a wall and draw their hearts out.

The lineage of fine representational drawing is where Biel instinctively seeks to be placed. Drawing, in a contemporary framework, can mean almost anything. The idea of 'what is a drawing?' has been liberally stretched thin by scores of artists. In Biel's case, his measure is the established canon of narrative works that engage in storytelling. Spiritual forebears include Da Vinci, Goya, Ingres, Bellini and Breughel. In each of these European artists can be found a quality of line and a special atmospheric environment that makes their work influential to Biel. Drawing becomes more than notation; it veers towards 'high art', and the objective is complete, finished works that employ sophisticated techniques of pencil



Clockwise from top: *Promenade*, 2005. *Jumper*, 2005. *TopHat*, 2006. All images courtesy: the artist and Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle



glazing and combinations of line, blending and cross-hatching. Drawing is an end in itself. There are numerous contemporary artists who have taken representational drawing to heart. Vija Celmins and Mark Tansey immediately come to mind. In Los Angeles, Jim Shaw, Tom Knechtel and Alex Donis are well-known practitioners among many. They too have studied the past, but they are just as likely to cite Robert Crumb as an influence, and are well informed by current trends in animation, cartooning, and illustration.

Biel is different from the artists mentioned in that drawing is his primary means of expression. His work has the debris of narrative left in the image. *Promenade* (2005) is a large work that approaches painting in its scale. In a horizontal field, a large bag of some sort is being pulled out of the picture frame. The bag has broken open, littering the ground with the detritus of a story that has already been told. Fragments of culture are strewn about, suggesting all this baggage is somehow being left behind. Biel is depicting things before or after they happen, inciting a parable rather than a representation. He builds his own poetic world, with a timeless mythological quality that becomes his own metaphysical signage. Biel has been compared to Canadian artist Marcel Dzama and the Royal Art Lodge, because of the whimsy and oddity of his imagery. Works such as *TopHat*, *Pistol*, *Kingdom* and *The News from Poems* (all 2006) confirm his interest in the offbeat portrait. Filled with psychological blowback, they deliver very difficult ideas with humour. Biel views his audience to be a 'museum audience', meaning a broad range of people who want to have an experience. He feels the art world has failed to fulfill the functions it used to serve, which may be disenfranchising a larger public. To this end, Biel has strategically come back at us with plain old basic skills, pictures that are sincere, direct, sardonic, well crafted and compelling.

CLAYTON CAMPBELL IS AN ARTIST AND CULTURAL COMMENTATOR WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN LOS ANGELES





above: *The News from Poems*, 2006. Opposite: *Dancers*, 2005