

Walter and Me

For Reasons Unknown

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September 18–November 8, 2015



SOUTH SHORE ART CENTER

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Acknowledgements

South Shore Art Center has looked to the Museum School for teachers, artists, jurors, and general inspiration. We are proud to have Bill Flynn as one of our most sought after workshop instructors. The exhibition *Walter and Me* is an Art Center high point—to display such important drawings and paintings that come to us with a wonderful story behind them.

I would like to thank Tony Pilla for organizing the exhibition with Bill Flynn and the Pashko family and Deedee Agee for editing the catalogue text. The Art Center is very grateful for the support of Panopticon Imaging, Robert Amory, Gretchen and John Moran, Martin Anderson, Janet Blagdon, Larry Guilmette, Jan McElhinny, Terry Heinzmann, and Joe Norris.

—Sarah Hannan, Executive Director

A Reflection

Former student and teacher, and later teaching colleagues, Bill Flynn and Walter Pashko enjoyed an extensive artistic relationship. They were close friends and competitive artists, and as such engaged in long-term conversations about one another’s artwork and the creative process that motivated each individual’s search for self expression. That exchange of ideas is the subject of this exhibit, “*Walter and Me*.”

For each artist, drawing was the core medium, and they engaged in a “call and response” approach that lasted over 40 years and resulted in the creation of thousands of drawings—sometimes a means to an end—other times an end in itself. As Walter explained: “Drawing is like playing chess with the paper. As soon as you make a move, immediately the paper responds. Then it is your move!” This exhibition is about the “moves” each artist made in conversation with one another. It was as Bill said recently: “The drawings were the dance for the two of us, a way of being in the world.”

In each artist’s work one can see clearly the impact their printmaking experiences had on their drawings and paintings. One can find in their work references to tactile sensory imagery, dramatic applications of light and dark values, dynamic and sometimes perplexing expressions of positive and negative spatial contrasts, and lines of force that change speed and direction in visceral ways. In this manner their work challenges our perceptions and the way we see the world. The works exhibited here are by two virtuoso artists engaged in a process of pure invention, unafraid of exploring the void to reveal what is unseen, and the form of things unknown.

—Anthony Pilla, Organizer



Photo: Bill Flynn

There was a drive to draw the figure at school, so four or five faculty hired a model and drew on Saturdays, and when that ended, Walter and I continued—going out to junkyards, boatyards, we’d drive around searching for places, mysterious sites that looked like something happened but was still a mystery, some sort of construction that had been taken apart, some abandoned boat cradle with a tarp over part of it that kind of triggered the imagination. There was a small abandoned foundation somewhere out in Medway that someone drove a car into, all bent and rusted—just a crazy image. That’s what we liked—a place to go from...order and chaos. We’d go to a junkyard and draw the engines, odd machine parts, and the drawings didn’t immediately reflect the work we were doing in the studio.

In the wintertime we made setups. They weren’t still lifes as such, just a mass of stuff we put together that we thought was interesting —whosever studio we went to that week was responsible for the setup. Some of them were great environments, dramatically-lit installations. Music was an important part of the atmosphere. We’d go at 5 pm and draw until midnight when the trains stopped—or walk home if we couldn’t quit.

We’d have broken glass, mannequins, masks, mirrors. Walter loved looking at a piece of mirror and seeing something contradictory reflecting in it. He made a tabletop setup of shards of broken mirror, gluing pieces of cardboard to the backs so he could stand them up like chess pieces. The setup looked infinite if you got down low to view it. I am sure he photographed this landscape and it became reference material for many of the later drawings.

—Bill Flynn

Walter Pashko (1930–2006)

Walter Pashko was a member of the faculty at the School of The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for over 30 years. He taught drawing and printmaking, including etching, monoprinting, lithography, and woodcut. He loved teaching and continued to participate in student review boards and class critiques after his retirement.

Pashko studied painting in Hartford at the Randall School of Creative Arts in the early 50s. Subsequently, he travelled to Mexico on the GI Bill and enrolled at Mexico City College where he sought out artists who could teach him the techniques of fresco and mosaics. During his years there he also studied printmaking. Upon his return to the United States, he went to Tufts University, graduating cum laude in 1958 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. He began working at the Museum School as an assistant to the printmaking instructor and was soon promoted to lead instructor.

In 1971 Walter won a traveling scholarship and spent six months in Spain, working in photography and drawing. In the mid-seventies he had a major exhibition at Brandeis University, and in 1984 he had several paintings and drawings in the *Boston to Washington* exhibit at the Foundry Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Although he taught printmaking, Walter regarded himself primarily as a painter and draftsman. In Boston, he was represented by the Victoria Munroe, Fine Art Gallery and his works are in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and in many private collections.

During the final years of his life, Walter was working on drawings that were inspired by his readings about the expanding universe and the complexities of multidimensional space.

William Flynn (b. 1941)

William Flynn is an artist, teacher and author of *Armed Chair*, a collection of more than 220 drawings of a stripped down antique chair that became a metaphor for the war in Iraq. Flynn served as a drawing instructor at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston for 45 years. His additional teaching experiences have been at the Rhode Island School of Design Summer Program at Pont-Aven, France and he has served as a faculty advisor for the Tufts University MFA program.

In addition to awards for his teaching excellence, Flynn has received the James William Paige Traveling Fellowship award from the Museum of Fine Arts for study in Japan, a Mellon Foundation grant for study in Spain, and a Ford Foundation grant for the production of an award winning film about drawing called, *Paper Targets*.

Flynn has exhibited extensively in the Boston area and New York. His solo exhibition at the Phillips Academy in Andover evolved into the visual art book, *Armed Chair*. He has had a number of solo exhibitions and his work is in many private collections including the Boston Public Library and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He is currently represented by Victoria Munroe Fine Art, Boston.



Toe Touch, 2005, 29 x 23 in, Walter Pashko

In the process, the unseen is revealed.



Dualities—One But Two, 1979, 6 x 7 ft, Walter Pashko



Discovered and Folded, 2015, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



Detail

A Conversation

One afternoon in June 2015, five people sat down to have a conversation with Bill about the years he and Walter spent drawing together. Included were Tony Pilla, exhibition organizer, Gina Holstead, Walter's daughter, her husband Donald, and Deedee Agee, who documented the interview.

Bill: I first met Walter as his student in the first year woodcut class, getting three colors and white from printing two sides of the block. It was almost the way we thought.

Walter started as a printmaker, learned fresco and mosaic in Mexico City in the '50s on the GI bill just after Orozco and Rivera were being recognized. I did mostly woodcuts and etchings in school, so white vs. the black was a big deal. We both had tremendous respect for the paper.

The woodcut process is embedded in Walter's later drawings, the cut-out shapes, stenciling and marks remind me of the way he'd do a drawing/diagram to show students how the two-color woodcut could work from their preliminary sketches. They were amazing little drawings—showing where the blue would go, where the orange would go, and where you'd get the brown for free when they overlap

One night drawing, 5 or 6 hours into it, Walter said, "Drawing is like playing chess with the paper. As soon as you make a move, immediately the paper responds. Then it's your move." I thought it was one of the most profound things I ever heard. The paper, depending how many marks you have on it, changes color, the way the light is being reflected. The light is crucial in his work. The white is crucial. Later in his work, the paper becomes the space that the marks allude to. He was never not conscious of the light.

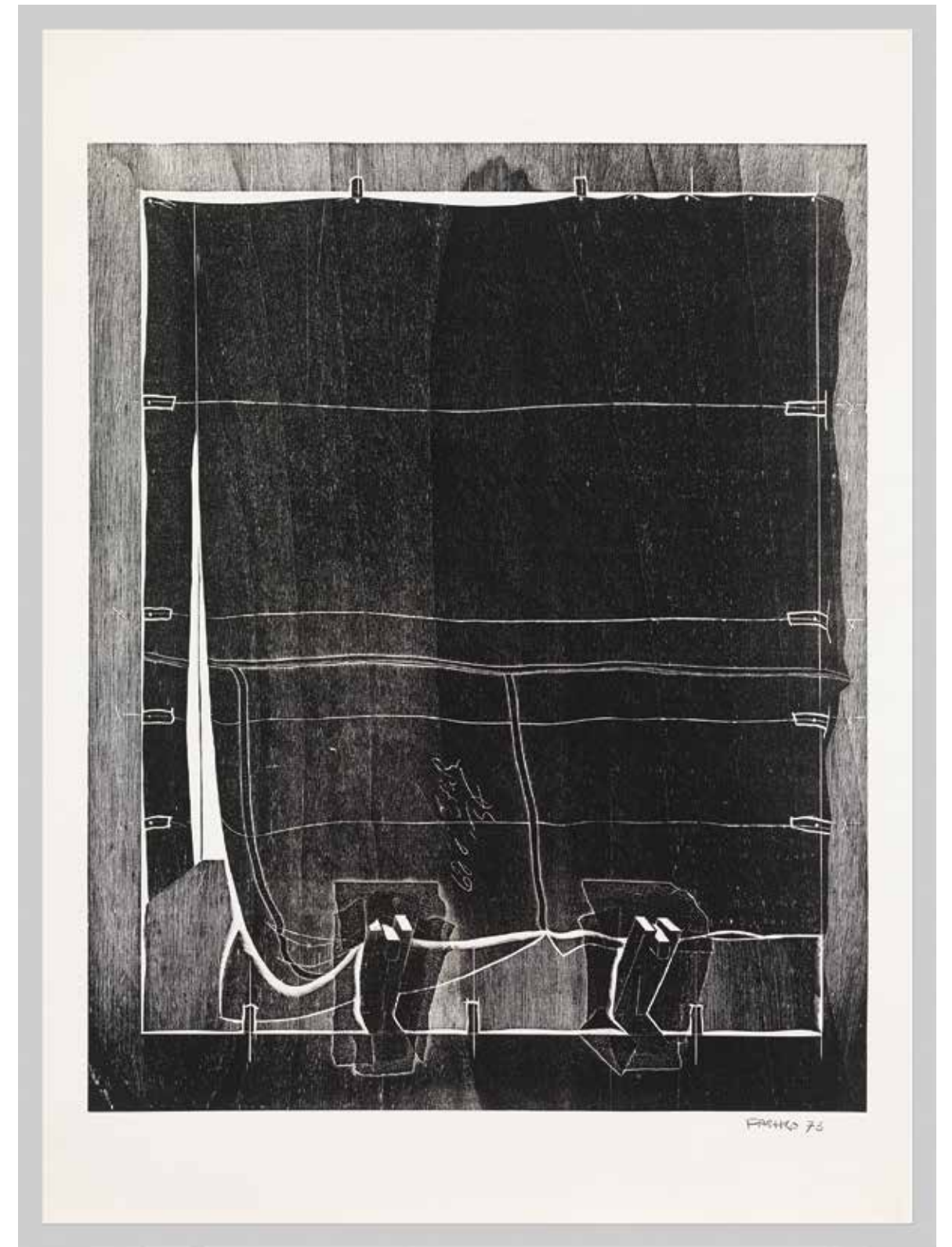
There was a rivalry between us big time, it was never overt, but it was always there. He was my teacher, ten years older than me; there was a little bit of competition.

Tony: Which artists were you each looking at?

The artists we were looking at? Walter loved Tàpies. He got a grant from the Museum School and went to Spain, and I think the Spanish physicality for materials is very strong. He looked at Motherwell, Diebenkorn, Soutine, Ben Nicholson. For me it was de Kooning, Gorky, other neon artists, Chryssa, people who dealt with materials and light, Dan Flavin. I went to Japan to study neon as an abstract experience in a language I didn't understand. And their sense of materials, the way they use them, is mind-blowing. How they would wrap a truck with a stretched piece of rubber, tiny little doors in a stone wall—just blew me away. And the gardens, the meditative ones and the larger strolling gardens too were exquisitely organized.

Walter was really drawn to the tactile. It had a lot to do with his eyes. He had very thick glasses—near sighted. He was legally blind without glasses. When he looked, he saw things differently than most of us. Looking at a setup, he'd focus on the darks and lights, the reflections, and then he'd look for a high contrast starting point. He never put things together the way the normal world would. He looked at the negative space, a shadow, a highlight, the angle of a piece of wood.

His camera, I think, was like a third eye to him. He always framed things beautifully, struggled to get it just right. He would later project slides and begin to build those images into a concept for a painting.



Woodcut, 1973, 30 x 23 in, Walter Pashko

We see through one thing to another.

—Benjamin Péret

Tony: There seems to be through all of this a sense of the surreal, the desire to want to transpose things, to play, “the mystery in mingling opposites”, having an understanding of one thing and all of a sudden coming to a shocking realization that, what more could it be, is it just that? It seems to be this running thread, interacting in sort of revelatory ways on the natural environment. Things that are seemingly commonplace suddenly become special. An ordinary thing acquires meaning because the artist has touched it.

Bill: That’s perfect.

When we had a good crew, the energy was very wonderful. We were drawing more to find out what would happen. We never wanted to draw the setup as such, but wanted to see what it would provoke. The first was tentative, by the third there’d be the start of a conversation, ideas would become clear. Usually the 3rd or 4th drawing would get somewhere.

Later when Walter had stopped painting and the drawings were everything to him, he was reading about space, astrophysics, and dark matter. He played visual games of hide and seek, and was contemplating, maybe even reinventing the universe.

The drawings were the dance for the two of us, a way of being in the world. We could have been in a Beckett play. The absurdity of meeting once a week to put marks and color on paper, standing in front of an odd arrangement of worthless objects, listening to music, arguing about whatever, then putting the drawings in a box or a drawer and thinking—what a great day! I mean two guys, Flynn and Pashko waiting for God—or a little recognition.

Walter said you learn how to paint through accident. You had to live with it or turn it into something else; one thing provokes another. I mean everything is connected; the things you do in the beginning of your life come back in the end.

We’d talk about the drawings when we did them—that’s a good one, that’s a bad one—but didn’t criticize too carefully. The competition thing didn’t allow for that: if I was right, he was wrong, I think that’s how he saw it. Once I asked him what he was going to do on the left side of a drawing and he said, “Nothing, that’s where the universe ends.”

Because of the interaction, we kept to a high standard, always reaching for something to stumble into, to sink your teeth into, some new visual experience.

By working together we were pushing each other. That’s the most important part.

We strongly believed that the drawings were finished pieces in themselves if they came together completely or in a visually provocative way. In a drawing session, I’d never sketch it out. When we started, drawing was just beginning to be accepted as an end in itself. We saw drawing and painting as the same, like jazz and classical music. Most of the drawings happened quickly and are more spontaneous, but took 30 years of experience (many more failures). Paintings are usually larger and are built over time and can change in the process. Possibly they are more formal summations of visual ideas, but nothing is closer to the artist than the directness of a great drawing. Drawing for me is visual thinking, put it down, look at it and respond, do another—how is it changing? Do another, respond, and the evolution is evident. That makes for good drawings. The process we were into was discovering what we would do. Drawing to see what happens is how I work now. I have plans, but I have to do it, to see how it will emerge. Otherwise it looks too controlled. It’s all discovery and surprising myself and hopefully others. That is what’s so wonderful about Walter’s drawings, they are visual experiences.



The Inconceivable is Unknown, 7 x 6 ft, Walter Pashko



Unexpected Fluctuations, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



The Performance of Shadows, 50 x 60 in, Bill Flynn

The emotional intensity of shadows.

The act of drawing for both of us was just a magical thing. We had our ceremonial toast, bowed to each other, we're about to die, we salute you. It was our ritual.

Walter always looked at things, didn't draw from memory much, he really wanted to see what he was looking at and took from what was there, but never completely. He left out an enormous amount. He told me one time when he wanted to shift things or needed ideas, he'd look out through his glasses sideways; it was total distortion. There's always something there, you just got to look for it.

From Walter I learned how to look at things even more—I don't want to say abstractly—a touch, a way of being, of editing, to look at the solid ambiguities. You don't want to put everything in anyway. He knew how to select from the unseen. As soon as I put myself in that seeing position, I see things differently. See something new—a way of seeing—I start pulling it, like a magnet—what do I need? I think Walter had an effect on that. He was a shape man, a light and dark man, very tactile, used that to make things pop. I picked that up too, that tactility, eliminating the unnecessary.

Donald: But your friendship far exceeded that. There was besides competition a lot of camaraderie, collaboration—not to mention love.

Bill: Yes. Without our ritual once a week I would not have done over ten thousand drawings, and those drawing sessions were some of the best days of my life.



Torn and Folded, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn

Leave out the obvious.



Untitled Flynn's Place, 23 x 29 in, Walter Pashko

Drawing springs from the hand, defines from the point, glows from the black contrasting the paper.

—Bill Flynn



The Set Up 2015, Bill Flynn. Photo: Stewart Clements

A love—crushed gloves and pop up books—became folded images.



photo: Bill Flynn



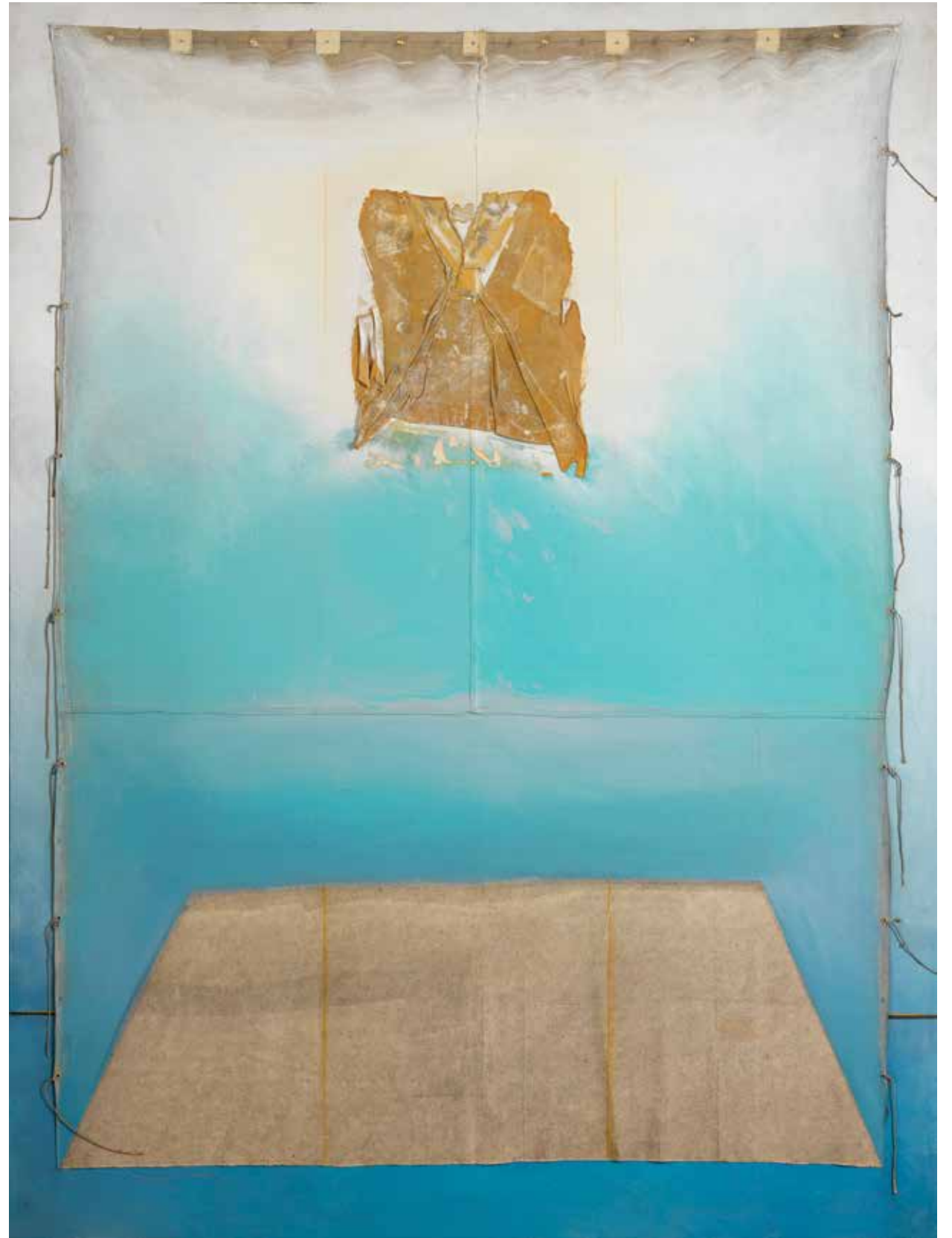
Myth Passing Through, 6 x 4 ft, Walter Pashko

Perception is watching things change, sometimes they do not, but you do as you observe and draw them.

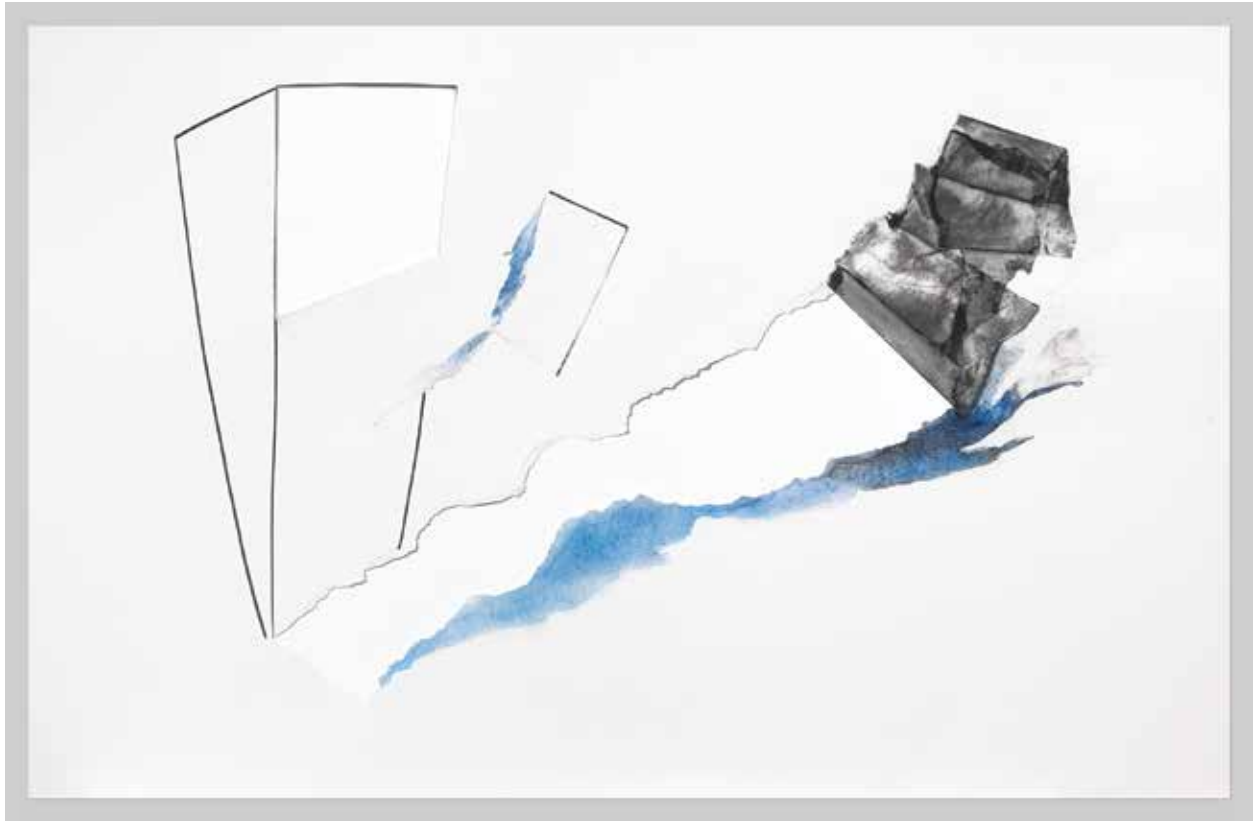


Important Nonetheless, 29 x 23 in, Walter Pashko

Projections, reflections, selections.



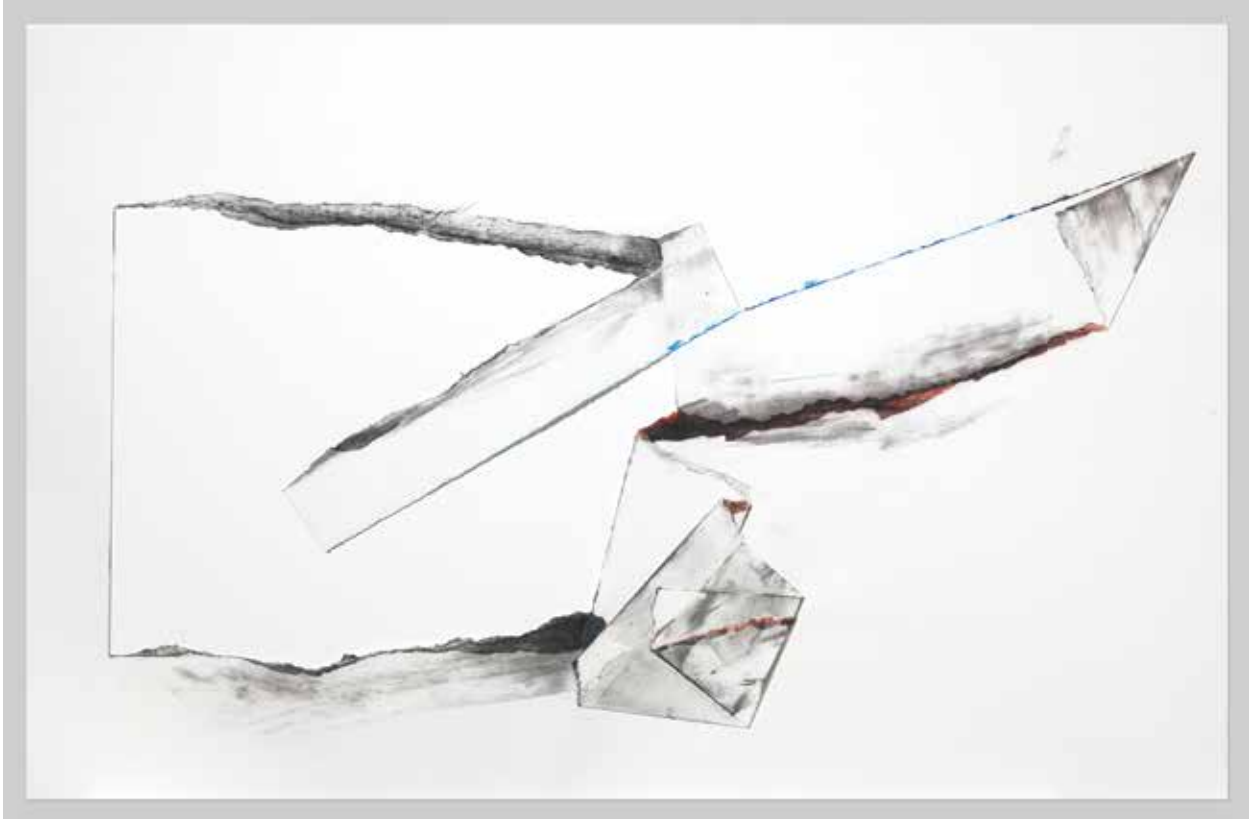
Crossing With the Wind, 8 x 6 ft, Walter Pashko



Dimension Stepping, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



Plication I, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



Folded Diffractions, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



What Exists After the Play, 60 x 66 in, Bill Flynn



From Front to Back, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



Untitled History, 6 x 8 ft, Walter Pashko



Distance Unknown, 29 x 23 in, Walter Pashko



Scored Drawing, 26 x 40 in, Bill Flynn



No Matter What Matter, 29 x 23 in, Walter Pashko



Always Part of the Whole, 36 x 40 in, Bill Flynn

Tearing a drawing and folding it back on itself is an interruption of an action. Asking the viewer to imagine what can not be seen.



The Choice of Experience, 29 x 23 in, Walter Pashko



Waiting in Greece, 1980, digital print, Walter Pashko

Exhibition Checklist

Bill Flynn

The Performance of Shadows, 1989
oil on canvas, 50 x 60 in

What Exists After the Play, 1988
oil on canvas 60 x 66 in

Dimension Stepping, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

From Front To Back, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Always Part of the Whole, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 36 x 40 in

Folded Diffractions, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Discovered and Folded, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Unexpected Fluctuations, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Plication 1, 2014
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Scored Drawing, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

Torn and Folded, 2015
charcoal, pastel on paper, 26 x 40 in

The Set Up 2015, Bill Flynn
Digital print
Photo: Stewart Clements

Walter Pashko

Crossing With the Wind, 1980
acrylic on canvas 8 x 6 ft

The Inconceivable is Unknown, 1979
acrylic and collage on canvas, 7 x 6 ft

Myth Passing Through, 1995
charcoal and colored pencils, 6 x 4 ft

Dualities One but Two, 1979
acrylic and collage on canvas, 7 x 6 ft

Untitled History, 1978
acrylic and collage on canvas, 6 x 8 ft

Wood cut, 1973
woodcut, 30 x 23 in

No Matter What Matter, 2002
colored pencils and collage, 29 x 23 in

The Choice of Experience, 2004
colored pencils and collage, 29 x 23 in

Important Nonetheless, 2004
colored pencils pastel on paper, 29 x 23 in

Toe Touch, 2005
colored pencils on paper, 29 x 23 in

Distance Unknown, 2005
colored pencils on paper, 29 x 23 in

Untitled Flynn's Place, 1983
pastel and oil stick on paper, 29 x 23 in

Waiting in Greece, 1980
digital print, 23 x 16 in



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