ACCURATE DESCRIPTIONS

by

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ACCURATE DESCRIPTIONS

dedicated to Matthew Guest
who imbues my work and my life
with purpose and meaning
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ABSTRACT

Accurate Descriptions is a thesis exhibition in which a large-scale comic strip relays the story of an interior apocalypse featuring vulgar flesh, prophetic hieroglyphs, metaphysical to-do lists, shopping lists, and libraries, abstract expressionist painting, lustful toiletries, pensive self-portraiture, ominous classroom décor, and a thumb-sucking whale.
VITA

Jennifer Guest was born and raised in Tarpon Springs, Florida—the Sponge Capital of the World. She obtained her Bachelor of Fine Arts in six years, attending multiple academic institutions: Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida, St. Petersburg College in St. Petersburg, Florida, The University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida, and Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. Concurrently to receiving her formal education, Guest worked in shopping malls, theme parks, and as a birthday party hostess.

Guest’s work is influenced by paperback cover illustrations, didactic drawings and dioramas, Aztec and Maya codices, catalog photographs of consumer goods, conceptual texts and postmodern fiction, African sign paintings, and the work of the Flemish Primitives. She lives with her husband in a Dallas suburb and teaches a variety of group exercise classes including yoga, Pilates, kickboxing, and resistance training.
My interest lies in language—language in the form of words and their combinations, and language in the form of pictorial images. My preoccupation lies in culling words and images that reflect the world in which I exist—historically-minded while forward-looking, aware of the mélange of references that shape us as artists and as humans, and dealing with questions of existence and the abstract constructs of human consciousness. It is not a love of materials that drives my work. Rather, it is the idea of the artist as a curator of immaterial experience that urges me to make.

**Accurate Descriptions** is a narrative series of drawings motivated by my fixation with list-making. A common method for organizing, cataloging, and indexing information, list-making provides a strategy for gaining understanding of the world. While hand-written lists are included in the exhibition, the pictorial images together serve as a list, as well. My conceptualization of this project dictated that these drawings adhere to pre-determined dimensional formats, their installation also following a predetermined format. This mode of installation creates formal interest, but most importantly, it is necessitated by the concepts guiding the work. These drawings are not meant to exist individually but, rather, as part of a whole—each an abstracted moment from the fuller narrative. It is for this reason that the drawings are hung tightly spaced and that, while the drawings were made in different dimensions, they exist together as one long (25-foot) line. Each drawing’s significance relies on its relationship to the rest, their associations forced through the format of installation. This format’s reference to comic strips creates the narrative impulse, its left-to-right reading functioning as a progressive timeline.

The physical and literal structure and organization of the separate drawings into one unified piece is intended to demonstrate the abstract themes of structure and organization within the separate drawings. Each drawing is carefully contained within a line-drawn, one-centimeter border on each page. Containment is a theme I have explored in this project, both literally through formatting, and abstractly
through the objects represented. These objects include boxes, bookshelves, index cards (containers for information), grids (as formal containers), picture frames, architecture for enclosing water, and books (containers for information). My drawings also contain shallow spatial depth in an effort to give a sense of being contained in close confinement with the pictured objects. Furthering the theme of immobility, I represent objects, tools, and hardware for attaching or creating contact points including pins, brackets, staples, tape, a tripod, a ladder, and a chair.

I chose to use materials that are not, themselves, inherently interesting. Paper and pencil are common, ubiquitous materials and their uses are familiar and comprehensible. A pencil’s capability as a tool is relatively limited as it produces a limited number of marks. Colored pencils, specifically, are a young medium in fine art and, as a material, make little art historical reference. The white drawing paper that serves as the ground for my drawings carries with it very little association other than its use as drawing paper and, because of its ubiquity and inherent lack of visual interest, becomes almost a non-material. I wish to use materials that have little associative power. By making these choices, I hope to lend more significance to the image and to the process of making, these drawings created by an idiosyncratic and systematic layering of line.

I view the pencil as a direct and immediate source of line and I view line-making as a system of organization and containment. My drawings are created by a slow and sometimes tedious build-up of line. The shape, placement, arrangement, and coloration of line creates form, volume, and texture. When making a drawing, I am always interested in the way my mind organizes an input of information, makes edits, omissions, and additions, and organizes and controls its output. Because of this process of input/output and because of the directness of line in articulating these processes, I find drawings infinitely interesting in their ability to communicate and to provide insight into the complicated
structure of the mind.

**Accurate Descriptions** follows the events surrounding an apocalypse. It is not the type of physically catastrophic apocalypse featured in action movies, but a nearly uneventful, non-climactic apocalypse—one that is barely noticeable, even, as though experienced from inside a sealed room. The moments presented create an ambiance of contemplation, the apocalypse representing an unveiling of knowledge. My drawings chart the events from a pre-apocalyptic era of “not-knowing” to a post-apocalyptic era of “knowing.” Because we use stories of apocalypses as ways to examine personal death, I see the narrative as gently pushing its protagonist toward an existential demise. The protagonist does not suffer a violent, dramatic death. She does not contemplate her mortality while enduring insufferable pain. It is a possibly more tragic death, a “passing away,” one that takes place unconsciously, unknowingly, as though during sleep.

The drawing *Whale Scale* borrows formally from didactic posters and graphs and compares the height of a standing, generalized human figure to the length of an invented whale. While the height of the figure is one-ninth the length of the whale, an inset image pictures the figure in detail and presents the figure as being equal, height-wise, to the whale, length-wise. Throughout history, the whale has taken on a multiplicity of meanings in allegorical tales. The most well-known instance of this is Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* in which the whale becomes Ishmael’s irrational obsession and the ultimate source of his demise. Throughout the course of the novel, Ishmael, the protagonist and narrator, dedicates himself to the study of nearly every discipline known to man in his attempt to understand the essential nature of the whale. His inability to reach any satisfying conclusion suggests that human knowledge is always limited and insufficient. The invented whale I represent operates within this metaphor and serves as an illustration of my personal “whale.” In contrast to the powerful and threatening whale in
Melville’s tale, however, my whale is rendered physically insufficient, possessing a curved spine, the inoperable reproductive organs of both sexes, and the dental deformities of a thumb-sucker. The pictured figure, my story’s protagonist, is herself sexually ambiguous. The drawing pictures her graphic transformation from a small, generalized figure to a large, specific figure, representing her birth—the implication made that she is both birthed by the whale and compared to the whale.

The drawings To-Do 1 and To-Do 2 feature hand-written poems atop illusionistically rendered index cards. Presenting metaphysical “to-do” lists, these drawings propose lists of exercises for contemplating the self in its universal context. These pictured poems were motivated by an intriguing phrase in Don DeLillo’s White Noise. During the novel’s climactic scene, the protagonist finds relief from his own perpetual and burdensome fear of death by placing the life of another in his hands, instructing himself to “regard the squalor.” This passive response to extreme circumstances inspired me to produce a list of further instructions for existential query, formulating an analytical approach for examining the unknowable. Ending To-Do 1 with the phrase “Repeat the Series,” I began To-Do 2 by inverting the alphabetical sequence of words, this second list starting with “Survey the Ruin” and ending with “Signal the Rapture.”

Both Before Christ (B.C.) and Anno Domini (A.D.) present libraries of books containing titles created with the respective initials of each era. Books with titles such as Boob Creases, Bovine Carcasses, Buxom Concubines, and Breathy Coitus populate the library of the subconscious before The Year of Our Lord which, in this work, is the pre-apocalyptic era of “not-knowing.” The B.C. books represented exist as architectural structures enclosing a mirror-like field within an ambiguous, other-worldly landscape. Books with titles such as Angular Designs, Antique Desks, Automobile Depreciation, and Accurate Descriptions populate the library of the subconscious in The Year of Our Lord, the post-apocalyptic era of
“knowing.” The A.D. books are conscientiously arranged, in alphabetical order, within the earthly context of wooden bookshelves. The cryptic book titles contained within both libraries tease at their esoteric contents, but remain forever inaccessible.

Humoristic elements play an important role throughout the series. Humor presents an attitude and a perspective that creates a vehicle for the truth. It produces a type of shorthand, a form of communication that is layered and coded—the result being that not everyone will “get the joke.” Coupled with my use of symbols from the subconscious, some viewers may recognize a narrative thread throughout the series while others may view each piece as representative of an ambiguous icon. Both responses are anticipated and intended. The tongue-in-cheek title Accurate Descriptions points to the human longing for concise, linear, progressive stories with conclusive endings. In a denial of this desire, the series ends in uncertainty with the drawing Single Digit, a singular, large-scale index finger symbolizing the conscious, perceiving self—the last remaining element of a confusing existence.
Accurate Descriptions, installation view
Accurate Descriptions, installation view
Accurate Descriptions, detail of installation
Accurate Descriptions, detail of installation
Accurate Descriptions, detail of installation
Accurate Descriptions, detail of installation
Whale Scale
colored pencil, gouache, and graphite on paper
30”x 40”
2013
*Whale Scale*, detail
Whale Scale, detail
To-Do 1
colored pencil, Sharpie, and graphite on paper
7.5”x 11”
2013
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To-Do 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>colored pencil, Sharpie, and graphite on paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5”x 11”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before Christ (B.C.)
colored pencil, gouache, and graphite on paper
30”x 40”
2014
Before Christ (B.C.), detail
Anno Domini (A.D.)
colored pencil, gouache, and graphite on paper
30"x 20"
2014
Anno Domini (A.D.), detail
*Single Digit*
colored pencil, gouache, and graphite on paper
30” x 20”
2012