

# Amy Pleasant / You Are Here

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## Amy Pleasant: You Are Here

Most storytellers are concerned with a tale's beginning, middle and end, weaving narrative elements into a logical sequence of events. The drawings in Amy Pleasant's *You Are Here*, however, are a departure from the norm. Imposing no external order, she presents a variety of scenes that appear to be happening simultaneously. The work in the exhibition continues the artist's practice of creating a kind of mega-storytelling: freezing a moment and presenting a sampling from what appears to be a broad cross-section of time and space. In doing so she is creating a map or a still image of the way our brains remember and perceive events. Combining personal and common history, the drawings maintain an evenhanded, documentary tone. Her observations are presented objectively, without irony or judgment.

The viewing experience created by Pleasant's drawings is similar to looking at a naturally forming phenomenon from a great distance. Large shapes resembling the birth of a star, atomic structures, Mobius strips, or fractal patterns emerge from the pristine white void of the paper or wall. Closer inspection reveals these constellations are made not of atoms or planets. Rather they are inhabited by tiny, delicately rendered figures in various forms of resolution engaged in the activities of their daily lives. The rich pigments, suspended in their watery shapes, seem born into the world the way raindrops on the sidewalk are. The seemingly disparate events appear to be caught in the same gravitational orbit hurtling through the vacuum of space. Loops overlap the way individual stories often intersect.

The artist uses composition differently depending on the size of the surface. In the larger pieces, Pleasant's images seem to spin off on a tangent driven by some invisible cosmic force. In the small, untitled drawings the centered vignettes cluster together by some unseen glue, like bits and pieces of conversations overheard on a subway. The scenes often overlap and fade into and out of focus. One jumble shows a series of images each framed within an ellipse: a figure caught in the moment before crossing the street; a lone figure resting on a grassy lawn; a couple walking near dusk. Each elliptical passage is made with its own specific sharpness, cropping, and light. The scenes in the larger drawings, like the image of the sleeping woman paired with the figure



with the Eiffel Tower, appear to be separated by years and/or many miles.

Pleasant uses differing levels of darkness, clarity, placement, and the space in-between to reveal the physical and psychological distance between individuals, while at the same time illustrating points of commonality in the human experience. In the wall drawing, *Drip 2006*, a woman looks through a window at another woman in another building. The same drawing shows two people standing on the opposite sides of the same street. Elsewhere in the same drawing a faint, ghostlike woman caught in the act of removing her blouse floats beside a crisply rendered couple embracing.

The drawings often present differing views of the same event. Scenes are cropped or drawn from a variety of perspectives. Pleasant's cartoon-like drawings also function as storyboards to describe the way we look at the world: first, the eye makes out the broad parts of a scene and then a few frames later the focus becomes sharper and the details more apparent. What was once perceived as the antenna on the north tower of the World Trade Center eventually becomes a darkened figure on the roof looking down on the world. The drawings allow the viewers to simultaneously project themselves into the drawings while seeing themselves through the wrong end of a telescope that reveals both the vulnerability and the grace of their own lives.

Hamlett Dobbins, Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery





Cover: Detail from *Untitled*, 24x22" ink on paper, 2006

Inside left: *Untitled*, 45x72", ink on paper, 2006

Inside right: *Untitled*, 24x22" ink on paper, 2006

Back: Detail from *Drip* 2006, ink on wall, 2006

Images courtesy the artist and Jeff Bailey Gallery, New York

