History, Mythology and Science Fiction Inspire Larger-Than-Life Wall Drawings

BY KRISTIN STERLING

Working on a monumental scale is rare in finished drawings, yet artist Jesse Bransford, SoA ’00, has brought his wall drawings, which measure up to 25 by 80 feet, to life in museums and galleries in New York and Los Angeles. In both his large-scale wall drawings and paper drawings Bransford creates sweeping images across time and cultures that reflect ancient mythology, space flight and science fiction to heavy metal music and popular video games.

Bransford’s works draw con-

nections among various histori-
cal stages of knowledge, often incorporating astrological charts from the Middle Ages with 21st century rockets. “. . . when you look at the history of ideas, then you realize that it was all there from the beginning, that every ‘new’ idea has an analog some where in the past,” he said in an interview with the gallery Fea-

ture Inc., in New York, where he has participated in three group exhibitions and two solo shows.

Two of Bransford’s drawings on paper were recently dis-

played in New York. “Study for the Void” (2000) was at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in SoHo as part of the 2002 additions to the “FRISH: The Ahoolds Curiously Strong Collec-
tion.” The collection will now travel across the country before becoming part of the museum’s permanent collec-
tion. He also had a drawing on display at the Lehmann Maupin Gallery’s “Off the Grid” show of works on paper, which ran through Feb. 16. Bouncer Collu-

ra, adjunct associate professor in the School of the Arts, also participated in the show.

“Jesse Bransford’s work is interesting to me for many rea-

sons, not the least of them the fact that he has taken drawing, which is often relegated to the status of preparatory work, and made it an essential element in these strong, complete, resonat-
ing pieces,” said Michael Lynne, co-chairman of New Line Cinema and member of the

Full installation view of Bransford’s “Corner 02: Hollyhock,” approximately 25 x 80’, which adorning the UCLA Hammer Muse-

um’s lobby walls last summer.

School of the Arts Dean’s Coun-
cil.

The magnitude of these “res-
onative” pieces is demonstrated in “Corner 02: Hollyhock,” the 25 by 80-foot drawing that adorned the UCLA Hammer Museum’s lobby wall last sum-

mer. This drawing combines the mystical overtones of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Hollyhock House in Southern California with imagery from mythology and the 1970s metal band, Blue Oyster Cult.

“The images come across time and cultures,” says Brans-

ford. “Of particular interest to me was the idea of having his-

torically diverse representations of people moping and overlap-
ging in a procession to the bot-
tom of the stairs, led by images from medieval woodcuts of death, in the tradition of the

medieval ‘dance of death.’”

The historical procession includes images of warriors, princesses and an astronaut under the backdrop of ancient celestial maps. In this piece, the surface of the walls could rep-
tent, and as such, the corner could be the threshold of death. The position of the uni-
corn, a western symbol of puri-
ty and eternity, could then be seen as rebirth in a new form. Finally, the Hollyhock motif, which spans both sides, becomes symbolic of the join-
ing of the two surfaces, or the states of life and death.

How does an artist create a piece of this magnitude? After much research, the develop-

ment progressed through several al-

media, including computer files, an architectural installa-
tion and photographic repro-

ductions.

It took Bransford nearly two years, and with walls of scalfold-

ing, to render the images on the walls through a combina-
tion of the “ancient art of the grid” and the modern assis-
tance of an opaque projector. Bransford’s next large-scale wall drawing is currently under development and will be on display for the schedule-
um of Art in Pittsburgh, Pa., March 16 through June 9, as part of the “American Imagination” project series. For this very large, 16-by-118-foot piece, Bransford plans to adapt images of art in the museum’s galleries and artifacts from their Museum of Natural Histo-
ry’s collection, such as amphibi-
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“Jesse’s brilliance is in the un-hierarchical attitude that he adopts towards the symbols and images that he uses to cre-

ate his large scale drawings and wall murals. His hybrid cre-

ations combine varied refer-

ces to form poetical tar pits of visual information,” says Jon Kessler, chair of the Visual Arts Division.

Over the past two years, Bransford’s work has been shown at the Torch, Amster-
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New Yorkers Want Art More Than Ever, But Who Will Pick Up the Tab?

BY JO KASIDIECK

Most New Yorkers say they want more art and culture because they generally believe the arts can enrich their lives and help them engage with the world more substantially—especially after the attacks of Sept. 11. Three quarters of New York’s cultural groups, however, receive little or no financial support from the City.

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