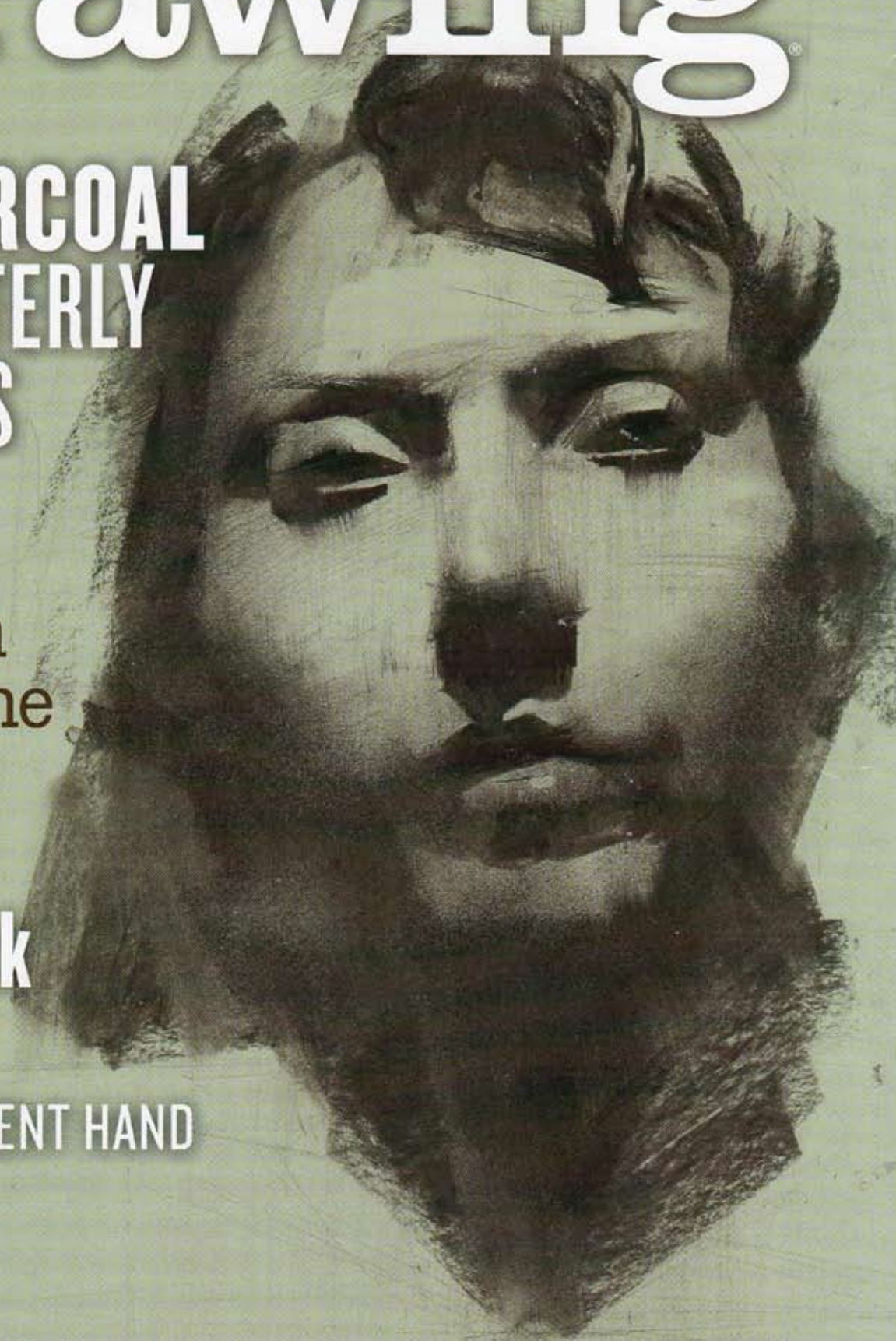


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Untitled (detail)
by Mark Tennant

BELOW

Rio Ganges

2009, graphite, 12 x 16.
All artwork this article
collection the artist unless
otherwise indicated.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Portrait of Betty

2009, graphite, 24 x 18.

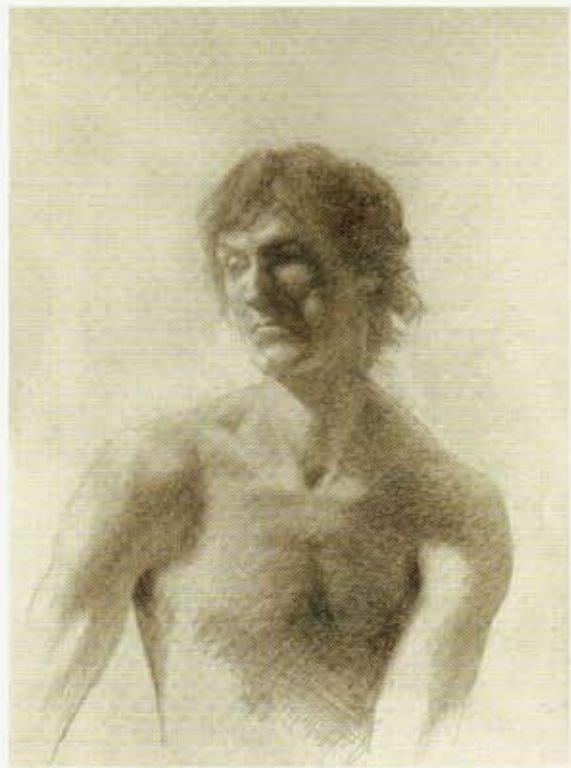
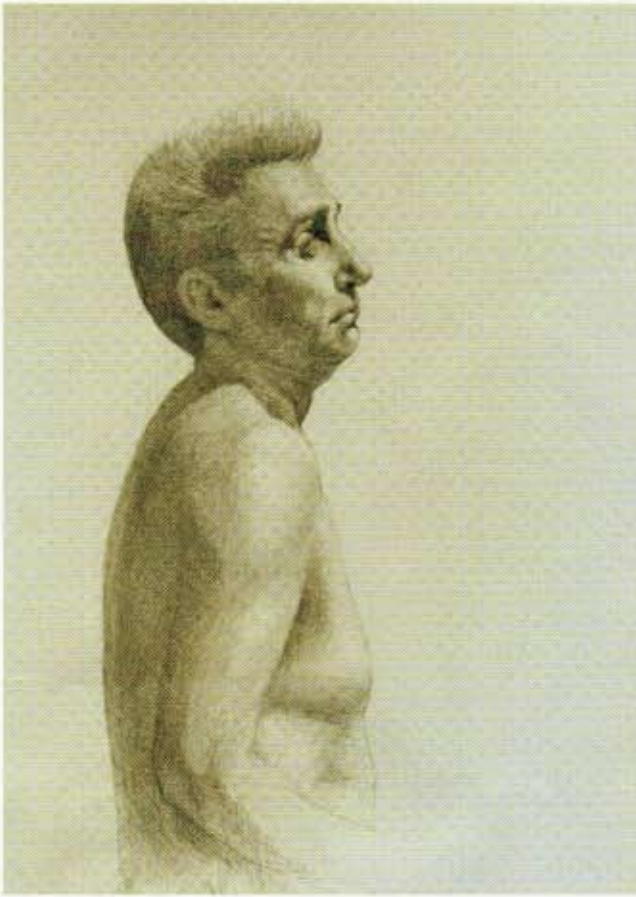
Making Quick PROGRESS WITH A CONFIDENT HAND

Although **Jean Marcellino**'s success in drawing and painting seems quickly attained, it owes much to achievements in her life and in her previous career.

—
by **Bob Bahr**







TOP LEFT
Emoting Christophe
2009, graphite, 24 x 18.

TOP RIGHT
Bellissima Ancora
2009, graphite, 14 x 11.

ABOVE
**Monday—James
the Vegan**
2009, graphite, 24 x 18.

RIGHT
**Friday—James
the Vegan**
2009, graphite, 24 x 18.

JEAN MARCELLINO'S RECENT HISTORY

is startling. In January 2005, she started attending a sketch night with predictable results for a newcomer. "The first few times I went, my drawings were beneath contempt—they were dreadful," she recalls. "But I gave myself permission to be bad." As a retiree, Marcellino had plenty of time to devote to her improvement in drawing and painting, and she soon found herself creating art every day. In October 2006, the artist was part of a group who invited retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to sit for a portrait. Marcellino's oil painting was chosen by the National Portrait Gallery for its collection, and it currently hangs in that Washington, DC, museum. From "beneath contempt" to hanging in the National Portrait Gallery in less than two years? Marcellino's story is even more interesting and complex than that timeline implies.

She was an art major at The Cooper Union, in New York City, in 1960 when Abstract Expressionism held sway and students were "all trying to copy De Kooning," according to Marcellino. "I was not in love with AbEx, but I had to please my teachers." She looked at the art that was then popular in the galleries, and realizing that her ambition and standards would push her to be "relevant" in a way that didn't really appeal to her, Marcellino considered other ways to make a living. She chose advertising. "I did not feel like I was prostituting myself," she says. "It was not painful for me to go that route. I liked the idea of solving communication problems with words and pictures, in an abstract way." Stints in the design department at Columbia Records and Arista Records followed, then a quick climb up the ladder of advertising firms, culminating in a top spot at J. Walter Thompson and a successful freelance career. Marcellino stepped away from advertising in 2003, but this career seems crucial to her subsequent work as an artist, not only because it kept Marcellino in the creative realm for more than 40 years but also because it gave her the license to make decisions on the fly and to follow her muse.

When one watches Marcellino draw one realizes just how free she is in her artistic choices. Working on the "creative" side of an advertising agency means being open to many ideas. Perhaps this is the source of her flexibility, abetted by the clear fact that she has little to prove after a successful career. Regardless, Marcellino seems at liberty to meld multiple approaches to drawing if she deems them fit for the task at hand. On a recent afternoon in her home studio, she began a life drawing using a relatively hard HB graphite pencil, in contrast with many draftsmen's practice.

Portrait of Sandra Day O'Connor

2006, oil on linen, 20 x 16. Collection National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC.



Painting a Supreme Court Justice

Marcellino was part of a painting group that invited the recently retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to pose for portraits one day in October 2006. The artist reports that the judge was charming and witty, and the six hours passed quickly. Documentary filmmaker Neil Leifer was present and produced a film chronicling the event, which aired on Cinemax. The Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery expressed interest in the project and hosted an exhibition of the 26 artists' work, and Marcellino's portrait was selected for the National Portrait Gallery's permanent collection. It will hang indefinitely in the museum's third-floor "Search for Justice" exhibition, according to Marcellino. "As Neil Leifer said, 'Sometimes everything that can go right does go right,'" says the artist.

(She commented that this was not necessarily her custom.) Marcellino carefully sized up her subject using a photographer's metal viewfinder and contemplated compositional choices based on the dimensions of her paper. Her routine is to frame the subject in the viewfinder, then precisely note where the middle of the composition would be and place a dot on her paper in the corresponding spot. She marks where the top of the model's head will be in the composition, and the rest of her measurements grow out of those two landmarks.



About the Artist

Jean Marcellino works out of her Manhattan home studio and attends sketch groups at area schools and clubs. She is a graduate of The Cooper Union School of Art, in New York City, and is retired from a career in advertising during which she served as the senior vice president/creative director at J. Walter Thompson. Marcellino's portrait of retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor is in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, in Washington, DC, and her work appears in other private and public collections. For more information, visit her website at www.naje.com.

Marcellino's background in abstraction serves her well in the early stages of a drawing. Recalling a method she saw in a Nelson Shanks class at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, she makes a point of drawing the overall gesture—the tilt of the shoulders and hips and the line that the spine follows—in broad strokes. From this frame she hangs big geometric shapes—in this case a triangle that she felt was key to her composition and a large circle encapsulating the model's head and curly hair. Her drawing looked more like a Joan Miró than a Nelson Shanks at this point. Marcellino drew with a light touch and with a seemingly wanton hand, scribbling freely to indicate to herself

LEFT
Fontana del Moro
2009, graphite, 16 x 12.

OPPOSITE PAGE
Weeping Putto
2009, graphite, 11½ x 8½.

where the shaded portions were. Using the distance from the crown of the model's head to her lowest-lying curl as a unit of measurement, Marcellino marked off the proportions of the model on her page. She popped back and forth from laying down positive shapes to navigating using negative shapes. At times she simply made marks in the diagonal direction that her hand naturally fell into, and at other moments she made her marks follow the form like a sculptor's tool. When the artist needs to achieve dark darks, she switches to a jet-black Design Ebony pencil, but she sometimes returns to a harder, lighter pencil for her last marks.

The sun was quickly setting on the winter afternoon of Marcellino's demonstration, which posed a challenge that the artist countered by choosing the light effects she liked best, regardless of their continuity. It worked. Overall, Marcellino works tonally, slowly building up darks and leaving edges soft as long as possible. She attributes her love of tone to the influence of Ephraim Rubenstein, who taught her at the Art Students League, and to Shanks, who demonstrated for one of her classes by drawing a figure, erasing it, drawing it again so that the page was quite smudged with charcoal, then "drawing" a third time by simply pulling out the lights with a kneaded eraser. Anatomy is of little concern to Marcellino—at least in terms of knowing every muscle and bone. "I'd always prefer to err on the side of 'what I see' as opposed to 'what I know,'" she says.

Marcellino's process seems quite blithe, with very loose hatching slowly describing the form—then suddenly the image appears out of the tone. She is able to achieve admirable progress in a limited amount of time with calm and ease. Last May the artist spent a month in Italy touring and drawing, and the resulting pieces look like the result of hours in the studio. Their success is actually attributable to a schedule Marcellino created to maximize her time. She started a 9 a.m. drawing, a 10 a.m. drawing, an 11 a.m. drawing, and so forth, returning to each drawing's location at the scheduled time to ensure consistent light effects. On rainy days she drew other scenes and indoor views. Marcellino estimates that each of her drawings of public sculptures from her trip to Italy took about five hours.

The abstract artist of 50 years ago is now drawing classical sculptures in a realistic way. What happened? "I got the need to be clever out of my system," she says. "That part of my brain got over-exercised working in advertising. I don't want to do that anymore. Advertising is creating reality. I'm rebelling against that. I'm interested in harnessing reality."



DEMONSTRATION: CLAUDIA



Reference

Marcellino was interested in how the light played on the model's back, and she also found the twist of the pose compelling. Three subtle spots of light caught the artist's eye: the dimples on each of the shoulder blades and the highlight that defined the musculature in the upper leg. The model would hold the pose for three hours in 20-minute intervals.



Step 1 (above)

The artist's first marks were quite abstract. Marcellino was intent on showing the angle of the shoulders, the triangle of light on the model's back, and the size of the head (for use as a measuring device). Using a photography viewfinder, she cropped the view to the exact proportions she wanted in her composition, observed and marked the midpoint in the figure to start the drawing, and noted where the top of the head would go relative to the top of her paper. Her marks were lightly applied with an HB graphite pencil. The artist found that another head's length would go from the bottommost curl of the model's hair to the crease at her hip, and from the crease of the hip to the bottom of the left buttock.



Step 2 (left)

Marcellino next indicated the spine, the sole of the model's left foot, and the darkest dark where the buttock rested on the couch. "At this point I realized that the key to this drawing was the juxtaposition of the spinal contour with the triangle of folded cloth on the couch," she recalled.



Step 3

A figure began to emerge from the abstract shapes as Marcellino added contour lines. She observed the negative shape under the right arm to determine the proper placement of the left leg.



Step 4 (above & detail, right)

Marcellino used loose scribbles to mark the area in shadow on the figure. From the start, she was pleased by the triangle of drapery on the couch to the left of the model, which mirrored the triangle on the model's back that intrigued her. The artist drew in the drapery, explaining, "When drawing a model in my or another studio, the acknowledgement of some environment often situates the model and renders the figure more credibly."



DEMONSTRATION: CLAUDIA, CONTINUED



Step 5

While the model took a break, Marcellino scribbled in some shading in the background on the right. For this and the rest of the demonstration, she used a jet-black Design Ebony pencil, which is graphite-based but makes very dark, matte marks. "At this point, I realized the essential magic of this image would reside in its darks," said the artist.



Step 6

The drawing made a major leap over the following 20 minutes. Marcellino noted that the sharpest value contrast was along the edge of the model's back, and she began to depict this on her paper. She drew in the pelvic bone and modeled the head by adding more dark to the shadow side and drawing in a few curls. Further darkening the background on the right allowed a lost edge on the breast. Further definition in the sofa firmly placed the model in her pose. During the model's break, Marcellino turned the paper upside down and scribbled in some tone on the bottom of the drawing.



Step 7

The artist turned her attention back to the core shadow on the various subforms, which she called the crest line. During this 20-minute segment, she concentrated on the subtleties in the darks and some of the details in the fabric on the couch—she was conscious that this area would be an important counterpoint to the contour line of the spine.



Step 8 (left & detail, above)

The afternoon light coming in the north-facing window began to shift as it hit the windows of neighboring buildings, and bright highlights began to pop up in various places on the figure. Marcellino chose a few she liked and ignored the rest. In particular, she liked the light running along the model's right arm and the stronger highlights on the upper part of the right leg. Like a sculptor, she began to make marks that followed the form, and she made a point of depicting a few hard edges. Marcellino then reinforced the darkest darks.

Step 9: The Completed Demonstration (opposite page)

Time was running out even though Marcellino wanted to keep working. She focused on adding darks to the right leg and to the buttocks to more convincingly turn the form. She added dark to the background to make the model's head pop a bit more. Finally, the artist laid down a few contour lines to suggest additional areas not fully rendered.

THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:

Claudia

2009, graphite on laid paper, 24 x 18.

