J.J. Kegan McFadden, "Derek Dunlop," Strange Bedfellows, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, UBC, 2006.

Strange Bedfellows

Derek Dunlop
Untitled (detail), 2006
acrylic, oil, pencil, carbon, pen, crayon, pastel, charcoal on paper
169 cm × 264 cm

Derek Dunlop | J.J. Kegan McFadden

When we're young we're taught to colour inside the lines. By our teenage years most of us have begun to experiment and venture outside of the lines. By the time we reach our mid-twenties, and later still, lines continue to be drawn yet are increasingly ignored. For Derek Dunlop, such lines seem to exist only to be blurred. Over the past two years in the MFA program at The University of British Columbia, Derek has been attempting more than a blurring of lines. I'd venture to say he is eradicating them at every turn. However, in order to confront these parameters that lines impose, these rules of the game, it is essential to acknowledge their existence. Such conventions must be made obvious before they can be obscured, before they can be manipulated and subverted. Ultimately the rules are different for everyone, and Derek's focus is on the conventions of maleness.

In an attempt to articulate the socialization of masculinity, his latest series of drawings are informed exclusively by images from popular culture. Whether it's a beer commercial or an advertisement for the armed forces, Derek "grabs" images of men interacting with one another from television and online. Haphazard but relentless, he pilfers through this media; ingesting it so that he may spit it out. Once he's consumed a plethora of testosterone-laden rhetoric he stores it in his own memory as well as in slide format in order to project the images onto his paper. He then quickly traces and sketches over these scenarios obliterating normative roles with his seemingly child-like scribbles, rendering the images illegible. Disparately placed patches or schisms begin to populate the paper surface allowing for a constellation-like effect, a new map of sorts emerges in defiance of mainstream charting.

Derek's mark making might also be a form of self-scrutiny, editing out the aspects of his culture in which he has had no choice but to participate. For this reason, his drawing can be further understood in terms of the current historical moment wherein we find ourselves: a melancholy place where refuelled wars and the fêted death of the martyr plays out in tandem with violent "reality" television shows and the celebration of a different kind of willing victim—the aggressive prime-time male. Representations of these realities and dramas are colour-blocked and scratched out on Derek's page—notions of enculturation are directly confronted. Nothing male is sacred … most certainly everything masculine is under scrutiny. Within this palpable mess, Derek presents a visual cacophony leading to seizure or maybe orgasm. His drawings allow for any need to follow the lines to matter far less, and for the terrain outside of them to be indulged in, to be a fantasy, instead of insecurity.