

# CASCO BAY ARTISANS

INTERNATIONAL FINE ART GALLERY

## Perception of Form: Jean Wiecha Drawings & Paintings



Over the last year, artist Jean Wiecha has been looking at bras. It started with an interest in the structure and shape of these objects, especially the forms they take when casually discarded at the end of the day. Soon, these shapes started to connect to her interest in eastern philosophy and the bras transformed from functional clothing to an embodiment of ideas around form, emptiness, and where the edges of matter can be defined.

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## PERCEPTION OF FORM

### Artist's statement

The bra series started as a technical exercise. At first I thought drawing bras would be instructive, and also fun and a little silly. Then I realized how hard they were to draw. After that they became an irresistible challenge. The more I studied them, the more I learned. Joanna Field, in her book *On Not Being Able to Paint*<sup>1</sup>, wrote about how objects seem to change as we observe them while drawing or painting. For me, it wasn't just that the objects changed while I drew them; making the drawings also changed my art.

Doing this series forced me to stretch my understanding of complicated forms and how to render them on a flat surface. I got increasingly interested in how forms end and space begins, in the edges of things as they curve away from view. I started to finally let go of the notion that drawing an object meant using line to enclose and separate it from the space around it. In art we talk about hard and soft edges, and the more I stared at my bra the softer its edges appeared as it rounded into or away from the light. Sometimes I couldn't see where it ended and the background began. This seemed kind of magical and a little profound, and I dug into it.

At first, I defined the challenge as figuring out how to make form fade into emptiness, but over time it seemed that I had it backwards. The more compelling issue was how to make emptiness gradually coalesce into form. It seemed like the emptiness was critical for charging the form with energy. It wasn't just a notion of negative space but of accepting an equivalence between form and emptiness, that the space was just as much painted or drawn as the form. In fact, the emptiness seemed to make the form possible, and the form needed the emptiness as a substrate to emerge from. And every new configuration of the form altered the shape and quality of the emptiness around it. The two were continuous, inseparable.

The Buddhist Heart Sutra says in part "Whatever is form is emptiness, whatever is emptiness is form." Buddhism interprets form (both things and ideas) as impermanent, fluid constructions. The way we perceive forms is very much a product of our own minds; as our minds change, we see things differently. So the idea of impermanence casts emptiness as a sort of pool of infinite possibility that forms rise out of. Where there is nothing, there is the potential for something. This is completely consistent with the practice of drawing, in which we create illusions that grow out of blank paper. As our perceptions and ideas change, we understand and execute our work differently. We get better, try new things, backslide on a bad day, but the point is we're always pulling something out of nothing.

What does this have to do with my bra? Well, over time it went from being a very mundane and predictably comfortable 34A into a shape-shifting aggregate of light and shadow. Capturing this visually involved a lot of failures and do-overs early on. There were questions followed by experiments and

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<sup>1</sup> Field, Joanna. *On Not Being Able to Paint*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1957.

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discoveries, and I threw out a lot of paper. But as I kept at it, good things began to happen. I learned to stay open to every nuance of the drawing process, coming up with ways to use *these* pencils, on *this* type of support, to convey *this* subject. I learned that I had infinite amounts of time to get the marks right and, miraculously, that time folded easily around every curve and crevice in the images, so a minute might pass, or maybe an hour, and I couldn't tell the difference and I didn't care. And I learned to pay attention to the way I showed up at the easel: I often caught myself being tense, crooked and vigilant, and holding my breath during the hard parts. When I began to relax, balance my weight, step back, and breathe, I began to sink more comfortably into my work. It became more about *drawing* and less about *the drawings*.

Most people that see the bra series won't see this text, and will decide for themselves what the work is about. The images are ambiguous on purpose and their interpretation is therefore open. For me, now that I'm on the other side of this series, the ideas of impermanence and possibility, of form and emptiness, helped me find new art habits and have also settled into my consciousness on other levels. I'm trying to face unknowns with an appreciation that solutions are out there and that I can gather them if I stay open to seeing them, even if they are hidden in the dark right now.

Jean Wiecha  
2020

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Jean Wiecha 'Wound Up' Graphite on mylar 11.5" x 12" 2020 \$1200

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Jean Wiecha 'Wired' Graphite on Mylar 11.5" x 12" 2020 \$1200



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Jean Wiecha 'Tumbled' Graphite on Mylar 14" x 8" 2020 \$1200

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Jean Wiecha 'Twisted' Graphite on Mylar 14" x 8" 2020 \$1200

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Jean Wiecha 'Round Midnight' Graphite on Mylar 19" x 12" 2020 \$1200



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Jean Wiecha 'Last Night When We Were Young' Graphite on Mylar 19" x 12" 2020 \$1200

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Jean Wiecha 'Soft Serve' Oil on Linen Mounted on Panel 13.5"x13.5" \$600



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Jean Wiecha 'Overexposed' Oil on Linen Mounted on Panel 11.5"x9.5" \$600