

JASPER SEBASTIAN STURUP

Written in Fur
Drown in Snow

Forever & Today, Inc.
New York 2012

PREFACE

Ingrid Chu and Savannah Gorton

This artist book, *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow* (2012) by Danish artist Jasper Sebastian Stürup, was conceived as a part of his 2009 commissioned installation, *I Don't Believe You, It Used To Be Like That And Now It Goes Like This*, presented at Forever & Today, Inc.'s Lower East Side/Chinatown storefront exhibition space. It dealt with transitional themes relating to Stürup's recent relocation from Copenhagen to New York, capturing a momentary sense of change and metamorphosis.

His highly focused installation included a large-scale intricate ink-on-paper drawing, a silent video projection of cherry blossoms floating by in a river, a fur sculpture made from a discarded coat's fox collar, and a free pocket-sized limited edition booklet that in many ways resonates in dialogue with this book. Viewed in concert, these works appeared within a room that was painted chalkboard black, evoking the uncanny feeling of walking into one of Stürup's artist books or drawings.

As such, an apropos component was to commission an artist book elaborating on ideas touched upon in the installation, further revealing his internal process. *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow* encompasses drawings and photographs composed for the printed page, along with contributed texts and a studio visit conversation that delves into Stürup's interests and work, and the many artist books he has been self-publishing since the early 1990s.

Commissioning new work is always a collaboration, and Forever & Today, Inc. is grateful to the Danish Arts Council for its generous support of *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow*. Additionally, we would like to recognize the kind assistance of Susanne Ottesen. We wish to acknowledge the insight of contributing writers David Senior and Christoph Tannert for their sensitive and thoughtful perspectives. Most of all, we thank Jasper Sebastian Stürup for creating and sharing new work for the book.

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FLEETING TEXTURES

Christoph Tannert

Jasper Sebastian Stürup has an insatiable appetite—for the lashing of drums, the carrying-on of the bass, breath drawn in the midst of exclamation, the bliss of melody, and uncertainty. His drawing process is an enduring and intimate occurrence, subject to permanent revision; it gains legitimacy precisely because the artist is capable of articulating doubts and self-doubts. Or in Stürup’s own simple language, schooled by a reading of Karl Popper: “The decisive aspect of critical drawing is a willingness to question one’s own knowledge and examine things as carefully as possible in order to perhaps discover something new about them.”¹ According to this program, Stürup measures his way through a 50-year history of pop music’s ideas—rasping, entirely open to the world, rough, pouncing, and without even a minimum of comfort, but always with rhythm and groove.

Deliberation and outrage come together here, like stoic sovereignty and passion—feeling at home in sound, in a sense of boundlessness, and in the past and the future. And all this within a little book of drawings that in turn provides stimulus for another book. Even those who have no idea at all about pop music will notice the fundamental scraping of the drawing tool, sawing away at authority. Stürup translates sound into drawings, the forms of popular modernity into images, making it possible for us to sense the underground scene, the feeling of being different, and independence.

This is not a backward-looking gesture that plaintively laments something lost, but ammunition for the future. Yet Stürup is very much of today. He shows that repeatedly, drawing has ended up in a dead end or become uncritical whenever it has sought refuge in the past or the future. The youthful temperament of his affection for the old/young spirit of unrest is also expressed wonderfully in his single sheet drawings and artist books. It would be nice to think that there are more such refreshing minds, not yet dozing their way towards immortalization in museums with cultivated resignation and a diffidence that conforms to the art market.

From Stürup we learn that harmony is of no use at all, any more than a society that elevates consensus in daily political affairs, and elsewhere to a confession of faith. In the kingdom of democracy it cannot be a matter of wellness, peace/joy, and cute kittens and puppies, it should be about friction generated by different opinions. Secondly, we learn from him that humor is not necessarily subversive, often it is quite the opposite. Amidst the raucous bawling of thoroughly commercialized “old man” rock music in stadiums (which as we know, long ago became a program of social duty particularly on TV, and as an action for good causes of all kinds), Stürup hears chiefly the mocking voice of the mob, which sets the jeering pace when it comes to applauding one’s own limitations. He has never been interested in crowd taste.

Stürup’s drawings are connected in a liberating and labyrinthine way, sophisticated as well as punk-primitive—as radical as they are simple. There has rarely been anything as tender, as wild, as bold and as dark, but also as carefree and bright in drawing. Stürup dreams up every conceivable cascade of rock along which he can float without being disturbed by criticism of capitalism and general disquiet in the face of the zeitgeist. It is a carefree attitude that explodes the horizon, mingling with alert reflection without ever becoming dogmatic. He meets the pressure to conform that emanates from the heart of society with the spontaneous, the naïve, and the clumsy, which all make us curious and joyfully expectant.

Here are the solipsistic lines, arcs, and concentrations of line that translate a handwritten score into aesthetic energy. Here is the melancholy expanse of sound, conjuring up images of magical landscapes. And below it all is the gentle, easily pulsating rhythm of a paper structure that asserts a state of the universe in which something white exists, something that no longer needs to be re-drawn but emerges when our attention is redistributed.

The white of the paper holds and releases forms, according to the conventions of drawing. It is a completely organic sound that Stürup has mixed so richly here. Moods develop like fields of clouds—and just like clouds, they pass on. The line may lead down into darkness as if following a convoluted path, only to widen soon afterwards into an even clearer, brighter way. On another occasion, Stürup creates a wonderful fluid balance between all the fleeting and microscopic textures, so formulating the subject of every sheet.

These drawings exude a freedom that is not only derived from the music Stürup admires—each of them is a cosmos of improvisation, overflowing in its creativity. They are gestures of reverence, living from memory but equally from the spirit of departure, and each little artist book makes sure that its links lead not only into the past but also to the present.

¹ In conversation with the author on October 18, 2011.

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SOMETHING TO DO: ARTISTS' BOOKS AND JASPER SEBASTIAN STÜRUP

David Senior

Since everything is good as soon as it is printed, and as one reads it and one thinks everything is good reading when print, so one can read it and see that everything is good when read even if not printed, but written, since everything, even print, is written, especially when one says everything is good as soon as one reads it, after one or someone has printed it or written it or published it as print or not print, it is good as soon as it is written or printed or print, simply.¹

—Dieter Roth

At the very least, the artist making a book exists with feet in two territories. In one territory, we have the more recent lineage of strategies that create new spaces for artworks to be encountered—a rearticulation of an aesthetic space. Another foot lurches down deeper into the stores of old things, a field that disperses across both space and time, encompassing a history of books, and in the 12th century words of Hugh of Saint Victor, “in the vineyard of the text.”² This sounds dramatic, and it is—even if it may not matter to the makers of artists’ books.

Bibliography, as a formal subject of study, is detective work, of following books around, tailing their movements. If we speak of artists’ publications, movement is a primary aspect of their identity, a dispersion to and from various places. Is it the essential conceptual conceit of these little books—that they are built for travel? Slip them in an envelope and away they go. An argument could also be made that the relative affordability of these artists’ publications is the essential aspect of these materials. “Each artist should have a cheap line,” claimed John Baldessari in 1976 in the special issue on artists’ books by the magazine *Art-Rite*.³

Either way, these ideas are all a part of what we call bibliography. Also, the question of materials pertains to bibliography; that is, how a book was constructed and printed and finally presented to a public audience. The thing that the questions of bibliography do not ask is what a book means in regard to the text content. It is a big omission, but on the other hand, a huge relief. It is delusional though, especially in the context of artists’ books, to qualify these aspects as separate from the work’s semantics. In many cases, the prevailing messages of these books are their condition of being an informal, handmade object—affordable, mailable, and self-produced. Books get made to be in the hands of friends, to sit in lonely storage, to appear in a little book fair in Tokyo, to get cataloged in a library, to sit on a dealer’s desk, to get thrown out, to have coffee spilled on them. We have them in our homes, they are given as little gifts, they can be saved to phones, discussed in a blog, used as fuel for fires, ripped up to make other art. Books have these qualities and these qualities are dynamic and they make their own stories.

I start in this way because the artist Jasper Sebastian Stürup told me that when he was first making books, he was also working in the library of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen that had a collection of very old books. He also had a memorable visit from Martin Kippenberger during his time at art school in Copenhagen. These two influences hanging together are an interesting pair. I don’t know what the academy’s library looks like exactly, but I have an image in my head. I have lots of images in my head of what Kippenberger looked like and often one particular image stands out in my head. This image is at night on a city street—and Kippenberger has a mischievous smile and there is a group of other people around him, making their way through another evening to morning. It looks like a band photo, it could have been a band photo. So, I have now put these two images next to each other, an old library with old things and Kippenberger going into the night. We can probably start here.

One of the facts of Kippenberger’s practice was that he made a lot of things, a continuous loop of integrating life into a practice and so on. Kippenberger made a lot of books. Can we speak of one Kippenberger piece? Yes—but it’s more interesting to think about the accumulation of Kippenberger things. This is how I think about his books anyway, the fact of value shifting from the signature of one thing, to the tableau of all books, to all the things that he decided could be books. Reductively, it is a persistence to make stuff, without that nagging little issue of whether something is good or bad. In another way, it is a constant affirmation of a process that finds a lack of boundaries in terms of where to stop and where to begin.

A recognizable pattern in the stack of Stürup’s artist books is the repeated lack of faces. The numerous drawings of bodies do not have faces. And the pages of the books repeat the pattern with variation on facelessness. In accumulation, the bodies project a series of symbols achieved through gesture. Emptied of the face, the body signs a meaning—or at least signifies movement or activity. When you repeat something enough, when you utilize a specific formula enough, work takes on its own set of dense definitions and rules. With minimal patterns, a painter that has painted three lines her whole life turns her entire artistic oeuvre on its head when she adds a fourth line to the work. An extended practice creates rules. With the often lack of face, I think of Stürup’s rules that he makes. It is always in some way related to a face, even if the face is not there. Was this figure from a face that we might have recognized? We wonder as he works

from photographs whether it's a famous figure. A calculus of forgetting or disappearing has already happened. In recent works, as in the pages of this book, the face is now appearing, shifting from avoidance to an embrace of this feature in regard to the figures in the drawings. This is one of those shifts in the rules that I just mentioned. In this case, it is a flip, topsy-turvy—in some cases just the faces—facing us. Like they have been reclaimed from all the former bodies.

There are some skulls in and amongst the figures too. Here we come back to the conceptual image of the old library. We implicitly infer an Apollonian condition to our ideas of the library—ordered spaces with ordered taxonomies and the slightly-alive keepers of these materials pushing books back and forth. But, libraries are inherently Dionysian as well. They smell of rot, wholly combustible in terms of materials collapsing on themselves though the weight of time. Libraries eat themselves. My first job as a library worker was in a special collection library in Chicago, called the Newberry Library. When I think of the books there, I think of various editions of the *Danse Macabre* of skulls and skeleton figures inhabiting pages of illustrated printed books and the margins of manuscripts. The skulls and dancing skeletons implied something and so did the stacks of books themselves—the whole emblem of the Dürer *Melencolia I* (1514) figure and the black bile of the creative act. Did Stürup's skulls really come from this kind of response to the library? I am not sure.

The little book, *And Who Shall I Say Is Calling?* (2008) is in front of me now—with a photograph of a skull printed in black-and-white on the cover of the book. I have gathered the books Stürup has given me on my work desk. This one keeps staring back. There is something really funny about this book. The printed title, “And Who Shall I Say Is Calling?,” coupled with the image of the skull, has the feel of a successful collage. A found phrase and a found image placed together, fortuitously cleaving to a whole string of associative meanings. The tone is a bit macabre—but it is also kind of that punk/metal/skater dark humor where death imagery is used in jokes and word play. Doom does not always equal gloom. The phrasing and graphic style of many of the titles of Stürup's adds a pop element to the books. They are often direct quotes of lyrics or song titles and cut from their original contexts and pasted down as a point of entry to each book. The oblique poetic associations of the lyrics and the typographic references of the texts equally convey a specific tone and is a naming device that complements the feel of montage in the book works.

I like the size of Stürup's books—the most repeated size is a slightly off-square six-by-five-inch pamphlet. They are generally under twenty pages long and simply sewn with one stitch in the middle of the slim spine. It is a familiar size for little Xerox zines of the past thirty-five odd years, a manageable size for the making by hand and cheaply printing yourself. If we get back to the ideas of bibliography, we can be quick to assume that this is for a reason. It is hard for me to not associate making a small book with a choice to align with one of the originary ideas of artists' books—this ethic toward making an accessible, affordable work. Often with art students visiting the library I work at now, I harp on this idea, of this proposed space of the book as one possible way to have a public practice on one's own terms. Stürup has been making books for almost twenty years now. His practice has evolved, but it is clear that the early books fit this described scenario. As a younger artist, he managed the task of circulating work by producing these little bound works. They found their way out of Copenhagen to shelves elsewhere, at Printed Matter, Inc. in New York and other such places.

Another thing about little artists' publications is the idea that they often document a practice or process while also simultaneously being a practice or a process. Books like Claus Oldenburg's *Store Days* (1967) or early Gilbert and George booklets are my common examples wherein performances or other ephemeral gestures are documented in the books. The publications are both an archival record of events and also works, in and of themselves. Within the medium of drawing, printed books that reproduce notebooks or sketchbooks of drawings take on the feel of a diary. In many cases, it is at once showing a process of failure, or a learning to execute something, as well as a presentation of a work itself. The structure of the codex leads you through and it's hard to feel you are not learning something, learning about the hand where the image came from and the movements that lead to the forms.

Drawing, repetitive as a practice, may create an accumulation of repeated forms with developing and devolving tendencies. As I take a wide-angle look at the books in front of me the simple fact bears stating: the books contain Stürup's drawing practice. They are public notebooks of conjured lines that often form animate actors and things; things make cameos as actors and sometimes actors turn into things. In the group of publications from the most recent past, there are roughly four phylum: tree, rock, hair, person. A broad, animated spectrum of turning mineral to plant to animal or vice-versa. They are notes toward something.

In Stürup's case, he also makes drawings that are hung on walls and shown in exhibitions. One sees the same characters in the larger drawings—it is just that their plane is different, the way the figures relate to one another is different. Stürup described to me how each of the books come from exploring a working idea, and the books match up to a discrete set of images that he makes specifically for the book works. In this way, the books are not simply practice for the “real” thing, i.e. the stuff for galleries. They are worked to be a book, to circumscribe an idea that exposes itself in the reading. In this format, we see the substantive quality that exists in books of drawings. I think of this as a filmic quality of books of images, that each book of images is like a flip book, a paleo-moving image. In between the images—the

turning of page—we have the message, an interrelationship of images playing themselves out. You then have a third meaning that is part of the simple procedure of passing between two pages. And these relations build up through browsing further. It is a built environment, but it can contain its own world.

As it was mentioned above, conditioned by a pattern, slight changes in format may seem like a shifted axis in this built environment. In terms of Stürup's little books, reproduced photos—often informal snapshots—are slipped into the sequence of drawings every so often. The effect is another complication of the message. The inserted images are strangely attracted to the drawings, inflecting resemblances of tone between the images and drawings that taken out of context may not be obvious. Inside *From Afar It Was An Island* (2009) we find a drawing of an unidentifiable rock-like form that shares an opening with a pixilated digital photo of a geologic specimen, looking molten and strange. In another opening, a drawing of a featureless bearded figure shares an opening with another low-fi photo of a molten rock. The books take on another level of surreality with the addition of the hard-to-fully-see photos. The coupling, the tripling, the quadrupling of surprising and weird images bears the expressivity of a non sequitur. *Black Country Rock* (2011) has a first opening where a faceless figure holds an orange. It is next to a picture of a bar, the counter with half-finished drinks in the foreground. The narratives of the two images are separate—but we have their juxtaposition to deal with and revisit.

I have had Stürup's books in front of me during the time of writing this little essay and I have had the idea that this pile of books would be an image I would want to conjure for the reader. Not just in and of itself, but as a figure for Stürup's mode of working, of an expressiveness in the accumulation of these little book projects, and how, in their stacking up, they become for me another work. I dwell on this idea regularly as I look through other piles of books at work and rows of tomes in the library stacks. The groupings can have strange messages, spelling out weird visual poems, or they can crack jokes. Books make friends with other books, they socialize, forming little communities on desks and shelves. This is a more fanciful kind of bibliography, but part of the story here. And in the book where these words will go, it will intermingle and add another character to the tableau of artist books that Stürup has created.

¹ Roth, Dieter. *Zeitschrift Für Alles. Review For Everything. Tamarit Fyrir Allt*. No. 1. Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1975.

² Illich, Ivan. *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1996.

³ *Art-Rite. Artists' Books*, No.14. New York: Art-Rite Publishing, 1976.

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A STUDIO VISIT WITH JASPER SEBASTIAN STÜRUP

Ingrid Chu and Savannah Gorton

Savannah Gorton: We're pleased to be here in the studio today, to speak about the way you work as well as your background and interests, and to talk about this artist book *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow* (2012).

Glancing around the studio, it's clear you spend a lot of time here. There are many different drawings and even a few paintings on the wall that appear to be in various stages of completion. When do you know that a work is finished?

Jasper Sebastian Stürup: Whenever I am working on something and I think it's finished, I hang it up on the wall and I leave it there to hang for at least a couple of days. With some, I have a feeling right after completion they're probably good but I still put them up on the wall to look over. Others hang for quite a long time before I decide what they're supposed to be. It's a process of having a maturing on the wall while I think about something else. I have to forget about the work, distance myself, and then get back to it to figure out when I think it's good or not.

Ingrid Chu: We see that among all the stacks of books and art supplies, there are also a tremendous number of pens and markers here, perhaps your most important tools. Since you primarily do drawings, is there a particular type of pen that you prefer to use, that is important to your mark making?

JSS: Actually, I have just switched. That's a pretty big thing for me because I had one main pen that I started using around the time I was fourteen years old. I was using the German pen, a Rotring Rapidograph, intended for technical drawing. It's in the family of a ballpoint pen. But instead of a ball, it has a little metal rod that the ink runs through. It's very precise and I love it, but it also clogs up and it's kind of difficult to work with if you don't use the pen often. So, my main size of pen was fine but using other sizes would dry up all the time. And then you spend hours for it to get working again. Within the last two months I switched to Japanese Micron pens. They're felt pens and I am quite excited with that. And the pen gives some freedom but it also has a different line. I have to learn how to make it as vibrant or alive as the line from the Rapidograph. Besides those main two, I have been using a lot of other different kinds of pens once in awhile.

SG: Because so many of your ink-on-paper drawings are very detailed, and there's often a wide expanse of white paper on the larger works, it's probably difficult not to make a mistake since you draw freehand and with such fine lines. Do you embrace the "mistakes" or do you strive for perfection? Are the occasional ink spots and drips allowed to be in there somewhere?

JSS: I've gotten much more relaxed over time with mistakes. Years ago, the smallest mistake would make me

discard the work immediately. I am getting better and better at accepting mistakes. Some of them I actually use, repeat, or work with. I think that maybe what I have actually really done is widened the expression of my work. Sometimes, especially with the older pens (the new pens don't bleed ink), I might repeat a mistake, so I'd work it into the drawing. It also comes with the way I work which is I don't have a plan from the beginning. And in that way the drawing changes while I'm working so a mistake can become a thing that has to be there. But it can also suck up the drawing so much that I have to discard it.

IC: It's interesting you're talking about the idea of mistakes, it leads to this notion of permanence, and you've stated before that besides contemporary artists, you admire the Old Master works of Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, and Goya, as well as the works of later artists like Edvard Munch and Anders Zorn. What is it about their work and techniques that continue to inspire you?

JSS: Well, with those, I think what they have in common is they are all really, really good at whatever technique they have chosen. I don't really see mistakes in their work. They probably would themselves though, like all artists do—they're very good at finding mistakes on their own. To me, they are pretty perfect in what they did.

It's actually more that with these artists—the older of these especially, I feel like they have put something into their work that I cannot decipher which is a thing I really like and it intrigues me. With Anders Zorn, I understand what he's doing, but especially with him it's mainly his etching and drawing that interests me. It's not so much the paintings, they get a little too glamorous for me. It's the vitality. You can say that there are a lot of painters if you go a hundred years back, and further back, where I would prefer the drawings or the etchings because they have a vitality that they don't have within the paintings. The paintings become very, very "finished."

SG: And Dürer, Bosch, Brueghel—why are you inspired by them?

JSS: The subject they use is—sometimes it doesn't actually matter at all what it is they're painting because they're doing it so well and also, I feel their presence which to me is the parameter for all art that I like whether it's old or new. I have to be able to feel the person who made the work. Which doesn't matter if it's a Brueghel or if it's a monochrome, I have to feel their presence, I have to feel that somehow the works transmit an urgency of this being important for the person doing it.

I think these artists we're talking about do that and that's one of my main parameters for looking at art, and enjoying art. And, of course, some of them have amazing

techniques that I can't help but just admire and know that I cannot do.

IC: Do you consider yourself a more classical artist then?

JSS: I am a contemporary artist without a doubt but I work in a way that is old fashioned since I don't do "concepts." I don't lay out a plan for what I want to do. I work. I go into my studio and I sit down and I start working on what is important for me and when I'm done, I'm done, and I do the same the next day. But without having a plan for what it's supposed to be. Where a lot of artists have a plan as they're working on a special project. I hate the word "project"—I don't do projects.

To me it's a whole other way of thinking. Some artists working in this way, you can't feel them anymore because it becomes a plan, it becomes a job. It's not an urgency anymore. And the day I don't feel urgent to be in the studio I'm not going to go there.

SG: We want to ask another question about the work in terms of the visual forms. You seem to have a great interest in the human form and its many gestures and details—such as hands, eyes, hair, and bodily curves. Do you ever draw from live models or is it mostly from other sources like photographs?

JSS: I haven't drawn people from live sources for many, many years. I do it with some objects but most of my images of people I derive from photographs. Whether they're photographs I find online, photographs from books, or from my own photographs; I have a very big archive on my computer with thousands of images from all sorts of sources. I don't really care where the pictures are from or what they were supposed to do in the first place. When they first get into my folder I feel like they're mine and I will use them any way I want. A lot of them are derived from fashion, not because I have a particular interest in fashion, I don't really. Fashion photographs are very good for the way they show people's hands and feet where a lot of other images are cropped when it comes to people.

SG: Would you say then, that you've really assembled a "collection" of images over many years that you're working from?

JSS: Yeah, I have a huge one and what I do is, because I tend to go back to the same images, every couple of years I will archive the collection and start a new one. I did this maybe six months ago. I don't want to keep always going back to the same thing that fascinates me the most. So I also have old archives that once in a while I go back to but most of the time I don't use them.

IC: For many years you did not include the faces of the figures in your drawings, only gestures, clothing, and other aspects that indicated the body. But more recently, you have been focusing closely on the face in your work and these faces become almost like portraiture, one could even say self-portraiture, since your own face is at times included. How has this new interest in the face changed

your work?

JSS: In the beginning, while I was still at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in the early '90s, I would only draw objects, no people at all. And, occasionally, I would draw some animals together with the objects, mainly deer.

At some point, in the early 2000s, I started drawing people, but I didn't want to do the face. Because when you see an image that includes a face, you decipher all emotions and everything else from the face right away before you even address the rest of the image. I decided to exclude the face and have the gestures of the bodies create all the information you needed. It became very important how the gestures were. If the arm was bent this way or that way, or if a hand was facing upwards or downwards, which is one of the things that links back to the Old Master paintings—they had a whole language about the body, of the people in the paintings.

So I felt like I took that as far as I could, doing the drawings of faceless people, and they were becoming more and more about the interaction between people and less so with the objects. From there on I'd just be repeating and it wouldn't be very interesting, so I decided to start doing the faces. And it has taken maybe two years to get me to a place where I'm confident in that. But I'm still searching and looking, and right now the face is my main obsession. It has become what a lot of the drawings are about, trying to decipher the face, and what is the face and what does it do? What can I do with it, how do I master that?

IC: Do you see a connection with the idea of self-portraiture, especially in relationship to your interest in the Old Masters? There's a history of artists painting a portrait of themselves, or depicting themselves in the process of creating their work, often in the studio setting.

JSS: Even though they are of course, self-portraits, when I am drawing myself in the drawings it is usually within a complex composition—it's very seldom that it would be only my face. Usually it's together with other objects, other people, or other people's faces. And I don't label them. If you don't know what I look like, you will not know which one is me.

I don't really think of them as self-portraits in the classical sense. It's more that all my work is about me, or about my thoughts. And in that way, it's very natural to include my face since I am working with faces. So the meaning of it being me is not as heavy as doing a classical self-portrait.

I use other people in the same way—one of the people I draw the most is David Bowie, and I love David Bowie's music. But when I draw him, he stops being David Bowie. Then he becomes a charismatic face. In a few drawings where it's just his face, I have used a title or a line from one of his songs as a link to it. If you know that you will know that it's him. Otherwise, I take great freedom with how he looks. Anyone else I usually draw because I just want to get the sense of emotion that is being portrayed, or that I'm able to derive more from it, rather than that

it's a specific person. And I treat my self-portrait in the same way, I believe.

SG: It also seems in your work there is a feeling of the interconnectedness of life, nature, and sensuality, or pleasure in seeing. We see spider webs, strands of pearls, icicles, and emanating lines connecting the people, the figures, with natural and man-made things such as gemstones, flowers, animals, candles, even beer cans. What is it about literally creating those connections that interests you?

JSS: Well, in general I am trying to connect everything in my work, thought-wise. Everything I think about, I'm trying to connect that together and some are symbols and a lot is also just based on whatever fascinations I have. It's a very big part of my work. For example, I love the gemstones. I used to draw mountains a lot, and over time they've been transformed—like the transformation of no face to a face—they've transformed from mountains and now they are gemstones of different sorts.

There are a lot of people who think that, okay, if you take this stone it means this, or different crystals do that. I don't believe in the power of any of them besides aesthetically.

SG: But even aesthetically...

JSS: They're material.

SG: ...there's an overall lack of hierarchy.

JSS: Right.

SG: All the things are treated in an equal fashion but then they're also connected to one another using these different types of visual foils you could say, like the strands of pearls and the lines.

JSS: Yes.

SG: What is it about the flora and fauna or the various objects that become connected to the people? Are those really about thoughts or are they about things that you were saying you were obsessed with?

JSS: It's a mix of all of those. But, it's also that I have a great interest in sculpture. I make very few, maybe a couple of sculptures a year, but I draw a lot of sculptures. I think a lot about these as sculptures. I draw liquids and I draw different solids. The rocks are solid and there are also things drawn that are a softer solid. The beer can is also sculpture in terms of drawing. I did one recently, a sculpture for Overgarden at The Armory Show. It was a Tecate tower—a tower of Tecate cans derived from a picture in the book at a bar, a setting where the people around me were stacking empty cans into a tower. And I later transformed the cans into a sculpture.

It's a lot about sculpture but of course, everything does have a meaning. It has both its physical meaning but it also has another meaning that I put into it. And so will you as a viewer because you already have thoughts about

what a pearl means, or what a crystal means, or what a piece of wood or a beer can means...and then they interact with the different people or other objects.

SG: It's sort of like a still life.

JSS: Yes, right.

SG: All these various objects that are either in the studio or that you capture through photography or that you see when you're out.

JSS: Yeah, I mean maybe you can call it part of an emotional still life.

IC: Just like other things you return to again and again, one of your formats is artist books. Making the artist books is really a process of devotion, since they're often handmade or small-run editions or obscure due to limited distribution. You've been publishing since the early 1990s under your own imprint Fluens Forlag. What does that name mean and what has been the focus of your publishing activity?

JSS: Well, if we start with the name, it's "fluens," the fly's (the insect), and "forlag" means publishing company. There's a great tradition of having animals as logos in publishing. So you have Penguin Books and Pelican Books. Pocket Books has a kangaroo on it, and then there are a lot of ones with birds like the crane and the owl.

I wanted to keep in the tradition of having an animal, and knowing that this would be one of the smallest publishing companies ever, I wanted a small creature and I thought the fly was kind of nice to have just sitting on the wall, publishing small books as Fluens Forlag.

[laughter]

JSS: So the name comes from that. I really liked the idea of artist books as a way to get what I was doing out, and I like the form and the intimacy of the format. To me, the book is very important, when you have a book in your hand, when you open it up and look inside of it, everything else disappears. There's only that in the world for you right at that moment. Where if you are in a gallery, unless it's a full installation, you still have the room present while you are looking at a painting, or a video, or anything else. There's an intimacy because you are really good at mentally excluding everything else. That's unique to the book.

IC: You have a new publishing project called Flâneur. Does this indicate something different than Fluens Forlag? Can you talk to us a little bit more about this new imprint?

JSS: Flâneur is one of my favorite words and activities, or maybe a non-activity, since I don't think you can really plan it. I thought it would be a perfect name for my new imprint, born out of love for the art of the artists being published. It will not have any real system or a publishing schedule, I just want to publish when I feel the need

or desire for it. To publish in the same way as strolling without aim in some neighborhood, with my attention on whatever happens to fascinate me along the way.

The main idea with Flâneur is to basically do the same kind of books that are small and home-printed like Fluens Forlag with other artists, inviting them to do something within that format. I've been doing a little work with other people in my books, but I have very limited distribution and don't really want to ask people to do a book until I know I can get it out to a wider audience; I hope that Flâneur will get better distribution.

IC: You've collaborated with other artists on exhibitions in the past, would you say this is maybe an artist book series or publishing format that operates in the same way?

JSS: I do very little collaboration, I don't want to do more than one thing a year at most, and the last one is two or three years ago now, *That's When the Rabbit Taught the Eagle a Lesson With a Smith & Wesson* (2009), an artist book where I invited four artists and I also included myself. It was also an exhibition at Participant Inc. here in New York. A couple years before that in 2005, I did a show at Galleri Susanne Ottesen in Copenhagen where I invited artists, and in the same way, I invited them because I really love their work. Flâneur will be different as it will not include me, it will only be other artists. Before when I did a show or a book, I wanted to do something that I wished somebody else had invited me to be in. So I created those shows or books with myself included, to do something together with those artists. I don't see myself as a curator in any way, I'm an artist who once in a while publishes a book or organizes a show. To me there's a big difference.

IC: That seems more like you're a fan, than working from a curatorial angle, just like when you were talking about David Bowie. You draw inspiration from his music, and it seems like it's about drawing inspiration and assembling a dialogue with other artists whose work you enjoy.

JSS: Yeah.

SG: When you are in the studio, you have mentioned that you listen to music while you draw, and this becomes more obvious knowing that many of the titles of your drawings, paintings, and artist books come from musical lyrics and poetry as we've talked about. In fact, the first time I saw one of your artist books was on the shelf at Printed Matter, Inc. and it was called *Whiskey Works Better Than Beer* (2005). I immediately picked it up since I recognized it as a lyric line from an Elliott Smith song. You could say I was initially seduced by the title.

JSS: Yes.

SG: And then I fell in love with that little book because of the drawings inside. Is that something you intend to happen, for people to recognize the titles taken from musical lyrics, and for them to connect with the language as a first impression?

JSS: I kind of like it as a small clue to the work—to the

emotional state—or the ambiance of the work. But I also want it to be able to be seen by someone who has no clue what the song is, so the books have to be open to both. But it is a door opener into the world of the work for sure. I guess somehow it's a little club, in some ways. Like you're a part of the Elliott Smith Club, and so you've got that connection to the book, and other books will have other connections. I don't tell where anything is from when I do it, although I have one exception to that in one of my books, *Velvet Goldmine* (2004), where in the back I list the albums that each drawing is from, so they are all linked to certain albums.

SG: Albums by David Bowie?

JSS: It's different musicians—he's in two drawings, and then there are other bands I like.

SG: So it's almost like a compilation?

JSS: It is kind of a compilation, but it's drawings that all relate to music. There is a series of four pages from Brett Anderson's bedroom, he's the lead singer of Suede, and on that bed he wrote, I think, the first and second album. Over his bed was a poster from the film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (1976) with David Bowie, so that became a double. In the back I credit all the albums and we get to know when they were released and who produced them. But that's the only time I was very straight about where it is from. I take the titles from everywhere, but it is mainly from music and poetry. And some are from film, and some I make up myself.

SG: You started to touch on this a little bit earlier, the idea of the format of the artist book itself. Which you yourself said has an intimacy, since it is an artwork that can be held in the hand, touched, and taken away. Can you tell us a little more about why you've chosen that format so often over the years?

JSS: Those are the main reasons, but it's also that I like the availability of the book as an art object, you get a real artwork in a small edition. Most of mine are in an edition of 150, they would cost \$8 in a shop or at a show. Sometimes we give them away for free, so it means that you might not be able to afford a drawing or a painting, but if you like the artist book, you can buy it because it's in an inexpensive price range. It's a democratic way of getting work to people who love it, or like it, or want it, without them having to think about the financial impact of acquiring that artwork. To me that's very important.

IC: This particular book, *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow* is commissioned by Forever & Today, Inc. It was intended as a part of your 2009 installation exhibited at F&T titled *I Don't Believe You, It Used To Be Like That And Now It Goes Like This*. Compared to the show, and as an artist book, would you say it's more diaristic in terms of how you compiled the book?

JSS: It's very different creating a show for viewers to walk into and stand and look at it. You are there for a certain amount of time and then you leave. A book you will have,

you will look in it, you can put it on the shelf, and then you may look at it again. So it has to work within the revision, or repeatedly being used. I wanted it to be a lot more complex, much more fragmented in the way it is built up. There are a lot of different sections that do various things and work together, and of course, compared to a show where I had a video, here I can't have any moving images. So it is also a still.

IC: Speaking of stills, there are many photographs included in *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow*. They seem to draw from some of the things we see here in the studio, like peacock feathers, candles, cactus plants, and the rock minerals that you said you love so much. Other photographs are of urban and rural scenes, women, graffiti, trees, snow, or a taxi. Are these images all taken from your surroundings and daily life?

JSS: I always carry a camera and I photograph a lot. I may think a picture can be used as an artwork, but most of the time I just photograph whatever interests me, and those images would be absolutely useless in a book like this. Once in a while I have something where it does something more, but in general I think that photography is very difficult as an art form. If I draw, I look at something and it goes through my brain, out my body through my arm, and I somehow distill it. With a photograph, I just point at anything, click, and it's there. I want the photograph to have the same kind of feeling, the same kind of content mentally that a drawing does. It's much more difficult, or maybe it's way too easy to take a photograph.

IC: There's a photograph in the book of one of your drawings tattooed onto someone's arm. Can you tell us the story behind that image and how it ended up as a tattoo?

JSS: My visa lawyer asked if she could have a tattoo of one of my drawings and how much that would be, and I said, "Well if you're getting a tattoo it's absolutely free!" [laughs] I had given her some of my books, and she found a couple of my drawings in the books and she wanted one of those. So I actually went with her to get it and helped her choose the drawing. She had one tattoo before getting this one, and I thought it was kind of amazing that someone wanted a permanent version of one of my drawings. [laughs] I mean, I would never get a tattoo myself, so it was kind of a big thing. So I went with her and she had it made and they actually did it so it looks very much like the drawing, the lines are a little bit thicker, because you have to do that with tattooing. But it's really well done. I was absolutely flattered that she had it done.

SG: And why was it important that the photograph of the tattoo be included in the book?

JSS: Basically I was really flattered, and I thought it fit with the contents of some of the other drawings, I have drawn tattooed people in the past, there's none in this book, but there could as well have been. It really fits with what is going on in the drawings to have this real arm

with a tattoo of a drawing.

SG: What exactly is that drawing of? There's a car...

JSS: It's a mix of two things. It's a car that's been in a wreck—for a while I was photographing cars that have been in wrecks—so it's a drawing of a photograph that I took myself. And then there's a hand dangling a little string with a pearl. That's from a Fellini movie. There's a harem scene in this movie *8 ½* (1963), where there's a guy sitting in a big room and it's a dream. There are all these women. One of the women was told she is too old now—that she has turned 26 (she is played by an actress who, my guess was in her 40s). She has all these pearls on her dress and in her hair and she gets very upset and throws a fit and the pearls go everywhere. And after she gets thrown out of there, the man sits with this pearl on a string in his hand, holding it. So that's where the pearl is from, it's a merger of these two images. Again, it's this kind of link. If you are really a Fellini buff, you might know it, but most likely nobody would ever know that's it—it becomes its own.

SG: We talked a little bit earlier about the influence of music in your work, about David Bowie and Elliott Smith. There's a painting in the book that you told us is titled *Drunken Butterfly* (2011), after a song by Sonic Youth. We see that the painting is a portrait of musician Thurston Moore—what interests you in pop and underground music and its icons since those themes appear so often in your work and in this book?

JSS: One thing is I have a very big love of music in general, whether it's underground or super big hits, it doesn't matter so much to me, I have a very wide taste. I listen to music all the time and have an endless lust for knowing new music. I use it as a mood enhancer while drawing or I can also, without thinking about it, be playing music and it will lead me in some way... there's no doubt that listening to music affects the work. About this painting, *Drunken Butterfly*, I saw the image in a magazine, and I really liked the image. I'm actually not a fan of Sonic Youth. But the image was really good, and I did a painting and I really liked the painting. And it needed a title. So I was looking at all the Sonic Youth titles, and found out they are really bad titles. I only found two or three titles that I thought were appropriate to use for anything. I like my titles to be somewhat poetic.

SG: Well...*Daydream Nation* (1988), that is a great title...

JSS: Yeah, but it's kind of like just too much.

[laughter]

There were very few titles that went with the criteria of how I pick my titles but I was thinking a lot about them and I actually looked at all their song titles, I found a website. I want a title to add something to the work, not just reinforce what is already there. And it has to be poetic, I think. So they usually are. And that goes with this one, and I was very happy with the result.

SG: Lastly we'd like to ask about the title *Written In Fur Drawn In Snow*. Where does it come from? It's very poetic, but also seems to indicate a temporal existence to the work, since writing in fur is nearly impossible (at most you can make a barely visible impression onto fur) and drawing in snow eventually melts. So they are disappearing gestures, even. But it also seems to speak about writing and drawing being in tandem, which are both contained in this book.

JSS: The title is like what I especially think drawing does when it's best. That it is there and in some way when I draw the drawing, everything is real, nothing is unreal, nothing is made up. Everything is real, but at the same time it is of course unreal, it's imaginative. For me the title does the same as that, it is real and it's unreal at the same time. The first part, "Written In Fur," I read or heard it somewhere. I wrote it down immediately, and I took that from someone. The other half I just made up, it

seemed like it was the natural reaction to the first. Done the same way as I draw, and also because I knew that this book would have both writing and drawing. Usually the only writing in my books is the title and the colophon. I don't use any text, I don't write anything besides that.

IC: So this brings our visit to a close. We appreciate your opening up the studio to us, it was a pleasure speaking with you.

JSS: Thank you both for coming, it was a lot of fun.

SG: We're looking forward to this new artist book, thanks.

Ingrid Chu and Savannah Gorton are Co-Directors & Curators, Forever & Today, Inc., NYC.



Written In Fur Drawn In Snow

Jasper Sebastian Stürup

Artist Book

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