

# Elizabeth Josephson

a two-part exhibition of drawings



February 11, 2010 – March 21, 2010

FiveMyles

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Elizabeth Josephson's drawings of women incarcerated at Rikers Island Correctional Facilities are a result of her life-long interest in portraiture. From the start of her career in the mid 1980s, Josephson has been interested in drawing and painting people living on the fringes of society, whether they are musicians, the homeless, drag queens, artists or criminals. A student of Buddhism and psychoanalysis, she is not so much championing anybody's cause or seeking to right injustices as she is interested in providing us with a naked encounter with another soul. She actually feels at home with people who survive by their wit and street instinct. She admires their agile minds, their emotional complexity and their sometimes explicit sensuality. After nearly thirty years of living the challenging, peripatetic life of a New York City artist Josephson is no stranger to peril and doubt. She connects with her subjects' circumstances and understands the entropic, distant aspect of their day dreams.

The noted art critic, Karen Wilkin, in a 2007 review of Josephson's work, called her a "fearless painter... [who] plays fast and loose with anatomy, proportions, and even features, but nonetheless convinces us that we are in the presence of distinct individuals. The simmering intensity of her portraits suggests that Soutine and de Kooning are among Josephson's heroes, and perhaps Alice Neel, if Alice Neel were more in love with the sensual physicality of paint and less interested in clear boundaries."

In her current collection of drawings of women offenders, Josephson further erases the boundary between artist/viewer and subject by overlaying fragments of the women's written autobiographical sketches (or notes that Josephson took interviewing them) over the drawings. The words, some scrawled on line paper, some typed, seem to emerge from the portraits, adding a cryptic history of desire, abuse and disillusionment.

“Their story is prison and the chronology of trauma that got them there,” Josephson says. Across the haunting face of one woman we see the child-like printed words “Wondering if I’ll ever be...was not realizing my...mind something tells me...find myself for him...to tell me.” In another portrait, almost buried beneath Josephson’s fierce pencil lines and smudges are the words: “He will kill...Likes steak and peanut butter.”

In her second collection of drawings of adolescent boys who have spent time behind bars at Rikers, Josephson literally enlarges our meeting with these brassy, wounded egos by projecting their drawn images on the wall. Larger, than life, yet confined to narrow linear spaces, Josephson emphasizes their tangential grasp of what lies ahead for them.

Josephson’s work is, thankfully, too intuitive to become didactic. She has always focused on her subjects eyes and mouths to garner their humanity, to access a full confession of who they are, and then she implies the rest with the fluid, quirky lines that make up their hair, their neck-lines, shoulders, and, occasionally, their clothes. She creates a nuanced human landscape, filled with desire and remorse, for us to contemplate.

— Glyn Vincent

# Drawing I – Women

February 11 – February 28, 2010





Drawing II – Adolescent Boys  
March 4 – March 21, 2010







Elizabeth Josephson

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