

## VISIONARY ART

## The Art of Anthony Ballard

Long before computer graphics became the norm, many designers, illustrators, and draftsmen used Rapidograph pens to draw solid, flowing lines of specified widths.

Rapidograph pens are extremely versatile, demand very little hand pressure, and work on a variety of surfaces with almost any type of ink or color. Many artists looking for precision and control, including Anthony Ballard, use these pens for their drawings.

Mr. Ballard favored Rapidograph pens after coming across a slightly broken set for 25 cents at a church flea market. He spent the next 2 years perfecting the use of the pens in his black and white geometric drawings.

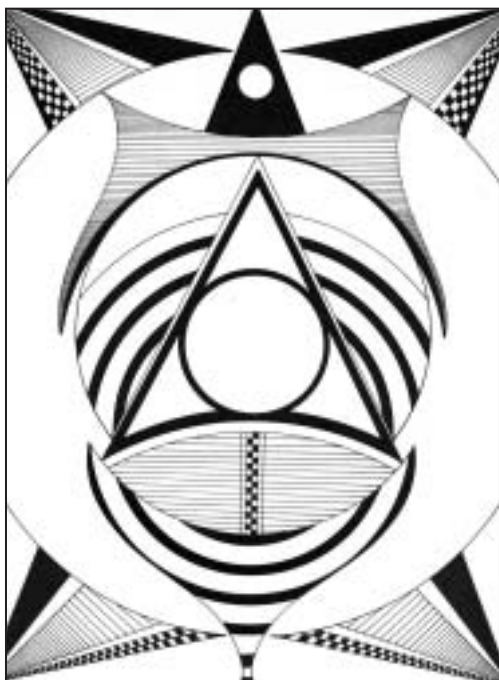
"My drawings actually evolved," he said. "I spent a lot of time with templates and made outlines of the figures in the drawings, whether a curve, or angles, etc. And then I arranged a series of areas that I have to fill in with lines and squares—not color—and ink in. Then if I come across any error, I incorporate the error into the drawing and make another series of drawings around that to include it. I do it all very, very slowly and very meticulously."

Mr. Ballard, diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder in 1997, has had several exhibitions in New York City and has sold many drawings. But Mr. Ballard doesn't view himself as a professional artist. "I think of a professional artist as a person who actually earns his living from art, and I don't do that," he said. Unfortunately, the current mix of medications he is taking causes hand tremors too severe for him to continue doing the precise work demanded by his Rapidograph drawings. However, he is now working on a series of freehand paintings using oil pastels.

—Deeanna Franklin



Untitled # 7



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IMAGES COURTESY ANTHONY BALLARD

## THE ARTIST'S REFLECTIONS

**I went to a Catholic academy**—which is quite antithetical to art. I started doing art at about the age of 12 or 13. I'm 62 now. The art here was done as part of a series in the early 90s. In the 80s, I did a series of erotic art drawings, one of which was exhibited at the Fountain Gallery's [in New York City] last show. But it didn't sell. Not all of my work is abstract; some of it is representational.

**I did sell 16 drawings** to Fountain House itself. They're on display in the lobby of the building. I just love to be involved with paint and color and pencils, and the movement of color ... and copying things and still life, like Cezanne-type still lifes. I won awards in parochial school for my drawings. I copied photographs of Boris Pasternak, when he first became famous. I used to draw them on pebble board, and I got very good likenesses. I admired Pasternak for his stance against communism. I'm not a political activist, but I am politically aware. Cezanne was also one of my influences. I liked his use of color and the way he was able to invoke the human condition in such a precise way using blocks of color and shapes that were not actually rounded or curved, etc.

**I went to a flea market** in the basement of St. Paul the Apostle's Church, and they had a box of Rapidograph pens for 25 cents. They didn't know the value of them. I had worked with a Rapidograph before but I wasn't able to use it well; I didn't have the technique. But because I had the time, I started using plates to make circles and objects in the house to make triangles. I would make circles and draw figures inside them and make bubblelike series of circles, and do human figures inside them. I would do this on regular drawing paper. I got good at it. It took me about a year or 2 to get really good at it, and then in the 80s, I started to do the erotic drawings series. After that series I stopped using human figures in my work and started completely using abstracts. I did abstracts up until about 1994.

**The drawings pictured here** were done with Rapidograph in 1991. It works at a 30-degree angle, and the pens are numbered from triple zero to four with the triple zero giving the thinnest line. I didn't do these drawings to sell. I can't draw if I think I'm going to be selling it. I do them for myself. When I draw, I put on the radio or opera. I like to listen to opera in Italian—it has to be music with no beat. I pour myself a wine or whiskey. I don't drink very much now, though. I get into a state where my mind is clear. When I draw, my consciousness clears, and any problems evaporate. It's just me, myself, the night, and the drawing.

**I'm on Lithium now**, and it causes the tremors. I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. I was diagnosed initially when I was 22. I had taken some LSD, and I went into a manic state and I did not come down from the state. I wound up arrested and sent to Bellevue and then to Rikers [prison] Hospital for about 3 months. It was a very brutalizing experience. They sent me to the hospital at Rikers by accident, so I was there for about 10 days, and then I was remanded to Bellevue's prison ward. There weren't any schizophrenic symptoms before taking the LSD. In Bellevue they

offered us social services, but I just wanted to get out of there. We had to get an attorney to get me out, and he had to threaten them. They wanted to send me to Creedmore [Hospital]; they wanted to send me to an institution. I wasn't responding to their treatment.

**I was 23 years old** then. I had never worked with people my own age, and when I got out, I got a job with Brentano's on 5th Avenue as a customer service person. I started meeting a lot of women there, and I became very popular. I was having a grand time. But I knew my whole course of life had been changed, and my drive was to live rapidly, and as quickly and intensely as possible. I did not think about the future. I was doing very well at Brentano's, but then I took LSD a third time. I wanted to challenge the drug. I wound up at Bellevue again. I was there for a week.

**This time I knew** what to say to the doctors. I just said: "Listen, I took some drugs. I feel fine." The doctor said, "You sound sane enough to me," and they released me. I didn't lose my job. I was working at Bookmasters in Manhattan then, and the manager there wanted me back to work. I took 2 weeks off and went back to work, although 9 months later I did lose my job because they fired everyone who was a hippie, and I had long hair. In 1970, I wound up hanging around with drug addicts, and getting involved with Methedrine. I became quite a druggie.

**I was still doing art work** then. I was doing paintings and charcoal sketches. Art was in my blood. I was always doing sketches of my girlfriends or paintings of them, or paintings from photographs. Whenever I landed [after a drug trip], I would always be doing it. In 1969, I was doing oil painting in my girlfriend's house in Manhattan. I always had girlfriends. Most of them were middle-class girls from Pembroke and universities like that. I was just a creature, and they had never seen anything like me before. I was different. I was a hippie in appearance, etc., but I wasn't middle class. I was a working class kid. I grew up in a housing project behind Lincoln Center: the Amsterdam Houses.

**In 1980 I took a job** as a crew leader for the 1980 census, and that was the first time in my life I made over \$200 a week. I worked for the Census Bureau for about 9 months. It was the first time I could pay my rent and have food in the refrigerator and vodka. Then I met my femme fatale—a woman who came from the upper class. She saw me as an artist and a poet. It was a very tempestuous relationship that went on for about 4 years. We broke up about 11 times.

**I have been writing poetry** since 1969. I got published in periodicals around the country. I go to poetry readings once a month now. We do readings in the basement of St. Veronica's church in the Village. And I do some other readings around town. Afterward, we all gather at the Hudson Diner, and talk and hang out for a few hours. I also get together with four or five people, and we do prose readings and criticize it. I do poetry more now because of the hand tremors.

As told to Deeanna Franklin by Anthony Ballard.