

GUEST ROOM

ALEX GARDNER

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SCAD: The University for Creative Careers

The Savannah College of Art and Design is a private, nonprofit, accredited university, offering more than 100 academic degree programs in more than 40 majors across its locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia; Hong Kong; Lacoste, France; and online via SCAD eLearning.

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Cover image: **Alex Gardner**, *Recap*, acrylic on linen, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and The Hole, New York, New York.



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ALEX GARDNER

ABOUT THE ARTIST AND THE EXHIBITION

The SCAD Museum of Art presents *Guest Room*, the first museum exhibition in the U.S. by artist Alex Gardner, a figure painter who works in acrylic to make intense and memorable scenes. His entangled ink-blackened bodies are draped with dramatically folding white cotton, separated and posed in pastel environments where the reflections of color produce subtle gradients and thoughtful tonal shifts. As in Mannerist paintings, they capture drama with their bodies through distortion — a clump of muscle, a knobby knuckle or a languid wrist. Over-articulated fingers and feet contrast with completely featureless, smooth faces; expression is portrayed only through body language. Gender is hinted at, but as with the skin, clothes and the environments, all cultural signifiers are smoothed over to de-individuate and universalize.

For *Guest Room*, Gardner has thought about the way one navigates Gallery 109 at the SCAD Museum of Art. He asks us to

consider each of the canvases as a portal or, in Gardner's words, a "hotel room you are opening, a vignette of an interpersonal interaction, a private moment you are glimpsing." The spaces Gardner creates are close to what French philosopher Michel Foucault described as "heterotopias," or places that are elsewhere and that can represent several incompatible sites and moments at once. For Foucault, these instances break with traditional notions of space and time. That is precisely what Gardner's paintings allow: intimate gestures of communication and proximity, frozen in front of us, in an undetermined space.

This exhibition presents a selection of Gardner's most recent work, along with new pieces commissioned for SCAD deFINE ART 2019, held Feb. 26–28 at university locations in Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia.

ABOUT SCAD AND SCAD MUSEUM OF ART

Offering more degree programs and specializations than any other art and design university, SCAD is uniquely qualified to prepare talented students for creative professions. The SCAD Museum of Art, a resource for SCAD students and alumni during their academic careers and beyond, features emerging and established international artists through commissioned works and rotating exhibitions, and involves local communities with special initiatives of international scope.

SCAD Museum of Art educational materials engage K-12 audiences in activities that enhance understanding of art and design — investigations that reveal relevant personal, historical and cultural connections while promoting cross-disciplinary links necessary for today's innovative careers.

SCAD gives special thanks to The Hodge Foundation for its generous support of the university's award-winning curriculum guides.



Alex Gardner, *Dk in J Tree*, acrylic on linen, 2018. Collection of Michael Xufu Huang. Courtesy of the artist and The Hole, New York, New York.

“| THINK THE INTERPRETATION OF LIFE IS THE BASIS OF ART ...”|

ALEX GARDNER

“YOU’VE GOT TO JUST MAKE [IT] ...
SEE WHAT’S COOL AND WHAT’S NOT COOL ...
THEN YOU MAKE ANOTHER ONE, AND THEN YOU MAKE A THIRD ONE ...”²

Alex Gardner’s work is figurative — it focuses on the human body. Art history is rich with responses to the challenges of figurative art. Through close observation and practice, artists continue to translate complicated poses and movement into combinations of line and shape that create realistic images.

Follow Gardner’s advice by making a series of drawings from the same figure. Choose a pose from one of his paintings to draw, or ask a friend to model for you.

1. WARM UP

Spend a quiet moment observing the figure. Try squinting to blur details and bring out basic shapes. Moving your arm from the shoulder, use your index finger to trace these forms.

2. MAKE IT

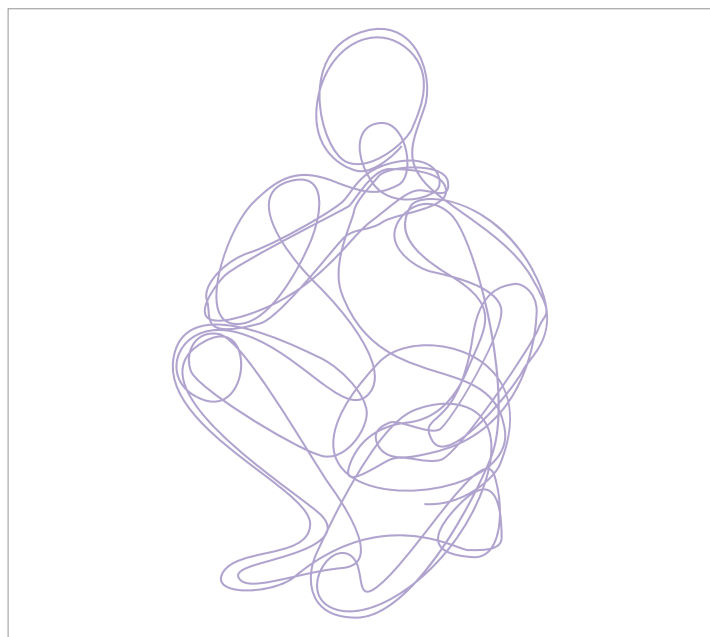
Take up your pencil. Your grip should be gentle, and within the half of the pencil farthest from the point. Begin lightly drawing the first marks, focusing on basic shapes rather than details. Continue to move the pencil from your shoulder rather than from your arm or hand.

3. DON’T STOP

As your eyes shift back and forth between the subject and your work, draw continually, without lifting the pencil from the paper. Keep the marks light, retracing and adjusting without stopping.

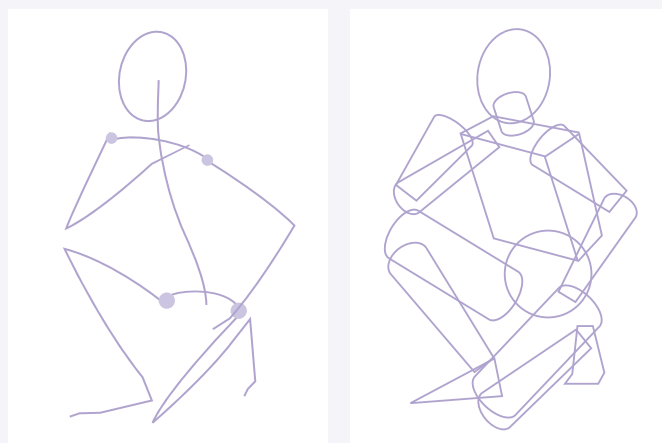
4. SEE WHAT’S COOL

Once you have an initial sketch of the whole subject, pause and identify what is right about it before making corrections, then begin to build on your work by adding details.



• MAKE ANOTHER ONE •

Try a different approach and experiment with these drawing strategies.



¹Brune, G. (2016, March 02). Faceless Figures Navigate a Pastel Painted World. Retrieved March 5, 2019, from [vice.com/en_us/article/d74edv/alex-gardner-faceless-paintings](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/d74edv/alex-gardner-faceless-paintings)

²Chrissttttiine. (2016, October 27). A Brief Conversation | Alex Gardner @artposer. Retrieved March 5, 2019, from [youtube.com/watch?v=wj9kVVMl7ks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wj9kVVMl7ks)

Gardner’s figures are faceless, their clothing is plain and their settings lack detail. How then do these paintings suggest stories? Think about the ways we use our bodies to communicate through gestures. People point or shrug their shoulders to purposefully express themselves. Drooping shoulders or a slight tilt of the head can unintentionally reveal feelings. In art, gesture has additional meaning — it refers to the language of lines and shapes, and conveys energy and emotions.

Choose one of Gardner’s paintings and examine the gestures and poses of the figures. What is going on? What evidence in the painting gives you this idea?

“ALL OF THE WORK IS ABOUT HUMAN EXPERIENCES.”³



Alex Gardner, *Couch Coaches in Coach*, acrylic on linen, 2019.
Courtesy of the artist and The Hole, New York, New York.

The titles of Gardner’s paintings are related to the events and emotions that his figures are experiencing, although not in a direct or clear way. Gardner is careful not to share obvious clues about what inspired a work because he prefers his paintings to speak for themselves.

Return to the painting you examined. Together with friends, brainstorm ideas that relate the title to events in the work.

³Gardner Alex. (2019, Feb. 26) Gallery talk with H. Moro, SCAD Museum of Art.