The Morgan Explores Al Taylor’s Witty and Lyrical Drawings

The Drawings of Al Taylor
February 21 through May 24, 2020

Press Preview: February 20, 2020 at 4PM

New York (December 6, 2019) – The Morgan Library & Museum is proud to announce a presentation of drawings by painter, sculptor, and draftsman Al Taylor (1948–1999). The Drawings of Al Taylor, on view February 21 through May 24, 2020, explores the artist’s lyrical and witty compositions inspired by banal objects and everyday situations. Driven by curiosity and a sense of humor, Taylor drew maps of pet stains, imagined puddles hanging out to dry, and rendered elegant still lifes of tin cans suspended by wires. During his relatively short career, Taylor produced more than five thousand drawings, in which he combined technical skills, Old Master virtuosity, and graphic systems such as charts and diagrams. The exhibition at the Morgan will shine a new light on Taylor’s practice, highlighting the artist’s distinctive draftsmanship through works spanning the mid-1970s to the late 1990s. The first U.S. museum exhibition devoted to this subject, The Drawings of Al Taylor comprises nearly eighty drawings and twenty sketchbooks, including many drawings that have never been shown before.
Taylor began his career as a painter, and shifted to sculpture and drawing in 1985. Whether in graphite, ink, watercolor, or other media, the drawings he created between the early 1980s and his death in 1999, at the age of 51, display a fluidity and sensuousness that derive from his love of painting. Yet they are also intimately connected to his work in three dimensions—not as studies in the traditional sense, but as independent works dealing with similar subjects and issues. Taylor once said, “At best a drawing should function as a pure drawing first, and only as a conceptual springboard second. I’m using concepts only as a good excuse to make a better drawing—a thing of beauty which can hold on that level all by itself, as a desirable object.” The ambiguous status of his drawings, poised between painting and sculpture, gives them a singular place in the history of the medium at the end of the twentieth century.

The Drawings of Al Taylor is curated by Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings at the Morgan. Many of the works have been borrowed from Taylor’s estate and from the personal collection of the artist’s widow, Debbie Taylor. The exhibition relies heavily on a close study of Taylor’s sketchbooks and notebooks, and the accompanying catalogue presents extensive new research on his uncommon achievement. Dervaux said, “Al Taylor’s original contribution to the art of the 1980s and 1990s can be summed up as a combination of virtuosity, humor, precision, and nonchalance that should be a revelation to many visitors.”

The Drawings of Al Taylor continues the Morgan’s nearly twenty-year commitment to mounting exhibitions devoted to modern and contemporary drawings. The Morgan’s renowned collection of Old Master and nineteenth-century drawings provides a unique context in which to examine the transformations that have affected the medium since the early twentieth century. The museum’s Director, Colin B. Bailey, said, “We are extremely pleased to present a comprehensive and engaging selection of works by Al Taylor. The artist, who became an avid draftsman after early years of painting, fits well within the Morgan’s scope and devotion to
collecting modern and contemporary drawings. While Al Taylor has been shown in Europe, we are excited to be the first institution in the United States to highlight his drawings.”

About Al Taylor

Al Taylor (1948–1999) was an American artist whose innovative approach to process and materials encompassed three-dimensional objects and two-dimensional drawings. Taylor was born in Springfield, Missouri. He received a BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1970 and moved to New York City the same year. Taylor’s first solo exhibition was in 1986 at Alfred Kren Gallery, New York. Since then, his work has been shown in many exhibitions in Europe and the United States, including solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Bern (1992), Kunstmuseum Luzern (1999), Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich (2006 and 2010), and The High Museum of Art in Atlanta (2017). The artist is represented in a number of prominent public collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Musée national d’Art moderne, Paris; The British Museum, London; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Al Taylor’s estate has been represented by David Zwirner since 2007.

The Drawings of Al Taylor

February 21 through May 24, 2020
The Morgan Library & Museum
225 Madison Avenue at 36th Street
New York, NY 10016

For more information about the exhibition, hours, and admission, please visit www.themorgan.org.

Related Programming

LECTURE

“… all one effort, not to be separated”: Strategies of Perception, Objectification, and Radical Infringement of Rules in the Work of Al Taylor
Michael Semff

Al Taylor compared art making to playing a game in which you change the rules in the middle so it doesn’t get boring. Join Michael Semff, art historian, former Director of the Staatliche Graphische Sammlung in Munich, and author of Al Taylor Prints: Catalogue Raisonné, for a lecture that will shed light on one of Taylor’s major demands: to devise “elaborate programs, systems and methods which break down, fall apart and change the more successful they become, taking on meanings and a life outside and beyond the artist’s original intentions.”
Monday, February 24, 6:30 PM
Tickets: $20; $15 for Morgan Members; free for students with a valid ID
* The exhibition The Drawings of Al Taylor will be open at 5:30 PM for program attendees.

Gouache, Ink, Toner, or Is It Dirty Water? The Drawing Materials of Al Taylor
Lindsey Tyne
Al Taylor is often noted for the fluidity with which he moved between two and three dimensions in his artwork, creating overlaps between drawing, printmaking, painting, and sculpture. As a result, his drawings incorporate unexpected material combinations that deserve close attention. Lindsey Tyne, Associate Paper Conservator in the Thaw Conservation Center, will discuss Taylor’s deliberate choice of paper and mixing of typical and atypical drawing media to achieve his intended visual effects—puddles and stains look like puddles and stains, shadows like shadows, and twisted wire like twisted wire.

Wednesday, April 1, 12 PM
Tickets: $20; free for Morgan Members and students with a valid ID
* The exhibition The Drawings of Al Taylor will be open at 11 AM for program attendees.

GALLERY TALK

The Drawings of Al Taylor
Isabelle Dervaux, Acquavella Curator of Modern and Contemporary Drawings

Friday, March 6, 6 PM
Friday, May 1, 1 PM
Tickets: Free with museum admission.

Al Taylor: Coloring the Everyday Abstract
Azi Amiri
Al Taylor found inspiration in everyday situations, creating works with titles like Pet Stain Removal Device and The Big Spill. Join artist and educator Azi Amiri on a tour of The Drawings of Al Taylor, the first exhibition in the United States to focus on Taylor’s contributions as a draftsman. Following the tour, create your own abstract watercolor inspired by your everyday experiences.

Friday, April 3, 6–8 PM
Tickets: $45; $35 for Morgan Members. Limited availability; advance registration required.

Organization and Sponsorship

The Drawings of Al Taylor is made possible by generous support from the Sherman Fairchild Fund for Exhibitions, the Ricciardi Family Exhibition Fund, Alyce Williams Toonk, the Robert Lehman Foundation, and David Zwirner.
The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

About the Morgan Library & Museum
A museum and independent research library located in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the personal library of financier, collector, and cultural benefactor Pierpont Morgan. The Morgan offers visitors close encounters with great works of human accomplishment in a setting treasured for its intimate scale and historic significance. Its collection of manuscripts, rare books, music, drawings, and works of art comprises a unique and dynamic record of civilization, as well as an incomparable repository of ideas and of the creative process from 4000 BC to the present.

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