

William Downs

Sometimes it hurts



William Downs, *The bathers, bathing*, 2018. Ink wash and spray paint on drywall, 96 × 180 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sandler Hudson Gallery. Photo: Fredrik Brauer.

Drawing is Atlanta-based artist William Downs's primary medium, with the figure as the foundation of his composition, and line as his elemental form of mark making. Stories, dreams, and personal experience enter into his work, which may or may not be easily recognizable to the viewer. *Sometimes it hurts* belongs to a multi-part series of large-scale drawings that address the body—its desires and desirability, its function in compositional space, its place in art and art history. In this site-specific ink-wash drawing, Downs explores the anthropological relationship of the body to its environment, dramatically manipulating those surroundings to conform or clash with the figure within the space. Downs's concept of space is beyond physical dimensionality and includes mental and emotional space.

By layering a group of smaller drawings with the larger work, Downs suggests visual source materials and a

glimpse into his imaginative process. A work of this scale demands extensive preparatory planning, but Downs leaves himself ample room for improvisation, along with collaboration. Students from the Washington University Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts assisted Downs in the completion of *Sometimes it hurts*, adding their contributions to the final work.



Audio Tour

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A dramatic tension is embedded within Downs's work, emerging from the conflict between figure and environment, the recognizable and the uncertain, and a push-pull between resolution and dissolution. *Sometimes it hurts* exists in a state of psychological unease. It is from this state that Downs sets out to awaken repressed feelings of anxiety, fear, joy, angst, and lust—feelings the artist literally draws into the world.

William Downs (b. 1974, Greenville, South Carolina, lives and works in Atlanta) works in a range of mediums, but focuses primarily on drawing. His work was part of the exhibition *On Paper* at Field Work Gallery in Pittsburgh (2013), and *Art AIDS America* at the Zuckerman Museum of Art in Kennesaw, Georgia (2016). Recent solo exhibitions include "*aimless reverie*," Fuel and Lumber Company, Birmingham, Alabama, and Slag Gallery, New York; *atease*, Parker Jones Gallery, Los Angeles; *a world never made*, Slag Gallery; and *fly away fly away*, Artspace, New Haven, Connecticut. His exhibition with the artist Brooke Pickett, *Crossing Lines*, has been shown at {Poem 88} in Atlanta and The Front in New Orleans. Downs received a multidisciplinary MFA from the Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, and a BFA in painting and printmaking from the Atlanta College of Art and Design. Downs is currently a Drawing and Painting Lecturer at Georgia State University.

The Work in Progress program is generously supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

William Downs: Sometimes it hurts is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator.

Related Programs

Work in Progress: William Downs

Wednesday, September 5, noon–1:00 pm



William Downs, *unarmed*, 2018. Ink wash and spray paint on paper, 50 ½ x 38 inches. Courtesy the artist.



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