

Figure drawing boosts brush confidence

Who: Eliot Goss

What: 'Figures'

When: 5:30-7:30 p.m. Friday; Show hangs through May 27

Where: ArtSpace Conference Gallery, Art Association, Center for the Arts

Web: EliotGossPainter.com

By Katy Niner

Figure drawing suits Eliot Goss' artistic temperament. Fast, decisive and bold, he completed each drawing in his upcoming show in a matter of minutes.

"Figures," a show of three dozen drawings, opens Friday in the Art Association's conference gallery. It remains on exhibit through May 27.

Goss begins each figure with its lines, drawn with a disposable ink pen. Then he takes a brush, wet with ink and water. A drawing takes as little as three minutes, no more than 20.

"The technique follows my temperament," Goss said. "I like to work fast. I like bold detail. I'm not much into spending four months on a painting."

Ink wash allows for a broad spectrum, from the jet black of undiluted ink to the sheer effect of a watery wash.

"I like the fact that you get these terrific blacks, and, at the same time, you can put down a wash that is almost as light as the paper," he said.

Goss began exploring art during architecture school, in 1955. Now, he draws from life at Greg McHuron's Tuesday morning sessions. When those gatherings take a summer hiatus, he attends the life drawing open studio at the Art Association.

In the two years that "Figures" spans, Goss did an estimated 200 drawings but only saved 60. For "Figures," he pared his selection down even more.



Eliot Goss' figurative drawings reflect his penchant for working fast to create bold details. "I'm not much into spending four months on a painting," he said.

One of the last drawings he did displays his progression toward loose lines, away from gripped carefulness.

"A lot of people would say it's sloppy," he said. "To me, it's fast and dynamic."

Pen or paintbrush in hand, Goss shifts into gear, blanking all else out.

"With art in general, it's always a surprise. The outcome is always in doubt until you are done," he said. "When you get experienced enough

to be at the point of 'happy surprises,' that is really rewarding. I can hardly believe I did them myself."

In drawing the figure, Goss finds torqued poses most interesting, although simple standing poses do offer the difficulty of getting proportions right.

Faces require focus, yet because he draws so quickly, he cannot fuss with likeness.

"It's important for me to get down a certain amount of information," he said. "It gives the drawing more of a sense of purpose and reality."

Goss strives to grow as an artist.

"One of the things I feel strongly about is constant change, constant growth," he said.

With figure drawing, he explored many mediums, first conte crayon on newsprint, then charcoal on charcoal paper, before arriving at ink wash, a shift inspired by Richard Diebenkorn's ink wash drawings. After ink, he returned to charcoal, which he describes as "drawing with lines and smudges."

Figure drawing presents distinct challenges, Goss said. No lines are straight, and its subject is so well known, everyone can recognize flubs.

"You can't fake it," he said. "It has value beyond the figure. You get comfortable with the idea that if it's there, you can draw it. If you can do good figure drawings, you can do anything. ... I can draw anything in this room without thinking about it."

Take, for instance, figure drawing's empowering effect on his plein air landscape painting.

"You start drawing with your paintbrush. You have the confidence in your eye."

Goss works in series, following a creative current for two weeks, two months, two years. Beyond figure drawing, he has recently explored portraits and studio oil paintings based on plein-air watercolors.

Despite the lingering cold, Goss has already ventured outside to paint.

"That's what I like doing best. That's where the magic comes — you have no idea what the end result will be. You start putting the paint down, and if you're lucky, it works. That's the most exciting kind of painting."