

December 1949 -- from a letter to Mark Rothko.

... A large drawing show (to be held in the Legion of Honor Museum).

Everything over six feet. Several members of the faculty here at the California School of Fine Arts get rolls and rolls of packing paper and charcoal and paint, and work and work and work, in the school and elsewhere, and struggle for just the right idea to put himself over and, "Oh God, are we artists. Boy, we'll show 'em, -- no I'll show 'em. My work will out-smart, out-original, out-nervousness, out-blah everyone else's". So they all dig and smear and smudge for the Curator. And the Critics.

The Curator sent a flunky to sound me out when the idea was first thought of. I said, "No". The flunky agreed, "You're right". And I forgot about it. Except when I would accidently stumble over a teacher in a hallway or classroom daubing away at yards and yards of paper, or another unrolling preparations for "IT".

Two days ago after a very sumptuous dinner at the Curator's, the issue was revived. "All the show needs is a drawing by you, Clyff. That will really put it over. How about it, Clyff. Just a nice big drawing."

"O.K. I'll give you a picture. After all, this show to an artist of integrity can only be a gesture. Since it is made for a museum program, I will give you my gesture, my respect for the public art gallery working in these terms. I will give you my contempt for the whole business: a 6 x 10 foot canvas blank as the fabric comes from the factory."

The matter was not mentioned again.

Postscript: I told the story years later to Ed Cahill in New York City. He said, "I would have taken you up on that and hung your canvas." I replied, "I know you would have, Ed. That is why I wouldn't have made even that offer to you."

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