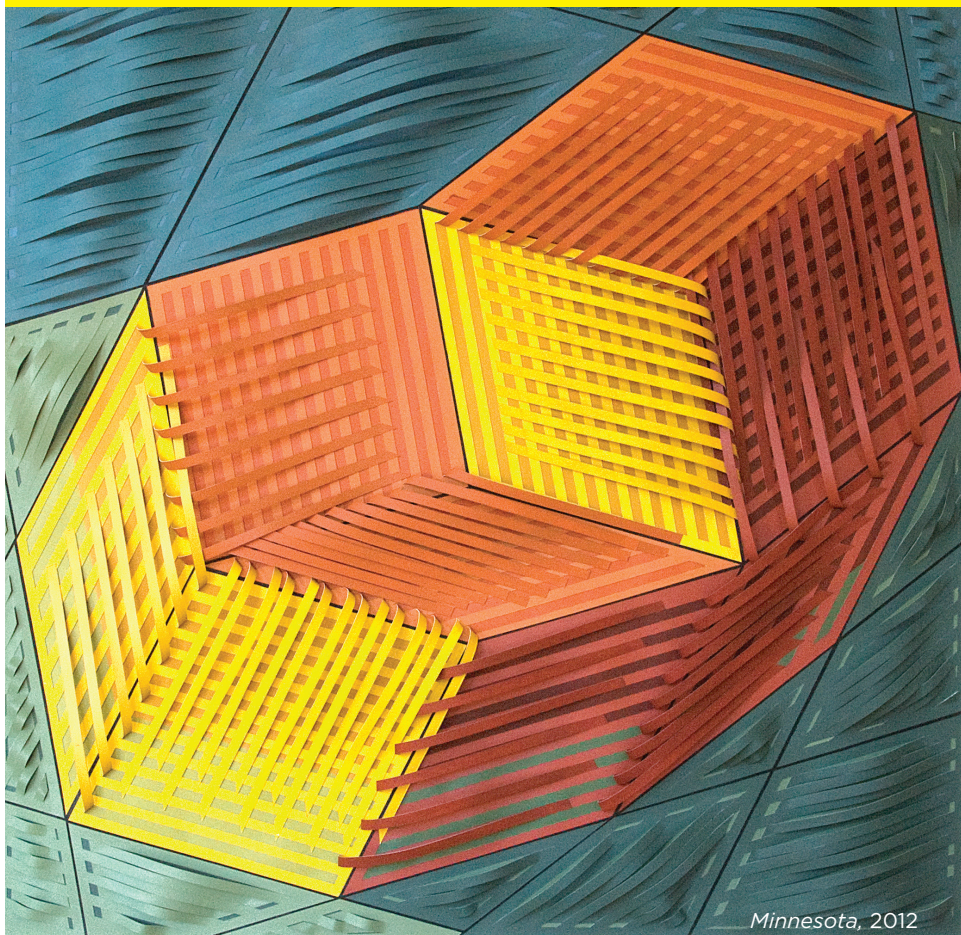


JOHN ANDERSON
DRAWINGS: 2006-2012
CONSTRUCTED
CONCEPTUAL



Minnesota, 2012

**NOVEMBER 30, 2012 -
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This publication grants us rare access to the intimate details of an artist's studio practice. It is a primary source document capturing an artist's complex thought processes in his own words. John Anderson's work is immediately beautiful. But, the content requires time, thoughtful consideration, and intellectual rigor. This is an opportunity to examine excerpts from Anderson's personal journals for a behind the scenes look into the beautiful mind of an artist steeped in a process of creating art that is firmly within his control and, at the same time, left to the roll of a dice and a flip of a coin.

-DJ Hellerman, Curator, Burlington City Arts

Vermont-based artist and architect John Anderson challenges conventional definitions of drawing and sculpture by blurring the boundaries between two-dimensional drawing and three-dimensional space. *John Anderson Drawings: 2006 - 2012 Constructed Conceptual* brings together four different bodies of work in which paper and graphite drawings are uniquely cut, torn, rolled, twisted, folded, and painted to create dynamic sculptural objects, and alphabets of line and color.

PAPER STUDIES,

2006 – PRESENT, GRAPHITE ON PAPER, 11 in X 15 in

Since 2006, I have made 140 of these studies. Most are all labeled, neatly boxed up, and stored in my son Ash's abandoned bedroom; he's away at college. The most recent pieces hang on my dining room wall where, from time to time, they give me a new idea for another study. They are at the same time drawings and small-scale sculptures, constructed drawings. The basic premise for the pieces is my notion that a piece of paper is a three-dimensional object with height, width, and depth and not just a two-dimensional abstract plane. To show this physical quality and three-dimensional potential in a piece of paper, I follow six specific rules in the construction:

- 1.** Two pieces of paper, of identical size and specification, (in this case Arches watercolor paper, 11 in x 15 in) are placed one on top of the other and affixed with glue.
- 2.** The top piece can be manipulated in any way I can think of: ripped, crumpled, cut up, punched, grated, chewed, soaked and formed in various shapes, etc.
- 3.** The bottom piece is left flat as a reference plane.
- 4.** Either piece or both pieces may or may not have graphite applied to enhance the contrast between the manipulated sheet and the flat sheet or used purely as a graphic convention to strengthen the concept.
- 5.** The graphite can be applied in several ways: It may be applied in conventional lines or transferred through pressure like a print. It is most often rubbed in with an Ebony pencil until the paper takes on an even, metallic sheen, or graphite dust is rubbed into the paper with a cloth and sealed.
- 6.** The bottom rectangular sheet is always aligned horizontally.

There are, of course, an infinite number of ways in which a study can be made by these rules. I have dry spells when I lose interest in the project or have no new ideas, and then brief periods when I may make three or four in a row. It feels good to have the project waiting for me when the mood strikes, and it feels good to have a set of unvarying rules that structure and limit the freedom of execution. Perhaps I could track the evolution of my thinking and artistic skills by looking at the studies chronologically.



GRASSLANDS SERIES, 51 in X 51 in MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER

I have completed seven new large drawings in this series including *Joshua Tree, Nebraska, Wyoming, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana* and *Iowa*. All except *Joshua Tree* (which references my many visits to that National Park in southern California) are inspired by my most recent road trip in September 2011 across the grasslands of middle America.

On that trip, my photography was focused on discovering and documenting lines in the landscape. The lines could include fence lines, crop row lines, road striping, and tarring calligraphy—all rather permanent lines. I also sought out lines that appear between different color fields of grass, the fleeting edges between light and shadow, narrow spaces between buildings, dust trailing a truck on a dirt road, atmospheric reflections and rainfall. The lines I discovered were fixed and rigid and also ephemeral, virtual, barely moments in time.

As I photographed lines, I also thought about what might constitute lines in a drawing, other than conventional drawn lines. I thought about lines as cuts, tears, and folds in paper, lines at the edges of paper, strips of paper as lines, lines created by the adjacency of two different colors. I wanted to make drawings outside of the conventional process of drawing with a medium such as graphite. I saw that I could draw by manipulating the paper three-dimensionally. Simultaneously, I wanted to make three-dimensional drawings.

These interests grew in part from a book titled, *Richard Serra Writings Interviews* which I got as a gift from my son Ash after we saw a show in New York of Serra's drawings. In the book he talked about the cut edges of his steel plates as drawn lines. I'm also reminded that back in 2000 when I did the Kelliher Samets Volk murals, I wanted to literally draw full-scale, three-dimensional (architectural) space. I saw beams, columns and exposed steel studs as "drawn" lines in space. I saw the spackled edges of sheetrock as ghostly lines layered in the murals. All these new line elements worked in harmony with graphite, lumber crayon, and snapped chalk lines.

The current grasslands drawings are also a natural progression from the three-dimensional Paper Studies (2006 – present), the large Chance/ Drawings (2009 – 2010) and the Chance Drawing/Paper Studies (2010 – present). The current work, while partly employing randomness or chance technique, is large in size, three-dimensional and structured by color, but it is primarily about exploring line.

The materials in this series include graphite, colored pencil and acrylic paint. The paint is watered down and applied in many layers often alternating with lines added between layers. In some of the grasslands drawings, the acrylic paint is applied full strength. I like the transparency that comes with thin layers and the secondary colors that emerge when one color is applied over another. The density of lines will also affect the overall color. Keeping the paint fairly transparent allows the work to read as a drawing and not a painting.

Joshua Tree is inspired by Joshua Tree National Park and its fantastic landscape of granite boulders. Here, the base sheet of Arches paper contains a chance grid composed of my alphabet of lines and the random application of six different colors that I associate with the park landscape. A second sheet of the same size was cut into six rectangles, and a chance grid combined with one of the six colors was applied randomly to each sheet. These six sheets were moistened with water and shaped into three-dimensional boulder-like forms. A painted "property" line that defines a limit to the field of the drawing on the base sheet reappears randomly on each of the six shaped forms.

Nebraska is a more refined version of an experimental exercise I did in 2011. A painted landscape that is really a diagrammatic map of the route I took while driving through the Sand Hills region in the western part of the state is applied to the base sheet of paper. It included an abstraction of the dunes, their general orientation, and the colors were all those that I remembered seeing in the dune grasses. I made a copy of this on a second sheet of paper, cut it up into 64 - 6in x 6in squares and shuffled the squares face down. I then glued the squares together following a new grid determined by a chance procedure of flipping a coin—heads, a square is added to a module in the grid, tails, no square is added in that module. The resulting quilt of squares was much larger than the original drawing. It was then bent and folded to fit on the base sheet. The lines of the drawing include both the edges of colors and the bent and twisted edges of the paper squares.

Wyoming is a three-dimensional drawing composed of strips of painted paper as lines. It represents the Black Thunder coalmine, the largest open pit coalmine in the world. This horrendous and fascinating slash in the earth sits in the middle of the vast Thunder Basin Prairie landscape in eastern Wyoming. Coal trains 137 cars long leave this area full and come back empty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The strips of paper representing the trains extend beyond the base drawing making the entire piece almost 10 feet long. Other colors in the drawing are based on my memories of the colors in the prairie grasses.

Minnesota was inspired by the soybean fields that I discovered in the prairie region on the western edge of the state. I passed through there in September and the fields that I saw were in various lovely shades of chartreuse, yellow, orange and red and formed soft geometric patterns on the landscape. Here, the lines are both cut and twisted and then folded. The strips on a second layer of paper are applied in trapezoidal sections over the base sheet. For each section or field, three surfaces of paper are exposed, each in a different color—one side of the base sheet and both sides of the second sheets. This very complicated layering of paper had my head spinning. I needed diagrams to keep me clear on the necessary patterns and sequences required to create the lines, texture, and shapes of the drawing.

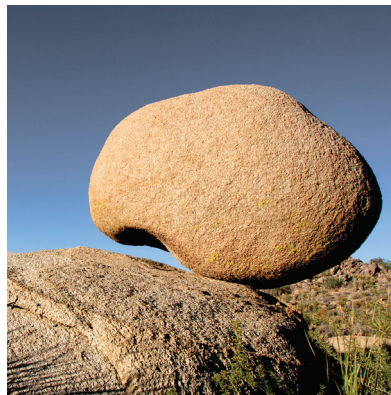
North Dakota features the torn edges of paper as lines. It is also based on a very beautiful and even elegant visual experience that I had while traversing the very northern tier of the state. At the time wheat was being harvested by very large combines. These machines create tremendous thick billowing clouds of dust as they cut down the wheat into flat rows. One freshly cut field had a long yellowish white cloud at the far end and through this dense shape occasional glimpses of bright canary yellow could be discerned. These moments of color came from what was probably a New Holland combine. This piece also includes more conventional drawn lines in graphite and colored pencil that, combined with layers of acrylic paint, create a fine texture, especially while juxtaposed against the jumble of shaped pieces of torn paper that form the abstract dust cloud.

Montana proved to be a challenge. I love the state, the enormous scale of everything, the sense that everything is bigger than an expected, normal reality. I wasn't in Montana very long on this last trip, but I do have nice photographs that suggest both its enhanced scale and powerful examples of lines. I was cautious about launching into what would be another big project without feeling clarity and certainty about the drawing concept. I had two in mind.

One was a large ovoid field of very flat and light colored surface, almost like an Ellsworth Kelly shape, set within a more rumpled surrounding. The shape could recess or project three-dimensionally. Another possibility was based on a pair of tall rectangular grain elevators that I encountered in Froid, MT and set so close together that at dusk, the space between them became a bright white line separating massive dark gray planar grids. In the drawing, the representation of the structures would project three-dimensionally, angling off the base sheet like wedges. I became eager to get started in the physical problem-solving phase of execution. (06.03.12)

I proceeded with the concept of the virtual line emerging between two grain elevators. I did paintings of the two gray metal facades of the elevators (based on a photograph) and then cut each up into small rectangles (thus representing the weathered panels of corrugated metal on the elevations). These rectangles were shuffled, placed face down, and glued randomly onto the projecting surfaces of the piece. The line of light between the gray grids is a very bright yellowish white. The implied scale of the image, the rough and random texture of the planes and the stark contrast of plane and line of light, to me all represent Montana.

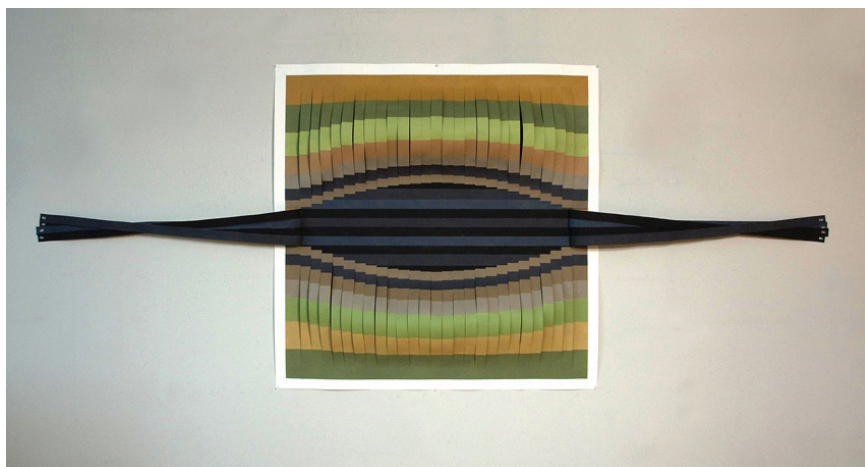
Iowa is based on cultivated fields that I saw in the beautiful rolling hills of that state's agricultural landscape. In what seems to me to be unique to Iowa, the fields are terraced, probably to prevent erosion. When I saw this landscape in the spring, gently sloping terraces with a tan corduroy texture of newly planted grain of some kind were separated by sharply sloping, bright green grass walls. These walls formed lines in the landscape tapering as they appeared and disappeared among the hills. The drawing is made of strips of paper laid over each other with the visible edges folded over. The "lines" of the drawing are these folded edges, and the folding and the layering create a slight three-dimensional texture to the drawing. The strips are painted in colors reminiscent of the actual landscape. I'm not sure at this point about the success of the color choices. This drawing looks more like a recognizable landscape than any of the other six drawings in the series. I might be more satisfied at this point if the drawing were more ambiguous and abstract. We will see how it evolves.



source image for *Joshua Tree*



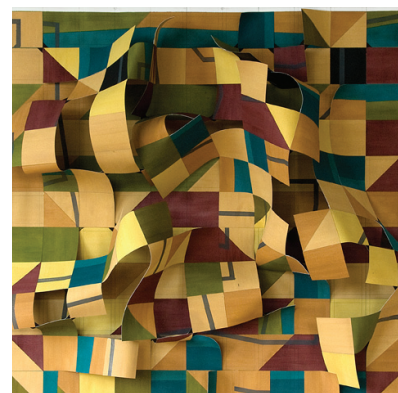
Joshua Tree, 2011



Wyoming, 2011



source image for *Nebraska*



Nebraska, 2011



source image for *North Dakota*



North Dakota, 2012

ROAD STRIPING, 2010 – 2011, 35-1/2 in X 28 in

This series of drawings is also inspired by my most recent grasslands road trip in September of 2011. These are a result of my journey following secondary, two-lane blacktop roads, which I did almost all of the time. When the road ahead and the landscape on all sides is virtually empty, one can drive at any speed and safely stop at any moment. As a result, I became more aware of the road surface, itself. These roads come in many colors depending on where I was geographically and the types of asphalt mixes and stone used locally. The yellow and white paint striping added to the color palette of the surface, and most interestingly, the beautiful patterns that emerged from the practice of applying tar to the cracks in the road surface. Whoever might have applied the tar must have done so in the spirit of great Chinese or middle-eastern calligraphers. All of these patterns were further enriched by the marks of rubber tires burned into the surface or tracking wet paint across it.



source image for Road Striping



Road Stripe 4, 2012

CHANCE DRAWINGS 2009 -2010, MIXED MEDIA, GRAPHITE, ACRYLIC PAINT, 51 in X 51 in

These drawings gave me, at least partially, the opportunity to work with chance as part of the process of making a drawing. It meant giving up control over some of the visual results. The inspiration came first from reading I was doing in certain areas of theoretical physics. In particular, it came from my interest in the quantum world where events can only be understood and determined by probability. Nothing is certain in the world of small particles. A single electron can be in many places at the same time and take many simultaneous paths from A to B. Only when it is observed by experiment does it land in a specific place. Even then it is never stationary. We cannot control events as they unfold in the micro scale of the quantum world; at best we can only make predictions about probable outcomes.

Back in the macro world, it is refreshing to give up a certain amount of control in making art. But, there are also many arbitrary and subjective choices I made in the drawings of this series. A general description of the process of making these drawings will demonstrate the various moments where I kept control of a visual result, or not.

I began with a group of 28 line configurations including two points. This group is my alphabet of marks or more metaphorically, 'letters'. Each represents a roll of two dice followed by a flip of a coin. One line may represent a roll of a 7 followed by a flip of heads (7H), a different type of line represents a roll of a 3 followed by a flip of tails (3T) and so on. These designations are the names for the letters of my alphabet. Each of these designated marks relates to the others in being able to be placed in a square, a module, of the same dimension.

I then compiled a randomly generated master list of dice rolls and coin flips, 2T, 6H, 11T, 10HT, and so on. These are kept in a notebook. There are presently 3,087 entries. (See Diagram 1)

To control where these lines may be placed in a drawing, I arbitrarily create grids of lines that may be flat and square, but also diminishing in perspective, curved or combined to form three-dimensional volumes. These planes, or membranes, are placed on the drawing following a visual idea or concept of my choosing.

Next, I filled the grids with the letters of my line alphabet; each module in the grid received a letter. To do this I used the master list. I can proceed forward or backward with the list and start at any point in it, but I follow whatever order is there without skipping an entry or jumping ahead. The grids are filled in an orderly process; for example either left/right

or right/left by columns and top/down or bottom/up by rows. So, the lines and points are applied with no immediate control over what letter follows another as the alphabet is placed in the modules of the grid.

Once the grid or grids are filled, the drawing is complete or a decision is then made to introduce color. Color is added by a process of again flipping a coin that determines where in a given module of the grid the color is placed, left or right of a vertical line, above or below a horizontal line. The choice of color is subjective and arbitrary. (See Diagram 2)

Finally, in some of the drawings another very subjective decision might be made about the drawing as a visual whole. Graphite might be added to obscure parts of grids or their relationship to each other. Lines or color might be added to create additional connections between letters in adjacent grids. These decisions might in turn lead to more coin flipping, another layer of chance input.

I have mentioned my interest in theoretical physics leading to the incorporation of chance in this work. There is also a particular idea that I've seen in reference to Information Theory and Black Hole Theory that has informed this series. It is called the Holographic Principle and it has influenced *Chance Drawings* #5, #6 and #9. In my own words, the principle suggests that the total amount of information that a given volume can contain is limited by the number of Planck bits or units on the surface of an envelope containing that volume. A Planck unit is very small and perhaps the smallest area that can exist in our universe (it is 10 to the minus 33 centimeters on a side). In any case, the grids that combine to envelope volumes in some of the drawings do contain their information in bits, in the letters and colors within the modules. There is a hierarchy of information in the drawings.

Another inspiration from theoretical physics is seen in *Chance Drawing* #8. A cosmological concept that has emerged from String Theory posits that the origin of our particular universe came about by the collision of two membranes floating in a more infinite and more ancient universe than our own. Furthermore, the smallest particles of our presumed reality are thought to be strings and loops of energy that belong on these membranes and may move between them. I think of the grids found in these drawings as membranes containing information and that the membranes commute with each other.

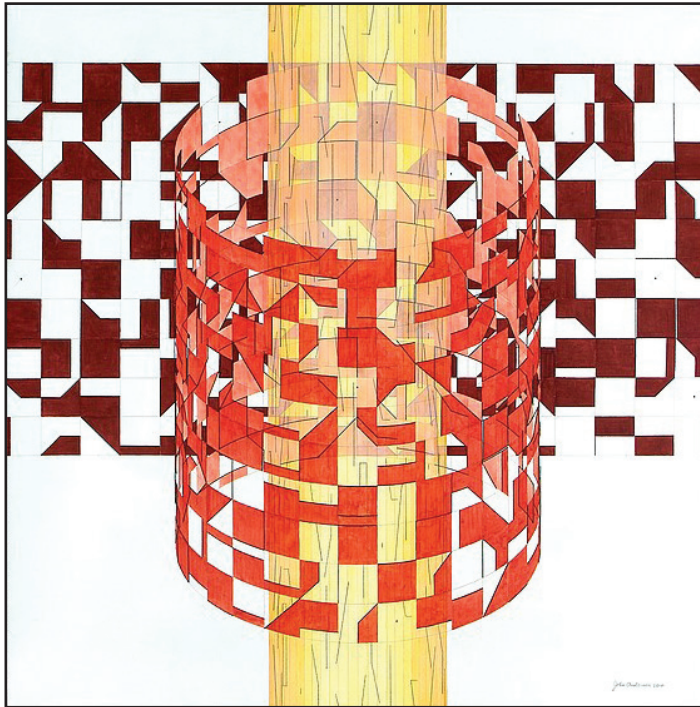
In a gesture of full disclosure, I admit that the process of giving up control to chance and random acts was surprisingly difficult at times. After flipping 10 tails in a row, I found myself desperately wanting a heads.

When following the master list and adding letters to the grids I became at times visually frustrated by the repetition of certain kinds of lines or points. I was often unhappy with the way color was accumulating. I even cheated on myself once in a while, maybe skipped an entry in my grand list or giving myself a second chance on a coin flip! I find the relationship between art and personal control quite complex.

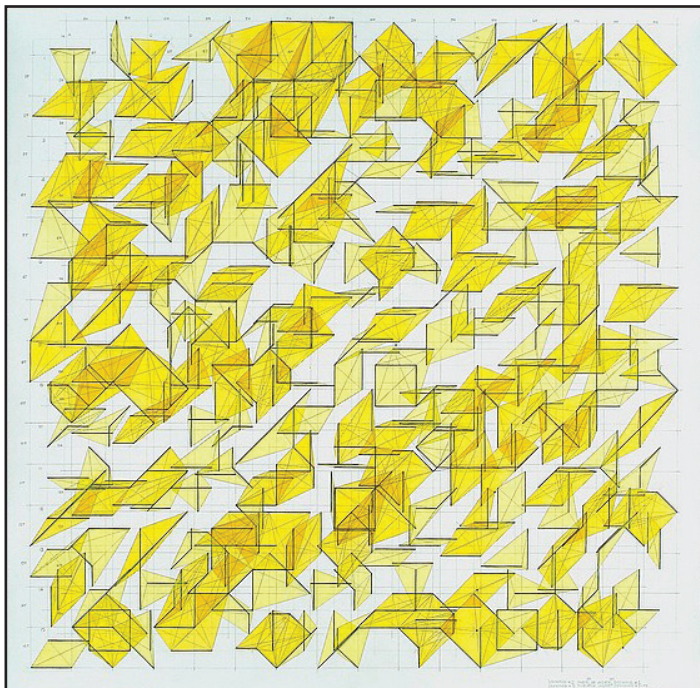
Ultimately, however, I'm interested in the information which these drawings contain and where it comes from. Bits of information are presented in the form of symbols—lines and points—that in turn represent acts of chance. These symbolic bits are integrated into the drawing via various random processes. Subjective free will—if such a thing really exists in our universe—gets introduced at stages in the process of creating a drawing that communicates an idea. The final and total amount of information in the drawings includes giving up control and asserting it in a nonlinear way.

(29)	(30)	(31)	(32)
8 T	6 T	10 TH	7 T
10 H-T	7 H	4 H	7 H
9 H	8 H	9 T	7 H
6 H	11 H	3 H	7 H
7 H	7 H	7 H	5 H
11 H	6 H	8 T	6 H
8 H	8 T	6 H	5 T
7 T	9 H	11 H	8 T
6 H	5 H	8 T	3 T
8 T	5 T	8 T	7 T
7 T	6 T	4 H	8 H
7 H	6 H	4 H	6 H
7 H	6 H	4 H	12 T
10 TH	10 TH	4 H	12 H

Diagram 1



Chance 5, 2010



Chance 6, 2010

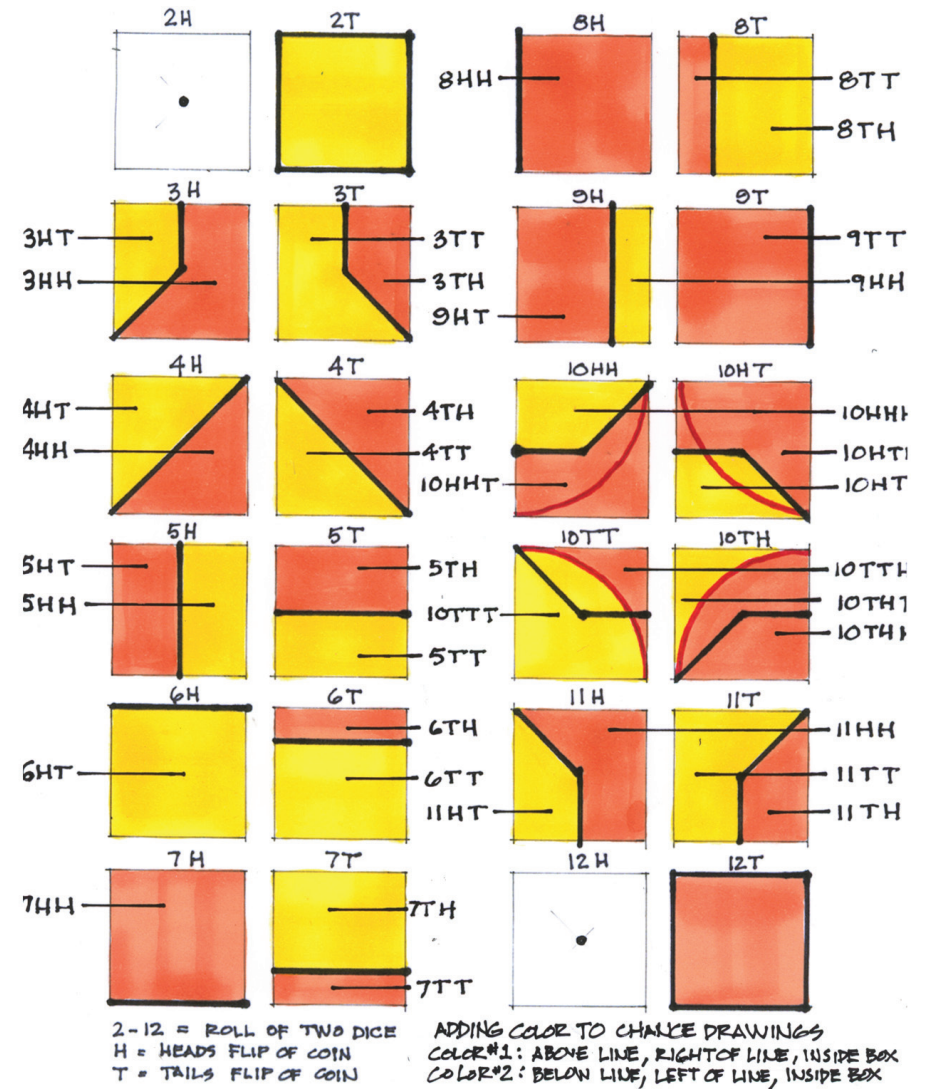


Diagram 2

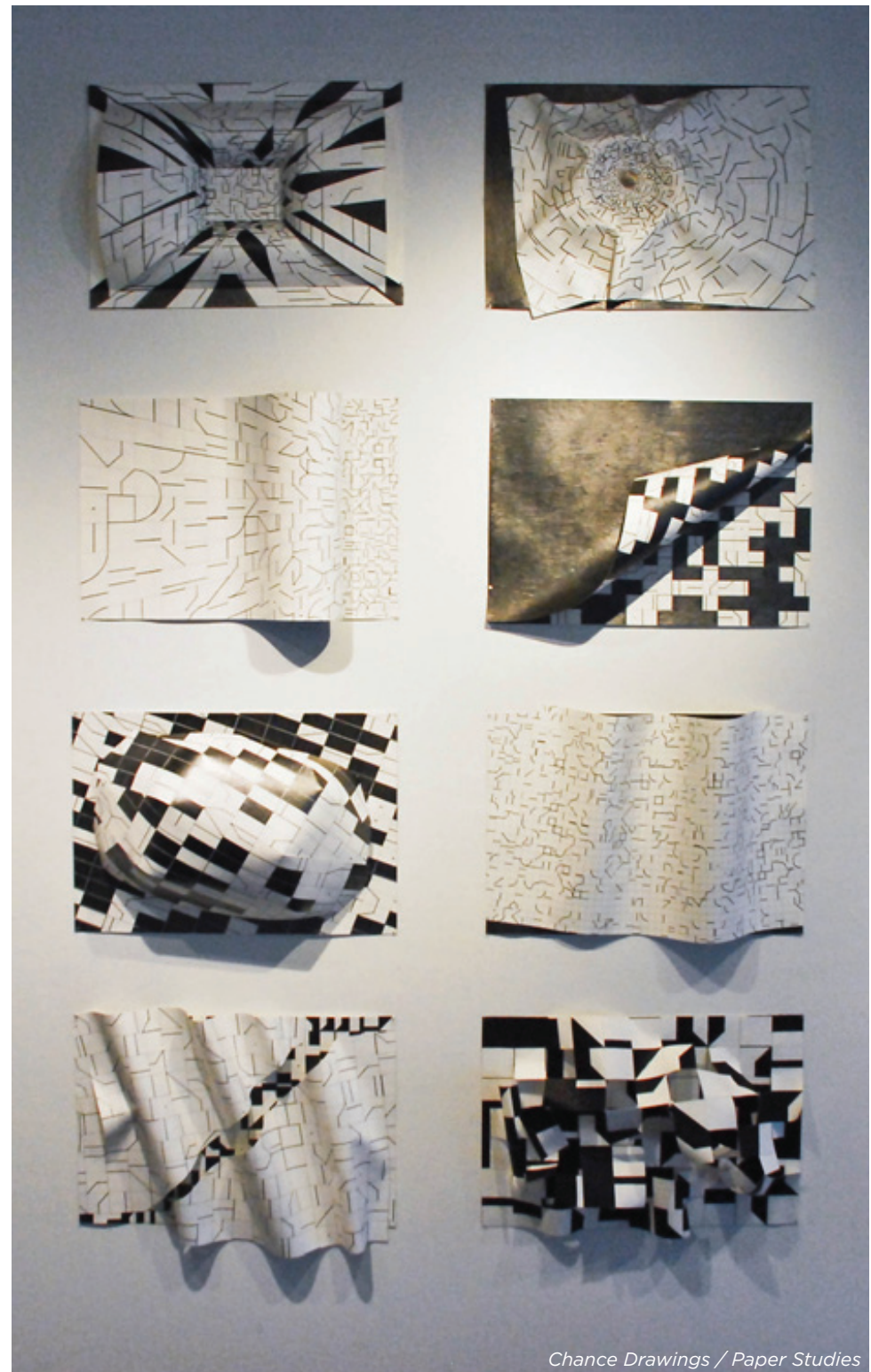
CHANCE DRAWINGS/PAPER STUDIES,

2010 – PRESENT, 22 ft X 18 in X 4 in, GRAPHITE ON PAPER

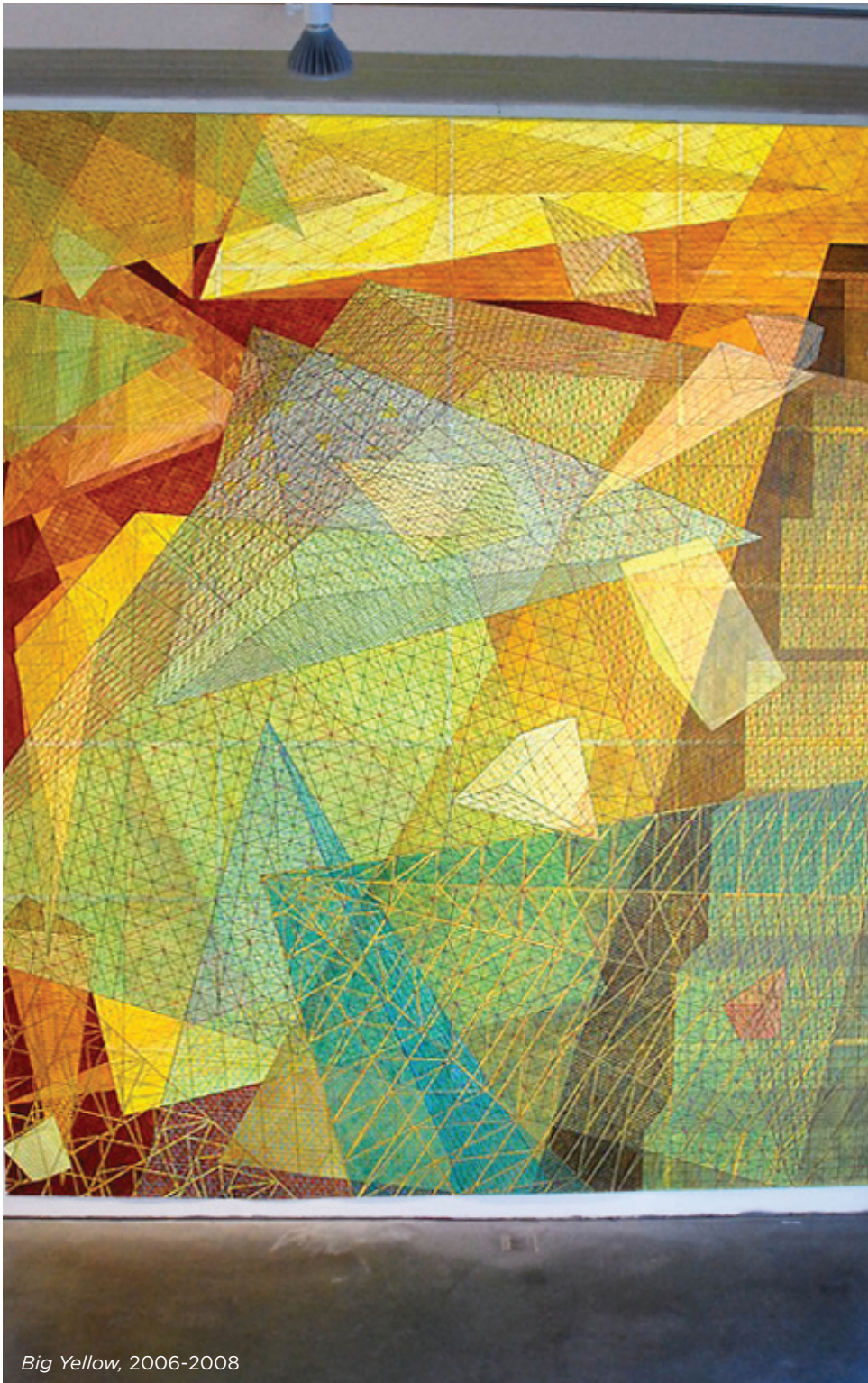
The initial inspiration for this work came from a visit to the Yale Art Gallery in New Haven. Ash was with me and we were looking at some very beautiful abstract Japanese ceramics. I remember him asking if I could consider making sculpture and what materials I would use. The ceramic pieces were so simple and direct and not self-conscious. It occurred to me while looking at them that I could do something in a material as basic as paper.

This small series of seven pieces borrows from both the *Chance Drawing* series and the *Paper Study* series. As in the latter series, the pieces are composed with two sheets of paper, one manipulated, one flat, and graphite is applied. But, as in the former series, grids were drawn on the paper and an alphabet of marks was applied to the grids following a chance process using dice and coins. The grids were drawn, stretched in perspective and otherwise applied in a way that reinforced or enhanced the three-dimensional topography of the paper.

I feel that this series is incomplete and not fully explored. I would like to do more sculptural work in paper and perhaps at a larger scale. This is something that I want to continue to think about, particularly in relationship to ideas about landscape, still processing the grasslands trip.



Chance Drawings / Paper Studies



BIG YELLOW,
2006 - 2008, 102 in X 84 in

Big Yellow is made up of 28 separate sheets of paper. At first, I wanted to work on each sheet separately with some overall concept to generally fix their positions and relationship to each other. I wanted the 28 drawings to maintain some individuality while working as part of a larger image. There would be a slightly random result as they were joined together. As I progressed, I became more interested in the larger composition, its sense of space and the layering of images, but the wide seams between the sheets still define the parts within the whole. I wanted the drawing to make a virtual space that the viewer might feel he or she could walk into. The steps on the right side of the drawing suggest this in a more literal way than the rest of the drawing.

This universe of triangular shapes, of tetrahedrons and pyramids, can be perceived on the human macro scale with the shapes being exactly the size as drawn, or on a more cosmic scale with the shapes and volumes referring to Plato's ideal forms in a more vast universe, or finally on the microscopic or even sub-atomic scale where triangularity begins its organizational structure of matter.

I had planned and continue to consider doing two more drawings at this scale and technique, one of spheres, arcs and chords of a circle and one of cubes and squares and right angles, perhaps one in red tones and one in blue. That would make a series and I would feel much more comfortable seeing *Big Yellow* as part of a larger idea rather than just a one-of-a-kind drawing.

Prices for John Anderson's work are available upon request.

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