

“Everything starts with a drawing – Geoff McFetridge”
January 8, 2019



Geoff McFetridge is fascinated by the human condition. His work engages existence and semiotics from a curious, poetic and personal point of view. His practice, painting, drawing and sculptures circle around concepts such as beginning and end, relation and understanding, perception and the unconscious. He investigates these themes with an intuitive graphic vocabulary. His unique visual language is heavy in preparation; some paintings start as drawings worked on for decades before they are resolved. If there is one ethos McFetridge stands by, it's that everything begins with a drawing.

Could you tell me a little about your background, where did you grow up and when did you embark on your professional journey?

I grew up in Calgary in Western Canada. It's an oil town at the base of the Rocky mountains on the prairie. It's a new city, and I lived the suburban lifestyle. Creatively, I grew up in a vacuum to some degree, my mom was a teacher, and my dad was a lawyer. My Dad dropped out of art school, but I remember always noticing he would doodle while on the phone and that was the start of my exposure to creativity.

I have always loved to draw, for me drawing was play. As I got older, the skill started to become more useful. My friends started bands, and I would make their t-shirt designs for them, or I would draw on my friend's skateboards. Drawing started to have a function, a use, beyond play. That was instrumental. I quickly realised I could use it in my everyday life. It was an opportunity.



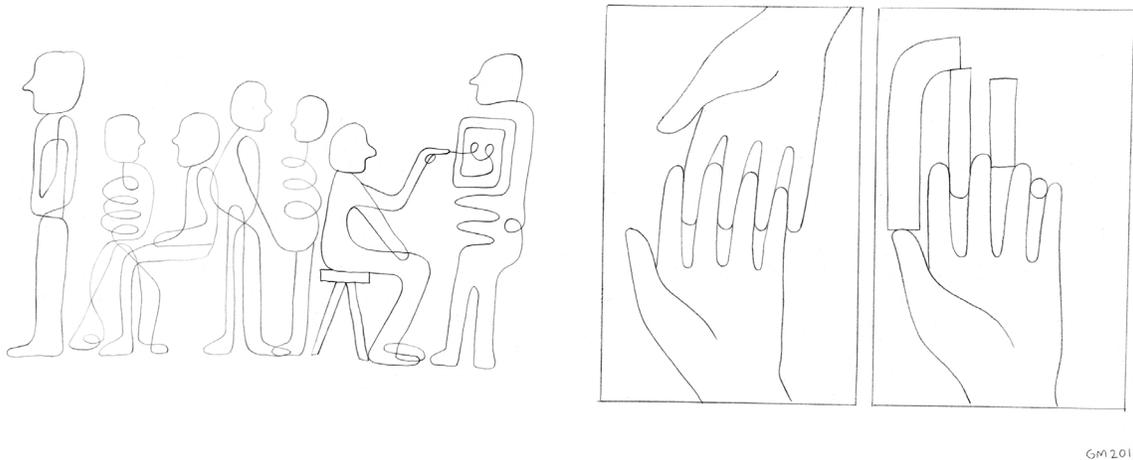
During High School, my first summer job was at a silkscreen factory making t-shirts. I worked on the mechanical press with a team of guys. It was raw and rough work, by the next summer I was in the art department, a space where I could use my skills. I started to realise I had acquired skills that I could use in my professional life.

I studied at a local art school, and on the side, I had clients in California, and I was creating flyers for gigs and designs for skateboards. Even though I was in Canada and it was quite remote, I could produce things without a lot of infrastructure which was exciting.

California was always a pull for me. I went onto study at CalArts where the course ideology was a perfect fit for me. Design was used to express everything. After graduation, I ended up working for the Beastie Boys on their magazine. It was around that time that I established a template for my work which remains true today. I split my time between client projects, art shows and creating animations.

You've said many times that 'Everything begins with a drawing' and you're at your most articulate when you draw.

There is so much dogma with drawing. It's similar to writing, everyone can write, but some people can write well, novelists, journalists etc. We are all aware of this level of writing, but it doesn't stop us from writing emails, journaling or engaging with the written word.



For me that's the same for drawing, what I have with drawing is very common and accessible, but over time I have got good at it. But it's accessible to everyone, the majority of drawing I do is not great drawing. Sometimes the scribbliest notations are weighted with thoughts. What is important to me is that drawing takes you to this place which is in-between language or outside of language. It's trading on narrative or communication, and a mind without language is a freer mind.

How does your creative process evolve from the drawing?

All of this is super interesting to me. I often reflect on why I was drawn to design in the first place. I'm still searching for the reasoning behind why I make things and what is exactly going on while I'm working on them, but what I do know is the emotional aspect of the work is the heart of everything I do, but how it looks is the way in, it's the trick, the hook, but it's not that important.

The highest level for me is feeling, work which stimulates an emotion. I'm trying to move away from content, which can be described as ideas and focus on more circular thinking.

In your latest project, *Coming Back Is Half The Trip* you have shared years of previously unseen sketches, letting people into your creative process and providing insight into your study of form. The book is raw and candid, giving people new insight into your process. That must have been a vulnerable space to occupy?

There are drawings included in the book that I don't even like. The purpose of the book is to show the process, the chain, of drawing things five times or five hundred times until you get somewhere. The book hopefully gets to capture the essence of the thinking, the meditative, repetitive process of developing work. There is a certain familiarity in it; there are a lot of mundane moments before an inventive moment appears.

I believe in separating yourself from being goal oriented or being purposeful. Allowing yourself to enter a state where your mind is on vacation, a state of play. It's not about chasing perfection.

I'm a believer in visuals. If you believe it's a powerful thing, then you want to focus on what you're creating, and the process is key.



You recently had a show in Copenhagen of the same name, which explores ideas around cognition. What was the genesis of the exhibition?

It was a show that took a lot of core thoughts in my practice and brings them together. When my work gets clear, I think it gets better. The cognitive aspect seeks to explore how images can function as language. I've always been interested in the idea of alphabets, words and the spaces between words where we have no definitions. They are unknown territories. Slipping in-between the part of your brain that reads and the part of your brain that sees and filling it with emotion.

Between the two poles, there is a space in between meaning, language and visuals. If my work is successful, it should feel like something rather than look like something, like tapping into a cognitive no man's land.

Process is so fundamental to your work, what is the most exciting stage of creating work?

The best result of process is when something manifests and takes you by surprise. Some paintings are drawings I work on for years and years. The work 'It's Not Getting Worse It's A Loop' is a perfect example. I worked on it for years and had no idea where it was going, but stay committed. Just when you think nothing will happen, something strikes you out of the blue and changes an entire piece. When the head became a stepping-stone, I knew the work was complete. I genuinely believe that process is everything.

What keeps you so passionate and focused today?

I've created a sustainable environment to work in, space where I feel happy and relaxed. I'm not interested in getting burned out, I've adjusted my life, I've stopped doing things if it's not conducive to this positive space. I'm focused on a long game. I'm aiming for something, which is beyond the work. The work helps me get to that place. That is a huge part of my fulfillment with the work.