



In oil paintings, such as the 2008 work on canvas *Terence* (left), as well as pencil drawings, such as the 2006 image from the diptych *Fear of Nuclear War*, 1986, Gerald Davis shines a light on the unsettling.

**G**erald Davis describes his drawings as “a diary of weird ideas, memories, daydreams, and sexual fantasies.” Indeed, his finely rendered pencil and pastel images leave few corners of his psyche unexposed, whether portraying a scene of drunken sexual reverie or an abusive letter from an imagined gallerist exhorting him to “at least marry someone famous.” “I think most people can relate to what I draw,” says Davis. “It’s just that they keep it hidden. I like to show those secrets.”

To create these often excruciatingly personal images, Davis, 35, begins by drawing in pencil, then goes over the lines with pastels, moving between the two until the image is saturated with one dominant color and the pencil can be erased. The results are incredibly precise drawings, in which strands of hair on a head or veins on a penis are depicted with a disconcerting accuracy.

Ever since his first solo show in New York, at John Connelly Presents in 2006—titled “1986” and focusing on that pivotal year in the artist’s sexual, social, and creative development—Davis’s work has drawn its power from the contrast between juvenile subject matter and sophisticated style. In the recent works lining the walls of his studio, a converted garage at his Los Angeles home, he’s shifting the focus away from childhood and toward the present. “It’s me now, where the ‘1986’ show was me then,” Davis says. John Connelly Presents, which will hold another Davis show in the fall, sells the drawings for \$5,500 to \$9,000. Davis’s oil paintings are handled by Salon 94, with large-scale works selling for up to \$35,000.

Growing up in Pittsburgh, Davis was determined to be a Disney animator, and he produced thousands of drawings replicating cartoon characters. While studying for his B.F.A. at Pennsylvania State University, and later his M.F.A. at the

Art Institute of Chicago, he discovered the potential of fine art to express an artist’s identity in a “deeper and more personal” way. Today his animation influences are evident in drawings like *The Switch* (2009), in which a penis moves from flaccid to erect in a series of stop-motion-style images.

When teaching advanced drawing classes at UCLA, however, Davis drills students in how to create images “that come straight from the mind through the hand.” Asked whether he ever feels tempted to censor his own imagery, the artist says, “If I think of something that makes me uncomfortable, I know I should look into it more.” Shining a light on those hidden places isn’t just the source of his creative energy. It’s also, he says, “something important to tell people about, something that will help other humans feel not so alone in their own experiences.”

—Sasha Watson



Sasha Watson is an arts, culture, and travel writer. She is the author of *Vidalia in Paris* (Viking, 2008).