

Intro

These notebooks! Michele said, *Anything will do* — a short poem, notes from your trip, some postcards & bus tickets, a few drawings — a page or two, or fill the book! *And we keep them as a record of your having been here.* A poem, a photo, things people said. Drafts of poems — *that* would be valuable.

But I hate to start something knowing that it mustn't fail or begin something aiming, from the outset, at its being merely okay, or at least okay, good enough.

And so the years have passed.

HOW I DREW CERTAIN OF MY DRAWINGS—WHY, EVEN

Up at night

I see the notebook — on the floor,

Where it has lived now

Among the mess in my room

For a few years, surfacing

Occasionally/]. Michele would have me

Finish it—put something in it

& send it to New Zealand.

I'm reading *Perrier Fever* & a book

Called *Frank O'Hara Now*—&

Passing time. I don't want to put

Something crap in it & have it

Archived forever, or put something

Good in & send it *away*. For a

Moment I thought of a list of my

Drawings, with commentary. But

How would that go? Now,

Tonight, the same night that I am

'Up late', but a few nights after

The idea for the notebook—&, actually,

I *can't* see the notebook now—

Tho I know where it is

(Under a Blundstone boot

& a couple of exercise books

One spiral-bound & a book of

Italian historical documents,
1875 to 1960, that I'll probably
Never read, that I bought on impulse
Two dollars! & I have read some.) I decide
To make a start. But not in any
Order, & not exhaustive. I like them
Mostly for their ineptitude
& their succeeding despite it.
So, the drawings. (Yes, I meant
The drawings—not the Italians—
Though it's a good joke.)
Here is one I did to illustrate
Part of a poem called 'Europe'.
(I got notice I was to be included
In a show & panicked & got started
Immediately—to make sure that
Beside all the artists I had something visual
To look at—not just poems.)
The poem at one stage recalled
A teenage Italian girl I saw
On the train from Heathrow into London,
Looking out the window at 'England'.
She was excited & communicated it
To her family: very pleased to see something
So totally & typically English
As a man & his golf clubs out there
On the green. I remember
Her more adult attention as the buildings
Got drearier & drearier &
More dangerous-looking. My guy
Is a scribbled duffer: plus fours

Was extraordinary. I've done it twice.
Suddenly everyone's mood lightens.
Italy! The bus moves off, the houses
Look Italian & the radio is loud
Unbelievably corny & upbeat
& the speakers vibrate & are burnt out.
The volubility, the pop songs, the scenery—
Everybody's mood lifts. My drawing
Suggests 'Italy'—exactly the cliché,
Which is not untrue—& the drawing
Is easy & graceful because I did it
Tiny & very quick & paid attention.
I mean, it's not Dufy—but it's
Not ungraceful. (There are terracotta
Tiles on the roof, quickly sketched, a
Window with curtains, a cup & a glass
On the table, It does the job.
The second time, I was with Cath & the kids,
& their partners & so on—seven of us—
Who'd met in London & flown here.
It was my idea. We landed tense
& exhausted. Would they like Trieste?
Was Trieste as good as I thought?
The bus trip produced that same euphoria—
Everyone babbling & laughing. Adventure!

Here's a glum, slightly puzzled
Or confounded Krazy Kat, bending,
Looking at something on the ground.
I love George Herriman—the slightly lonely,

Existential figures—Krazy especially,
But also the policeman Offissa Pup
& the rat is admirably fierce & pure
If not loveable. I use them occasionally.
And Philip Guston's 'Smoker 1' or
'Smoker 2' or whichever: the round head
That fills the picture & consists of
Round cheeks & huge round eyes,
In profile, staring sadly, philosophically,
Abandoned—midway between bravery
& self pity—as time rolls past.
Not unlike Herriman. Guston did
The portrait of O'Hara the cover
Of the book features, that, like a cartoon
Is completely evocative of O'Hara's look
& also of his own momentary, ongoing (?)
Self examination. O'Hara up at night
& thinking *Do da-doot do doo, or Am I*
Any good? The drawing sometimes seems to me
Cocteau-ish, but it's more kindred with
Guston's smoking figures & Herriman.

I had the Guston—a black-&-white reproduction
From a newspaper article—torn out
So a triangle of text hung beneath it,
Blu-taked to my wall for years. I communed
With it. Or ignored it. I would be up late,
Pottering, writing, wondering
& it would give ... solidarity rather than
Encouragement. When John died
It seemed to remind me of him. He'd been

At our place, sleeping down the back
Worried about his health, whether time was
Running out. Which it was, & had,
& so the picture became 'his', tho it has
Transferred back some of its identification
To me since. When I saw the original
Or perhaps a reproduction of it, in colour
I didn't like it—it seemed to have lost
Gravity & to be essentially, almost,
Graphic. A coloured-in drawing the colour
Had merely weakened. But that's how long I had
Lived with it in black & white—& live with it
Still.

A serious-looking drawing I did
& spent much time over is of Cath & Anna,
Mother & daughter, sitting in a bower-shaped
Curve of lounge & light looking at magazines.
I photocopied the photograph, blew it up
& copied it on a light-box with charcoal.
Photocopied again & reduced it looks great—
Like something by Vuillard I am persuaded:
Intimate intimate intimate!
The bubble of perfect quiet
& muted attention is lovely.
I love them is part of the reason—
But really, it looks terrific. I told
Michael it wasn't really a drawing—
I meant 'Art'—because of how I'd done it
But he said Whatever way, it's a drawing.
True. Tho it hardly seems 'mine'.
I've used it a bit: it's one of the images

I talk about in a poem to Gabe
Consisting in part of reasons he might come
Home (E.G., his beautiful mum &
Sister)—tho I've given it various titles—
'Australian women examining the *Kirkman Guide*
To the bars of Europe' is one. I gave
A copy to Pam & Jane & one to Anna. There's
One in my room. I also gave Pam
(Pam & Jane) a drawing of a cat
Arching its back in fright
As a kettle near it begins to steam
& shriek. I've done a few versions
Of this & always like it. Folksy.
Understated. My favourite
Italian artist is de Pisis—favourite
Twentieth-century Italian—the very
Scattered, scratchy, flecked drawings
Of Paris, & Italian streets & squares,
I think are terrific. That is
I like them terrifically. I would
Like to draw like everyone—or, everyone
Who wasn't too painstaking—not Raphael
Or Poussin. I couldn't put in that work.
Tho Poussin's is a name I use inordinately.
(Inordinately often?) (My grammar
Is like my draughtsmanship.) I do like him
& some of his drawings. Tho I use him
As a synecdoche (!) for classicism,
High seriousness, etcetera. I honour him
"In the breach" — like Cy Twombly. I
Just read that, recently, in an article

On Cy Twombly & Poussin: however
Attracted to him he was, Twombly
Used him to bounce off & against—
& as ironised, as loss, as unattainable
Etcetera. I.E., the reviewer could see
No connection of influence. I did two
Drawings recently—for a poem
Of John's & mine—in which the speaker
(Of the poem) recounts a moment spent
With Jackson Pollock in a lift.
He makes the right joke
& the dangerous Pollock
Laughs & they end—"as" or "with"?—
Hooligans, throwing their spent spray-cans
On a fire. I drew it (from very faulty
Memory) from Poussin's 'Et In Arcadia
Ego'. The first one, in pencil,
Is cruder, tho it has an antic
Energy: the standing figure is good; the
Kneeling figure's face seems masked or
Animalistic & the 'Terme' looks Picassoid, to me,
Which I like, tho it's accidental. The
Other version is in biro & finer. The special virtue
Which it has is that the main figure
Does not look so possessed (which was confusing maybe)
& the Terme looks as tho it has one hand
Effetely to its face—like Jack Benny—
As if to say, Well goodness gracious—at
The antics (have I used that word?)
Of the young graffiti-ists, Pollock &
Jenkins-&-Bolton. They're amusing,

But partly because something so amateur
Rarely shows up in a book. I sent a good
Drawing to Greg O'Brien a while ago—
Embarrassed to have owed him one for
So long.. Beer can in front of a window
Looking out on a yard with an old car—
Gothic, Texan, white-trash, *Last Picture Show*
& so on. A can of Resch's Pilsener.
Or was it Fosters—so much easier to draw?

Notes to the poem

Page 1 — *Perrier Fever*—a recently published book by poet Pete Spence; and *Frank O'Hara Now*—critical essays on O'Hara

Page 3 — The trying/not trying issue is a factor for me always: getting started is essential, but despite one's inadequacies there is still some skill that will find its way out or arrive to help as, without knowing it—if that's the mood you're in—observation & humour kick in. I mostly draw only when I have to, but then I enjoy it. Occasionally I attempt correctly observed drawing rather than caricature and cartoon.

Page 5 — "book of John's & mine"—John Jenkins & KB, *Lucky For Some*, Little Esther Books, 2011.

Page 5 — so far this drawing has been used to illustrate 'Europe' for the *Mentor Mentor* exhibition (CACSA, Adelaide 2005) and in *Lucky For Some*. The poem 'Europe' exists as a book & is collected in *A Whistled Bit Of Bop*.

Page 13 — "When John died": poet John Forbes

Page 13 — I made or registered this transference in *Three Poems For John Forbes* (Little Esther); also collected in my *At The Flash & At The Baci* volume.

Page 15 — Michael—artist Michael Fitzjames

Page 15 — Gabe, my partner's son, was in London: the drawing attaches to 'Some Photos For Gabe' in the book *A Whistled Bit Of Bop*

Page 17 — 'Kirkman Guide' drawing is also used in *A Whistled Bit Of Bop*. The poem itself appears in *Sly Mongoose*.

Page 17 — the cat-&-kettle drawing was done about 1980 when I lived in Coalcliff. First used in John Jenkins & Ken Bolton, *Airborne Dogs*, 1988

Page 19 — my drawings 'after Poussin' were made for a poem in *Lucky For Some*

Page 21 — Jack Benny, a once popular American comedian

Page 21 — only a detail of the beer-can drawing is shown here. Greg has it now.