

Shape-shifting humans, grotesque beasts, benevolent creatures, majestic birds – these are just some of the players in a visual drama that springs from the uncommon depths of a defiant artist named Jeanne Brousseau. The drama is both tragedy and comedy, whimsy and horror, rendered with childlike imagination but with the precision and intensity of a “grown-up” who has something important to say. These strikingly beautiful combinations of line, color, and form are in fact a survivor’s attempt to confront deeply suppressed memories of child abuse by her father.

Hirschl & Adler Modern is proud to introduce the work of self-taught artist Jeanne Brousseau (b. 1952). This represents the artist’s debut solo-exhibition in New York, the first time many of these highly personal, intimate drawings have been seen outside her hometown of Penobscot, Maine, where Brousseau is known locally as a maker of offbeat crafts, a dog breeder, gardener, and a skilled knitter. It wasn’t until recently that the sheer breadth of her creativity became known when she decided to tell her story and share her private drawings with the public.

The drawings started as therapy in the mid-1990s when Brousseau was in her 40s and beginning to piece together the details of her troubled past. The most chilling of the images, *Untitled [Drawing no. 1]*, of about 1994, was her first serious effort to encapsulate the physical sensation, emotion, and pain of her ordeal. It is a profoundly original, devastating portrayal of sexual violence and its toll on the victim. But to focus solely on the difficult premise behind her work misses the extraordinary triumph of spirit playing out across each drawing, not to mention their aesthetic achievement. The ensuing visual narrative is one of courage, escape, survival, and revenge. The intricately drawn forms are fanciful in appearance yet they grapple with real experiences and her struggle to overcome them. Alluding to her abuse both directly and indirectly, Brousseau conjures up strange figures and a distinctive visual language to set up a classic dichotomy of Good vs. Evil. *Untitled [Vengeance Tale with Horse and Alligator]*, about mid-1990s, features the artist’s band of animal warriors called on to protect her and to seek her retribution. Here the tables are turned as her father assumes the role of victim. It’s a ghoulish scene rendered with childlike innocence and cuddly characters while the eerily precise micro-writing tells of their deadly serious intent.

The exquisite color and jewel-like renderings in her work belie the harshness of their subject. Brousseau’s markers seem to flow across the paper surface with surprising ease and delicacy forming near perfect lines. She has likened her drawing sessions to a trance where every move of her hand is unconscious, even automatic. The unique figures Brousseau invents with abundance seem to spill out of her mind like a dam that has finally broken. The resulting pages are free of any tension or timidity; just a clear-eyed resolve to unmask her attacker with beauty and grace intact.

After the initial 1990s burst of creativity and self-exploration in which she made mostly linear, monotoned compositions, Brousseau abruptly stopped drawing. It wasn’t until 2018 that she returned to the format, now with an almost joyous confidence and strength with breakout color announcing her victory. The characters and the facts of her past remain. But with time comes catharsis. The tone of

Brousseau's recent work is about renewal, self-agency, overcoming her past. No longer fearful, these are sophisticated, fulsome statements of hard-won survival and the astonishing lyricism of her truth.