

Ecce Homo: The Drawings of General Idea

October 7, 2022 – January 15, 2023



For press inquiries and images, contact:
Allison Underwood,
Director of Communications
212 219 2166 x119
aunderwood@drawingcenter.org

The Drawing Center
35 Wooster Street
New York, NY 10013
drawingcenter.org

Free Admission
Wednesday–Sunday: 12–6pm

New York, NY... Founded in Toronto in 1969 by AA Bronson (b. Michael Tims, 1946, Vancouver), Felix Partz (b. Ronald Gabe, 1945, d. Winnipeg, 1994), and Jorge Zontal (b. Slobodan Saia-Levy, 1944, d. Parma, Italy, 1994), General Idea is recognized today as a key participant in the Conceptual Art scene of the 1970s and 1980s. From their early staged beauty pageants, boutiques, and talk shows to their later material output in the form of postcards, prints, posters, magazines, and wallpaper, General Idea enthusiastically embraced commercial forms and explored multimedia, conceptual, and performance work as a tool for engaging with popular culture and its repressions. Less well-known, but equally significant, are the drawings authored by General Idea, which The Drawing Center will bring together for the first time in the United States for the exhibition *Ecce Homo: The Drawings of General Idea*.

Produced from General Idea's conception until shortly before their disbanding in 1994 following the deaths of Partz and Zontal, the drawings presented in *Ecce Homo* investigate motifs found throughout their multimedia works, such as poodles, stiletto heels, masks, heraldry, and metamorphosed genitalia. The drawings were all produced by Jorge Zontal, who made them as a habitual practice conducted during the group's daily brainstorming meetings, yet they are considered to be collaborative, given that authorship was a collective enterprise for General Idea. Although the drawings were made entirely by hand, the repetition of specific motifs follows a viral logic that is akin to General Idea's fascination with mass reproduction.

Zontal made drawings throughout the group's existence but he drew more regularly from 1985 through General Idea's last meetings in 1993, the years the exhibition takes as its focus. Notably, 1985 was the year the group made the decision to leave their home city of Toronto, which felt to them increasingly isolated from the global art world, for New York. It was also a time when their early joie de vivre was tempered by the pervasive presence of AIDS. In Bronson's words, it was a period "during which we had to face and somehow incorporate the illness and death of most of our friends as well as Jorge and Felix themselves." The exhibition's title, *Ecce Homo*, deliberately references a 1923 publication by German artist George Grosz chosen, according to Bronson, because "the anti-Semitism in Grosz's narrative is mirrored by the homophobia in ours." Bronson continues, "The title *Ecce Homo* in our case refers to General Idea, self-deprecatingly, as homos. It is a kind of self-portrait as the rejected part of society. In North America, we represented that part of society left to die in a pandemic, which conveniently ignored the white moneyed straight folk."

This pain and gravity is immediately felt in the drawings, whether in an early series of silhouetted figures shot through with holes; the trembling, melting visages that populate so many of the images; or the latest drawings, when, during Zontal's last months and while he was going blind, he represented the black floaters in his eyes as cockroaches. These darker strains are leavened when

juxtaposed with the high-heels, heraldic symbols, floating lips, and prancing poodles familiar from General Idea's lexicon.

Ecce Homo: The Drawings of General Idea is presented in partnership with Musée d'art moderne et contemporain Geneva (MAMCO) and will travel to MAMCO in 2023.

The exhibition is organized by Claire Gilman, Chief Curator, The Drawing Center, and Lionel Bovier, Director, MAMCO.

Publication

The exhibition is accompanied by *Ecce Homo: The Drawings of General Idea*, a 200-page artist's book published by JRP|Editions with The Drawing Center and MAMCO Geneva. Modeled on George Grosz's 1923 publication, the book includes full-scale reproductions of 122 drawings, some of which are in the exhibition and others of which are unique to the book. The publication is edited by Lionel Bovier and Claire Gilman, co-curators of the exhibition *Ecce Homo*, and features a text by Gilman, a conversation with AA Bronson, as well as an index of the drawings.

Credits

Major support for *Ecce Homo: The Drawings of General Idea* and its attending publication is provided by Mitchell-Innes & Nash and Michael Ringier, with additional support provided by Eleanor Cayre, Steve Ells, Esther Schipper, Mai 36 Galerie, Maureen Paley, the Consulate General of Canada in New York, the Council for Canadian American Relations, and Leo and Sandra DelZotto.

####