

## HoustonPress

# “Just Trying to Figure Out How to Draw a Circle” - Joseph Havel

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Eight drawings entitled *How to Draw a Circle* from the exhibit of the same name by Joseph Havel at Hiram Butler Gallery

*Courtesy of Hiram Butler Gallery*

Artists and poets often look to each other for inspiration; there is an energy to the abstract concepts found in each discipline that allows creativity to flourish. In the case of Joseph Havel, it was a chance encounter with Dean Young, 2014 Poet Laureate of Texas, that led to

the current exhibit **“How to Draw a Circle,”** on display now at Hiram Butler Gallery.

Havel had long been inspired by the written word, naming Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Ashbery and John Berryman among his favorites. During that meeting with Young, while waiting in the anteroom behind the Texas Legislature chamber for a ceremony recognizing Texas state artists, the pair discovered commonalities of thought. Three weeks later, while he was walking the campus of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s Glassell School of Art, where he has served as director since 1993, Havel ran into Young again and they decided to collaborate. It took a while to gel – at first it was more of a back-and-forth dialogue, with nothing overly special resulting – until Havel shared his new works, graphite and oil stick on paper, explaining that he was “just trying to figure out how to draw a circle.”

A dozen of those drawings, all with the same title, are edited down from a larger whole and arranged in a grid in the gallery. Havel’s process is to work on about six of them at a time, reiterating vocabularies from previous works, “taking bits of himself and putting them back into a hole,” or circle. Some of the compositions are light and airy, hollowed circles of gray marker or graphite, while others weigh heavy with the thick smears of gray oil stick. The absence of color and the frenetic nature of the compositions, interspersed with letter forms and smudges, allow the pieces to work as a collective whole, as well as standalone pieces with a specific, acute narrative.



Four drawings entitled *How to Draw a Circle* from the exhibit of the same name by Joseph Havel at Hiram Butler Gallery

*Courtesy of Hiram Butler Gallery*

Upon seeing a photograph of these experimental circles, the poet wrote a poem about a man walking his dog (with a moon in each eye), preoccupied with thoughts of this and that, rehashing the past to find peace in the present, and finally returning home. To reinforce the circular nature of the collaboration, Havel then produced a pair of books with circles cut from the pages, and reproducing the poem by cutting out and reassembling letters and words from books of John Ashbery's poems. One of these is on display in the main gallery; be sure to ask to see the second one when visiting.



Three bronzes entitled *How to Draw a Circle* from the exhibit of the same name by Joseph Havel at Hiram Butler Gallery

*Courtesy of Hiram Butler Gallery*

A fitting balance to the two-dimensional drawings, the exhibit also contains five bronze sculptures, incorporating remnants from earlier works. Looking closely, the viewer can see the textural detail of masculine and feminine clothing – lace edge, shirt buttons, Mexican embroidery – as well as an American flag. Pushed into moon shapes, with holes and craters, the sculptures also contain armholes and serendipitous instances where the Foundry's pour didn't completely fill in the bronze.

Also at Hiram Butler, "Women Rule," featuring work by female artists incorporating lines drawn or papers torn by rulers, is on display through August 29.

*"How to Draw a Circle" continues through September 22, at Hiram Butler Gallery, 4520 Blossom, open Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., 713-863-7097 or [hirambutler.com](http://hirambutler.com).*