I started writing arts criticism for newspapers when I was still in high school, and at the same time I sold caricatures to publications. After college, I had a drawing master who had been a student of Alice Neel, and we visited the artist in New York. She said every figure started with an ultramarine outline that she then sort of smudged into three dimensions, leaving “pentimenti,” second thoughts, still visible. I fell in love with the idea of letting a design flicker in and out of definition by smudging or erasing it.

Blue nudes on tracing paper, a material always abundant around printing presses, were my first post-Neel drawings. There was a constant flicker of conflict in the pages of mass media that was like the second thoughts Neel talked about. Tragedies came and went, leaving ghost memories in a medium that sold crises as entertainment. I started drawing in series, illustrating some American conflict—religious disputes, family tensions, the conquest of the West, urban decay—in bright, cheery color. Only animals seemed impervious to this sort of upbeat spin. And I came to identify with their mute independence.

-Dan Bischoff