



Detail from *Ground I*, 2014.  
Ink on paper, 46 x 46¼ inches  
(116.8 x 117.5 cm).

Since the late 1990s, Joan Linder has employed mark making to scribe a visual commentary on the power structures that surround us. As a nonnative Buffalonian, Linder came to the topic of her current project—toxic waste and environmental disaster sites in Western New York—through her own reconnaissance and pursuit of knowledge. In 2010, she visited part of the now-uninhabited Love Canal neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York, and was poised to draw the landscape she encountered there. Yet, with each stroke, Linder came to realize the potency of her subject. She therefore endeavored to develop a larger, more consequential body of work and delved deep into research: a massive undertaking that forms the heart of this exhibition. *Joan Linder: Operation Sunshine* presents meticulously hand-drawn replicas of archival documents and large-scale renderings of pervasive weeds, grass, dirt, and gravel. These are joined by a sequence of drawings in small, accordion-style notebooks that portray the current vestiges of cleanup sites and their surroundings: chain-link fences, power lines, row houses, and city streets. Taken together, these deftly rendered images faithfully record the passing of time, subtly calling into question the authenticity of information. With each incidental mark and imperfection, Linder's hand is evident. Her ardent observations create a poignant, collective memory that bears witness to the improbability and travesty of historical events.

**Holly E. Hughes**  
Godin-Spaulling Curator & Curator for the Collection



**Albright-Knox  
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**Museum Hours**  
Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm  
M&T FIRST FRIDAYS, 10 am–10 pm  
Closed Mondays and Independence,  
Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Days.

Edited by Emily Mangione, Editorial Assistant  
Designed by Ann Casady

All images courtesy of the artist.  
Photograph of *Hooker 102nd Street Book*, 2013–16,  
by Etienne Frossard.  
Photograph of *Ground I*, 2014, by Biff Henrich.

## Joan Linder: Operation Sunshine

July 9–October 30, 2016

This exhibition is organized by Godin-Spaulling Curator  
& Curator for the Collection Holly E. Hughes.

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their support of this project.

### About the Artist

Joan Linder is an Associate Professor in the Department  
of Art at the University at Buffalo. She has shown her work  
throughout the United States and in Brazil, Denmark,  
Germany, Israel, Japan, and South Korea. This is her first  
solo museum exhibition.

### Related Events

#### Live Drawing by Artist Joan Linder

Friday, August 5, 2016, 6–8 pm  
Part of M&T FIRST FRIDAYS @ THE GALLERY

#### Live Drawing by Artist Joan Linder

Friday, September 2, 2016, 6–8 pm  
Part of M&T FIRST FRIDAYS @ THE GALLERY

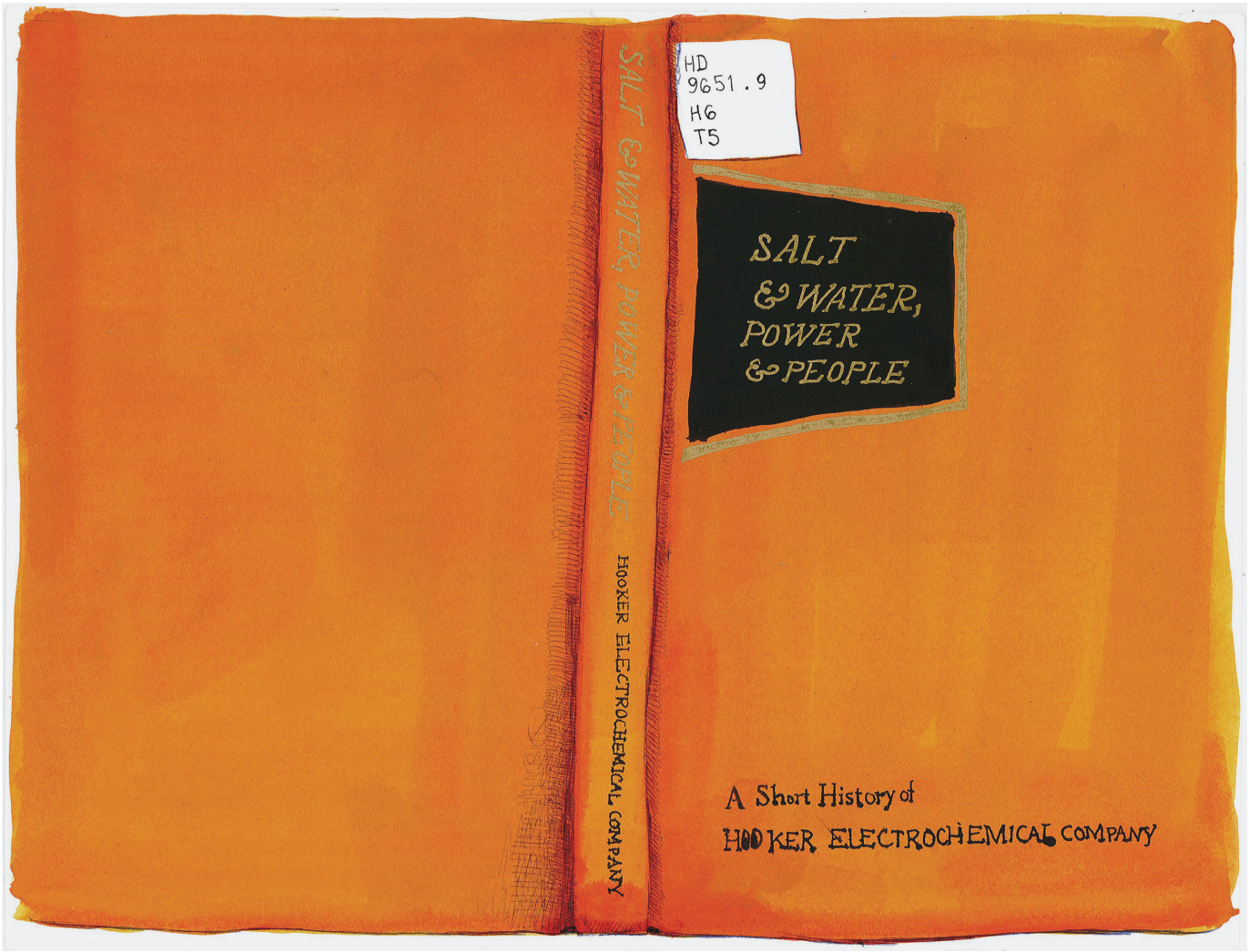
#### Artist Talk: Joan Linder

Friday, October 7, 2016, 6 pm  
Part of M&T FIRST FRIDAYS @ THE GALLERY

**Cover:** *Salt, Water, Power, People 1* from the series "Toxic Archives,"  
2013–16. Ink on paper, 9½ x 12½ inches (24.1 x 31.8 cm).

# Joan Linder: Operation Sunshine

July 9–October 30, 2016



**Albright-Knox**



**Holly E. Hughes:** You originally went to school for painting and sculpture. How did you end up at this mode of drawing?

**Joan Linder:** Drawing was fundamental in art school; I took life-drawing classes every morning. It has always been the foundation of my work, even when I was painting. At different points, drawing pushed to the fore in my work by circumstance. In 1998, I had surgery on my right shoulder, and my arm was in a sling all summer; I'm right-handed. I couldn't paint, and charcoal was too messy, so I started making strange ink drawings with my left hand. When my arm was better, I returned to painting. In 2000, I was on a residency in Berlin, and there was a woman there who made very large pencil drawings of Turkish rugs as airports or landscapes; those drawings really interested me. I thought, "Oh, it'd be fun to make some kind of landscape drawing." So while I was in Berlin, I worked on two pen-and-ink drawings of the view out my window and a fifteen-foot-tall drawing of the Fernsehturm. They looked much like the drawings I had done two years before but on a larger scale. I was thinking about the feminist implications around mark making and labor. The drawings were a little like sewing in terms of repetition.

When I got back to New York, I was pleased with those drawings. I was still painting, but I thought, "I have a lot of energy. I can do both." I'd been working on series of paintings of men in power. I was thinking about gender and power all the time. I wanted to figure out how to create a visual language that would simultaneously represent power while challenging and questioning its authority. The mark making and scale that I was using in the Berlin drawings felt like a good place to start.

**Holly:** Prior to your move to Buffalo in 2004, did you know about Love Canal or, at the very least, the prevalence of toxic waste sites throughout the region?

**Joan:** Not really. I was old enough to remember the words "Love Canal." I knew it was an environmental disaster. When I first came to Buffalo, I wanted to work with imagery that was iconic, that represented Buffalo and the region. My first thought was to draw Niagara Falls. When I visited Love Canal, I was struck by the thought that "this is the perfect subject for an antithetical, antiheroic, anti-monumental drawing of Niagara Falls." It's seminal. It's hidden. It's land. It's all



Block Club from the series "Toxic Archives," 2013–16. Ink on paper, 12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 22.9 cm).

of these things that I'm interested in. Love Canal is a story about families and about a housewife. It's about power—literally. Love Canal wouldn't have happened if we didn't have water-power, so it's about political power, corporate power, greed, power of the press, and the ability of governments and bureaucracies to bury information.

I went up to Love Canal to draw the landscape and thought that was amazing. Then I started talking to people and gathering information about other waste sites in the area: LOOW [Lake Ontario Ordnance Works], Niagara Falls Storage Site, CECOS, and Hooker (Hyde Park), to name a few. Suddenly, Love Canal was the tip of the iceberg.

I had heard that there was a Love Canal archive at the University at Buffalo. When I went there, I found boxes and boxes and boxes of folders; it seemed endless. I could only go through two boxes of folders in a day. I was overwhelmed at the quantity of government reports. I started to become interested in the design of report covers, how much information just the cover shows.

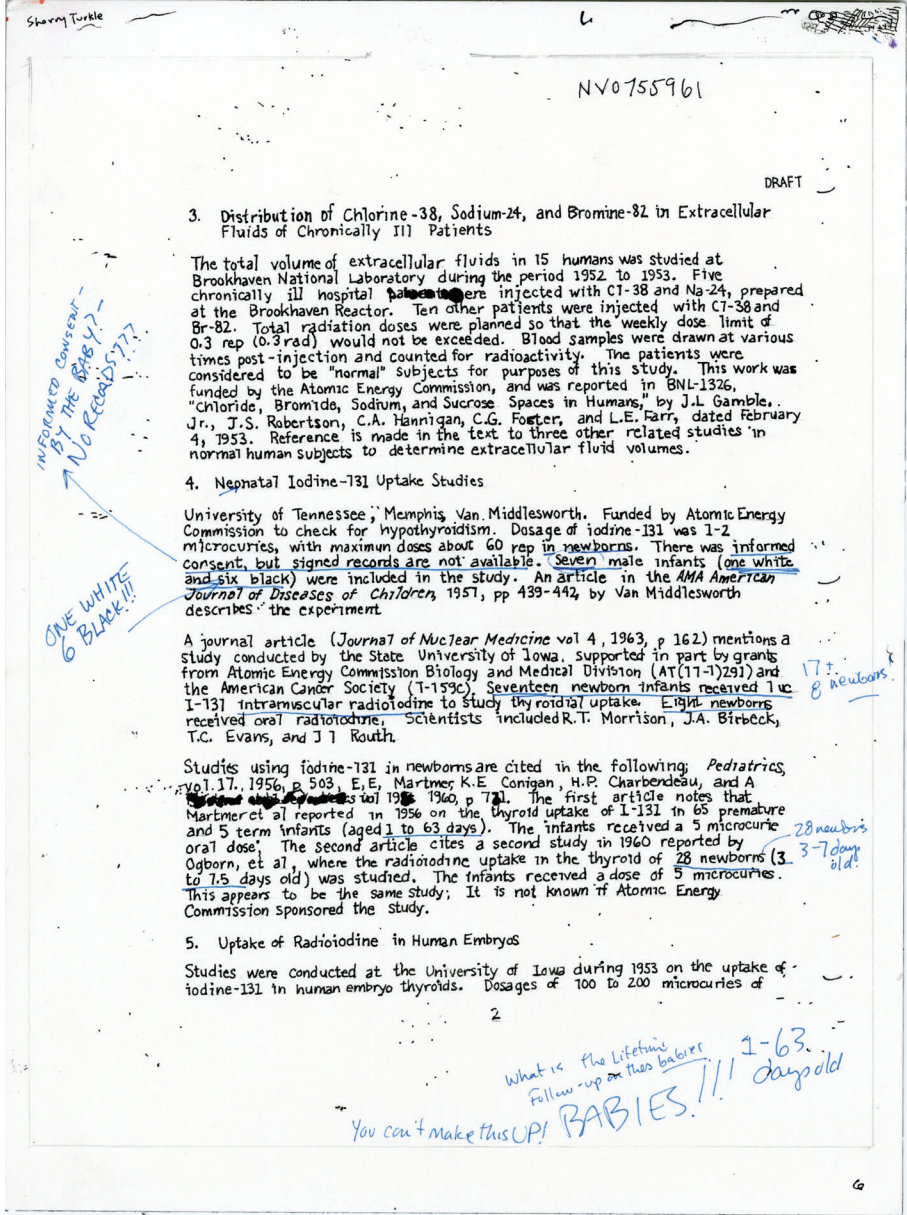
**Holly:** Of all the archival materials you have encountered through this project, which documents have shocked you the most in terms of content?

**Joan:** By far, the most shocking thing for me was learning about Niagara Falls Storage Site and LOOW. Learning that not only were we so deeply involved in the Manhattan Project and processing uranium here, but that there was radiation waste buried here, leftover from its use in human experiments. Then I began delving into documents from the University of Rochester's experiments at Strong Memorial Hospital, where they injected people with hexavalent uranium.

**Holly:** You're an artist. You're a researcher. Do you see your role in this project as part activist, too?

**Joan:** Insofar as I am telling a story that people would like to forget or bury.

The other big tie-in for me, especially with the human radiation experiments, is that my father and his parents are Holocaust survivors. In 2002, I traveled with my father to Eastern Europe, where we found the mass graves in which my family is buried. I was going to make landscape paintings of the overgrown fields and wildflowers: the mass, unmarked Jewish graves that hold my relatives. I took the trip, but I never made the paintings. I just couldn't do it. It was too personal.



Consolidated List of Human Radiation Experiments (DOE) p2 from the series "Toxic Archives," 2013–16. Ink on paper, 12 x 9 inches (30.5 x 22.9 cm).

There are terrifying parallels. With Love Canal and the other toxic sites here, the subject is easier for me to deal with. Even though I live here, I have a level of detachment because I'm not from here. To me, both projects participate in larger questions about the banality of evil and modern atrocities. They investigate forgotten histories of unmarked sites where physical remnants remain buried in land that people presently live on or near.

**Holly:** It sounds like you are striving to resolve the personal through this project as well, like you have come to this point of feeling that you somehow are accomplishing what you set out to do many years ago.

This makes me think about the drawings of the chain-link fence. I'd be curious to hear about the impetus behind these works in particular, because the fence was your first subject and part of the genesis of this project.

**Joan:** With the fence, I was trying to figure out how to make a life-size drawing of a toxic site; I wanted to convey the sense of scale. I sit and I look, and that's my way of bearing witness. I made a handful of smaller sketches at different waste sites. I

started them in accordion-fold notebooks. As the sketches evolved, I started to make individual drawings that are each a whole notebook long and stopped thinking of them as sketches. One of these drawings was of the fence at Hooker 102nd Street. The notebook held less than one-sixth of the fence. It felt unfinished. Then I realized if I drew the entire stretch of fence running along Buffalo Avenue, the drawing would be over fifty feet long. The drawing functions as a scale model, yet it is so big that it requires the viewer to walk to see it all. The drawing begins to convey the sense of scale, the enormity of these waste sites.

At this point, one of the things that I wanted my landscape drawings to have was a compressed element of time. I like that in the fence work you can see how the drawing evolves. It's really simple in the beginning. Then it indicates that the season has changed. It gets less sparse, then really dense. It records something, but not in the way photography records it. It's a much slower and kind of quirkier way.

I look, and I look, and I draw.

Installation view of Hooker 102nd Street Book, 2013–16. Ink on six Moleskine notebooks, 5½ x 105 inches (14 x 266.7 cm); 5½ x 3½ inches (14 x 8.9 cm) each, closed.

