A dominant regional presence since the 1980s, James Drake, now living in Santa Fe, is admired in Europe and the U.S. for his forthright, personal style and use of a wide range of media, including sculpture, photography, video, and drawing. His recent exhibition in Dallas, “Border of Desire,” was characterized by the affective authenticity of an expressive hand and the immense power of a serious adult mind.

Also included in Robert Storr’s 2007 Venice Biennale, Tongue-Cut Sparrows (Inside Outside) played on two small monitors in the gallery. The black-and-white video depicts women standing outside a jail in El Paso (where Drake grew up) who communicate with prisoners on the inside using their hands and arms. At Drake’s request, they “signed” passages from Shakespeare, Dante, Jimmy Santiago Baca and other poetic texts, choosing, according to the artist, “certain passages ... that exemplified their love and loss and desperate need to communicate.”

Revealing the kind of skilled rendering and expressive hand rarely found in art today, “Border of Desire” is primarily a drawing show. Drake studied with classically trained draftsman (and pioneer Los Angeles abstractionist) Lorser Feitelson at Art Center in the 1960s, before and after his service in Vietnam. Drawing’s capacity to convey emotion is especially evident in the most haunting work in the show, Exit Juarez (2007), based on a photograph of a tattooed ex-convict. Like other drawings here, this one is unframed and draped loosely on the wall. The support is a tattered quilt of torn sheets of previously used white and cream papers, pockmarked with charcoal smears, black tape, paperclips, and rubber bands, providing a sense of spontaneous process rather than studied compo-