

Henry

VIEWPOINTS: *These Are Their Stories* by Samantha Scherer

December 7, 2019 – April 12, 2020

Viewpoints is a rotating series that highlights works from the Henry's collection, paired with commentary and insights from University of Washington faculty. By offering diverse perspectives across academic fields, the series encourages open inquiry and presents diverse ways of seeing and interpreting the art on view. This iteration of the series features thirty-five drawings from Samantha Scherer's project [*These Are Their Stories*](#).

The 2019-20 *Viewpoints* series is supported with a generous gift from T. William and Beatrice Booth.



Samantha Scherer, *06-117*, 2009-10. Watercolor on stained paper. Henry Art Gallery, purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, 2016.12.19, © Samantha Scherer.

Samantha Scherer (U.S., born 1970)

Selection of works from *These Are Their Stories*, 2007-ongoing

Watercolor on stained paper

Henry Art Gallery, purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, 2016.12.1-2016.12.35

Across her work artist Samantha Scherer explores themes of loss and conflict, and the human response to devastating events and circumstances. *These Are Their Stories* is an ongoing series of drawings depicting victims from *Law & Order*, the legendary police procedural and legal drama that premiered in 1990 and ran for twenty seasons. One of the longest running scripted series in U.S. television history, the show has been an important cultural touchstone for decades, profoundly influencing popular interpretations of the justice system and court process. Virtually addicted to crime dramas on television, as she states, Scherer makes the *These Are Their Stories* drawings to examine her personal as well as the larger cultural fascination with vulnerability and loss, and the role of media in feeding this fascination.

"These are their stories" is a quote from the opening monologue of each *Law & Order* episode which celebrates the activity of detectives and other members of the prosecution. Scherer focuses instead on the victims in the narrative. Rendered from video stills of the post-crime scene, her drawings remove extraneous background information and create a visual accounting of life lost. In the title of each drawing, the first number refers to the season, the second to the episode, and the third (when present) to the victim, if there is more than one per episode. Rather than progressing with her drawings episode by episode, Scherer skips throughout the 456 episodes that comprise the series, a process that reflects the way viewers encounter the syndicated show today--non-sequentially via reruns across multiple channels.

FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS

Framing Death

Susan Harewood

Associate Professor, School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, UW Bothell

What are the frames through which we might examine our relationship towards violent death? Looking at Samantha Scherer's *These Are Their Stories* I am struck by the 1:1 ratio framing of the faces of crime scene death. Each week, *Law & Order* simulated death in crime scenes carefully staged to offer a frisson of solvable disorder. Initially, *Law & Order* death scenes were framed by the temporality of the weekly broadcast schedule and the 4:3 ratio of the television screen. More recently, however, these scenes have spilled out of these borders. Syndication, digitization, and mimicry of the crime story formula have brought us to a point where sometimes it feels as if we are never far away from ever more beautifully rendered crime scenes with their ostensibly dedicated police characters and artfully posed corpses. By contrast, the framing of Scherer's watercolors cuts away the noise of pacing police to focus our attention on the faces of those actors employed to repose into the role of anonymous victim. Scherer invites us to contemplate each image as we would any portrait. And yet, the sheer number of images Scherer has created also prompts us to reflect on our pleasure in violent death as entertainment.

Are These Their Stories or Ours?

Cheryl R. Kaiser

Professor and Chair, Department of Psychology

The world is not just. Good people suffer misfortune, including random violence and homicide. Despite this reality, humans are motivated to perceive the world as just; a place where people get what they deserve and deserve what they get. Psychologist Melvin Lerner dubbed this motivation the "Just World Fallacy." The Just World Fallacy can lead us to blame innocent victims for their suffering, especially when we cannot fix the injustice. If victims are to blame for misfortune, then we can feel safer about our own fate.

In *These Are Their Stories*, Samantha Scherer seizes upon this human preoccupation with maintaining justice by inviting us to consider the perspectives of crime scene victims. Through her intimate depictions of these victims, she obliges us to allocate disproportionate attention toward the victims, inviting us to contemplate how and why they perished. Her focus on the victims' faces draws us deeper into their stories. Yet, her avoidance of color and her decision to identify these drawings with depersonalized episode numbers, add psychological distance from the victims, increasing our ability to blame them for their fate and maintain our own sense of safety. Are these their stories or our stories?

Dearly Departed

Dan Paz

Lecturer, Comparative History of Ideas and School of Art + Art History + Design

Dearly Departed,

Imagine we are side by side and I move closer to see small renderings of you in watercolor, set in white. Three major entanglements surround you in this work: the televisual, materiality, and touch.

When reframing a depiction of death, what are our obligations when we consign human elements to that of form? The syndicated program, *Law & Order* broadcasts the tough-on-crime political climate of the 1980—1990s echoed in this work and is one example of the historical, racialized devaluing of your subjectivity. But does the material gesture here allow for your death to slow and be taken away from the frames that precede it?

Through the desire to touch and the desire of touch, these portraits, your portrait, these pools of flesh and blood, take up intimacy and the leveled accumulations of violence. Do stills pulled from thirty frames per second transform, or soften the abjection?

What are the ways that we can intervene in a timeless exertion of power over lives and the persistence of loss, notwithstanding the disproportionate loss of black and brown lives? *These Are Their Stories* makes the case for one such occasion, and I move closer to you.

un beso, dan

Too gruesome?

Gail Stygall

Professor, Department of English

Would disturbing color photographs of dead crime victims ever actually make it to a criminal jury? Possibly not. A good defense attorney would argue that photographs are too gruesome or emotionally upsetting for jurors to see. At worst, if admitted and shown to the jury, a judge would likely give a jury instruction indicating that a juror's emotional response should be suppressed and replaced by cool rationality. Rationality in the law is foundational.

Samantha Scherer's watercolors of *Law & Order* crime scenes convey coolness in black, white, and grey tones while focusing on the victims' bodies, their faces, and their wounds. Yet the cool renditions of the victims are in their own way just as disturbing as full color photographs might be. A face dotted with blood spatters precisely delineated, the pathways of blood from the mouth, the nose, the ear, the sightless staring open eyes, the attempts to cover wounds, and evidence of poverty or wealth—all make for deeply emotional viewing.

Henry Art Gallery Checklist with Images

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
01-004. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size; 6 x 6 in. (15.2 x 15.2 cm) mount
board size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.1



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
04-085. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.10



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
05-098. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.11



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
05-102-3. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.12

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-112. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size; 5 3/4 x 5 3/4 in. (14.6 x 14.6 cm)
mount board size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.13



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-113. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.14



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-114. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.15



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-115-1. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.16



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-115-3. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.17

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-116-01. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.18



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-117. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size; 6 x 6 in. (15.2 x 15.2 cm) mount
board size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.19



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
01-007-2. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.2



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
06-123. 2009 - 2010
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image size; 6 x 6 in. (15.2 x 15.2 cm) mount board size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.20



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-135. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.21

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-139-1. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image size; 6 x 6 in. (15.2 x 15.2 cm) mount board size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.22



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-139-2. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.23



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-141. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.24



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-146. 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.25



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-152-1. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.26

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-152-2. 2011 - 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.27



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
07-153-2. 2011
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size; 6 3/4 x 6 3/4 x 3/4 in. (17.1 x 17.1 x 1.9 cm) frame size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.28



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
08-03-01. 2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.29



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
01-008. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 7/16 in. (6.2 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.3



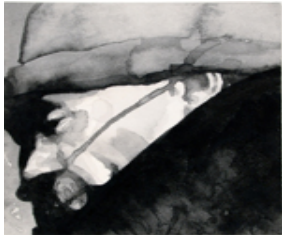
Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
08-162. 2011-2012
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.30

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
14-307. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper

Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.31



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
14-313. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.32



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
14-315. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 1/2 in. (6.2 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.33



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
14-317. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/8 x 2 7/8 in. (7.3 x 7.3 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.34



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
14-325. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 7/16 in. (6.2 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.35

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
01-020-1. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 7/16 in. (6.2 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.4



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
03-049. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 7/16 in. (6.2 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.5



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
03-050-2. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 7/16 x 2 7/16 in. (6.2 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.6

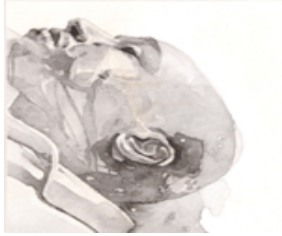


Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
03-051. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 7/16 in. (6.4 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.7



Scherer, Samantha
U.S. (1970 -)
03-061. 2007 - 2008
Watercolor on stained paper
2 1/2 x 2 7/16 in. (6.4 x 6.2 cm) image and sheet size
Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.8

Viewpoints: Scherer



Scherer, Samantha

U.S. (1970 -)

04-084. 2008

Watercolor on stained paper

2 1/2 x 2 1/2 in. (6.4 x 6.4 cm) image and sheet size

Henry Art Gallery, Purchased with funds from the Ambrose M. and Viola H. Patterson
Endowment Fund, FA 2016.12.9