

Artists redefine 'drawing' in Princeton arts center exhibition

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By Janet Purcell/For The Times of Trenton

If someone asked you the question “What is a drawing?,” how would you answer?

Chances are you would say it’s about the laying down of marks on paper that would represent, in realism or abstraction, an object or a concept, a landscape or a person. Then you might take it a little further and talk about the materials used or the size or shape of the finished product.

But spend time with the current exhibit, “Drawing Beyond,” at the Arts Council of Princeton, and chances are you’ll have a far different answer the next time someone asks you that question. This exhibit of contemporary drawings celebrates the emergence of that genre into our present-day realm of new materials and technologies. It pushes through boundaries and offers new ways of seeing and understanding.

Guest-curated by Marsha Levin-Rojer, who holds a degree in mathematics from Temple University and who received formal training as a certificate student at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the exhibition comprises works by nine contemporary artists. When you enter the gallery and see an interactive installation, a streaming video from a stereopticon projector, that question, “What is a drawing?” may come immediately to mind. However, in her catalog statement, Levin-Rojer states clearly, “Regardless of the materials employed or process used, all of the artists in this exhibition see their work as ‘drawing’.”

Centered on the gallery floor is Sara Schneckloth’s “Excavation,” an interactive table in which charcoal on paper, acetate and plastic ball bearings make up the “image” that forms intricate shapes and patterns. Her monumental wall hanging “Confluence 1,” done with white china marker on black photo backdrop paper and measuring 8 by almost 9 feet, dramatically pushes the boundaries of scale.

Maurice Galimidi also uses scale to his advantage. His “Albertino,” a life-size figure abstraction, fills the papers he had to add to complete the work. In “Resolute,” using charcoal, he shows just the torso of a female whose arms and strong hands protectively cross ample breasts. There’s tension in this drawing between the figure’s fiercely resolute stance and Galimidi’s free charcoal strokes.

Scale works in the opposite direction for Caroline Lather-Stiefel’s “Untitled” space drawing that measures only 8 by 9.5 inches. In this, narrow and jagged gray sticklike shapes seem to be dumped and scattered over swirling and jagged orange shapes. Caroline Burton’s drawings bring into sharp detail the grid Lather-Stiefel’s orange shapes begin to suggest. Using silver ink and acrylic on black paper, Burton creates

an open-ended cage in “Untitled (rabbit cage 4)”. “Untitled (14)” is more dense and gauze-like but it, too, offers a suggested entrance.

You don’t enter Sun K. Kwak’s drawing, “Dual Force.” Instead the swirling lines she creates using white masking tape draw your eyes and your imagination into an elegant dance across a black field. Also on display is a photograph of her “Untying Space” drawing for the Leeum Museum in Seoul, South Korea.

Eve Aschheim and Theresa Chong both work on both sides of their support media. Aschheim works with graphite, ink and gesso on translucent Mylar or drafting film. As curator Levin-Rojer explains in her essay, Aschheim creates photograms “by placing a select few of the Mylar drawings directly onto photographic paper and exposing it to light. These photograms become reversals on the black, gray, and white marks of the original, blurring the boundaries between photography and drawing.” Aschheim’s 14-by-11 inch photogram, “Untitled,” is an example of this technique.

Chong’s “Sesi” is what Levin-Rojer appropriately refers to as a “snowscape.” Working with graphite on semi-transparent rice paper, Chong hand-drew tiny pixel-like squares on both sides of the paper. Also on display is her intriguing “4’33” (for John Cage),” a drawing transformed into a video still.

Patti Jordan’s “Dis-Splay (invert 011)” is a digital carbon print of a drawing. The form is organic with some semi-opaque areas seeming to flow gracefully into translucent shapes. Her “Back-Slider (Denticula 005)” done with ink and graphite on paper, is another organic shape that brings to mind a tall pod with an area ripped open showing the darkness inside but also the beauty on the reverse side of its skin.

South African artist William Kentridge’s works in this exhibit push the definition of drawing even further. On display is his “Scribe 1,” Photogravure and drypoint, showing a man, drawing book open on his lap, looking at a large female nude seated by his side. Also on display is his “Larder 2007 from the Stereopticon Suite” Photogravure which Levin-Rojer says is “an example of his interest in the relationship between drawing and visual perception.”

“Marsha Levin-Rojer did an outstanding job of assembling works that show the range and depth of contemporary drawing while maintaining an aesthetic profusion. It’s a beautiful show, aesthetically beautiful and cohesive,” says the Princeton Arts Council’s executive director, Jeff Nathanson.

“It pushes the envelope but there is an aesthetic beauty that is quiet and quite seductive. The bit of color that does come in is subtle and creates an interesting balance. There’s a tonal range that many feel whole. People love being in this gallery during this show.”