

The Content Isn't New, But the Processes Are

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

LARCHMONT

THE exhibition of abstract drawings at Kenise Barnes Fine Art here is a satisfying "new wine in old bottles" kind of show. The originality isn't in the style or even the content, rather what's innovative is the process used to achieve the work. If Ms. Barnes didn't expressly intend "Re: Drawing" to be a show of eight artists who work with unusual mediums, that's what she has achieved.

There is no feeling of avant-garde about the work. In many ways it emphasizes tradition so that the departures from what is commonplace are all the more marked. In some quarters a drawing has been defined as "any unique work on paper," and while many in the contemporary art world have ventured well beyond paper — substituting their own skin, for instance — almost everything here is on paper and in a frame. The exception is a couple of artists who work on vellum, or parchment.

Andra Samelson's two large ink drawings each contain a novel half-organic, half-geometric shape. But the ink Ms. Samelson uses isn't a special kind for artists. Rather she uses Bic pens with blue ink. This is obvious in the cross-hatching, which gives a sense of volume to the shapes and helps make them ingraining; any viewer can identify with the process. Most of the pieces in the exhibition are untitled, or have a general series name with numbers added for individual works. Ms. Samelson causes a bit of delight when a viewer notices that her contributions are titled "Bix #2" and "Bix #18." The early, incoherent-sounding jazz trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke is brought to mind by this play on the name of her trusty implement.

On the surface Mark Steinman's drawings are as traditional as they come, for

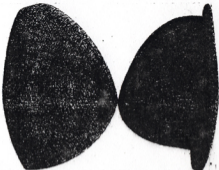
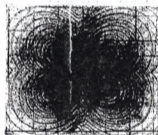
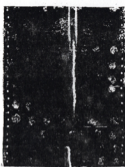
they are graphite on paper. But Mr. Steinman's intention is to disrupt that surface by drawing in what might be called a negative way. What makes his lines and delineates his forms is not a pencil but an eraser. His two drawings show his versatility with this ghostly medium. One, of horizontal lines, seems to give the impression of moving fast or conveying up skill marks. The other is stable. The grid of lines made by the eraser looks rather majestic, like the facade of a glass-and-steel office building.

Ms. Barnes allows that another artist, Lily Prince, could potentially injure her little finger the way computer users injure their wrists. That's because Ms. Prince's tool is her finger — dipped in pastel and tapped down over and over on a sheet of paper. The arrays of dancing dots achieved this way also have depth, depending on how much pastel is on that finger and how heavily she brings it down. She can o-have a range of effects, especially busy a it is the drawing in which the dots stream diagonally from the upper left corner. This stream seems to be about abundance.

The title is need of explanation is the general title for Mary Judge's works (she has 15 pieces of varying sizes in the exhibition). "Spolvero" refers to the transfer technique used to make marals during the Renaissance. A drawing is traced on transparent paper, perforated and then dusted or "pounced" with crushed charcoal.

Ms. Judge adapts this venerable technique to small abstract drawings, using a dressmaker's wheel to make the perforations. Her imagery is essentially concentric, rippling shapes that seem to spread out toward the viewer. Perhaps it is by association with the old masters, but Ms. Judge's use of "spolvero" seems to add gravity to her simple work.

Cristina Michael is an exception here. Everything on exhibit by each artist is es-



"Bix #2," above, by Andra Samelson, "Untitled," top left, by Lily Prince, and "Spolvero Drawing," by Mary Judge. All are works in "Re: Drawing," a show of eight artists who work with unusual mediums, at the Kenise Barnes Gallery in Larchmont.

entially alike, as if to reveal mastery of a technique. Mr. Michael, on the other hand, shows two drawings coming from entirely different places. "Rhapsody" is redolent black ink on paper, but instead of using ink to delineate forms, he employs a variety of strokes to achieve a dense, churning composi-

tion. Another of his drawings, "Pull," uses a variety of mediums, including shellac and gesso, which are usually associated with making ambitious paintings.

Karen Margolis and Amy Wickersham are the two artists who work on vellum. Ms. Margolis exploits vellum's transparency

This is effectively illustrated by two ink drawings displayed in the window to allow light to pass through. Ms. Margolis' imagery is a web or net of lines. She draws these on two sheets of vellum that she tapes together. The result, seen differently from either side of the window, is a mix of bold and faint lines that provides the illusion of density. Ms. Wickersham's use of charcoal shuts out direct light but her pieces gain lustre and a sense of great durability by having been coated or sealed with resin.

Jacob J. Hassard's main mediums are not tangible, but the concepts of immensity and time. Ms. Barnes says that the minuscule letters in "Grid" are letters of the Hebrew alphabet, although to the viewer's naked eye they have some of the flourish of John Hancock's signature. Mr. El Hanaou works with his naked eye, one might have expected a magnifying glass.

His rhythm, Ms. Barnes says, is to alter nearly work size minutes and rest six minutes. There is some mystical component here, and it's the most subtle medium in a show rich in subtleties.

"Re: Drawing" is at Kenise Barnes Gallery in Larchmont through Feb. 17. Information: (914) 834-8877.

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