

The Attenders: Creates a hairy situation at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art - Review

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Sharon Louden's sculptural installation piece, *The Attenders*, has created a "hairy situation" at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art. Having hung more than 15,000 bundled strands of black and gray monofilament fiber from the ceiling of the gallery, Louden invites the viewer to stroll through the exhibit of what may look like something that it is not.

The Attenders simply put is a test of personification. Sharon Louden gives an inanimate object, the monofilament, (better known as fishing line) a lifelike or "beinglike" quality. As the viewer enters the gallery space it is certain that the hanging bundles, in their massive quantity, will conjure up images of gray and black strands of hair. Walking through the bundles and allowing them to graze over the body one will sense that this is not hair at all. This misconception allows the viewer to feel as if the "lifelike" objects are "passing through" the gallery at the same time and space as they are. This intentional visual and spatial field of relationships between artist, material, viewer, and museum space is best noted when Louden states " My Work is about giving character to individual gestures through the illusion of movement, placement, and direction of marks. I consider these forms "creatures" with whom I have an ongoing dialogue. ...I am interested in placing these figures within a frame or a specific space and having them come alive as individuals, humorous, elegant entities unto themselves." (Tamarind Institute brochure, New Editions: David Bates, Sharon Louden, Wes Mills, Juan Sanchez, April 1999, a division of the College of the Fine Arts of the University of New Mexico)

The Attenders or "Creatures" Louden personifies are representative of nature. Hung in abundance by fishing wire, the bundles consume the gallery space with their chaotic arrangement. Some of the "Creatures" float in groups or what could be perceived as packs while others float alone. Some are curled and frazzled as if to say they were under some sort of stress, while others are straight and neatly groomed. One could even say that the colors used: gray, black, and silver represent the age of each.

Perhaps the most significant element of the shows representation of nature is the fact that the show will never be duplicated. Once the "beings" are taken down they will never be fashioned in the same way. This is not to be interpreted as the end of the life of the bundles. It is Louden's belief that the material has a "life" before it becomes part of a sculpture, as much as it does after it has become the sculpture.

A truly engaging show, the interactive element will appeal to an audience of all ages. While it is Louden's intention to allow the audience to touch the bundles of monofilament she asks that they do so in a gentle manner as not to tamper with their flowing nature. The Attenders will be on display at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art through May 25th. Admission is free.

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