

East Tennessee Regional Update

Contemporary definitions of drawing are increasingly expansive, and the large and comprehensive look at the discipline as a primary media that was held at both University of Tennessee/Knoxville art galleries was richly layered. Curated by Creighton Michael, a 1971 graduate of the department and presently a visiting professor of drawing at Hunter College in New York City, the exhibition focused on the very diverse work of fifteen artists who are pushing the boundaries of drawing.

William Pittman Andrews, William Anastasi, Caroline Burton, Elisa D'Arrigo, Mary Reid Kelley, Sharon Louden, Jennifer Macdonald, Peter Mollenkof, Darcy Brennan Poor, Bill Richards, Beatrice Riese, Hilda Shen, Drew Shiflett, Stephen Talasnik, and Sam Vernon utilized media ranging from body etchings, shredded paper, rubber tubing, and video, along with more traditional materials.

Poor's large scale charcoal, graphite, ink and intaglio drawings, and prints inhabited a ghost world of unseen lives where all that remains are the shadows of what has been. The artist referred to them as reliquaries, which was immediately evident. Residential staples such as chairs and old fashioned radiators appeared in the middle of the paper, frozen in memory, but with no context surrounding it: just the white halo of paper. The drawing was meticulous, though smudged in a way that suggested passage of time and the unseen touch of unknown people. Her handling of figurative work was even more ethereal. A series of intaglio prints were produced by the friction and movement of her sleeping body in direct contact with the plates over a period of time. What eventually was transferred onto the tiled paper sheets from the plates were images reminiscent of the Shroud of Turin.

William Pittman Andrews sought to replicate movements found in science and human physiology. Being both an artist and the Director of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in New Orleans, Andrews finds himself drawing when he should be sleeping. How does insomnia and fatigue affect random hand motion? What is the directional pattern a moth makes as it bangs against a window? The drawings were scrawled and jerked, and though outwardly chaotic, still preserved a pattern and rhythm that formed a narrative of disquiet.

In the same state of exploration, William Anastasi produced work informed by his daily movements. How does one's hand move across a surface while walking or riding the subway? Actually looking at the paper while working is counter-productive in his process. He will close his eyes or keep the paper inside a pocket. What matters is the accidental movement. Often drawn in multiple colors of ink, the energy of the mark-making becomes almost three dimensional as the two colors collide.

The wall and floor sculptures of Drew Shiflett heavily employed the methodology of drawing by the manipulation of her materials. Handmade paper, cheesecloth, Styrofoam, and polyester stuffing were ripped into fringes or woven into patterned weavings. Mainly monochromatic, the only contrasts were the lines formed by rips and edges. When finally involving conventional drawing material, the markings remained linear and repetitive, reinforcing the language of the primary materials.

Two of the representational artists in the exhibition, Bill Richards and Stephen Talasnik, were anything but predictable. Richards did clean, obsessive, graphite drawings of segments of turf: leaves, flowers, and vines intertwined in smooth, flawless patterns. As hyper-real as they appeared, though, on close inspection they seemed artificial. Botanical details were rarely there. Since his work employed almost pure volume drawing, anything defined by line simply must not exist and was not shown. Talasnik, on the other hand, heavily employed line. His subjects were architectural or sculptural on paper, and when he produced sculptures, they were made with thin, linear materials and appeared as if they sprang forth out of an AutoCAD rendering. The drawings were also very strongly defined by technical drafting. The forms defined were close to being what might be a machine, a man-made organism, or a scientific drawing. The heavily distressed surfaces in some made them feel as if they were ripped out of a Da Vinci notebook or some obscure Victorian journal.

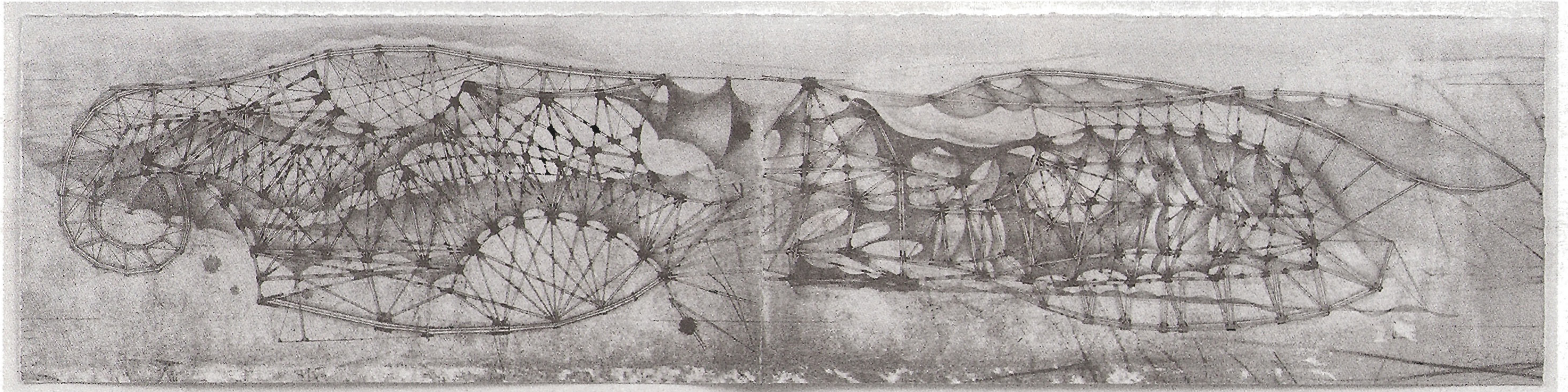
Video and animation are often missing in drawing exhibits, but was prominent in *Pencil Pushed*. Jennifer Macdonald's animation techniques were both analog and digital. She hand drew multi-sequence drawings and digitally tied them together. In *Untitled, 2011-2012*, she created 36 acrylics on Mylar wash drawings of a reclining woman's head that were framed and mounted in tiled sequence on the wall behind the pedestal mounted video. The motion of the video construction in front of the elegant original drawings was more than an educational illustration of her process; it was total graphic indulgence.

Mary Reid Kelley took an altogether different approach to video. In *You Make Me Iliad*, an allegory of women's roles in World War I, she employed both herself and family members to play out her narratives. The monochromatic costuming she created along with black and white body paint deconstructed their three dimensional presence into bizarrely cartoonish imagery. Her twisted historical narratives were spoken in rhymes and puns, reinforced with occasional jumbled screen text.

Though Sharon Louden also contributed video for the exhibit, her sculptural piece *Cathedras*, made of rubber tubing glued to a white and red metal folding chair was the standout. The twisted and wrapped tubing fell over and around the chair, and then spilled onto the floor, creating lines that twisted like a swarm of black eels.

There is no doubt that drawing as a medium is finally considered a force unto itself, but it should never be overlooked that throughout history it has been considered the most direct and personal medium: the primary connection to the artist's mind. This exhibition demonstrated that even after it has been escalated to new dimensions, drawing remains intimate.

Denise Stewart-Sanabria is a Knoxville based artist and writer.



Stephen Talasnik, *Folded Structure*, 2008, 8" x 36", pencil. Courtesy of the artist.



Bill Richards, *Hudson River Park #9*, 2009, 16.5" x 19.75", graphite on paper. Courtesy of the artist.



Mary Reid Kelley, still from *You Make Me Iliad*, 2010, 7:22 minute run time, high definition video. Courtesy of Fredericks & Freiser.