

ARTS & CULTURE

Open Studio Press tries new 'Line' of work

Visual Arts/ by Mary Sherman
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The Open Studio Press in the South End departs from its usual fare of selections from its regional competitions with "The Fall Line: Intuition and Necessity in Contemporary Abstract Drawing," a show of contemporary drawings curated by gallery owner Steven Zevitas. Here the common line - that most rudimentary and versatile of marks - expresses the inexpressible.



Covering Beacon Hill to Capitol Hill, the Herald's tradition of fearless news coverage consistently gives readers the story behind the story.

With 33 works by 11 young artists, the show favors depth over range. It is not meant to be seen as an exhaustive survey of abstract drawings; rather, the aim is to focus on a particular type of drawing. Though the featured artists share a common concern with surface, touch and nuance, Zevitas writes, "... each has developed a highly personal language of abstract form."

Complementing these works is a small selection of impressive drawings by some of America's most consistently interesting artists: Sol LeWitt, Richard Tuttle and Brice Marden.

The show's title takes its inspiration from the term "fall line," defined as the natural line an object will take when traveling down an incline, as dictated by slope and gravity.

In these pieces, there is little suggestion of an imposed system or doctrine at work. Instead, there is a sense that the drawings have grown out of a keen and focused sensitivity, awake to every nuance of their making - no matter if the marks are as obsessively repeated as in Jacob El Hanani's drawing "Nof," filled to the brim with ellipses, or as delicate as Bronlyn Jones' lines and halting, rectangular boundaries.

In the largest drawing in the show (it's more than 10 feet long), Laurie Reid narrows her expressive use of watercolor to a few essentials: the color blue regularly splashed out in dotted lines across a huge sheet to create a spare image of decided power and intensity. It is a bit of a shock to see something so light and elegantly simple pack such a huge wallop.

Equally graceful, but considerably quieter and smaller, are Theresa Chong's white, cursivelike marks aligned in rows atop thin, gray, double-layered papers, setting up an extraordinary repartee between the two pages. Creating a more tense and overt balance, Sharon Loudon tightly calibrates her use of shiny painted marks, which float freely but are in a highly charged dialogue with one another and their slick prepared paper ground.

Denser in surface, Mark Sheinkman's loopy, biomorphic lines twist and turn on themselves, across a background of ghostly traces of similar marks, like the wild trails of a crazed insect. The difference is Sheinkman's trails are stunning in their narrow range of grays and blacks, locked together in a dance of lyrical ecstasy.

Richer in color but equally memorable are Suzan Frecon's arching lines that create a dynamic rhythm, rendered in deep jewel tones reminiscent of Paul Klee's remarkable use of muted hues. More systematic are James Siena's mazelike drawings, Eve Aschheim's complex reiterations and John Morris' set of drawings, "Untitled (Drawing for the Austrian School)." In one of these, shapes conjure the idea of raindrops. This work, like Morris' others, is made of repeated elements that in turn create a design of immediately pleasurable impact.

Together the works create a handsome show - one that suggests the gallery's new effort to curate exhibits, apart from those drawn from the regional competitions, is a risk well worth taking.

"The Fall Line: Intuition and Necessity in Contemporary Abstract Drawing," at the Open Studio Press, 450 Harrison Ave., No. 304, through Jan. 25.