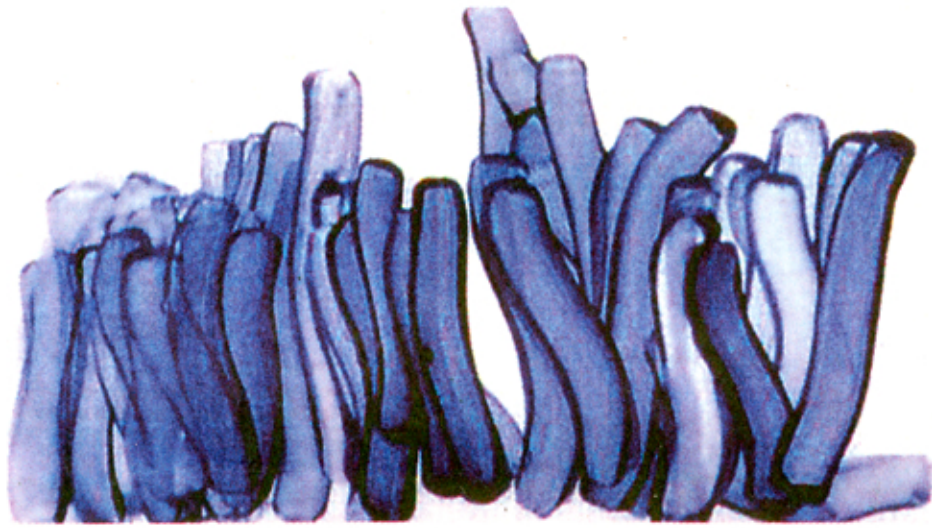


ART REVIEW



Something New, Something Animated

An Artist Moves in a Different Direction
With Playful, Refreshing Works

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

BEHIND every successful work of art, there are often several dozen failures, sometime years of trial and error. This is one reason why artists, when they hit upon a winning formula, stick to it. And it is also why artists, when they look to change what they are doing, need to tread carefully.

Sharon Loudon, now the subject of a mixed survey exhibition at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, N.Y., is an artist with much on her mind. She has made a name for herself in recent years as a purveyor of absolutely astringent, all-white, minimal-abstract paintings on Mylar, paper or wooden panels. She is the Robert Ryman of the 21st century.

An exhibition by Ms. Loudon is, you may think, perfectly appropriate for the mid-winter doldrums, when gallery-white snow usually covers the ground. But just as the weather this year has been varied, so is this exhibition. The curator, Dede Young, has paired Ms. Loudon's earlier, successful white-on-white paintings with the artist's recent experiments in sculpture and animation. It is brave selection.

I was disappointed when I first saw this show. I thought it was scrappy, unfocused and lacked a message. But I have come to see it differently, and positively, as the per-



fect sort of exhibition for this site, and the kind of exhibition that an artist like Ms. Loudon had to have.

As a way of explanation: Too much pressure is placed on artists in New York City venues to make or show crowd-pleasing work, or work designed purely to sell. Spaces like the Neuberger, and there aren't too many of them, have the luxury of not being accountable for sales or gate money. They can trustingly give artists time, resources and space to toss about ideas.

Ms. Loudon, 41, is at that point in her career when she needs to try something new.



A detail of "Flaps" (1998), top left; "Yellow Tails" (2004), left; and a still from "Footprints" (2006) by Sharon Loudon.

over all they are well produced, and the imagery is absorbing yet pleasantly lighthearted. Their playfulness is often stunning and refreshing.

The downside to Ms. Loudon's animations is the loss of the poetry of execution present in the paintings, the intrinsic visual qualities, like the texture of the brushwork and varying thickness of paint. Even the surfaces she uses yield different, subtle effects, as a quick study of some of the paintings on view here reveals.

But animation is the way to go, definitely, at least for now. It is more versatile and adaptable, and each year sees the release of ever more sophisticated high-resolution video projectors, screens and monitors. Soon there will come a time when animation will be able to replicate the sensual, tactile qualities of paintings and drawings.

Then there are the possibilities of making multiscreen works, and using sound. Ms. Loudon is already moving in this direction, with one work here, "The Dance: Acts 1 Through 5" (2006), a three-channel animation projection in which random marks float between screens. To me, it only hints at all the cool stuff Ms. Loudon can now do.

"Sharon Loudon: Character," Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, State University of New York, 735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, N.Y., through June 18. Information: (914) 251-6100 or on the Web at www.neuberger.org.

Her all-white minimal paintings certainly possess a particular if austere beauty, but don't allow for any development. Their charm lies in their restraint, the artist resisting her inner promptings of expression or outward expectations of content or style. To embellish them in any way risks losing what most viewers value most.

Several of Ms. Loudon's tentative answers to this formal impasse are on display here. Perhaps the least interesting of them are a series of installations made out of thick sheaths of colored monofilament line, hanging from the ceiling. They look like a

collection of cheap synthetic wigs, or a last-minute theatrical stunt to fill a large empty space.

More positive are some newly made digital animations. This is a sensible and logical move for the artist, for her minimal mark-making translates nicely to animation, which is essentially a kind of digital painting. Animation also allows for movement and change, which is always more interesting to look at than a static image.

There is an aching tentativeness to some of these animations, which suggests to me that the artist is still feeling her way. But