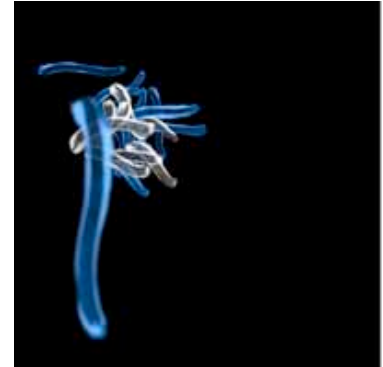


## Framing Line: Sharon Louden at the Neuberger Museum of Contemporary Art

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Sharon Louden's current exhibition initially conjures associations with natural forms such as hair, cilia, bacilli or underwater life. Upon closer inspection, the lines in Louden's varied works reveal themselves as playful, somber, energetic and enigmatic communities of form. The works go beyond representations of specific entities or minimalist explorations of media. They divulge, as the exhibition title alludes, their "Character." The artist not only imbues her carefully considered marks with personality—each line reacting to its neighbor to create a drama or dance—she activates the frame by giving the impression that it pursues and captures each unique moment.



Sharon Louden, *Footprints*, 2006. Animation, 4 minutes. Courtesy of the Neuberger Museum of Contemporary Art.

In this exhibition of Louden's paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures and animations, line ties all of her media together to expand our traditional notion of drawing. During an interview with the curator, Dede Young, Louden points to the significance of line in her work: "All my work is within drawing because of my extensive use of and dedication to the line as the source and backbone to my visual vocabulary. It is the line that defines the characters that translate the feelings, meanings, tensions and personalities that I look for within them." Louden's various creatures morph into altered states in the nine years of work surveyed at the Neuberger, continually re-emerging to play different roles.

Louden's drawings on paper and Mylar are some of the earliest works in the exhibit and reveal fundamental aspects of the artist's visual language. In *Flaps* (1998), blue translucent lines gather at the lower left edge of the page. Gel medium is utilized in a way that gives each mark a three-dimensional, tubular quality. The lines' fluid postures flop and float atop the Mylar's faint blue grid. They nudge and lie on one another like sleepy animals clustered in a corner. Convening at the bottom of the page, these languid lines rest comfortably within the frame. Conversely, the lines in other drawings from the *Flaps* series (not present in this exhibition) stop in mid-motion, as if attempting to escape off the page.

In Louden's animation, *Footprints* (2006), similar tube-like forms converge in enigmatic space. The resting lines, like actual footprints, retain the memory of movement. Whether fading in-and-out of the black background or wiggling in from the edges of the screen,

the hand-drawn lines (which are scanned into the computer) take on certain manners. The frame in this work remains static throughout the course of the short digital projection. On the other hand, in *Dance: Acts 1 through 5* (2006), the edges of this three-screen animation play an active role. Each frame shimmies and jumps to apprehend the skittish lines. The movements can be followed back-and-forth between the screens as the lines attempt to evade the frame. The screens are suspended from the ceiling and allotted ample space in the gallery, which allows for an uninterrupted viewing of the dance.

*Motley Tails* (2005), one of two sculptures on display, hangs in the center of the exhibition. Although one can enter the space of the sculpture—allowing for close interaction with the human-size, iridescent forms—the piece would benefit from its own environment. The separate manes of monofilament line are not grouped to form clear paths and do not coalesce as an installation. The gallery's trappings and Louden's adjacent works, viewable through large gaps between the hanging sculpture, interrupt *Motley Tails* to the point of distraction and serve to distance the viewer from the world Louden attempts to conjure. *Yellow Tails* (2004), however, assumes a dedicated environment, standing a few feet out from the corner wall. The mood of the work fluctuates as it simultaneously references comical Cousin It-like characters and ethereal sea creatures. Their Manic Panic infused, toy hair hangs limply in amassed clusters, yet each individual string is full of movement as the sinuous lines pool on the floor and reflect light.

Louden utilizes the effect of light on iridescent lines to an even greater extent in *The Attenders* (2003). The three selected prints hang in glass-free frames. Willowy tentacles accumulate in distinct groups separated by subtle shifts in color. The lines are made with either phosphorescent acrylic paint or water-based ink, barely visible in various shades of white and gray on white paper. The prints are given their own room, where the lights click on-and-off (with a brief fadeout) in equal intervals. The fluorescent lines, activated by the absence of light, have a powerful presence. As the room disappears into darkness, perspective fails and perception shifts. The two-dimensional forms become three-dimensional and appear to hover in a holographic environment. In the dark, Louden's "characters" are liberated from their frames. As the light returns, impressions of glowing lines linger like a world of bacteria floating across the eye's vitreous humor. The memory of these forms, momentarily juxtaposed over the newly visible physical marks, creates a dynamic interplay.

The survey of Louden's work offers a representative sample of the artist's exploration of line as it travels from the second dimension into the third, and then into animation. Her most successful works embody an energy. Moments are caught in the process of unfolding, revealing the importance of space and edge in all of her works. These varied borders and rooms provide the settings for the dramas of Louden's "characters." They act as the arresting agents, holding their subjects in suspended states that envelop the viewer.