

Pencil *Pushed*

Exploring Process and Boundaries in Drawing

Creighton Michael, *Curator*

Sam Yates, *Director, Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture*

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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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Pencil Pushed: Exploring Process and Boundaries in Drawing

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All images courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

Page 25, 26: *Maux de Tete*, *Dandy Saltimbanque*, and *Charlotte Corday's Gown* by Mary Reid Kelley all images courtesy of Fredericks & Freiser

Page 28, 29: *Cathedras* and *Eventing* (detail) both images courtesy of Christopher Gallo

Page 49: *Baluchistan* by Beatrice Riese courtesy of Yale University Gallery of Art

Page 61: *Mooring* by Stephen Talasnik courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Page 62: *Scream: a folded drawing* by Stephen Talasnik courtesy of Jerry L. Thompson

All images included in exhibition with the exclusion of the following:

Page 49: *Baluchistan* by Beatrice Riese

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ARTISTS’ VITAE

From the *Director*

Let whoever may have attained to so much as to have the power of drawing know that he holds a great treasure. Michaelangelo Buonarroti

For this exhibition, curator Creighton Michael selected works by fifteen artists that strongly demonstrate the power of drawing. While different in subject matter and in media, the works in *Pencil Pushed* share the same attribute described by Michelangelo over 500 years ago. Since then, drawing has continuously evolved; what began as a strictly two-dimensional process using silverpoint, ink, and/or chalk now also includes three-dimensional and time-based media utilizing various materials and technologies. Drawing has also developed from a secondary method of creating into a valid and primary mode of visual expression. Drawings once served as a strictly preliminary practice and were often shut away in private sketchbooks, portfolios, or studios. *Pencil Pushed* demonstrates the contemporary breadth of drawing by encompassing artists and works that exemplify both of these evolutionary shifts.

Creighton Michael's own drawings and creative work have been shown internationally. Michael earned a BFA in painting from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1971, an MA in art history from Vanderbilt University in 1976, and an MFA from Washington University in 1978. Throughout his career, he has focused on drawing, its process, and its importance as a primary artistic medium. He is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Art at Hunter College in New York where he regularly takes his students to museums and galleries to study both historical and contemporary drawings. He has a broad knowledge and appreciation for art history and is fluent in the current and ever-progressing attitudes about drawing. An ideal curator for *Pencil Pushed*, Michael is an astute networker and has a history of working with artists, gallerists, and other curators. I am grateful that he undertook this challenging and laborious duty. The educational and aesthetic rewards will be many for students, faculty, and community members who visit *Pencil Pushed* or read the catalogue. To add insightful commentary

to this strong collection of images, Michael enlisted Deputy Editor at *ARTnews* Magazine, Barbara MacAdam, to write an essay exploring the fundamental role of drawing in thinking about art and perception.

I would also like to thank the Ewing Gallery staff and student workers who have invested many hours to secure the success of both *Pencil Pushed* and its catalogue. Sarah McFalls, Sarah Campbell, Marissa Landis, Eric Cagley, Michael Martin, and Yan Zhang have each contributed significantly.

Once more, this exhibition would not have been possible without the vision and dedication of its curator Creighton Michael. I am indebted to him, the artists, and their agents who have generously shared this work with The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the community it serves.

Sam Yates
Director and Curator
Ewing Gallery of Art and Architecture

Drawing is primary, not preliminary came as revelation to my students when I proposed it almost two decades ago at the Rhode Island School of Design. Since then the idea has set the tone for every drawing class I have taught and now is the underlying premise of this exhibition. The fifteen artists in Pencil *Pushed* were chosen because mark-making is their primary vehicle of expression. Challenging the traditional role of drawing, these artists have refined their unique processes while expanding the parameters of this discipline. For the purposes on this show, the word pencil represents drawing and its activities. As technological innovation of the 16th Century, the invention of the pencil increased opportunities for drawing as a conveyance of thought and observation, thus ultimately determining its direction and importance. Similarly many of the artists in this show have discovered and employed new marking tools adding to drawing's vocabulary. Others have pushed within established boundaries to achieve extraordinary results simply with marks on paper. Combined the artists provide a drawing exhibition that the viewer will experience in two, three, and four dimensions.

By having each artist represented with a number of pieces created over different periods in their careers and in some instances, using varying materials and media, the viewer can see and come to understand each individual work in the context of its own history. Additionally the viewer witnesses the development and possible evolution of an idea that may have generated the initial work. With this knowledge the observer can understand the individual works as they relate to the others in the exhibition.

The variety of interactions among the works of art form a multilevel network engaging visitors to establish connections between pieces normally not shown or discussed in the same context. In this way, the exhibition examines numerous aspects of the drawing process. Peter Mollenkof, Bill Richards, Darcy Brennan Poor, and Stephen Talasnik aptly define what humble materials like pencil or

charcoal can accomplish, while ink is the dominant medium in drawings by William Pittman Andrews, Caroline Burton, Elisa D'Arrigo, Mary Reid Kelley, Beatrice Reise, and Hilda Shen. Crossing dimensions, works by Burton, D'Arrigo, Shen, and Talasnik share with Sharon Loudon and Drew Shiflett, not only an interest in physical drawing, but also a focus on drawing's basic unit. In general, it is the hand that forms the mark and completes the drawing, but Mary Reid Kelley, Darcy Brennan Poor, Hilda Shen, and Sam Vernon use their bodies as drafting instruments to create specific works on view in Pencil *Pushed*. Returning to the hand, the mark again finds importance in the work of Beatrice Riese as she considers drawing to be a marking system with similarities to writing. Shifting from script to storytelling, Mary Reid Kelley, Jennifer Macdonald, and Sam Vernon produce narratives housed in historical constructs to better facilitate their messages. It is the suggestion of a narrative that one observes in the works by Sharon Loudon. Time, the path on which stories ride, is the inherent structure for the drawings of William Anastasi and William Pittman Andrews, both of whom document the passage of time as well as past activity. Though pictorially different, Anastasi's and Andrews's drawings with their insistence on repetition and pattern, find common ground with those of Richards, Riese, Shiflett, Talasnik, and Vernon. In fact, it is William Anastasi's range of drawing activities from the 1960's that embodies the thematic structure of this exhibition.

These are but a few of the many threads relating these artists and their works to one another. This show presents an opportunity for the viewers to come up with their own associations and in so doing become part of the drawing process itself.

Creighton Michael

On and Off Line, Barbara MacAdam

You can dance a line (witness videos of Trisha Brown's performances); sculpt a line (as conceptual filmmaker and sculptor Anthony McCall does with light); draw a line (of course), and think a line. You can also build on a line. The analogies continue.

Drawing, of course, is fundamental to most art-making — not to mention most creative practices. It is writing, thinking, planning, and representing at the very least. The practice has remained in many ways consistent throughout history, with variations on graphite, charcoal, and ink still in fashion. But so much in the 20th and 21st centuries has changed that drawing's definition and reach have expanded to embrace new media, new materials, new technology, and new creative genres. Although, in the end, its goals and content may remain much the same — just new ways of telling and doing.

In the Pencil *Pushed* show, there are compulsive, expressive pencil drawings by William Anastasi; video with drawings masquerading as sets for a performance based on text by Mary Reid Kelley; stitched paper and fabric sculptural drawings by Elisa D'Arrigo; body-drawn impressions in sleep pieces by Darcy Brennan Poor; and the drawings on Mylar and animated videos by Jennifer Macdonald, whose imagery is inspired by Duchamp, Dante, and classic films with their strobe-light effects. Sculpting is currently Stephen Talasnik's primary genre, but he sometimes draws like Paul Klee, in a delicate, expressionistic way, and at the same time creates skeletons of solid sculptural structures.

From obsessive drawing to doodling, from automatic mark-making to writing, many of these works might seem to be generated by similar impulses. Abstract mostly but sometimes representational to the point of being abstract, as in Bill Richards's painstaking representations of foliage, vines, and scrub. The artist one-ups nature in his detailed replications, which belie his shaping of the compositions through strategically placed vines and black-and-white shading. The black-and-white pieces seem to conjure color but don't contain it. We're reminded

that, however natural Richards's subject, it is, above all, art. Working exclusively with graphite Richards conveys literalness and strangeness at the same time. "The longer you look at an object," Lucian Freud observed, "the more abstract it becomes, and, ironically, the more real."

Sam Vernon adds her black-and-white Edward Gorey-esque figures to the compulsively drawn mix. She regularly works with Xeroxes, which she maintains intensifies the contrast. She describes how she makes a drawing, puts it through a copier, then draws on the copy, and repeats the whole process. "My drawings are never really 'complete,'" she has said. They contain the "ghosts" of the earlier renditions — call them *pentimenti* — and sometimes collages those images, pulling us with her into a dream state. The works harbor narrative and history.

The show travels further from mark-making in the work of Peter Mollenkoff, who creates the illusion of figure and volume in colored abstractions that are almosts — almost spread legs, almost torsos, almost tree trunks, almost, almost . . . it's for us to figure out. They are less interior and self-contained in the way, say Anastasi's drawings are or even in the way Hilda Shen's fingerprint meditations on her own heritage, life, art, and memory are.

William Pittman Andrews shows the density of time on the one hand, titling his repetitive drawings after the time spent making them and, on the other hand, composing connect-the-dot-style networks that appear to be random configurations. They denote time as if connecting thoughts with pauses and punctuation.

Anastasi, Drew Shiflett, the late Beatrice Riese, and Andrews stand at one end of the spectrum with a range of works on paper that conjure, variously geometry and textiles (Shiflett and Riese), automatic drawing, time, and process (Anastasi and Andrews). As Paul Klee observed in his diary in 1902, "Small reiterated acts will yield more in the end than poetic frenzy without form or arrangement." Klee also

resides in the fabric of Riese's drawings, in the geometry, compositional experiments, and coloring.

Another presiding spirit among the mark-makers is John Cage, whose visible and invisible hand is felt throughout. It is particularly evident in the immediacy of unmediated communication in Anastasi's work, exemplified by his "blind" Subway drawings, done with his eyes closed and with automatic repetitive markings. Anastasi may or may not be letting the unconscious perform, but accident, and rhythm, and a strong sense of magnetism prevail, pulling together markings on the left and right.

Talasnik draws in whatever medium he works. His early interest in architecture led him to drawing, on which he concentrated until he shifted to sculpture in around 2000 by having his drawings fabricated. His compositions could be viewed as the skeletons of his sculpture — and, by the same token, his sculptures seen as the fleshing out of his drawings.

Also drawing in sculpture is Elisa D'Arrigo, whose favored medium is stitching with thread through paper or cloth. Working largely with found materials, she almost diaristically documents her life, stitching whatever is available whenever and wherever time allows. These intermedial drawings constitute pieced-together and layered thoughts and memories embedded in collaged elements, including cloth and paint and marble dust. It is as if they were holding together the fabric of her life — one stitch at a time.

Shiflett also blurs the boundaries between these genres, with abstract objects that reflect on themselves, their process, and their materials. Her Easel sculpture, consisting of a series of scroll-like forms composed of paper, fabric, glue, cardboard, polyester stuffing, wood, wire, and Styrofoam, looks like fabric, like rolled rugs, like ancient scrolls, but in the end it is itself — that is, something else.

While Caroline Burton adds three-dimensionality and unexpected volume to weblike drawings, she also

extends her practice right into an ambiguous sculptural realm where using the slightly rough material hydrocal — a form of cement — and wire (the connection with her drawings), she builds unfamiliar looking objects, underscored by a grid, and renders the ordinary and domestic — like a drain, a rabbit, a pillow — foreign and the unknown almost familiar. This work is so illusionistic that it has the communicative value of both a two- and three-dimensional work. Burton takes the drawn line into sculpture, but it's the drawing that gives the structure.

Sharon Loudon, too, leads her lines into sculpture, with tubing extending out and onto the floor, but she takes it a further step — bringing it all into animated video, creating a potential storyline. Her abstract animation indeed looks like dancing in space, keeping the idea of art, dance, and thought in motion.

As drawing reaches into new — or newish — media, we do witness changes and amplification. Video adds a form of mediation, creating a distance between the viewer and what is described or inscribed — we're conscious of an additional medium to be plumbed. This is evident in the animated films of Reid Kelley and Loudon. Their videos are filled with narrative and narrative potential. Loudon's "drawings," for example, turn into dancing abstractions — sometimes what she calls "anthropomorphic individuals" defined by line and gesture. Macdonald's drawn "sculptures" on Mylar also become active and three dimensional on video. And Reid Kelley plays on all fronts, drawing on commedia del arte (history) with her satiric narrative, costume design, stage setting, literature, satire, music, and fantasy, all through rather low-tech straightforward sleight of hand. She runs her "lines" across all the boundaries.

The ironic line running through much of this work is the spirit of the sentimental and domestic, with references to architecture and furniture and home. The forms describe the construction of nostalgia, which is communicated here literally through

domestic objects rendered as used and exhausted in Darcy Brennan Poor's huge painstakingly drawn renditions and sleep impressions. Poor's work extends her process into sculpture — she works with plaster and charcoal and graphite on paper. For her "Sleep Prints" she places sheets of paper under the bedsheets and lets her body etch in its impression as she sleeps and moves. In so doing, she turns the drawing into sculpture, and then performance.

Shen's work, like Poor's in some respects, also involves the body quite literally. Shen has also tracked her sleep movements on paper, but in this show the emphasis is on her hands — her fingerprints, nails, and palms using the applied patterns as very direct communication. She offers a remarkable record of the human body performing in concert with the practice of printmaking, focusing on touch. And like Poor, she engages in erasure as a way of tackling the surface of works and probing time and artistic life beneath.

Drawing on paper is extremely personal. The marks themselves are telling, betraying emotion and personality. In the end, big or small, geometric, conceptual, or narrative, drawings lie at the heart of art. They may best be compared to chamber music, with their intimacy and inward perspective. In other words, they are generally introspective in nature.

This show is not about what's new, since we can even look back at artists like Rebecca Horn doing innovative videos in the 1970s that reflect very literally on the potential of drawing to write about itself. In one video, she affixes a drawing apparatus to her head with many pencils attached and proceeds to move her head from side to side creating an automatic portrait. A portrait of the artist as art.

All of these works demonstrate how drawing tracks time, takes time, and represents time. It can incorporate the body or/and the mind or/and the subconscious. It can perform as in a mantra reiterating rhythms through the hand. It can communicate chance and impermanence. It can pose as many things it is not — like textiles and

sculpture and architecture. Art historian and curator Anna Lovatt writing on Cy Twombly, notes how his works "recall the 'Scene of Writing' described by Jacques Derrida: a palimpsest of traces on which every mark is always already a transcription, the archive of its own event. And yet these lines are not quite yet writing. Unlike the painterly mark, the drawn line relies on this process of abrasion for its existence." Nevertheless in this exhibition, "abrasion" takes many forms, literal and implied.

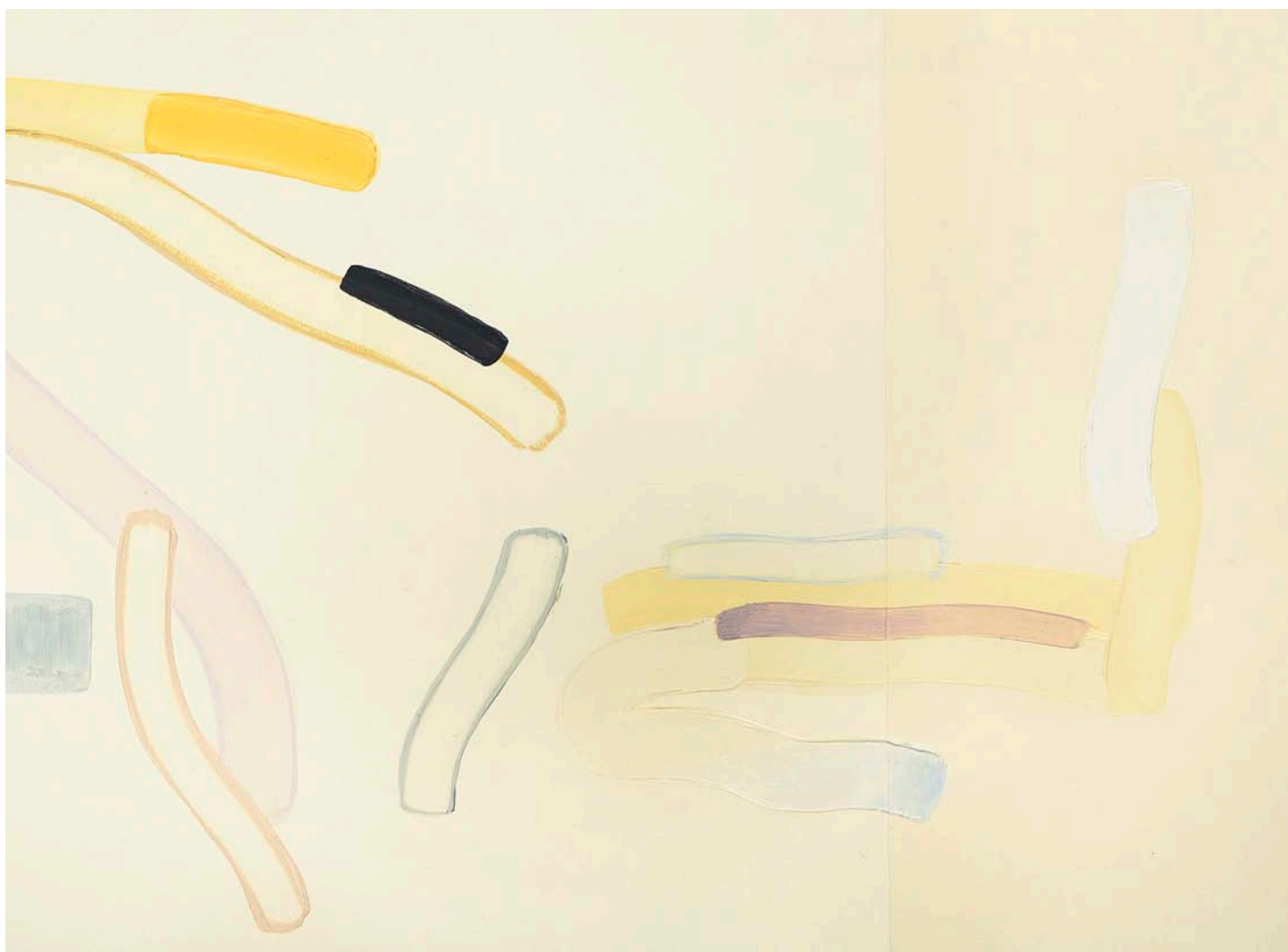
Barbara MacAdam
Deputy Editor of ARTnews Magazine

Sharon *Louden*

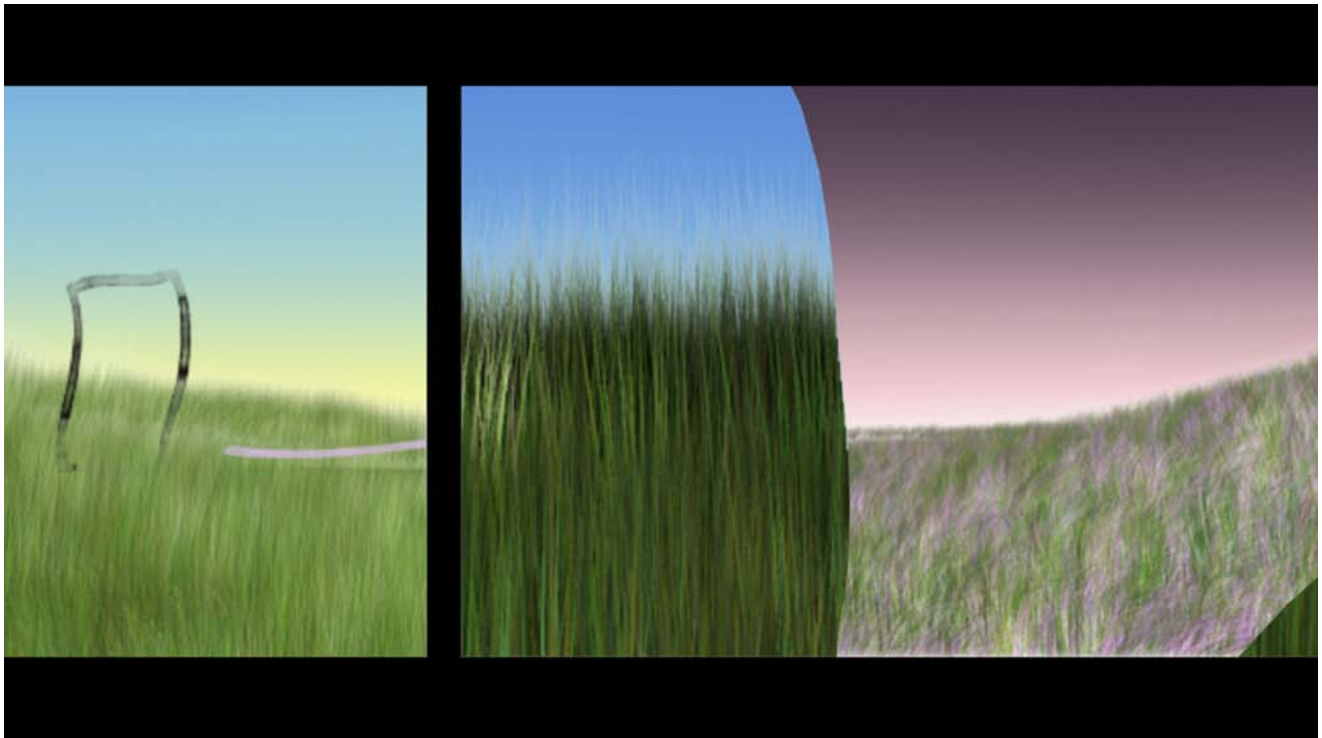
My visual vocabulary is one of movement and gesture that I explore through many different media including painting, drawing, animation, and installation. The foundation of my work is rooted in drawing where my gestures transform into what I believe are anthropomorphic beings. Although abstract and formal, these characters have human-like aspects within their minimal state; they are made simply but are full of whimsy and playfulness, elegance, and a child-like beauty. Through the specific, awkward placement of these forms, it is my intention that these gestures evoke movement in space. It is important for me to create the illusion of three-dimensional characters that, through their subtlety and beauty, elicit a powerful presence in their own world.



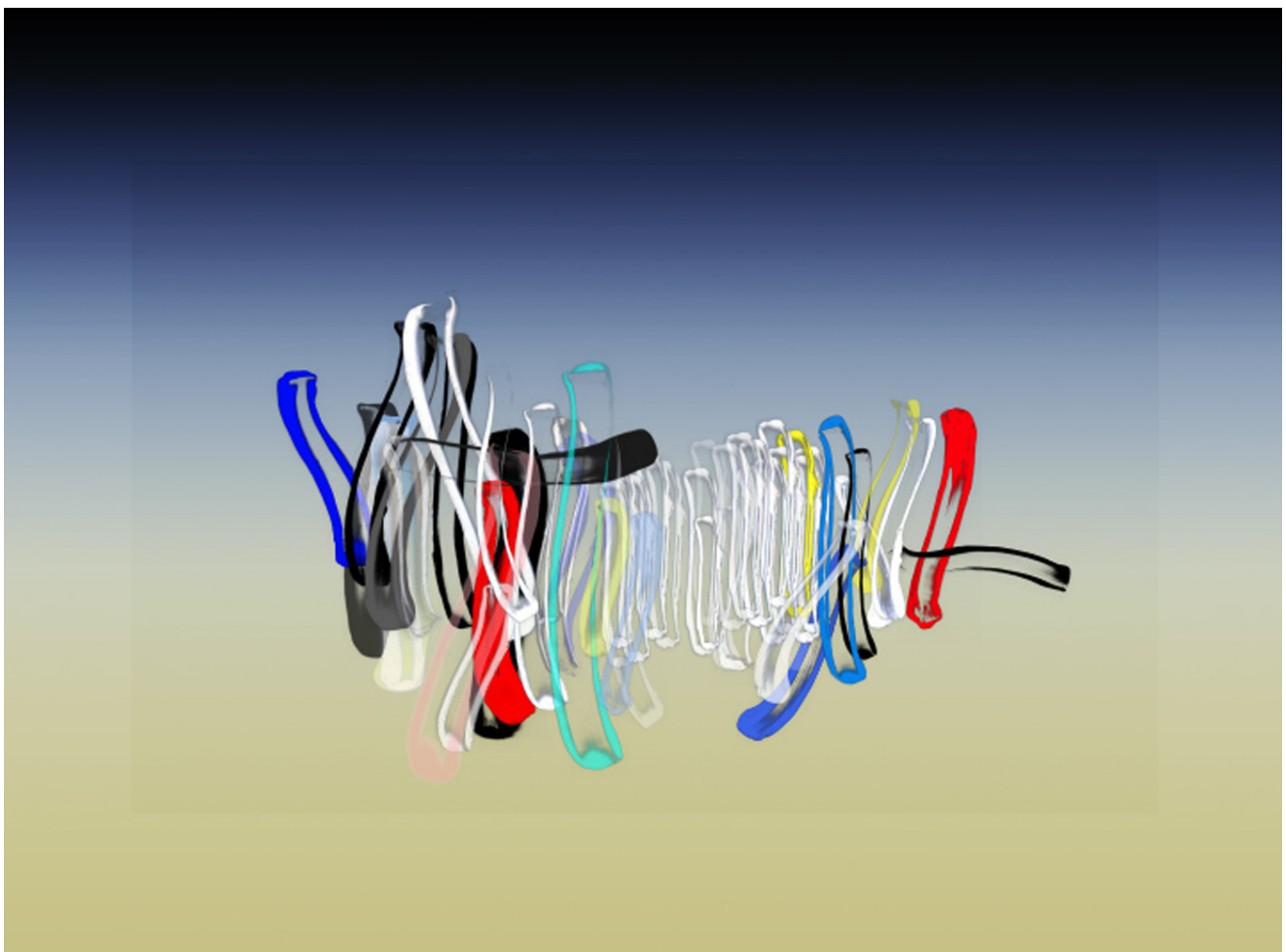
Cathedras, 2010, rubber tubing, glue, metal chair, total area dimensions: 25.5 x 45 x 80 inches,
dimensions of chair only: 25.5 x 12 x 10 inches



Eventing (detail), 2011, oil and acrylic on stretched paper on panel, 20 x 28 x 1.5 inches



Still from *Carrier*, 2011, 2:30 minute run time, digital animation



Still from *Hedge*, 2007, 2:13 minute run time, digital animation

Sharon Loudon

born: Philadelphia, PA 1964

EDUCATION

MFA Yale University School of Art, 1991
BFA School of the Art Institute of
Chicago, 1988
Atlanta College of Art, 1982-85

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 Beta Pictoris/Maus Contemporary,
Birmingham, AL
2013 Morgan Lehman Gallery, NYC
2012 Burnet Art Gallery, Minneapolis, MN
2011 Weisman Art Museum,
Minneapolis, MN
2009 Gallery Joe, Philadelphia, PA
2009 Weatherspoon Art Museum,
Greensboro, NC

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2012 *Notations: Contemporary Drawing as
Idea and Process*, selections from the
Werner Kramarsky Collection, Mildred
Lane Kemper Art Museum at
Washington University, St. Louis, MO
2012 *Rose Colored Glass*, Katherine E. Nash
Gallery, Regis Center for Art, University
of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
2012 *Pulp II: Works on Paper, Works With
Paper*, Beta Pictoris Maus
Contemporary, Birmingham, AL
2012 *accumulative something*, Patrick Heide
Contemporary Art, London, England
2012 *Light Matters*, Pelham Arts Center,
Pelham, NY
2012 *I have a secret wish...*, University of
Alabama Birmingham Visual Arts
Gallery, Birmingham, AL

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT
Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC

SELECTED PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Werner H. Kramarsky

