

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Drawings Set Apart In a World of Lines

Works That Transcend
Conventional Concepts



By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

Is it possible to make a drawing without using a pen, pencil or paper? Why not — these days artists make art from anything at all, then call it what they like. Two who are experimenting with the formal properties of drawing are Serena Bocchino and Gelah Penn, the artists in “The Notion of Line,” a show at the Alpan Gallery in Huntington.

Ms. Penn makes the bigger conceptual leap, presenting a dazzling site-specific installation made of neon-colored fishing line, rubber tubing, weblike mesh, Styrofoam and plastic balls. Titled “The Reckless Moment” (2008), it cuts a wide swath across the gallery walls, messy and oddly alive like some bacterial colony.

By knotting, twisting and looping together her tendril-like materials, which are bunched in places in a dense thicket, Ms. Penn constructs a drawing in three dimensions. At the same time there is an ethereal feeling, conjuring associations with dust storms, weather systems or, on the microscopic level, the arterial network of the human body.

You may even consider the work graffiti, or doodling, because of the color, playfulness and fluidity of the lines. It is also seriously trendy; at least, the for-

“The Notion of Line,” Alpan Gallery, 2 West Carver Street, Huntington, through April 21. Information: (631) 423-4433 or www.alpangallery.org.



mat and materials are in the vein of hip artists like Jessica Stockholder and Sarah Sze, both of whom use found objects and detritus to make sculpture with a jury-rigged appearance. Both also try to integrate their artwork into a specific environment.

More broadly, Ms. Penn's installation plays to the current vogue for improvised, provisional-looking art; for in-

stance, the inaugural exhibition in the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, “Unmonumental,” is awash with arty confections of everyday stuff.

Ms. Penn started her career in San Francisco as a painter, making colorful abstract art. But while living in New York in the 1980s, she started sticking things to the canvases to give them a more three-dimensional quality — hair,

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Above, Gelah Penn's “Reckless Moment,” detail, 2008. Above left, Serena Bocchino's “Deep Cries Out” (2008). Left, Ms. Bocchino's “Crash Full Rhythm” (2007).

to begin with, and later vinyl tubing and fishing line. It was a short leap from there to eliminating the support and working directly on the wall.

Since then the artist has perfected her technique. Some of the twisted squiggles of filament and clusters of delicate vinyl thread in the present work are neatly joined together with pins. In other cases they mysteriously issue from and disappear into the wall; this gives the installation a real dynamism — it seems to be suspended in space, floating before your eyes.

A similar sense of fluidity characterizes Ms. Bocchino's artworks, which are described here as drawings but could just as easily be considered paintings. They mostly consist of layers of squiggly lines of enamel drizzled over a background of blue oil paint, bringing to mind the sea or the sky. But the inspiration lies elsewhere: the lyrical style of Ms. Bocchino's abstracts evokes the rhythmic impulses of music.

Engaged with notions of pleasure, Ms. Bocchino's work is easy to look at. The influence of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings is evident, as is that of the Surrealist Joan Miró; both artists pro-

vide formidable points of comparison. Materially and stylistically, however, her works exhibit original and independent qualities.

Ms. Bocchino has labored to develop her own visual language. Most apparent is the elegant simplicity and abstract energy of the lines, scribbled and scrawled onto the canvas seemingly without much thought. In form and feeling, they speak of the pleasures of unfettered artistic creation.

Then there is the musical influence,

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giving these prettified canvases a conceptual depth. Installed here, in an appropriately intimate setting, they can remind you of the pages of sheet music, the rhythmical drips and swirls like so many notes on a score. If altogether they suggest a song, it is a happy one.

The juxtaposition of these paintings with Ms. Penn's installation pays off, for the work of the two artists complements each other nicely. Viewed together, the exhibits conjure a fascinating, tantalizing scene of playful if unfinished creation. Seeing them is a bit like visiting an artist in the studio.