

'Paper' at Hosfelt Gallery

The title of this exhibition incites no mystery about its theme. *Paper* features new work, by eleven artists,

made on paper, of paper, or about paper. This is a deceptively simple premise. Sure, most of the work is insightfully minimal, but, still, the show gives us a moment to ponder the intense importance of this material.

After all, as we've transitioned from an oral to a literary culture, our history has been recorded on, indeed owes its legacy to, paper. Nevermind that our most important documents are *paper* documents, all of the effort that went into printing the Gutenberg bible on paper jump-started a host of technological advances and the ethos of a post-industrial society. Theorists credit the newspaper and the psychogeography of the "reading room" as the two major impetuses in the evolution of the "public sphere." And, of course, paper continues to make the world go round, whether we're talking about monetary bills, recall petitions or handmade artist 'zines.

Creatively, paper is, perhaps, the most romantic medium of all. We fancy it a plain upon which artists, scientists and scribes flesh out ideas. Paper can be at once high-tech, transporting elusive watermarks, barcodes, the grooves of a disposable LP, or the chemistry that illuminates photos, and

"low" tech—that is, if you consider the process of translating wood into this richly diverse construct simple ...

The pieces in this show range from relatively traditional drawing to paper objects, with the two often merging in a murky pulp. Considering that Lukas Felzmann's work often involves architectural installations, his photographs of

From top: Nicole Phungrasamee Fein, *Cloud*, 2002, woven paper, 6" x 6" x 6"; Jill Lear, *Untitled*, 2003, charcoal with oil pastel on paper, 22" x 30"; Michael Light, *Calumet Mountains at 600 feet, 0700 hours, Twenty-nine Palms, California, October 2000*, 2003, pigment inkjet print, 40" x 50", at Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco.



other works on paper (i.e., maps or wall-paper) are given a unique depth and perhaps point to an albeit two-dimensional sculptural meditation on the layers of paper we accumulate and pore over in order to see the world.

Kirsten Bahrs Janssen found a creative way to process the tree saved from the last Christmas before her mother passed away. The wood was given a new life in a lengthy paper scroll made by the artist and hung in the gallery to evoke a hauntingly poetic reminder of the cathartic, emotive power of recycling. Jill Lear's charcoal and oil pastel drawings of trees are titled after their latitudinal/longitudinal whereabouts. While the lines of the tree-portraits are quite faithful to the tree's shape, the figure itself

may take a moment to recognize. Lear's marks are hewn in a quality we've now come to associate with a more performative mode of drawing, à la John Cage. Here abstract performance and mimesis meet in a work that is all about relationality—the proximity of trees to other trees, the artist's position in relation to the tree, and the relationship between a tree and a scrap of paper.

Michael Light's photographs are similarly unique in their (un)familiarity. His artist book features black and white aerial photos of "Some Dry Space." Given a knowledge of Light's previous work (who could forget *Full Moon?*), the first inclination is to suspect that this space is extraterrestrial. Recognition of vegetation brings us back to earth, while many of the large-scale images implicate the body. Not only must one adjust their own body in reading the book—to both turn its large pages and take in the entire image—but one also sees in the undulations and gentle crevices of Light's subject a reflection of their own corporeality.

A critic generally tries to avoid too personal a reading, but I must confess that Nicole Phungrasamee Fein's work nearly brought me to tears. Her sculptures, a bowl and a woven, unopenable box, are outstandingly beautiful and the two work together to illustrate the many possible textures, weights and functions of paper. But it was her watercolors that made my eyes puddle. Without pre-drawing anything more than four fine dots, on a square of paper, and without the aid of a ruler, Fein applied layer after layer of paint, in obscenely perfect lines, to create a series of grids, plaids and stripes the tranquility of whose calmness is interrupted only by the viewer's own superego chastisement for lacking the patience, dexterity, skill, or Zen disposition to execute something half as profound. One piece featured lines in a diagonal pattern

which dictated that each must taper at the edge of its square edge, in order to support its overall shape. And Fein painted these hard-to-execute lines again, and again, and again. If paper is a carrier of our history, may history please repeat itself in Fein's work.

—Marisa S. Olson

Paper closed in August at Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco. Other artists in the exhibition included Jacob El Hanani, Ron Griffin, Marco Maggi, Wes Mills, John O'Reilly and Mark Sheinkman.

Artweek
October 2003
p. 13