

South End News

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art

Paper chase

Two shows go from planning stages to full pages

Boston Now: Works on Paper, at the Institute of Contemporary Art through August 28.

The 9th Annual Boston Drawing Show, at the Boston Center for the Arts, Cyclorama Hall, through July 24.

by Robin Hardman

Paper and charcoal are enjoying a central position in Boston's summer art scene this year. The Boston Center for the Arts is holding its annual exhibition of drawings by Massachusetts artists, which has taken an ambitious leap in size and fills the Cyclorama. In a nicely timed conjunction, the ICA has just opened its eighth annual Boston Now show, entitled "Works on Paper." This latter exhibition does not confine itself to drawing, of course—neither does the BCA's Drawing Show, for that matter—but something of that freedom an artist feels when left alone with a pad of newsprint is evident in the works of both exhibitions.

Vytas Sakalas, one of several artists whose work is hanging in both exhibitions, begins his ink drawings with a shape he sees in the paper. Sakalas sketches over and expands upon the shape. The work grows, shapes get repeated, until the entire (generally quite large) piece is spread with a dense black pattern, intricate and rhythmic.

Meanwhile, the BCA's drawing show features so many artists that most can only be represented by a few works. Process is thus difficult to see, but there are compensations. Guest curator Barbara Krakow did her job well: visitors can luxuriate in large amounts of exciting work.

Rosie Rizzi's "Chalkboard Drawings," for instance, are oddly beautiful. They are simple renditions of worn old classroom blackboards, covered (in chalk) with close illegible writing and figures, as well as "erasures." (In "Chalkboard Drawing IV," dark paint perfectly recreates the look and texture of erased board.) Jesseca Ferguson's collages instantly bring to mind the intricate world of Joseph Cornell. She works with such things as old postcards and photographs, sticks and stuffed birds, attaching them to small boards, or, in the Cornell tradition, open boxes, and painting or drawing on parts of the finished piece.

In the more traditional charcoals of Barbara Milot, black and white interact powerfully, coming together in one piece to form a swirling white water river running through the dark cliffs of a gorge. Working in a more subdued way than she does in her colorful paintings, Nan Tull creates strong, sail-like shapes, very dark against a white

continued on page 12

continued from page 9

ground. Maxine Yalovitz-Blankenship draws elegant, organic shapes in charcoal, adding, in the case of "Leaf Painted," flat red paint that seems to be pouring over the single maple leaf from above.

Although much of the most striking work happens to be in black and white, color is certainly much in evidence. It may be at its best in Pelle Cass's energetic pastels. Brightly colored sculptural shapes float in blackness: a donut-like object fills one frame; a row of spheres, another. Words cover the images in an even, and

unfortunately only occasionally legible, scrawl. In her series "Lost in Wilderness," Ruth Fields creates a dense, forest-like scene in dark pastels and charcoal, from which emerges, on each canvas, a square of relative lightness. It is a door into a bright world opening in the wilderness, or just one spot of light surrounded, inexorably, by darkness.

In general, the figurative works chosen for this exhibition are less interesting. An exception is Don Stinson's disturbing drawings. The figures in his "True to Life" series all cover their mouths. Whether it is to life a wine glass, smoke, or simply to gesture, the result, when combined with the crinkling of fear in their eyes, suggests something private and ominous. Fred Faudie's cartoon-like drawings, in which the classic nude becomes an everyday figure hanging about the house with the TV on, are also strong. With these two shows, who says summer is off-season for art?