

Galleries

Coaxing the unearthly from terra firma

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NONA HERSHEY, NAN TULL

A Fall Show

At: *Miller Block Gallery, 11 Newbury St.,*
through Oct. 4

Cultural issues are bypassed in Nona Hershey's installation, on view at the Miller/Block Gallery. Hershey's subject is also forest interiors, but her concern is a life force common to people and nature.

Hershey simulates a forest, with treelike columns fronting large charcoal, ink and gouache drawings. The "trees" are composed of styrofoam columns coated with intaglio prints effecting the colors and textures of bark and leaves. The atmospheric drawings describe a dense woodland where branching vertical forms — part tree/part human — overlap and intertwine. The columns' upright stance conveys stalwart, rooted qualities, while the drawings' shifting forms suggest an evanescent world in flux.

Hershey's suggestion that a human spirit invigorates nature, and vice versa, is profound. But the installation does not have the breadth to carry this concept. In a lone, more recent drawing also on view, Hershey seems looser and more confident. Her trees assume fleshier bodies; twining together like lovers, their embracing forms convey feeling and vitality.

Also showing here is Nan Tull, best known for her large charcoal drawings of organic forms. Here she shows encaustic paintings and mixed media drawings, which take the leaf as a recurring motif, grouping leaves in allover but arbitrary patterns. Another layer of dot patterns provides the only spatial reference. Devoid of horizon lines, the leaves seem to both float and be fixed in space, as if at once wafted by wind and plastered to glass.

Tull, an artist highly aware of modernist issues, is playing here with the relationships of figuration and abstraction, deep and shallow space, and figure to ground. But these are poetic images, and the evocative nature of the wafting-but-still leaves is key; it suggests notions of journey and transition, as well as the pull between fate and free will.