

High-quality show of drawings

PERSPECTIVES

By Christine Temin
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Drawing, as an independent art form, is often shortchanged, considered subordinate to painting. The Mills Gallery at the Boston Center for the Arts has done its bit to rectify that situation with an annual juried show of drawings by Massachusetts artists. The seventh show, a particularly fine one even though technique outweighs content, is at the gallery through Aug. 9.

This year's judge was Amy Lighthill, formerly assistant curator at the Museum of Fine Arts. She selected 25 artists from a record 450 entrants, the large number due, no doubt, partly to the respect Lighthill has earned as a champion of contemporary art. A fascinating statistic connected with the show: This year, as in all previous drawing shows, the ma-

majority of both applicants and artists included are women. Mills director John De Lancey says he doesn't know why; there's probably material here for a doctoral dissertation on the topic "Is Drawing a 'Women's Art?'" Another, and rather sad, statistic is that the majority of the 25 artists are not represented by a Boston-area gallery. No doubt this is partly because drawings have traditionally commanded lower prices than other media have, and galleries stand to make less from a drawing show than from a painting exhibition.

A lot of the work here is representational. In her impressive charcoal and pastel "Scattered Seed No. 3," Nan Wezniak enlarges an exploding milkweed pod so that it is almost abstract, a quirky black shape erupting into cottony fluff. Amy Cain's charcoal "Garden" is also based on natural imagery, in this case tiny trees with smudged edges and topiary-

tidy shapes.

One of the most daring works in the show is Kenneth Fitzgerald's apparently autobiographical "Rhombustyled-Self Made Map." Fitzgerald has drawn a self-portrait on a grid and borrowed the curving lines of topographical maps to help define himself. Onto the edge of the drawing are paper-clipped bits and pieces of what could be the contents of a wallet: a signature on a check; a snapshot of the artist, standing in front of a map, with streaks of black pouring down his face; a subway pass.

Christine Hopkins' pastel "High Noon, Center Plaza" is a horrifying vision of lunch hour in a big city. An unappealing bunch of businessmen is squeezed into a claustrophobic space, looking directly at us, making us step back. All of them wear beige raincoats with very little variation; spiritually, Hopkins seems to tell us, they are equally beige.

The other artists in the show are Maggi Brown, Isaac Cohen, Bryan Davagian, Steve Davis, Rebecca Doughty, David Douglas, Tina Feingold, Mary Good, Timothy Harney, Timothy Hawkesworth, Jennifer Hilton, Jim Ann Howard, Peik Larson, Robert Leanna II, Thomas Mairs, Ilana Manolson, Carin Musacchia, Lydia Nelson, Phyllis Palmer, John Steczynski and Suzanne White.

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at Boston Center for the Arts