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ART = TEXT = ART curated by Elizabeth Schlatter

by Joan Waltemath

JOEL AND LILA HARNETT MUSEUM OF ART
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Art = Text = Art, an exhibition culled from Wynn Kramarsky's renowned contemporary drawing collection, starts out with a piece by Cy Twombly. A series of cursory strokes, both scribbles and letters, run across the dense medium-gray, crayon-and-oil ground and remind us of the origin of the impulse toward mark making and its kinship to the marking of a letter.

Placed on the end wall of the front room, Jill Baroff's "Untitled (Tide Drawing)" (2006) draws you in while it begs the question of its relation to the theme. Curator Elizabeth Schlatter makes a point of not limiting her definition of text in art to works with letters in them, but rather expands it to include systemic, programmatic, and haptic concerns, such as the data visualization of Baroff's exquisite "Tide Drawings," which make the rhythms and patterns of the fluctuating tide visible.

The gallery's generous rooms have allowed Schlatter to organize her layout strategically. In between the front room and one of the side rooms, containing most of the pieces with actual letters in them, is Alice Aycock's "The Garden of Scripts (Villandry)" (1986). An archive of nearly Borgesian dimensions, it seems to catalog the many forms letters have taken in their evolution through a myriad of alphabets and languages, from the familiar hieroglyphics to the less familiar right to left flowing Arabic and Asian script from the other side of the globe. Aycock's oblique perspective and definitive architectural style of drawing push an awareness of inclusion to the point of awakening: the more you know, the more you truly realize how much you don't know.

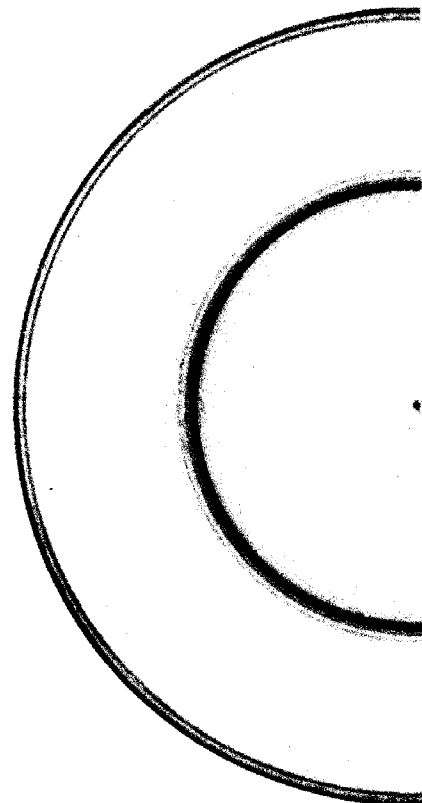
Next to Aycock, Christine Hiebert's "Untitled (Brand Markings)" (1998-99), points to another view of limits. Hiebert renders a cattle brand so that it hovers between a symbol, a form, a letter, and a line; it is executed with the tentativeness of its unfixed identity in the world of the drawn, rather than the legibility it might offer to a rancher.

More predictable in terms of inclusion in this exhibition are works such as Molly Springfield's "Chapter IX" (2008), an exacting copy of a Xerox copy of a text on copying from flat copies. Painstakingly drawn, it evidences in no small measure the dry wit needed to carry out such an endeavor at 22 by 17 inches. What is unexpected here is how the verisimilitude extends to the level of the material when observing closely how the nature of the graphite parallels that of toner. It elicits a silent deadpan laugh.

A drawn version of a typewritten list on ruled paper, Bronlyn Jones's "Untitled #3, from Drafts of an Empty Page" (2009), works similarly. Taking up the use of text as developed in the '80s by such artists as Jenny Holzer or Barbara Kruger, it pushes us to see what happens when a thought emerges through the material.

Nancy Haynes's "memory drawing (John Cage + Merce Cunningham)" (2010), picks up the horizontal lines of its neighbors from across the room to expose another facet of the relation of mind and matter. By typing the names of colors in one of her paintings on labels and organizing them as she remembers using them, Haynes brings the exactitude of science into the realm of indeterminacy.

In this context, Suzanne Bocanegra's "Brushstrokes in a Victorian Flower Album: Long Headed Poppy" (2000) is lively and whimsical. No less systematic in her approach, Bocanegra's ordering is singular. The two drawings here reveal the presence of a mind caught up in cataloguing and counting with an impulse similar to the methodology of the natural sciences. Bocanegra's works underscore how the mind of the seeker determines what is found. Her work is a standout in this exhibition, not only for its ability to be read across a room, in which much of the work is oriented toward intimate viewing, but for the contradictions that are seeking resolution here. They are also the contradictions that we face collectively at the end of the enlightenment period when the dominance of the quantitative over the qualitative has resulted in a world where money has become the supreme. Bocanegra makes us aware of what we have been left with by cataloguing these hand-drawn lines like a species going extinct.



Jill Baroff, "Untitled (Tide Drawing)," 2006, ink and silk tissue mounted on rag, 31 x 31".

On another note, Sol LeWitt's beautifully precise "The Location of Geometric Figures: A Blue Square, Red Circle, Yellow Triangle, and Black Parallelogram" (1976) shows the other side of exactitude, where precision brings clarity and geometry speaks a language that employs the textual to its own ends.

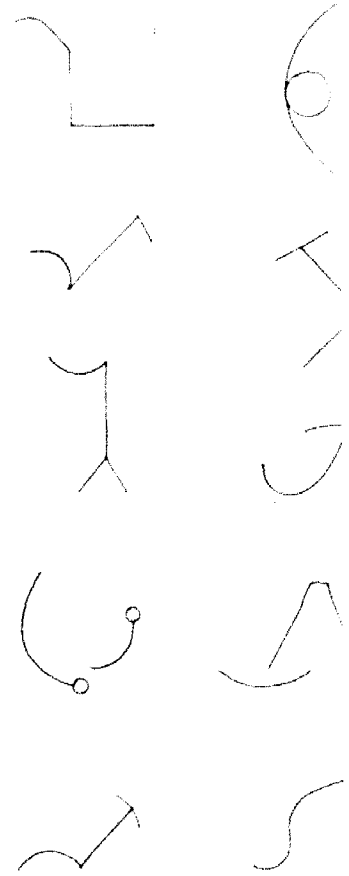
In the far room, moving past Jill Baroff's tide drawing, the curator has grouped works relying heavily on their materials to create vocabulary. Allyson Strafella's "Untitled" (1995), a typewriter drawing on carbon paper, recalls Carl Andre's seminal typed word stacks of the '60s. Devoid of words, though, they take instead Andre's poetic sensibility and transmute it into the world of the sensual. A seductively soft deep blue surface punctuated by the iridescent markings left after the carbon has been employed in a subtle articulation of symbols, Strafella uses letters to show words are not her avenue to content.

Next to it Joel Shapiro's "Untitled" (1969), a gridded fingerprint drawing, highlights the historic roots of Wynn Kramarsky's expansive drawing collection. The strength of which lies in the careful way in which Kramarsky has sought out those artists working today who have picked up and developed trains of thought that began in the '60s and '70s with Minimalist and related works and looked to see how those ideas are intoned in a very different time and place. With their works, Kramarsky is constructing his own art history to challenge the mainstream view.

Strafella's haptic nerve resonates across the room, its dark and unstable carbon the opposite of the softly aged, off-white stains of John Fraser's "Fading Light I" and "Fading Light II" (both 2003-11), with its mix of washes, meandering marks, and surface abrasions. Made of book endpapers, which open the blank page for further consideration, their stained edges pulsate with multiple given and created boundary lines, frustrating any attempt to discern the intended from the chance and thereby resisting a programmatic reading. Instead, their luminous fields open up, latent, for what might be brought toward them. They offer generous companionship to Robert Barry's "Untitled (ELIMINATE, FORGOTTEN)" (1978), which, from a distance, seems to be a simple blank page. It's only on closer inspection that the tiny letters forming words appear perpendicular to the paper's edge and begin to speak of conditions imagined to fill the void: glorious, despite, another, not, quite, forgotten.

The structure of the written text as we so often find it—letter after letter, word after word, line after line, page after page—provides the jumping-off point for another group of drawings. Here Schlatter chose to look at how artists examine aspects of text not always apparent to a reader or a writer—those visual aspects of block and form so familiar that we are no longer aware of them, such as the way we move from left to right when reading. The movement of reading and writing is taken up by Mary McDonnell as subject in her sensitively awkward "Untitled" (2007), in ink and mixed media on Japanese paper. McDonnell shows us how the break or mistake or excess in the flow is the incident that punctuates the field.

A beautiful vitrine with works by Ray Johnson, made between 1972 and 1994 especially for the collector, is but one example of the appreciation the artists in his collection feel towards Wynn Kramarsky, who brings together works with insight and sensitivity. The complex and unending dialogue between works of art is made visible in this exhibition in ways that span generations and movements and no doubt go beyond what anyone anticipated.



Christine Hiebert, "Untitled (Brand Markings), 1998-99," ink on tracing paper, 10 1/2 x 13 1/2".