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Not-so-basic drawings about moving the line

BY STEVE BENNETT : MARCH 15, 2012 : Updated: March 18, 2012 5:45pm

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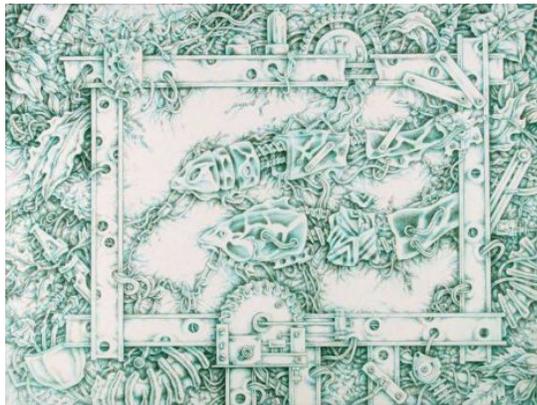


Photo By Courtesy of the artist

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Lubbock artist Terry Morrow has four meticulous drawings in "Texas Draws II" at the Southwest School of Art, including "Professor Lockheed's Aquarium #1."



For "Texas Draws II," curator **Kathy Armstrong** says she wanted to try some things that were "a little bit more experimental in the movement of a line."

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Which is a wonderful definition for one of our most fundamental skills, often lost in an art world that seems overly enamored with concept and installation and technology. Drawing, as any kindergartner can tell you, involves moving a line.

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Continuing through April 29 at the **Southwest School of Art**, where Armstrong is the director of exhibitions, this second biennial survey of the art of drawing across the state — the school's contribution to Contemporary Art Month — is both challenging and comforting.

Few will forget **Daniel Adame's** "performance drawing" at the exhibition's March 1 opening reception, when the Houston artist and dancer donned a sort of "chalk helmet" and drew on a blackboard.

Visitors could, and still can, contribute to the "collaborative drawing" in the hallway of the **Russell Hill Rogers Gallery**, a project inspired by the surrealists' "exquisite corpse" projects in which words and/or images were collectively assembled. Armstrong invites anyone, artist or not, to stop by and make a contribution to what will become a 5-foot by 33-foot community work.

Chinese artist **Beili Liu**, who lives in Austin, has formed a beautifully tangled 6-foot mass of dark, thin reeds into a "three-dimensional drawing" suspended from the ceiling against a white background. It is a subtle and stunning work that seems to communicate directly with Liu's nearby "Wind Drawing," a large-scale work of ink on panel that apparently depended on various gusts and breezes to form its rivulets and swirls. It resembles a satellite shot of a complex water system.

"My work depends on genuine connection with the material," says the artist, born in Jilin, China, in 1974. "I watch for the moment of surprise, when the material responds to one or a series of actions and leads to an exciting physical or conceptual outcome."

Dallas artist **Rosemary Meza** Des Plas plucks her own hair out of her head and sews with it on canvas to create works about women and violence. Her "La Gancha" women, packing pistols, are juxtaposed with "media-manipulated" images of violence such as the girls from "Charlie's Angels." Meza Des Plas' use of such a fundamental material (hair) in what is considered a woman's craft (sewing) gives her work a strong primal power.

Anne Allen, who's from Fort Worth, has contributed several "Bloody Scratch Drawings," red watercolor drawings on paper based on injuries sustained during the treasure-hunting game known as geocaching, in which players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS-enabled devices and then share their experiences online. (See www.geocaching.com/) These small, exquisite "networks of scratches" reflect the scrapes and bruises incurred on hikes in rugged terrain. Like a scab you can't stop picking, they draw you in with their invocations of pain.

Three San Antonio artists are including in "Texas Draws II."

Judith Cottrell, whose "drawbot" automatic drawing machine continues to unspool its cryptic imagery on Artpace's front windows, presents two works hand-drawn in the painstakingly layered style that led to the beginning stages of her carpal tunnel syndrome. Cottrell's work as a part-time surgical assistant in a veterinary office inspired the two drawings here, which represent two technologies of internal imaging — a myelogram of a spine and an MRI.

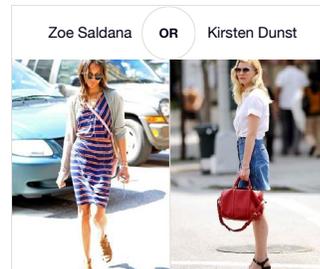
Known for her complex ink meditations, these two pieces are more representational, perhaps harkening back to earlier work, yet also can be read as abstract. As Cottrell points out, "I think that I've absorbed the aesthetics of medical imaging in my current drawings. Not to mention, conceptually, it is imagery unseen to the human eye."

Stacy Berfein deals with the human handprint on the environment in her pencil drawings of lush greenery on photographs of a dry riverbed, while **Alex Rubio**, the respected local muralist and



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painter, returned to his drawing roots during a recent residency in Vermont. His two striking graphite on paper images here are also a return to what Rubio calls “the cultural iconography and spirituality of my Latino-Chicano-Mexican-American identity.” “Mano de Dios (Hand of God)” is an exceptionally powerful, inspirational work.

Lubbock artist **Terry Morrow**'s surreal visions verge on steampunk in works such as “Professor Lockheed's Aquarium,” while Austin artist **Ian Ingram** creates astoundingly accurate photorealistic self-portraits, one of which, decorated with actual butterflies, was inspired by the birth of his daughter. **Nathan Heuer** of Victoria is a talented draftsman whose architectural drawings capture what he calls “contemporary ruins” in splendid isolation.

Finally, Houston artist **Gael Stack**, truly a Texas treasure, who had a monograph of her work published last year by **University of Texas Press**, presents three of her multilayered narratives from the 2010 “Forty-one Songs” series. With elements of text, pictographs, symbols, Twombly-like doodles, simple line portraits and what may or may not be coffee spills, these works are like pages from a desk blotter detailing our lives.

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