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Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER
Published: September 23, 1994

Selections Fall '94' Installations' The Drawing Center 35 Wooster Street SoHo Through Oct. 22

It is possible to see this attractive show of installation-size works on paper by four young artists as being about the traditional uses of drawing writ large, whether in the form the abstract expressive line, the geometric grid, the outline of the figure, or the written word.

Drawing's role as a preparatory medium, for example, is suggested by Brad Brown's odd-size sheets of paper covered with scratches and smears and crossed-out words and nailed to the wall. On some of them he even records the precise date when, apparently, a sheet was torn into smaller pieces, raising the question whether this scrappy compilation is a study for a mural in the making or a painting gradually coming apart.

By contrast, Jeff Beall's big, geometric "Empty Wall" looks faultlessly finished, though symbolically, at least, it isn't. It consists of dozens of plain, gesso-stiffened supermarket shopping bags stacked up, open but empty, in five rows. Empty, obviously, is the point here. The result may look like gigantic pristine Minimalist grid, but far from being complete and self-sufficient, it is literally waiting to be filled.

Kara Walker explores drawing's narrative potential in a large figurative tableau that looks as if it were drawn in ink but is actually made of silhouettes cut from black paper. This technique, popular for making quick, inexpensive portraits in the last century, is decisively updated in Ms. Walker's hands as she fashions a surreal, raunchy, angry fantasia on the world of antebellum slavery. Looking like a cross between a children's book and a sexually explicit cartoon, this is skillful, imaginative work and will doubtless be showing up elsewhere soon.

Finally, drawing's potential for intimacy and self-revelation -- perhaps it's most appealing function -- is nicely touched on in Larry Krone's two contributions, each of which copies out the lyrics of a pop love song, with individual words placed on separate sheets of paper. No big deal, really, except that each word, "written" in classic if slightly shaky Palmer Method, is formed from a few strands of the artist's hair: making drawing from the head as well as from the heart, in other words. HOLLAND COTTER

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