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Fine lines: Bonfoey Gallery exhibit displays a high quality of drawing

by [Steven Litt / Plain Dealer Art Critic](#)

Friday January 18, 2008, 4:20 PM

The art of drawing has undergone a complete role reversal over the past two centuries. Once considered a way for artists to rehearse primarily for more finished paintings or sculptures, fine drawing is now a goal in itself.

Once viewed as a way for audiences to glimpse artists at their most informal and unbuttoned, drawing is now an arena in which artists make highly polished works that stand on their own.

The formal, jacket-and-tie aspect of drawing is fully on display in "Delineate," a generally fine exhibition extended through Saturday, Feb. 2, at the Bonfoey Gallery in Cleveland. With roughly 40 works by seven artists from Cleveland and Columbus, it might even be considered a pocket guide to some of the best drawing in Ohio.

Work in the show ranges from the gritty urban landscapes of Laurence Channing, director of publications at the Cleveland Museum of Art, to the ribald fantasies of Ken Nevadomi, a professor of art at Cleveland State University.

What unites everything -- well, almost everything -- is high quality.

The dark and moody forest landscapes of Robert Robbins, who teaches painting and drawing at the Columbus College of Art and Design, are formulaic and repetitious. They'd make fine lobby decorations for a corporation that didn't want to offend anyone, or attract much attention.

Otherwise, the show is full of rewards.

George Mauersberger, chairman of the art department at Cleveland State, comes closest to being a philosopher of drawing. His trompe l'oeil drawings of flowers taped to black sheets of paper explore the tensions involved in creating the illusion of three-dimensional forms on a flat surface.

The blossoms in Mauersberger's highly realistic drawings seem to float in indeterminate blackness. But the scraps of tape holding the flower stems focus sharp attention on the fact that the flowers are fastened to a flat surface, which is in itself the illusory equivalent of the real surface -- the picture plane -- of the drawings.

Lowell Tolstedt, professor emeritus at the Columbus College of Art and Design, has a national reputation for highly realistic renderings of pieces of fruit or bits of candy. He revels in the crinkly textures of tin foil or cellophane.

Drawings such as "Apple With Cherries and Reflections" (2007), which portrays fruit sitting on crumpled foil or Mylar, shows how total realism can easily resemble total abstraction. The reflections in the foil make the apple and cherries seem to explode in a shimmering shower of Cubist fragments.

Channing and Charles Kanwischer, who lives in Waterville, are poets of urban gloom and suburban banality.



Bonfoey Gallery

George Mauersberger's "Wallflower 14" plays perceptual games by portraying highly realistic flowers taped to a flat surface that could double as the picture plane of the drawing itself.

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Channing's large charcoal drawings of highways and city streets are filled with a kind of exquisite bleakness. The same is true of Kanwischer's much smaller and more tightly rendered images of empty living rooms or the vacant, chewed-up earth of a construction site awaiting a subdivision or shopping mall.

Julie Friedman's stark images of naked tree branches or utility poles silhouetted against the sky explore a wintry mood close to despair, a quality enhanced by Friedman's decision to reverse the darks and lights in her drawings in the manner of photographic negatives. Amid the gloom, Friedman's drawings draw attention to the skeletal structures of branches, poles and wires.

At times, the finished results don't seem to justify the obvious labor expended on these works, but Friedman's use of multiple layers of paper, which creates subtle effects of luminosity and transparency, holds promise.

Her interest in poles and wires also indicates a desire to find beauty in commonplace things most people would overlook or consider ugly. That's an idea worth exploring in greater depth.

Finally, there's Nevadomi, who depicts playful, absurdist scenarios populated by nude or scantily clad women proportioned like slender models who just stepped off a runway. In one drawing, perhaps the best in the show, he envisions three bikini-clad women who drape themselves around a trio of macho cowboys in the midst of a poker game.

Through the windows that flank the room they occupy, a viewer can see squid and fish swimming about, as if the scene were set inside some strange aquarium. But wait, there's an automobile chugging along outside, too, suggesting that some terrible environmental disaster has just clobbered the planet.

Is Nevadomi saying that heedless Americans are gambling away the future as global warming melts the polar icecaps and floods the planet? That's for viewers to decide.

In the meantime, though, there's plenty to admire in the fluent way Nevadomi delineates the curve of a cowboy boot or the way a woman's breast joins the muscles of her neck and shoulder.

Drawing, as suggested by the word "delineate," the show's title, can be a way of describing things by recording how their contours interact or overlap. In Nevadomi's practiced hand, it looks easy. That's one reason his work gives pleasure, and why the Bonfoey show deserves to be seen and enjoyed.

REVIEW

Bonfoey Gallery

What: "Delineate: A Drawing Exhibition," featuring works by Laurence Channing, Julie Friedman, Charles Kanwischer, George Mauersberger, Ken Nevadomi, Robert Robbins and Lowell Tolstedt.

When: Through Saturday, Feb. 2.

Where: 1710 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

Admission: Free. Call 216-621-0178 or go to www.bonfoey.com.

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