

ART

Drawing: A Term Rich in Meanings

By HELEN A. HARRISON

IN art, it is easy to fall into the habit of relying on standard terms and ready definitions for things that, on reflection, are far more complex than such mental shorthand makes them seem.

For example, take drawing. Superficially, the idea of lines on paper seems to sum it up; yet, the term itself is rich with alternative meanings which, when applied to art, enlarge the possibilities of what drawing is and what it can achieve.

"Lines of Vision: Drawings by Contemporary Women," the current exhibition at the Hillwood Gallery of Long Island University's C. W. Post campus in Brookville, is dedicated to just such an expansive view.

Organized by the gallery's director, Judy Collischan Van Wagner, the show not only takes the concept of drawing past its conventional limitations, but also reaches beyond the mainstream of established artists to include younger, lesser-known and minority figures, thus reflecting the pluralism of today's art world.

With 138 artists represented, this is an in-depth survey of the many and varied strategies that artists, regardless of their sex, are now bringing to bear on drawing as a discipline.

But the fact that the show is limited to women is crucial to Dr. Van Wag-

ner's perspective on contemporary drawing, for she contends that the growing influence of female artists has been vital to the development of new approaches.

Paradoxically, the term for someone who draws is not sexually neutral, like artist or painter, but is a gender-based word: draughtsman.

Consciously or not, female artists may be seeking a way around this exclusionary male association by rejecting draftsmanship in favor of alternate means of expression that can still be considered drawing.

As the exhibition shows, "to draw" is a highly versatile verb. In addition to its narrow definition as delineation, drawing may refer to attraction, stretching, pulling, enticing — in fact, any number of forceful activities beyond simply making linear marks with the hand.

Thus, an unorthodox work like Katie Seiden's "Ascent of the Pigs," an assemblage of plastic toy animals embedded in paint and tar, is in fact a triple interpretation of drawing in its multiple meanings.

The animals are drawn to the surface like creatures trapped in pitch. They are drawn upward in a spiraling motion indicated by a track of paint, and we are attracted to the image as a curious mixture of whimsy and apotheosis.

Jane Logemann's "Begin" is made of paint and cement on a scrap of

aluminum screening. Her blunt, assertive central mark is a kind of primordial line: raw, primitive, an earth-mother of gesture. Perforated by the holes of the screen, it nevertheless pulls (or draws) itself into shape the way dividing cells do even as they split apart.

Collage, which unites disparate elements by drawing them together, plays an important role in many of the works. Scraps of paper, found objects and other additions to the surface provide textural and formal variety in some pieces, while in others they may serve a narrative or diaristic function.

Two serried ranks of dried rose

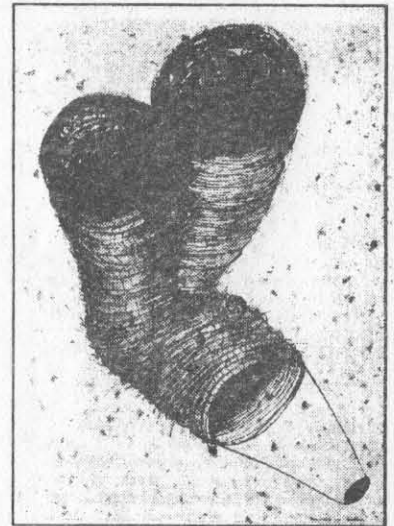
leaves on paper mirror one another in Maren Hassinger's "Equation." At first glance so alike, they differ subtly. Each has a singular character that only becomes apparent after concentrated study and comparison.

The collage's mounting on a strip of silk brocade suggests an oriental scroll, heightening the impression that this is a meditative work.

Joan Semmel teams up a xerographic image, taken from a photograph of her own body, with a linear treatment of the same subject. She implies that the camera provides the objective view, while the artist is free to interpret, turning observation into expressive creation.

The show includes plenty of

"Variations," left, by Joan Semmel. "Embody No. 2" by Elisa D'Arrigo.



straight drawings, too, running the stylistic gamut from Joan Weber's beautifully minimal finger markings made of raw pigment to Janet Fish's impressionistic "Cat and Fruit" and Eva Cockroft's realistic social documentary, "Shells from Samoza."

Several artists are showing working drawings or studies for works in other media, such as sculpture or site-specific installations. The schematic quality of pieces like Agnes Denes's project for a Florida airport and Alice Adams's "Platform Gate Study" for the Seattle Metro conveys something of the artists' thought processes as the concept evolved.

For pure, old-fashioned drawing, however, the most affecting pieces

are those in which line, whether abstract or representational, is the primary player.

No one can beat Mary Frank at making line seem alive with sensuous, elemental energy, as her watercolor, "Horses, Humans," demonstrates. In a more strident vein, Helen Oji's "A Double," a pastel and gouache, stylizes the forms of two cocktail glasses for a knockout effect.

Elisa D'Arrigo and the late Anna Mendieta used textured paper to give their drawings tactility. In Ms. D'Arrigo's "Embody #2," the roughness of the paper enhances the impression of a husk that once encased a figure.

The gallery is open weekdays from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Admission is free. ■