

ArtSeen

CHRISTINE HIEBERT Reconnaissance: Three Wall Drawings

by Lilly Wei

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Christine Hiebert's soaring installation, "Reconnaissance: Three Wall Drawings," has been in residence on the top floor gallery of Wellesley College's Davis Museum (designed by Rafael Moneo in 1993) for the past year. The 4000-square-foot, light-filled Tanner Gallery, with its series of clear glass clerestories and paired windowed alcoves, suggests a streamlined contemporary chapel, its altarpiece a glorious 5th century geometric floor mosaic from Antioch that is permanently installed on one wall. Not an easy space to integrate, interrupted by a great central atrium with an elegant staircase connecting all the floors, yet it was Hiebert's charge to respond to the architecture and the mosaic. The results, after a month-long stint working on site, were three immense and buoyant abstract drawings, one for each of the remaining three walls. Using the high, white walls as the ground, Hiebert worked directly onto them, improvising and revising as she applied a "mark"—blue carpenter tape or sheets of ink drawings—made not quite *alla prima*, yet retaining a sense of spontaneity, of a conversation in progress.

One wall plus a little more was given over to the blue adhesive tape, its bands placed in relationship to each other and to the space, sometimes crossing boundaries, overriding the actual spatial configuration of the architecture by linking two different planes that appeared to flatten into one surface before yielding to the incline of three dimensions. Hiebert would also roll the tape to meet the floor, then add another strip a short distance away, as if it were—or were not—a continuation of the line. Swooping up and down, playing with the straight line, she breaks the tape into angles or angular curves, their points of intersection and near-intersection pulsing, vibrant. All the configurations are on a diagonal to varying degrees, tautly stretched like extended, schematized dancers, one figure reacting to the pose of another, the composition a relay, in flux, nimble, yet opposed by a certain deliberate awkwardness—a flow and resistance with surprises that evoke the freestyle rhythms of new music and dance, of contemporary disjunctions. The different widths of the tape—from so delicate it seems penciled, on the verge of vanishing, to broad, bold anchoring bands—modulate line and color, conjuring a kind of spare, unsubstantial sky drawing, blue lightning, say, scribbled against a vast bank of white clouds, as if outside had

found its way in.

Three toppling stacks of paper covered by bands of black ink, rolled across the surface in varying densities and tonalities, are affixed loosely to the other two walls with plenty of space between them, one floating near the top of the wall, two springing up from the floor. The edges curl away from the wall in some places, the falling movement checked, but tenuous, taunting gravity and underscoring the same state of impermanence, of transition, that characterizes the tape drawing. The collage format establishes a direct dialogue between the ink bands—each one a striking drawing in its own right as well as an integral part of an ensemble—and the mosaic's patterns and muted coloration.

Hiebert's careful choice of materials, always critical to her practice, results in an interdisciplinary discourse that is rich, wide ranging. "Reconnaissance" becomes just that; an exploration of the relationship between architecture, mosaic, and drawing; permanence and the conditional; tradition and the contemporary—and their reconciliation. Most of all, it becomes a further exploration of the nature of drawing, of its immediacy, resilience and urgency, its proximity to the original creative impulse, even when the gesture, the touch is mediated through tape and collage. "Reconnaissance," ultimately, is a deeply gratifying, masterfully choreographed multipart invention about how drawing shapes space, real and imagined, and is one of Hiebert's most ambitious projects to date.