

GERING & LÓPEZ GALLERY

The Washington Post

ARTIST GOES FLAT-OUT TO DRAW THE VIEWER IN

There should be a plaque posted at the University of Maryland's Art Gallery: "Linn Meyers slept here." And not just because her two large-scale wall drawings look like giant, rumpled bed linens. Over the past month or so, the artist actually spent several nights there between marathon drawing sessions, sleeping in a makeshift bedroom in a corner of the gallery. The result is a pair of untitled works that you don't just look at, but inhabit.

Part of their power is their enormous size. The first, which bisects the main gallery on a graceful arc of curving drywall, is, at 44 feet long, the artist's largest wall drawing to date. From a distance, it looks like a mass of wavy hair or a shaky rendering of some disturbed radio transmission emanating outward, in a pattern of wave interference, from one or more unseen towers. As you approach, the lines of the drawing seem to calm down a little, to resolve themselves into a kind of topographical map. Ripples of wet sand? Those wrinkled sheets? The drawing itself is flat, although it doesn't look it. Stand close enough to see the trompe-l'oeil contours, and you'll notice something else. You can't see the edges. It's too big for your peripheral vision to take in all at once. It feels like you're swimming in it, enveloped by it. That's exactly what Meyers wants. "When I'm working, I'm inside of it," says the Washington-based artist, who has works in the collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden and other museums. "That I can bring the viewer to that point is a goal. A lofty goal."

In that regard, a second drawing is even more successful than the first. Located in the gallery's back room, the collaborative installation with D.C. sound artist Richard Chartier is a kind of walk-in drawing, a surround-sound environment that pairs Meyers's vibrating visuals -- one on the right, one on the left -- with an equally minimalist soundscape featuring Chartier's trademark digitally rendered "music." Chartier's composition evokes keening whale song one minute, distant crickets the next. A theremin-like sci-fi score threads in and out, punctuated by vaguely recognizable noises. A dropped pen cap?

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Something rubbing up against something else? Static? Here, the two walls on which Meyers has drawn come together to form a "V." Enter it, and after a few steps you're standing, quite literally, inside it.

But Meyers wants to make more than what she calls "wallpaper." She refers to her drawings as documenting the passage of time. The larger of the two took a little more than two weeks to make. Not long for a work that size, but a considerable commitment to making what is essentially the same line, over and over, only to end up with a drawing of nothing. And without her reeking of perspiration, her effort shows. Just looking at it made the muscles in my own hand cramp up a little bit. Still, the artist isn't interested in being seen as some sort of David Blaine-esque freak show, with her work a mere endurance stunt.

Spend some time with her art. (Several smaller, preparatory drawings on Mylar are also scattered throughout the show.) If you do, she hopes that you'll come to see something more than just the work that went into drawing those countless squiggly lines -- something she calls, almost apologetically, "devotion," in a reference to both the work's obvious effort and its almost mystical aspects. Meyers needn't apologize. It isn't hard to feel -- even if you can't see -- something powerful here. "One line is nothing," Meyers says. Like colonies of ants and bees, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The best comment ever made about her work, she says, came from a visitor to her studio who cut through all the art-speak. "It's a picture," Meyers recalls the woman saying, "of the wind."

