

SEANKELLY

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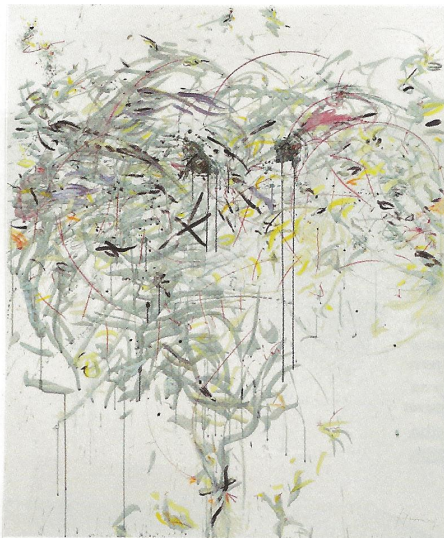
REBECCA HORN SEAN KELLY

A group of big, agitated "paintings" on paper (drawings would be the conventional term) were the main event in Rebecca Horn's recent exhibition, which was called "Cosmic Maps." All around 6 feet high and hung close to the floor, and often focused on bursts of graphic activity at shoulder height, they made it easy for viewers to put themselves in the artist's place, arm extended, hand flying. Horn, best known for kinetic and sometimes extravagantly dramatic sculptures (a few relatively modest examples were

included in this show), here demonstrated that abstract two-dimensional works can seem just as performative.

Not quite Action paintings in the old-fashioned sense, they imply the presence of the artist not only in their easily traceable gestures, and in their roughly human overall dimensions (their 5-foot widths conform to an average arm span), but also in the words that sometimes appear as handwritten marginal notes. The connection thus made to Cy Twombly is supported by Horn's drawn, brushed, dripped and finger-painted graphic marks, which conspire to elicit the description "poetic" as more than a term of praise. One clue to the work's essential lyricism is the original verse that was lettered on a gallery wall (it is among several poems by the artist that appear in the exhibition's catalogue). Horn writes of a pencil line that "flies around like ash, clasps hold of the fox star's tail," and so on. Titles do some of the literary work; in *Flames Burst out of the Heart* (2005), *Flaming Eyes in the Burning Bush* (2005) and *The Man of Sorrows in a Whirl of Clouds* (2006), they are among the words penciled in blue on the images (in Horn's native German). The palette in these three drawings tends to the visceral, including a fair amount of blood red.

On the other hand, *Primeval Cloud* (2004-08), with its widely flung lariats of pale blue ink, is buoyant



Rebecca Horn: *Tree of Winter Dew Drops*, 2007, mixed mediums on paper, 71 1/2 by 59 1/4 inches; at Sean Kelly.

in an almost rococo way; its sunniest reaches evoke Tiepolo—or perhaps Dufy. Similarly, *Blue in the Intermediate State* (2004) is a festive whirl of airy blue centered on two big orange drips. *Tree of Winter Dew Drops* (2007), given pride of place on a central wall, splits the difference between dour and ecstatic. Drawn in a watery gray that is delicate rather than melancholy, it features two centers of activity that could be eyes; its loosely symmetrical, grandly looping composition recalls Dieter Roth's two-handed drawings, redoubling the figurative allusions.

Also shown were smaller works on paper, which shared a room with two Cornell-like assemblages in glass boxes. These featured moving elements: turning gears in *Shell Clock*, flapping butterfly wings in *The Butterfly's Dream*. Most substantial among the three-dimensional works (all 2008) was *Cinema Vérité (The Snake's Ghost)*. Angling into a shallow pool of water is a metal arm with a coil of copper around its tip, which slowly advances toward, then suddenly retracts from, a little object in the water. The assemblage's reflection on the wall suggests a magnified struggle between two waterborne microorganisms. If the poetry in this work (as in some others) is a little oblique, Horn's inclination toward resounding, discipline-bridging Gesamtkunstwerken is clear.

—Nancy Princenthal