



Drew Shiflett:
Untitled #62,
2011, watercolor,
ink, cheesecloth,
handmade paper and
mixed mediums, 40
by 37½ inches; at
Lesley Heller.

DREW SHIFLETT

Lesley Heller

As I made my way through the cacophony of the Lower East Side gallery scene, Drew Shiflett's tactile and intricate "constructed drawings" caught my attention with their quiet understatement. The exhibition, Shiflett's third with this gallery, presented seven works made over the last four years. Each piece consists of multiple kinds of parchmentlike, often translucent, handmade paper glued together without concern for the regularity of the four-sided plane.

Shiflett draws on the surfaces of the torn and cut pieces at the same time as she adds layer upon layer, sometimes incorporating cheesecloth and paper pulp. Repetitive fine parallel lines inscribed in ink, graphite, Conté crayon and watercolor in a soft-spoken earthy palette resist being deciphered even as they pull us in. Basically abstract in nature, the works sometimes suggest architecture, landscape or woven textiles. Though Shiflett might hint at imagery, it gets submerged into the surface by accumulations of paper and mark-making, lending a somewhat hermetic quality to the work.

Her methods are subtle and diverse. Thin vertical ink strokes cross sanguine-colored horizontal marks and vice versa; a pale wash fills in a row or column, flowing past its edges. Glue application causes puckering, creating a relief

effect; and the translucent paper alters the color and tone of underlying layers. The drawing, in places, recalls van Gogh's reed pen markings; elsewhere, black ink lines resemble topography symbols for railroad tracks.

As she marries relief, collage and drawing through a slow, deliberate process that involves precision as well as messy, awkward improvisation, the artist devises objects that are at once dense and full of air. Six of the seven horizontal, squarish or, in one case, vertical works that were on display are medium-size; the seventh is over 6 feet long (*Untitled #56*, 2009).

In *Untitled #62* (2011, 40 by 37½ inches), three patched-together panels hang in front of a fourth. The strips of the back panel that can be seen have a grayish-brown cast, with closely placed sepia-colored lines, evoking closed Venetian blinds. A sliver of cheesecloth bulges in one area; its diaphanous wavy threads create a dialogue between the straighter sanguine and black lines on either side of it. Throughout the work, contrasts in color and tone—warmer browns, creams or black ink hatching on lighter whitish paper—establish a rhythm of rectangles.

As the artist marks time, striving to slow it down, something similar is experienced by the viewer looking into the minutiae of layers and lines. In a sense, Shiflett's drawings provide a metaphor for the human condition; they are contained, yet they have an expansive quality that suggests they could go on and on.

—Elisa Decker