



Richard Mill's untitled oil and acrylic: Rearranging familiar elements of expressionism

ART

Drawings come out of closet, onto gallery

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Everyone knows it's a cliché to say that without drawing there is no art, and that artists learn to paint and sculpt by first learning to draw.

The process is as basic as crawling before walking and its importance to an artist's growth is fundamental, even though later on he may paint in acrylics or watercolors without making a preliminary sketch.

But most painters and sculptors wouldn't consider starting on the final work without a series of preliminary drawings of hands, face, body and garments.

One has only to look at the sketchbooks of da Vinci, the notebooks of Picasso and countless others, to grasp the essential role performed by drawing.

Yet it is only fairly recently that drawings have come out of the closets and drawers of collectors and museums to hang on walls as works of art on their own and not as adjuncts to paintings and sculptures. Yet they haven't quite made it to the level of acceptance accorded paintings by the public at large.

For the most part, drawings remain the domain of connoisseurs and curators.

For one thing, drawings have never been terribly accessible. Until the last decade, exhibitions of drawings by galleries and museums were sporadic. For another, people looked to the plastic arts for innovation. Their tastes were determined by the cataclysmic changes brought about, for instance, by the advent of Impressionism more than a century ago.

It was in painting, not drawing, that so many post-Impressionist movements found root. It was in a painting of 1907, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, that Picasso confronted the world with cubism and it was in another seminal painting, *Nude Descending a Staircase*, that Marcel Duchamp opened people's eyes to the possibilities of creating the impression of movement.

There are a number of reasons why drawings have been attracting more interest. One is that the art boom of the past decade or so has narrowed the number and quality of paintings available for sale and purchase. Auction houses have also been responsible for a minor boom in drawings, encouraging collectors and the public to profit by the surge in prices. Museums discovered that drawings hidden in drawers possessed great market value and a flurry of exhibits resulted — as everyone scrambled to unearth works hitherto accessible only to scholars.

One of the most popular rooms, for instance, at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art, is that of prints and drawings. While no one has yet had the courage to open a commercial gallery in Montreal for drawings only, as some have for prints, there is one in New York.

The greatest impetus to this fervor for drawings has come from the current generation of artists. They experiment with the medium in the same bold way painters did before them.

Two shows now in town provide the public with examples of the prodigious technical range and studied spontaneity of expression that a new wave of artists is bringing to the craft. What most of them have in common are a healthy abhorrence of anything that smacks of tradition, and a desire to force the viewer to look at drawing in fresh and novel ways.