

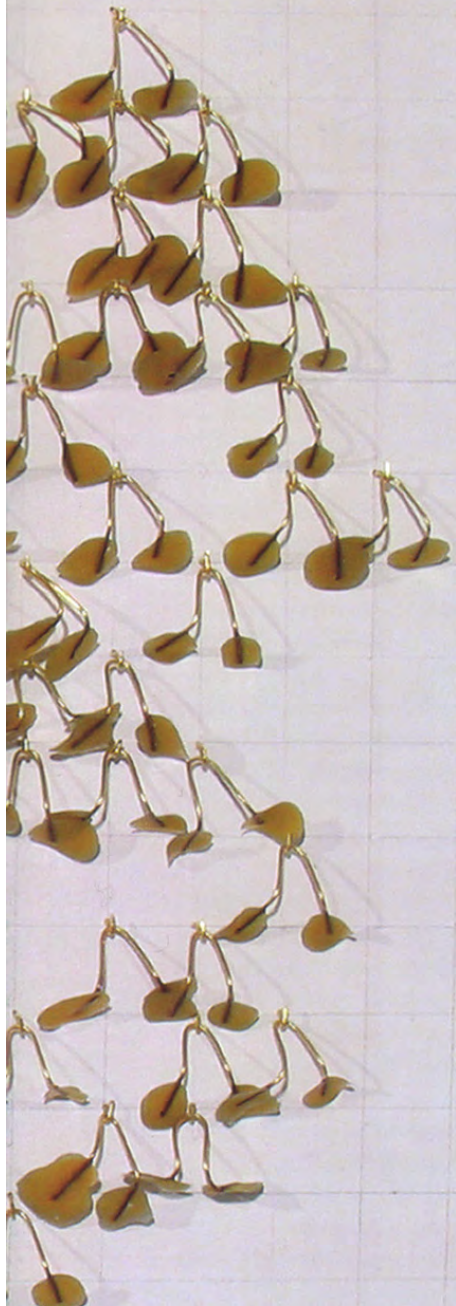
DIMENSIONAL LINE

Recent Work by

Sharon Loudon and

Creighton Michael

February 14 to May 2, 2004



Sharon Louden

CHECKLIST

Merge, floor installation
2003, strips of 1 x 7 inch
flash aluminum with wax
and luminous paint
dimensions variable

Merge, series of drawings
2001, watercolor
iridescent acrylic and gel
medium on mylar
96 x 48 inches each

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Sharon Louden
Lives in New York, NY

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS (*solo)

2005 The Neuberger
Museum of Art, Purchase, NY*

2004 Clark University, Worcester,
MA*

2003 Kemper Museum of
Contemporary Art, Kansas City,
MO*

2002 "Drawings of Choice from
a New York Collection,"
Krannert Art Museum,
University of Illinois,
Champaign, IL (traveling,
catalogue)

2001 DiverseWorks ArtSpace,
Houston, TX (catalogue)*
Numark Gallery, Washington,
DC
"Works on Paper," Grant
Selwyn Fine Art, New York, NY

1998 "Here: Artists' Interventions
at the Aldrich Museum,"
Aldrich Museum of
Contemporary Art, Ridgefield,
CT (catalogue)



Tips (shown in daylight)
braided cotton dental rolls,
luminous paint, glue, steel wire;
dimensions variable (approx. 7,000 units
spanning 400 sq. ft.), 1998-1999
Shown here at the Aldrich Museum of
Contemporary Art, Ridgefield CT

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Arkansas Art Center
Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts
Institute
The Museum of Fine Arts,
Houston
National Gallery of Art
Weatherspoon Art Museum
Yale University Art Gallery
Progressive Corporation
Yahoo! Corporate Headquarters,
permanent outdoor sculpture
commission
Werner H. Kramarsky

SELECTED AWARDS

UrbanGlass Established Visiting
Artist Fellowship
Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts
Grant
Art Omi International Artists'
Residency
Connemara Conservancy Artists'
Grant Visiting Artist Print
Residencies at Print Research
Institute Press (PRINT), Denton
TX and Tamarind Institute,
Albuquerque, NM
Visiting Artist/Scholar,
American Academy in Rome,
Italy

EDUCATION

MFA Yale University, School of
Art
BFA School of the Art Institute of
Chicago

DIMENSIONAL LINE

Recent Work by

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Creighton Michael

DIMENSIONAL LINE IS A CONVERSATION ABOUT DRAWING between the works of two artists, Sharon Loudon and Creighton Michael. Loudon and Michael have been paired for this show because their material easily gravitates between two and three dimensions. In their individual visual languages, Loudon and Michael examine such questions about drawing as the relationship of figure and ground; the performative human gesture as a record or trace; and working with units in series.

For this exhibition Sharon Loudon shows *Merge*, an installation comprised of a site-specific floor sculpture and majestic drawings. In previous projects, Loudon created forms with rubber tubing, monofilament or other materials more typically associated with industrial manufacture than with art. Regardless of the material with which she works, however, she considers all her work emerging from drawing, and she seeks out the stuff that will best create a lively line.¹ In *Merge*, drawing and sculpture indeed merge. Loudon fashioned the floor piece from thousands of strips of one-by-seven-inch flash aluminum, some of which have been treated with wax and luminous paint. The drawings measure 96 x 48 inches each and have elusive forms created in watercolor, iridescent acrylic and gel medium on mylar. To create the forms of the drawings, Loudon used sculpture tools—wedge-head clay shapers—rather than a brush, as if she were carving or shaping the material. The scale of these unframed works creates a sculptural presence that equals that of the floor installation. The human figure must relate to their physicality, which is a very different viewing experience from that of traditional drawings. Concentrating on the subtle forms of the mylar additionally makes other demands on the viewer. The pigment merges with the mylar because their colors are so closely matched; finding the forms is dependent on close observation and proper lighting; here is another merging, of the art objects into their environment.

Loudon installs these drawings such that the movement of the forms resonates from one to the next, as well as with the floor piece. She notes: "In the truest sense of installation, the placement and order of the drawings are based on the space for which they will be installed and the rhythm of one drawing to the next; the inherent relationships and dialogue of one form to the other determined by me at the time of installation... It is always my hope that each drawing has its own life, but grouped together as one family, one group, one species."²

That this species should be animated and suggest movement is cen-



Sharon Loudon
from *Merge*, 2001
Watercolor
iridescent acrylic
and gel medium
on mylar
96 x 48 inches

tral to Louden's drawing concerns. She does not therefore differentiate between figure and ground in the traditional sense. Her *Merge* figures exist in dialogue with the space of the ground in such a manner as to suggest the potential for these anthropomorphic forms to engage in a narrative of their own making. Louden further explains: "The 'ground' (mylar and paper) is not merely a 'support' for the drawings; it is the environment for which the *Merge* forms live, move through, carry themselves in, and place themselves momentarily... For example, if the forms are positioned

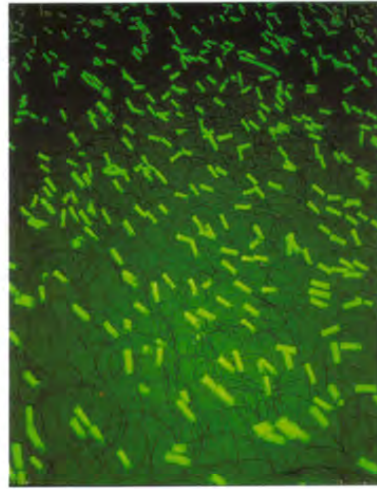
on the bottom of a page, it could appear and be felt that there is an underlying pressure and weight to the space above OR a space for the form to breathe and move through, if it would so desire."³

Drawing is a physical process for Louden. She seeks "confident," elegant forms, but to find them, she creates reams of unedited sketches that exhibit emotional rawness, works that are notably inelegant in their experimentation and expressiveness. From these, she winnows and discovers. Process is equally important as Louden creates her three-dimensional lines, which are invariably produced in volume for outdoor or room-sized installations. Once material, form and idea coalesce, Louden engages in the methodical, repetitive manufacture of the thousands of units she requires.

With drawing at the heart of Louden's *métier*, the love of stroke and gesture is palpable in her artworks. In *Merge*, as with earlier series, with little distinction between drawing and sculpture, the drawings take on a three-dimensional presence in the gallery and the gesture of lines on mylar is extended to the gesture of the aluminum units on the gallery floor.

A PREDILECTION FOR LINE is also a consistent motif that weaves throughout the myriad series of Creighton Michael's oeuvre. He has stated: "My vehicle of [artistic travel] has been the activity of drawing. Its process, its immediacy and its attention to the basic unit, the mark, have guided my work for more than two decades."⁴ In *Dimensional Line*, Michael is represented by several recent series that investigate line: *FIELD*, *DIP*, *GRID*, and *TUCK*. Although the *FIELD* series is initially identified as paintings, all of the work can be described as hybrid. None is readily classifiable because Michael incorporates unexpected materials as well as disruptions in spatial and temporal logic.

In the *FIELD* series, Michael investigates the tension between surface texture and the illusion of space within the picture plane.⁵ The works are curved convex panels on which Michael paints, "the focus being on repetitive activity instead of on the resulting marks," that is, on drawing.⁶ The accumulated layers then vie for prominence—Michael asks, "which does the eye see on the surface?" as it shifts between the sculptural panel on the wall to the surface's planes of pattern and between the interweaving figure and ground. He seeks to create a complex, ambiguous viewing experience: "*FIELD*'s fusion of elements taken from painting, sculpture and drawing encourages the viewer to



Sharon Louden

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braided cotton dental rolls, luminous paint, glue, steel wire; dimensions variable (approx. 7,000 units spanning 400 sq. ft.), 1998-1999
Shown here at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield CT

**BOTH /
TOWARD THE**

Creighton Michael

FIELD (1802), 2002, Oil on linen on convex panel, 32 x 24 x 3 1/2 inches

experience the compression of a three-dimensional field of vision placed on a curved ground. This 'liquid vision' or disruption of the field establishes layers of perceptibility for the viewer to encounter both physical and illusionist space."⁷

While Michael accepts that natural references may be discerned in the *FIELD* panels, he seeks instead to develop a contemplative atmosphere within them, to have the works "understood as meditations [rather] than as illustrations."⁸ In this respect, Michael's long years as a student of eastern philosophy can be discerned. With the *FIELD* panels, he adapts notions of time from these traditions. In viewing scroll paintings, for example, the works are unrolled for episodic viewing; the narrative is unfolded through a stacking of time, moving from one "place" in time to the next. Similarly, in experiencing Japanese gardens, space is expanded simply because it takes time to meander through the garden, through a circular movement that has no end. Michael hopes the *FIELD* paintings would engage a viewer with a similar, cyclical experience.

The mark-making activity of Michael's *FIELD* panels takes an interesting dimensional turn in his relief drawings. *DIP* ("drawn in paper") are relief drawings composed of individual units of wooden dowels dipped into a mixture of graphite, acrylic and paper pulp. Michael created each *DIP* by intuitively placing, or drawing, with the units on the wall. The resulting three-dimensional imagery resembles, among other things, wave patterns or flocks of birds in flight. Michael is able to recreate the *DIP* drawings via a paper template that he creates for each one. In *Dimensional Line*, the series migrates from wall to floor with two recent manifestations, *DIP 903* and *DIP 803*. Here the template and drawing co-exist on a single foundation as wall drawing transforms into sculpture-drawing.

ISTS SHARE THE IMPULSE
EATED GESTURE.

A second sculptural drawing series is entitled *GRID*. Michael began these with a

12-inch or 24-inch-square grid drawn in graphite onto a wall. He next drilled holes at randomly selected intersections on the grid and completed the drawing by inserting individual units crafted from wire, glue and acrylic. The early *GRIDS* resemble cascading, colorful petals that are similar to the painterly marks of Michael's *FIELD* panels. Their organic associations, however, exist in marked contrast to their structured ground.

The *GRID* series evolved through 2003 into imagery that is, paradoxically, at once simpler and more complex. The baroque petal-like individual units



Creighton Michael

GRID (2803), 2003

Steel and rubber

24 x 24 x 1 inches (variable)

give way to more austere-looking wire staples that may be adorned with rubber tubing (clear or dark). These *GRIDS* are much more variable. They coalesce as drawings through the interplay of the wires and their shadows (in a different way, light is as essential here as it is for Louden's *Merge* drawings). Moreover, Michael cedes control over their placement, explaining: "Each *GRID* has an accompanying schematic [that] instructs the preparator as to the placement of only one end of the u-shaped element. The direction of the other is at the discretion of the installer [which] results in a new configuration with each new installation."⁹

TUCK emerged from *DIP* and *GRID*. As with the former, the individual units are made



from wooden dowels, paper and charcoal, but they are drawn anew, like the *GRID* drawings, with each installation. And, as with *GRID*, says Michael, "the shifting appearance

and spatial ambiguity of these works alter the viewer's ability to distinguish between form and space, substance and illusion."¹⁰ In their form and creation, *TUCK* and the later *GRID* series suggest an affinity with mid-20th-century, eastern-inspired art forms. Michael provides a matrix, but encourages variation, in a manner reminiscent of a John Cage composition. Similarly, the calligraphy of his drawings, created by wire, light, and shadow, has visual precedence in the white writing paintings of Mark Tobey. In this regard, it should be noted that, while Sharon Loudon acknowledges the influence of Asian calligraphy on her line, Michael, by contrast, is more indebted to that of Middle Eastern sources. This is an interesting distinction, relative to the two artists' respective approaches to and intentions for the mark. Chinese calligraphy may be derived from pictographs, have some distant relationship to figuration. Loudon's gestures are not figurative, per se, but they have that potential. Michael's work is, instead, pattern-derived, for the calligraphy that inspires him was created by cultures for whom graven images were taboo.

Together, the work of Sharon Loudon and Creighton Michael in *Dimensional Line* creates an experience of the figure moving through time and especially space. Their aims weave between convergence and divergence. Both artists share the impulse toward the repeated gesture. Loudon's work is about mass, but she uses a mark to create vaguely figurative forms that will create individuality within that mass. Michael's process is also towards accumulation, but within his repetitive process he seeks variation, even surprise. His marks direct the viewer toward introspection of an interior life. It might be said that Loudon seeks to create form while Michael ultimately seeks formlessness.

Mary E. Murray

Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

¹ See Sue Scott, "Louden doesn't see herself as an installation artist. Instead, she sees herself as someone who draws, both on paper and in the air," in "Agents," *Sharon Loudon* (Wilmington, Del.: Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, 1999), n. pag.

² Interview with the artist, February 12, 2002.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Artist's statement, "Dialects of Line."

⁵ Marjorie Welsh, "Jasper's Patterns," makes an interesting observation on this topic: "For some orthodox modernists, the choice of spatial pattern is no idle matter, because it represents the avowal—or disavowal—of twentieth-century aesthetics. Central to this avowal is the idea that, whatever else the modern art may be, it is marked by a major shift from illusionist space describing a transparent world of events to nonillusionist space concerned with describing medium and form," in *Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 85-86.

⁶ Artist's statement, "FIELD."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Artist's statement, "GRID."

¹⁰ Artist's statement, "TUCK."