

ART GRIND

December 3, 2012, Sabina Tichindeleanu

‘SMALL’ IS FAR FROM ‘LIMITED’: “SMALL SCALE: EXPANSIVE VISIONS” AT GALLERY JOE

I know that this is my fourth post about a show at [Gallery Joe](#), but I can't help it; Gallery Joe consistently puts up great work, and in a city that, in my view, thirsts for galleries that show consistently high quality, non-commercial, non-crafty or non-stale figurative work, it's hard to ignore its exhibitions.

In the front gallery, a group show of small works on paper exquisitely demonstrates the beauty and unique richness of small-scale drawings. *small worlds: expansive visions* opened on November 17 and runs through January 5th.

Two of the artists in this show, Charles Ritchie and Rob Matthews, are already represented by Gallery Joe, while the other four, Marcel Gähler, Tom Molloy, Dozier Bell and Tom Fairs, are showing with the gallery for the first time. Each artist brings a different style of drawing to the show, yet the whole exhibition manages to point out what all these artists have in common: they manage to create, through exquisite craftsmanship in miniscule dimensions, complex, expansive universes that explode beyond the tiny confines of each piece. Particularly successful in this regard are the contributions by Gähler, Bell, and Ritchie, which achieve something I've hoped for in my own work: somehow through the small size of their drawings, they add to the surface or the initial image a new and somewhat paradoxical dimension of intimate grandeur.



Marcel Gähler, "Ohne Titel (Untitled)," 2012

As you enter the gallery, two drawings by **Marcel Gähler** inaugurate your passage into a world of self-reflection and introspection. Although it seems that each of the two pieces is an image of a projected photograph, slide, or video, together they function as a window to memory that is both personal and universal. Perhaps because ambiguous in content (children running on the beach, people walking through a field), the drawings seem personal and intimate to any viewer. Again the delightful paradox: the intimacy of the scale and the treatment of the subject give these drawings an endearing universal quality. These small graphite drawings offer a unique viewing experience. We see an image of an image of an image of a moment. The original image seems caught by surprise or frozen in time. The drawing manages to capture the same essence, that of a memory that is both alive and suspended in time. As we look at the drawing, we feel like a slide show is about to happen, the video is about to start, the memory about to replay. This game of remembrance – the feeling of looking at the drawing of a memory, the actual projection of the image from which the drawing was created, a reenactment of an initial memory, and the real moment from which this memory has evolved – creates an image that is layered in its content and allows the drawing to vibrate, transform, and exist beyond the two-dimensional surface. Through careful uses of compositional arrangement and the overall intimacy of the act of drawing, the artist is not only creating a space in time for the image, but also for the act of looking (at the image to be drawn or that is drawn). He manages to translate into drawing or through drawing not only a perfect depiction of an image but also the notion of time as space, and in this case of multiple spaces, through the re-re-creation of the same image or the re-remembrance of a particular moment. I've only recently discovered Gähler's work. It is fascinating, engaging both visually and conceptually, and, frankly, beautiful.



Tom Molloy, "Cloud V," 2004

Next, three drawings by **Tom Molloy**, take the exhibition in a different direction. These pieces reveal or point to history's misfortunes, the use or overuse of power, and, perhaps, offer commentary on modern warfare and its effects. What appears initially to be a peaceful drawing of clouds turns out to be a depiction of the first test explosion of a thermonuclear device in the Pacific Ocean. These drawings give us a window into a different kind of world, the world of war, destruction, and transformation and perhaps also threaten to catch us in our complacency or, what is worse, our ignorance.



Dozier Bell, "Flight," 2011

Dozier Bell's charcoal on Mylar drawings remind me of the sublime characteristic of the Romantic landscapes. They are beautiful and majestic, yet surreal and menacing. The intimacy of the small-scale allows the drawings to vibrate and create a tiny magical world of their own, one that is both real, almost palpable, but also fantastic and imaginary. The clouds gathering over a castle in *Burg 06:00*, or the birds hovering over tall pine trees in *Flock 4*, give the drawings a feeling of immediacy and suspension; the drawings are a tiny glimpse, a thought, suspended, of

what is about to happen or of what could happen. Besides the fact that Bell's drawings are perfectly and exquisitely crafted, they are striking glimpses into a world that seems both abundant and on the brink of destruction. The small-scale is what allows the drawings to have a dual, antagonistic feeling of unsettling serenity. Bell's drawings have a grandiose quality even though they are tiny; the largest one is a mere 5" in width. The *expansive vision* is contained yet it has a deep richness that pulsates and creates a moving, ever-changing universe beyond the tiny surface.



Charles Ritchie, "Fragment: Lamps" 2012

Charles Ritchie's drawings are also wonderful examples of tiny worlds that open up and expand beyond the surface. Even though Ritchie has been working exclusively in and around his studio and home for a little over two decades and has found inspiration in life in the American suburbia, his drawings are full of abundant richness and surprising variation. They are a tale of an artist's life, a peek into his process and his surroundings, a shortcut to seeing what he sees. The house becomes the artist and the artist becomes the house, a place of dwelling and reverie, qualities resonating from each of his works. There are no fancy artifices in his work. On the contrary, his drawings betray an endearing candor. Ritchie manages to take us on a journey to understand light, to point out the initial excitement of discovering or re-discovering the beauty of a corner, a hallway, or a window view, and to convey the surreal qualities of evening light hitting a cluttered desk or the eerie experience of seeing oneself in the moment, in a reflection. Ritchie masterfully depicts both what is visible and what is suggested or metaphoric, both the inside and outside of the space around him, both the interior and exterior of the artist himself. As Ritchie says in his statement, he aims "to come to deeper levels of awareness and to more fully interpret the magic and mystery behind the surface of things." I have long admired Ritchie's work. His drawings never cease to surprise me, to quell my peculiar aesthetic cravings, or to enrich my life with beauty for at least those few minutes that I look at each one of his works.



Tom Fairs, "Untitled"

There are also two landscapes by **Tom Fairs** showing in this exhibition. The quick line, the immediacy and spontaneity of the drawing, betray the fact that the drawing was done from life. With quick gestural marks, Fairs manages to translate the feeling of a moment, of the light and warmth of the sun seeping through the leaves and branches and resting on a trodden path. These two drawings have a freshness and vibrancy that I often miss in drawing; it is rarely achieved. Nothing can match the lightness and serious playfulness of a drawing done from life. Fairs' work is very rare in exhibition, which makes it even more exciting to see. His drawings champion the simplicity of the medium at its purest: "I have no theories, no special techniques and no information to communicate. I try to achieve a brief glimpse of the implicit order that lies beneath what we perceive as reality."



Rob Matthews, "Small Tree,"

2012

Last but not least, a small landscape by **Rob Matthews** brings this exhibition to an end. Rob Matthews is known for his detailed graphite portraits and his equally flawless landscapes. Reminiscent of Flemish High Renaissance landscape drawings, such as those by Hans Bol, his works – flawlessly rendered – betray a magical, imaginary world. Though initially Matthews' only drawing in this exhibition, *Small Tree*, is simply a landscape, this small image hints to the viewer that perhaps there is more here than what meets the eye. Rob Matthews' work leaves you in suspense; it leaves you playing a guessing game, trying to unravel a hidden narrative. His drawings have humor and playfulness, but they manage to remain mysterious and sober.

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