



Art Review: Working the Line at ILLE Arts

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by Esperanza Leon

“Working the Line” at ILLE Arts, 216a Main Street, Amagansett, NY 11930

On view through April 11, 2013

I might hesitate with an exhibition curated by a participating artist, as often the theme is weak or unclear and the presentation lacking. Walking into the clean, sparse space of ILLE Arts the latter point is laid to rest instantly and the power of placement is revealed. Crisp white walls, floor, and ceiling set off properly arranged and placed artworks. Neither is there a sense of forbidding or sterility, another issue rampant with standard white cubes. Here, the whiteness lends an ethereal quality and the artwork breathes and floats in an expanse that does not dwarf either the art or the spectator. During my visit, this quality was emphasized by a subtle glow of sunlight shining onto the floor from a circular window high in the wall opposite the entrance, a natural anchor or pause for the eyes.



“Richard Pryor” by Christa Maiwald, 2006.
Hand-embroidered, cotton fabric and thread,
13 x 13 inches.

“Working the Line” is curated by exhibiting artists Denise Gale and Christa Maiwald and, to the relief of my first point, it presents a simple—perhaps overly simplistic—yet elegant premise: five artists exploring the possibilities of line. Line is an essential formal artistic element so the selection could be easily overwhelming. Instead, the two artist/curators chose three other artists whose work complements, challenges, and illuminates their own and each other. The odd number provides asymmetry, while the exhibition retains balance.

Although the space would lend itself to larger works, the choice here was to display small to medium formats for visual cohesion. The pieces do not compete with one another, but each demands attention and speaks for itself. Again, placement here is crucial as no artwork mimics another. The curators did not make solely superficial correspondences, instead leaving it to the viewer to establish relationships—perhaps decorative ones at times—and conversations between works.

Christa Maiwald and Michael Chandler hang together and enjoy a fruitful interplay. Maiwald presents a group of ten hand-embroidered 13-inch square pieces. The likenesses are true and

playful, the stitches outlining faces and creating blocks of color for texture and shading of features. Each embroidery is on fabric that corresponds to skin tone: blush pink, electric fuchsia, and rich coffee, for instance.

The portraits are all celebrity comedians, including Robin Williams, Margaret Cho, Whoopi Goldberg, and Jerry Sienfeld. Richard Pryor is a notable work, a dual image: the left side is the embroidery verso, revealing process with threads hanging haphazardly as if to represent the comic's tortured existence, his wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression in both images a signature one. The original message of these works, once displayed as *Laughing Stock* (2006) together with portraits of George W. Bush, Condoleeza Rice, Dick Cheney, and Bill and Hillary Clinton, is muted here as the focus is on the elaboration of the line. However, those familiar with Maiwald's work will get the underlying humor.



"Nose" by Michael Chandler, 2005.
Oil and collage on paper, 5 3/4 x 4 inches.

Represented by small-scale collages, Michael Chandler continues the room with another level of amusement, perhaps more bemusement. Sober hues predominate these engaging, intriguing, harmoniously balanced pieces that entice the viewer to approach and explore each found image, juxtaposed text, and painted form or line. One senses a tragi-comic comment on the world being made in each work, be it social, political, or cultural. Perhaps they simply serve as formal exercises.

I was drawn to *Nose* (2005), which portrays that human feature at center, superimposed on a black and white photograph of a bespectacled man –is it Marcel Duchamp?—at a microphone, another figure at bottom left, back turned, more of an apparition. A purplish wash of paint obscures the photograph slightly. If this is Duchamp, the nose is a synecdoche for the man who possessed a prominent one himself. The way the feature is rendered it also appears like his iconic *Fountain* from 1917. These small works are controlled, enigmatic, and charged. Chandler's gestural painting style is evident in *Chain* (2012), the largest work displayed.

The structure of these collages provides an appropriate segue to the work of Janet Goleas that wraps around the wall as one continues clock-wise. The work displayed is unlike what I have seen before by Goleas, but is consistent with her abstract explorations in painting that strive to express sculptural form; after all, the artist began her career in sculpture. I have admired her *Nest and Knots* series, which fortunately was not included in this show, as that would have created an absurd repetition with the work of fellow exhibitors, Denise Gale and Claire Watson.

Using gouache exclusively in *Palisades* (2012) she achieves equilibrium between expressive and geometric abstraction, with bright, radiating forms defining a loosely constructed background. These very recent works have highly pigmented, tactile layers that glow and appear translucent. Goleas employs Flashe vinyl paint in *Eye Shadow* (2013), a composition of blurring horizontal lines, both wide and narrow. The artist's choice of medium (Flashe, gouache, and colored pencil) along with her sense for color and composition altogether promote the tension between opacity and

transparency in these works, which vibrate.



“Palisades” by Janet Goleas, 2012.
Gouache and colored pencil on
paper, 29 3/4 by 19 1/2 inches.

The facing wall displays six oil on paper works by Denise Gale that serve as counterpoint to Goleas’ vibrant pieces. Gale’s palette is equally rich in hues. Her method of working the line is also both structured and loose. Line organizes and determines the picture space at the same time that it clutters and tangles it. Broad swatches of color balance out each composition without it all resulting in too much chaos or too much control.

Claire Watson rounds out the show with a selection from her series of *Nots* (2011). I was familiar with Watson’s fascinating sculptural assemblages and fabrications, such as the *Kid Gloves* series. These drawings have a similar ludic quality and recall the Surrealist *cadavres exquis*. They are sensuous while being somewhat childlike. I should clarify that the latter characteristic is not in their rendering, which is immaculate, but rather their whimsical nature. It is as if the artist is at play, though there is most definitely a serious side to this play, which also involves pun, as is apparent with the title.

Wordplay extends to the title of this show: “working the line” in the restaurant world implies organization and division of labor. This exhibition is not only well-organized, each artist contributes accomplished ‘prep-work’. The final result: a thoughtfully prepared and visually stimulating exhibition.

-Esperanza Leon

BASIC FACTS: “Working the Line” is exhibited through April 11, 2013 at ILLE Arts, 216a Main Street, Amagansett, NY 11930. www.illearts.com.

To see more artworks in the show, click here: [“In Pictures: Working the Line.”](#)

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[“Women’s Work Speaks for Itself.”](#) Published Feb 23, 2013.

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