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Moving Outlines

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By **Line McCabe**

With last December's announcements of both a new executive director (Thom Collins, formerly senior curator at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center) and a \$24,485 state grant to cover operating expenses, the fraught Contemporary Museum positioned itself to rebound from 2003's financial and leadership woes that threatened its future (*The Nose*, Aug. 6). Now the local institution of good intentions returns with its second show since last summer's troubles (the first was December's tolerably affable and civic-minded *Hands On*), and we're simply going to have smile politely as the Contemporary finds its footing. *Moving Outlines*--ostensibly a look at innovations to the medium of drawing--is a flummoxing and scattershot group show that needs more time in the idea oven, or a completely different organizing rubric.

That's not to say the work isn't strong; many of the 19 works from 13 artists are a welcome sight on any local gallery walls. Numerous squiggly lines of white resin form heart-attack EKG waves in black printer's ink on paper for Maureen McQuillan's "Untitled," which instills a trembling vertigo if stared at too long. And Zak Smith's wall-sprawling "8 Variations, Drawing, Painted on, the Printed" is a pseudo-comics fever dream that comes closest to fulfilling the show's promise. "8 Variations" is an eight-row array of 192 individual pieces, snapshot drawings of splattery hipsters with Egon Schiele physiques contact-printed to saturate the colors and smear lines into third-generation photocopy smudges. It's the lone work that obsessively embraces drawing and literally turns it into something else that still retains drawing qualities.

Unfortunately, many of the works understand "drawing" merely as using lines, and these pieces--such as



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Rudolf Stingel's quasi-interesting but sorely included work in/on Celotex insulation board, or Doug Holden's utterly prosaic installation "Spread for Me," a haphazard pile of extension cords, surge protectors, and a fluorescent light on Astroturf--spotlight the show's glaring weakness. What *Outlines* is missing is any discernable outline as to what unites the work, because the "new directions in drawing" theme doesn't adequately define the parameters of these pieces. What makes Vik Muniz's "Key, Pictures of Earth (Sarzedo Drawings)," an aerial photograph of the key drawn in soil, differ from Robert Smithson's earthworks--that one is called environmental sculpture and the other a "new" form of drawing? What makes Lee Boot's short videos in "Linear" differ from, say, Norman McLaren's short line films of the 1960s?

Lurking just below the surface of *Moving Outlines* is a fecund collision of technology, recent genre developments, and abstract and representational idioms piling up in a heap of new ideas. Yet this show's thesis only draws the line at nomenclature, and tomato vs. tomahto only matters to Gershwin. Audiences might not expect more than this, but the artists and the work deserve better.



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