

An Exercise in Reading Between the Lines

By Deidre Greben

To make his celebrated "Jazz" series, Matisse used scissors to trace a rhythmic, improvisational line, cutting directly into colored paper. The 11 contemporary artists in "Line Dancing," an exhibition at the Islip Museum, used scissors, along with paint, wood, wire, thread and even a pair of skis to give new meaning, life and contour to that most elemental of marks.

Lines twist and pulse, sway and swirl, fade and jar, swell and stretch their way through the museum's hallways and galleries. About half of these forms are delineated conventionally — that is, in paint or ink, on canvas or paper.

Jill Moser explores the gestural line, fascinated by how it dances, but even more so, as she says in the show's catalog, by how it "trips and stumbles." A seemingly continuous orange or black line loops throughout her work, coiling and then expanding like a toy Slinky, pushing against itself to fill the paintings' surfaces.

Wendy Edwards explores the tactile line by extruding acrylic paint in a stringy weblike net across the canvas. Her se-

ductive images play with the contrary notions of exposure and coverage while evoking patterns seen in both natural and man-made materials.

Donelle Estey explores the representational line. Her round paintings portray a thicket of twigs harboring and concealing a variety of winter birds. Estey's work suggests that lines can be less intriguing than what may be between or hidden by them.

Nancy Manter, on the other hand, tries to capture the evasive line. She makes her drawings by skiing across them, tracking ink on rolls of handmade paper. The effect resembles that of random imprints in snow, some sharply defined, others reduced to faint traces.

Lance Goldsmith and Maureen McQuillan both present the open-ended line, created methodically but with its path left to chance.

And Paula Elliott plays with the symbolic line, making compositions that suggest diagrams, architectural plans, maps and charts, but do not represent anything specific.

The other artists in the show explore line-making in three dimensions.

Lines perform their dance as a troupe in Barbara Campisi's *Azzurro Oltremurino*. Here, strings dipped in latex and bright powdered pigment extend from ceiling to floor in a well-choreographed formation that changes depending upon the viewer's vantage point.

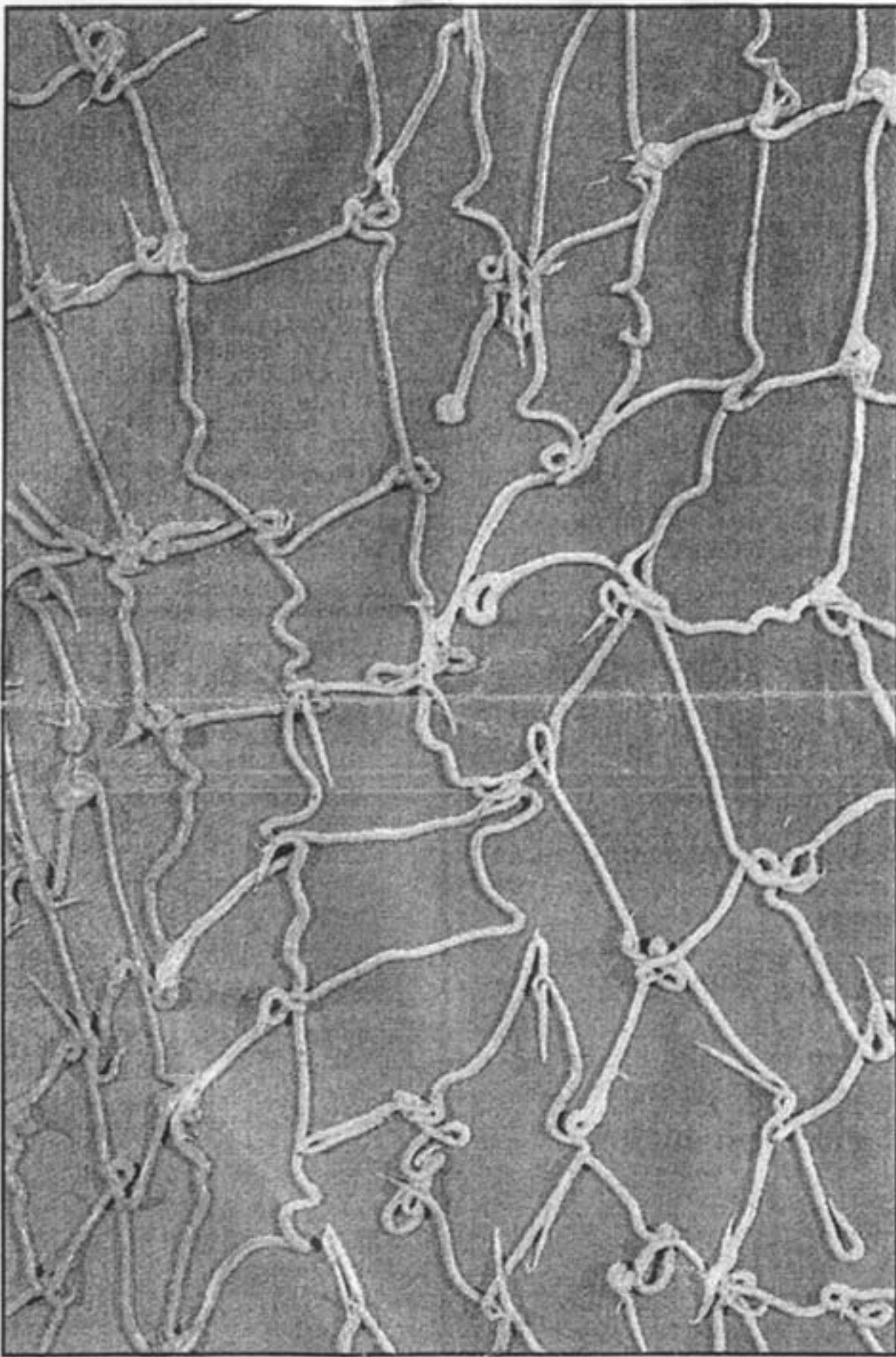
Todd McCollister uses line to connect physical and conceptual elements in sculptural artworks that reference ships and farming tools, employing carved wood, rope, stone and metal to create their elegant armatures.

While Noriko Ambe mines newspapers and encyclopedias by literally incising irregularly shaped holes through their stacked pages, Natalie Moore's electrical wires covered in a plaster skin permeate a wall, disappearing and then

reappearing across its white surface.

What emerges, in the end, for the viewer of the compellingly diverse works that comprise this show, is the realization that one line, thoughtfully manipulated, can indeed say a whole lot. ■

Deidre Greben is a freelance writer.



Wendy Edwards' "Blue Net" is part of the "Line Dancing" exhibit on view at the Islip Art Museum through June 15.

WHERE&WHEN "Line Dancing" is on view through June 15 at the Islip Art Museum, 50 Irish Lane, East Islip. Museum Hours: Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. (From June through August, the museum is open daily.) For information call 631-224-5402.