

Art in America

September 1995

Robin Hill at Lennon, Weinberg

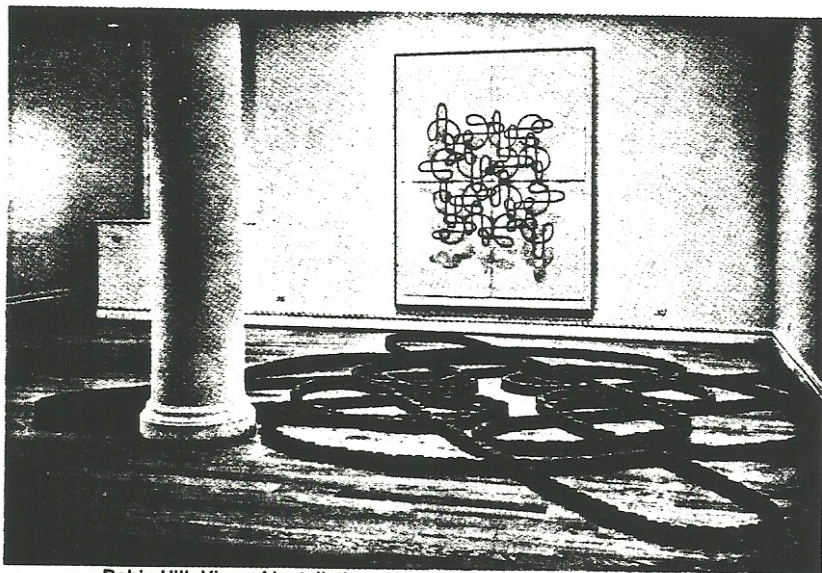
For almost all the works in her recent exhibition Robin Hill utilized no more than a looping blue line—drawn on paper and hung on the wall, or expanded until it broke apart into constituent points laid out on the floor. The elements of the floor drawings were actually conic sections, plaster cast in paper cups and dipped in ultramarine blue paint, set close together with alternating large and small ends up. Cast by hand from the same machine-made form, each little half-cone had its own complex surface, as the paint dried on and in the plaster with varying densities, so that the single color varied from deep saturation to pale wash. The long ropelike lines they made curved back on themselves again and again to form sets of simple structures which in combination produced a complexity that took effort to follow. They suggested the borders of a formal garden or labyrinth, but rather than enclosing a space, they delimit-

ed one—a carefully defined order at once visually forceful and physically delicate.

The nature of the designs was clearer in the wall drawings, which preserved more of the art object's normal distance from the spectator. For each, four large sheets of paper were pinned together to make a single 98-by-76½-inch surface. Soaked in wax, the paper made a materially assertive ground on which Hill drew looping lines in ultramarine oil stick, corrected when necessary with a knife or swab. (As the artist has explained, "substance has been added and taken away" in these drawings—a description suggesting sculptural process, just as her sculpture has the character of drawing.) When she found a curving form she liked, Hill repeated it—enlarged, reduced, inverted—in various spatial configurations, forming a dense net combining repetition with variation. System thus cohabited with gesture, as did hieratic remoteness—especially strong when the configurations evoked mandalas or cross forms—with intimacy. Scraped-down lines formed a blue haze. In one drawing the accumulation of lines created the effect of a sphere, suggesting the diagram of an atom visualized as an ordered lattice of particle tracks.

One of the origin myths of Western art has the maiden Dibutade tracing her lover's shadow on the wall; another has a shepherd drawing the contour of a shadow on the ground. In Robin Hill's work, line comes first, and can even cast a shadow. Drawing has the materiality of sculpture, and, far from requiring a model to trace, generates its own content. This show was a demonstration of life still left in the modernist story.

—Paul Mattick, Jr.



Robin Hill: View of installation, 1995; at Lennon, Weinberg.