

Monterey County Weekly

## **DRAWING ROOM**

### **Hartnell College Exhibit Shows Fine Lines of the Creative Process.**

**By Maureen Davidson**

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The artists' model is hunched forward, leaning into a sturdy staff. My drafting pencil is poised just above the surface of the page as I pause for an inward breath... Suddenly, from behind, my drawing teacher grabs the hand holding the pencil and pushes it up deeply into and along the spotless page. "My god, girl," he said, "if you have that much trouble making a mark on a piece of paper I can't imagine what your life will be like!" he said, encouragingly. Art school wasn't for sissies.

To make a mark recognizably your own... what a humble ambition. A mark that is so deeply personal that others will recognize it and say, "Ah, here (s)he was!" So elemental: the gesture of the artist's hand, the relentlessness of direction, the push of graphite... a mark repeated for emphasis, hatched and hacked violently, curved in a long, even meander... or steady with sublime control. All is revealed in the nature of the marks: The character and the mind of the artist moving across a page of paper.

*Parallel Lines: Works on Paper* from Monterey County Collectors at the Hartnell College Gallery is an eccentric collection of such revealing artworks, mostly drawings. A 15th-century illuminated manuscript, a Pablo Picasso drawing of a faun, a Delacroix etching, a Nathan Oliveira nude and a teenager's gesture drawing of a cat purchased at a state fair are given equal attention. Not "major" works, perhaps that's why the three-score pieces in the exhibition share an immediacy that allows the viewer unusual access into the creative process... a line corrected, a perspective tried and abandoned, an unruly line smudged out.

A "Still Life, Bottles and Books" by Barry Masteller is paired with Bud Gordon's "Bottle Study" at the entrance to the exhibition. Masteller builds volume in a controlled layering of thick and thin line with a hint of tone behind them, while Gordon's fat, ink-laden washes are breathlessly quick and sure. The difference in approach, speed, mood and personality are all the more accentuated because subject, composition and size are so similar. Thus begin the revelations of a very satisfying exhibition.

A cluster of exquisite nudes is an education in line and composition. A 1917 "Nude" by Ray Boynton teases the figure out of negative space by a hatch of lines darkening the background from which it emerges. In the modernist "Regret – Nude Study," Maurice Sterne's steady, minimal outline quietly encompasses a body, a gesture, an emotion – but also an era, a style, an attitude. He has corrected a line describing the underneath of a leg – his mistake gives the drawing even more power and poignancy.

Ann Morency's "Nude" is a brilliantly observed gesture drawing that leads up to a strangely incongruous Jawlensky-ish face – as if the artist suddenly remembered that she was an expressionist.

A refined and modern 2007 Susan Manchester “Self Portrait,” hangs next to “Lioness,” a 19th-century etching by Eugene Delacroix. Though he was known for the expressive color and energetic brushstrokes of his romantic paintings, all of the Delacroix’s passion and turbulence can be seen in this tiny etching. Delacroix’s genius is powered by his ability to draw – here with a barb on a smooth metal plate, in a few lines, the ferocity of a big cat.

Picasso drew hundreds of fauns, the lusty goat-humans that were such a perfect foil for the artist’s irreverent musings. In “Faun,” a few fast lines on paper are unmistakably a Picasso. Scribbles indicate the texture of fur. Unconnected marks contain volume without spilling it. The debonair confidence of a master at play emanates from the whole page.

Oliveira is known for his portraits of sole figures emerging from indeterminate space. In such a portrait here, the set of a humorous mouth, the proud lift of a chin, the level gaze, the bravura of nipples are inked in whispers of a few thick and thin lines.

Next to this fine minimal piece is a series of three drawings of “Young Woman with Hands Behind Back” by Susan Manchester, showing the journey from a loose minimal sketch to a large, fully rendered pencil drawing. As the size and style tighten, the image is increasingly burdened with information until the large rendering becomes stiff and dull.

Not so the volumes of information contained in David Ligare’s duo of “Sand Drawing #19” and “#23.” As if meeting a challenge to draw the minute relationships of the tiny grains, Ligare has rendered a few deep marks scribed into damp sand. The artist’s own graphite marks are claustrophobically dense – how many will fit on the head of a pin? They describe the sand marks without giving context or horizon, and so become abstractions, devoid of content, heavy with information.

**PARALLEL LINES continues through March 13 at Hartnell College Gallery, 156 Homestead Ave., Salinas. Gallery hours: Mon-Thu, 10am-1pm, and Mon-Wed, 6-9pm. 755-6791.**