

Time Lines

Janet Koplos

An installation is a spatial experience, and it's also defined by time. Gail Grinnell's installation for Suyama Space—an assembly of lengths of Sharpie-marked papery fabric—is at least triply engaged with time. First there's the standard implication that an installation is temporary; after its exhibition dates it is disassembled and no longer exists as an entity. But this is also an installation that immediately makes you think of its sequential process of creation, so you get a sense of the artist's investment of time in the work, both in making the many elements and in arranging them. And in addition, Grinnell evokes an image, an aura, of time past or passing, which seems to be part of her subject.

Ruffle, as is typical of the installations that have occupied this distinctive and evocative exhibition venue, invites us to move within and around it. The first impressions it creates are masses and tatters. It also emphasizes elevation: our eyes are pulled upward to the building's rafters and wooden plank ceiling, just as in a cathedral. The floor space is nearly empty. Three cascades plunge downward but stop short of the floor, which is occupied only by viewers moving around the room and employees heading in or out of the architectural office at the back.

The installation engages the space in another way: it is strikingly light-altered, and as daylight fades and the spotlights assume more importance, lacy shadows travel down the walls to catch the entire volume of the gallery in their web. Changes in light also alter the perception of color in the work. All the tonalities are gentle, the most intense being whispery peach or near-sepia but neutral ivories and grays more common. Directional illumination (from the gallery's two bands of skylights) both highlights and penetrates the material, so that the configuration seems to be constantly changing. A swath might look a bit dull or shadowy with bright light behind it, and then dazzle when the light falls upon it.

And that's hardly the only change. Our movement in the gallery space uncovers greater variation. Grinnell has massed her featherweight components in two-thirds of the space, allowing a view deep into the strands and streamers from one end of the gallery. Here the experience of the work shifts from physical to visual, and a succession of fleeting images may cross your mind, from cobwebs in an attic to swag decorations in a ballroom. The installation becomes a powerful image of festooned architectural space from this vantage point, with the wooden ceiling and floor framing the long view. (And, surprisingly, the shoji-like wall of the restrooms at the

opposite end of the space blends in harmoniously.) There is one other association that arises from this long view: the open volume suggests breath, probably because the catenary swaths make an overall oval, like a barrel ribcage—through which the silvery tube of the air conditioning duct runs like a spine as it calls out the pearly tones in the paper. (Grinnell has also constructed several oval openings visible from other angles, which may subliminally contribute to this suggestion.)

The most emphatic variations are the dimensions and curvature of the outlined elements, which have been cut in various widths like edging and lacing. That the parts are held together with corsage pins suggests spontaneous assembly and easy reconsideration. The consequence of all this is that any “still” view of the installation seems to be in slow or sinuous motion, in a trajectory through space.

This end view is memorable but not conclusive, since no one interpretation dominates. The title, *Ruffle*, favors the drawn curves and gathers on the three hanging masses. Looking at these details drives home that this is an installation of drawings: every part is by its essential nature flat. These are just as much representations of ruffles as they would be if framed and hung on the wall (but their up-to-12-foot lengths make that unlikely). Grinnell has combined the pictorial and the sculptural into a combination that plays with the senses, like decoration on pottery, which has an extra fascination because it bends into the third dimension. *Ruffle* has the impact of large scale as well.

Drawings allude to paper, and in fact this work has grown from the artist's engagement with paper sewing patterns used and saved by her mother, which she inherited. That tissue could be collaged but was too fragile to build into an installation. So here, as in her previous tower/column titled *tinker, tailor, mender, maker*, shown at Anchor Art Space in Anacortes last year, she made these fragments of memory, these thoughtfully composed but fluent and seemingly casual linkages, in a more durable carrier: interfacing, a material used for structural reinforcement in garments, such as in collars. She further strengthens it with a coat of acrylic medium and can then conveniently mark, roll, fold, cut and hang it although it continues to appear fragile and translucent.

The drawings are not complete scenes but renderings of parts, given an abstracting isolation that reduces them to pure line that traverses three-dimensional space with the same sort of internal relationships found in any skillful two-dimensional composition. One might think, individually, of Ellsworth Kelly's line drawings of plants (except that Grinnell's don't depict a complete object). In addition to the hanging ruffles, other

segments, layers of thick lines or thin ones, suggest medieval interlace motifs, Louis Sullivan's architectural details, rope knots, threads tangled in a sewing box, Islamic ornament and more. And considering it as a volume, the installation can bring to mind textile works such as Faith Wilding's web at Womanhouse in Los Angeles in 1972, Eva Hesse's draped entanglements, or the fluttery nests created by Colette beginning in the '70s. Grinnell's work has something in common with each of these, but specifically resembles none of them. The character of drawings prevails.

An artist who has shifted from painting to collage to drawing to installation, Grinnell follows her own path. And under her canopy of paper-cloth-memory-[time]line, she opens the way for each of us to find our own feelings and interpretations.