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COLUMN

There's aesthetic nourishment in even the dullest month

PHILIP ISAACSON / IN THE ARTS

January 17, 2010

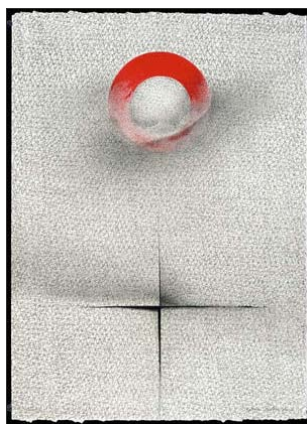
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Drawings in graphite by Josefina Auslender are exhibited at Edward T. Pollack Fine Arts in Portland.

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five years from now.

A note about titles. Several works in the show are given literary titles. They are non-descriptive. I find that needlessly defensive. A good piece will speak for itself without literary support. Yes, I know that George Nakashima sometimes used personal titles. He was a giant, and nothing he did modifies our admiration for his work and, I think, his life. But, in general, making references to matters outside of the work itself urges a transition from craft to art. That can happen, and when it does, we'll recognize it without titles.

Wayne Hall's "Walnut Hall Table" is a handsome object. Its well-defined thick slab top is assaulted by a pattern of shallow irregular grooves. The assault continues across the entire surface to create formidable tension. The corrugated surface and the monolithic slab are forever in opposition. Those conflicting forces are thrust at us by a spindly glade of red maple branches. This is an object in perpetual organic motion.

I liked Jack Rodie's cherry "Bogie Branch" for its contrast between flow and restraint. The constituent forms move cleanly along, but always within carefully prescribed channels. The piece exemplifies the evolution of late modernism with a bow to the organic.

I also liked Matthew Lindsay's "Strummers Stool," as much for the maker's courage in attacking molded plywood as for the result. In an area – molded plywood – that has been so thoroughly worked by Alvar Aalto, Bruno Mattheson and Ray and Charles Eames, it is refreshing to find someone adventurous enough to consider it further.

There is so much wizardry now afoot in wood turning that I'm timid about making judgments, but Lou Landry's "Spirits," a classical vase form made (visually speaking) of regulated elements, has a grace that much other work of its ilk considers irrelevant. I side with Landry.

WORKS IN GRAPHITE

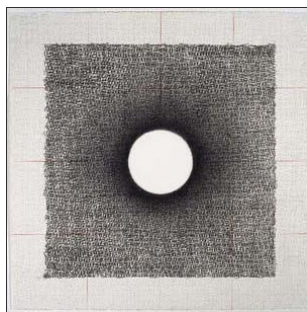
The show of drawings I mentioned consists of 20 or so works in graphite by Josefina Auslender at Edward T. Pollack Fine Arts. Auslender, who has exhibited frequently, offers two groups, each characterized by ground lines so dense and interwoven that they could be replications of textiles. The intensity of those lines is in marked contrast to the principal visual elements which are largely architectonic.

In one group, the elements play against one another, the recessive linked grounds opening and admitting columns of flaming forms that suggest the walls of great glass buildings. Their title, "Manhattan Blues," enhances the suggestion of curtains of glass in league with the sky. The second group, "Stendhal Series," is less emotional. It deals with precise linear forms, sometimes repetitive on the same sheet, against an uncommitted sky. I suppose rectitude defines this austere group.

In this show, we find deeply considered work by a singular artist.

Philip Isaacson of Lewiston has been writing about the arts for the Maine Sunday Telegram for 44 years. He can be contacted at:

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Drawings in graphite by Josefina Auslender are exhibited at Edward T. Pollack Fine Arts in Portland.



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Stretch Tuemmler/Courtesy of Center for Furniture Craftsmanship
"Strummer's Stool" by Matthew Lindsay, from "Maine Wood 2010."

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Wayne Hall/Courtesy of Center for Furniture Craftsmanship
"Walnut Hall Table" by Wayne Hall.



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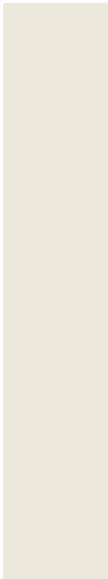
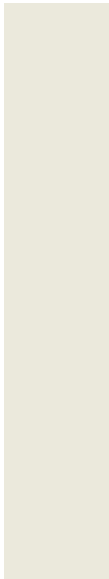
JimDugan.com/Courtesy of Center for Furniture Craftsmanship
"Twelve Lights Box" by Gregg Crispell.



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Courtesy of Portland Museum of Art
The collage "MZ 26, 44 res" was created by German artist Kurt Schwitters in 1926.

IF YOU GO



COLLAGE: PIECING IT TOGETHER

WHERE: Portland Museum of Art, 7 Congress Square Portland; 775-6148

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Sunday; until 9 p.m. Friday

CLOSES: Feb. 28

MAINE WOOD 2010: BIENNIAL

WHERE: Center for Furniture Craftsmanship, 25 Mill St., Rockport; 594-5611

HOURS: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday

CLOSES: Feb. 12

JOSEFINA AUSLENDER, DRAWINGS/MIXED MEDIA

WHERE: Edward T. Pollack Fine Arts, 29 Forest Ave., Portland; 699-2919

HOURS: 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday

CLOSES: Jan. 30

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