

Substance behind the ethereal



Kiki Smith's "Message", 2010, Ink on Nepal paper with colored pencil; 20 x 36 inches, signed and dated lower right
 "Kiki Smith: Drawings" exhibit is at the Barbara Krakow Gallery.

BARBARA

Kiki Smith uses her materials to evoke the immaterial in a moving exhibit at Barbara Krakow Gallery. She makes drawings on fragile-seeming Nepalese paper, pasted together in a grid. The larger pieces float off the wall as if a breeze blows through.

Smith has always been concerned with the intangible and with the body. That may sound contradictory; it isn't. The body is the site for everything we feel and sense but may not be able to express.

The drawings in this show consider the layers of unspoken meaning a body can convey. "Message" depicts two women, one with her back to the other, exquisitely rendered. The woman in the rear has lines like clusters of straight pins streaming from her eyes toward the woman in front. There's a tension between the two; at any moment, it seems, the woman in the front will sense the other's penetrating gaze and

and turn around.

In "Wave," a stern woman with delicate features looks intently outward, just past the viewer. She sits with her hands in her lap and blue lines whirl over her. Next to her, a radio on another chair emanates red lines, which I took to be sound. What, then, are the blue lines associated with the figure? Her own static, perhaps. The scene is simple, but charged with the woman's stare, and her loneliness.

For Smith, the paper itself, with its patches and puckers, is an echo for skin, which she works over the lines and collage. "Here" shows a nude woman with her back to us. Blue lines, as "Wave," do a herky-jerky dance around her head. Stars tattoo her arms and back; round marks made by cupping appear on her skin and along one edge of the drawing, as Smith links the skin to the page, and then, with her stars, right to the constellations.

Her hand-colored etchings mix symbolic and natural elements with pattern and abstraction. "My Girl-friends" features an eye-like circle radiating with colors above two arcing lines, each with a four-leaf clover at its base. The piece is cheeky yet mystical, a playful, abstracted goddess image. As always, Smith revels in the body's pleasures, powers, and vulnerabilities.

**Kiki Smith:
 Drawings**

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
 10 Newbury St.,
 through March 12th.
 617-262-4490,
barbarakrakowgallery.com

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