

Widener Gallery, Trinity College/Hartford

CONSTANCE LOWE: NETHERLAND

A visit to *netherland*, Constance Lowe's show of luminous drawings, is a journey into a tension-filled zone between the real and the imagined. Lowe uses inkblots as an inspiration for her images, but they are much more than a visual springboard. Like Rorschach images, Lowe's meticulous drawings make *use* of texture, color, and form to poke and prod the viewer. With painstaking detail, she transforms simple black-and-white images into a complex series of drawings that pulse with color and light, provoke visceral sensations, and engage the imagination.

Lowe's mesmerizing drawings hover beyond clarity, vague yet never quite entirely real. From a distance, her drawings call to mind real and fantastic landscapes, familiar yet foreign places. Up close they appear anatomical, like pulsing sinew and tissue. In between, figures emerge, both human and animal, which shift into focus and then blur away. The layers of source material—from the ill-defined images in the original inkblots to Lowe's superimposed imagination—complicates any attempt to define her drawings.

There is a physical quality to this as well. Lowe draws with colored pencil on drafting film, though “drawing” hardly describes an activity that when viewed up close might best be described as construction. Each drawing is an aggregation of short, distinct strokes, like small hairs, and the effect is of something bristling, full of movement. In her use of color-rich magenta, brilliant turquoise, and eye-popping lime green—Lowe's drawings come to fairy-tale life. Through her use of tone and shading, they shimmer with a three-dimensional quality.

As with several of the pieces in the show, [*FabCom 16*](#) is a loose, open, and symmetrical form. From the ragged coastline of the drawing, forms emerge that bring to mind calyx and corolla, human and insect bodies,

shapes that are vaguely spine tingling. Set within a field of white, they seem to be in constant motion. Other forces also work to set the image in motion. From the faintest of blues to solid blotches of pink and green, color creates movement within the drawing. Vibrant blues of varied hues bleed into each other and then disappear. Unlike the asymmetrical pieces in the show, *FabCom 16* is built on pattern, an arrangement that implies clarity and certainty, but the image keeps shifting.

The exhibition also includes several hand-sewn wool-felt constructions. Less complex than the drawings, they depend on the use of color and positive and negative space to pull at the imagination. [Untitled \(2005\)](#) is a batlike construction of metallic colors, slate blue, and iron red. Flaps in the wings open to expose a complementary color scheme: brown and royal blue. A line of lime green flows around the edges of the negative space, pulling the imagination into the voids. As with the rest of the works in the show, the piece is stirring yet disconcerting, demanding interpretation yet resisting definition.

Jackie Keren