

Drawings From The South of France

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By Mario Naves

Laurie Fendrich's suite of black-and-white drawings, on display at Gary Snyder Project Space, doesn't sacrifice structural rigor for flitting, jittery slapstick. If anything, Fendrich's goofiness is given thematic heft by the deft way she choreographs space, motion and iconographic shapes through the patient application of Conté crayons. But that's always been the way for a painter who channels Seurat and riffs on Malevich even as she nods, gratefully and with stern purpose, to Elmer Fudd. Fans of Fendrich's luminous brand of geometric abstraction will have their enthusiasm confirmed by the recent work.

Her lovingly impure extension of High Modernism—no De-Construction here, thank you very much—continues apace, with all requisite attributes in place: teetering compositions that nonetheless hold firm; a droll synthesis of Utopian geometry and cartoony distortion; fractured and bulbous shapes that take on a jaunty anthropomorphism; and, not least, a meticulous attention to craft. One slip-up with Conté crayons and Fendrich's crystalline orchestrations of form would come to a smudgy halt. For a draftsman who prizes the white of the page—there's not a piece that doesn't elicit its clarifying light—this must be a challenge, a headache and, when she's in the zone, a thrill.

Fendrich made the 33 drawings during a residency in the South of France—one drawing a day, in fact. Enconced in the countryside, Fendrich took inspiration from the surrounding landscape and architecture, but what survives in the pictures isn't a sense of locale so much as spirit: The pictures are tranquil and light-footed, calm, sober and silly. They remind you that one of this artist's chief strengths is the inability to take herself too seriously. This is where we get to see Fendrich play.

Laurie Fendrich: Drawings From The South of France, through Dec. 19. Gary Snyder Project Space, 250 W. 26th St., 4th floor (betw. 7th & 8th Aves.), 212-929-1351.

