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Review: An engaging show of 'Meteorites' at Winston-Wächter

Artist Ethan Murrow's photorealistic drawings take you into the world of a mysterious meteor hunter, in an exhibition at Winston-Wächter in Seattle.

By [Gayle Clemans](#)

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EXHIBITION REVIEW 'Will Be Snaring Meteorites'

Drawings and video by Ethan Murrow, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays, through Jan. 6, Winston-Wächter, 203 Dexter Ave. N., Seattle (206-652-5855 or www.winstonwachter.com). Ethan Murrow has mad skills. At first glance and from a distance, his large-scale (4 by 4 feet) drawings look like black-and-white photographs.

Clearly, the man can draw. But this demonstration of talent raises several critical questions, just like it did for the photorealistic painters of the 1960s: Why paint or draw something that ends up looking like a photograph? Why not just take the photo? Is this just showing off?

Fortunately for us, Murrow's work can defend itself beautifully, offering us answers, more questions and entire worlds to explore. For starters, it's important to know that Murrow's drawings are part of a multimedia, performative process in which he creates characters, open-ended narratives and short videos, often in collaboration with his wife, Vita Weinstein-Murrow.

In the past, Murrow has based his drawings on that process, sometimes directly working from stills from the videos. With his current body of work, "Will be Snaring Meteorites," he is shaking things up a bit.

Without a clear story in mind, he and Weinstein-Murrow visited a gym near their home in the Boston area. In the process of shooting photographs and exploring the space, the pockmarked floor, crisscrossed with lines and markings, began to look like a planetary surface, and a story about a meteorite hunter took off from there. Murrow began drawing right away and continued to work on the drawings while creating the video.

Cumulatively, the drawings develop a quixotic character, performed by Weinstein-Murrow, and an ambiguous plot. Engaged in acts of searching, examining, collecting and displaying the meteorites, the hunter is revealed as heroic, absurd, self-assured and oddly vulnerable. In "Will be Snaring Meteorites — And Be Devoid of Rivals," the Converse-wearing heroine, accompanied by her collection of little whiffle-ball meteorites, strikes a confident, even victorious, stance like some 19th-century mountain climber.

In fact, there is vintage quality to the narrative and visual feel of all of the works. Murrow has said that he began creating large-scale graphite drawings because he "aimed to create work that referenced historical documents, black and white photography, monumental glorification and so on."

However, while these images look like photography, refer to photography and work in conjunction with Murrow's photographs and videos, they are also clearly, decisively, hand-drawn fabrications. Get even slightly close to these drawings and the hand of the artist becomes abundantly clear, adding another layer of representation and fantasy.

As for the story that unfolds in "Snaring Meteorites," the charming and melancholy video that accompanies the show offers more concrete possibilities — possibilities, but not conclusions. One sequence begins with the text "the futile search begins," but what, exactly, is the goal of the quest? The hunter's deluded, but expert, search for meteorites? The search for the hunter, who, perhaps, has become a victim of the celestial objects over which she sought control?

Searching for absolute meaning is ultimately futile, but Murrow's marvelous, believable fabrications render the impossibility of the task irrelevant.