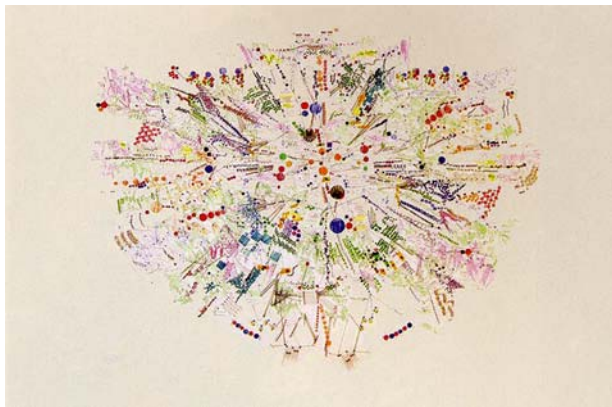


ART PAPERS



BRIAN LUND NEW YORK

Brian Lund's graphite and colored pencil drawings are dense webs of obsessively, mystifyingly systematic markings—Cy Twombly meets accounting. The press release for his recent exhibition *A Very Real and Very Dark Time* and the works' titles inform us that the artist has created a language—whose vocabulary includes colored dots, dashes, and squiggles—to record the editing sequences of films [Smith-Stewart, New York; January 22—March 1, 2009]. At first, the forms are as incomprehensible as any circuit board. But with effort, we begin to hypothesize about the meaning of each component. A colored dot for a character? A straight line for a cut? In stark contrast to the austere rigor of this notational system, processions of hieroglyphs meander around the page in a loose, biomorphic fashion, evoking river deltas or troop movements. In this show, Lund applies his system to the films of Robert Louis "Bob" Fosse, such as *Cabaret*, 1972, *All That Jazz*, 1979, and *Star 80*, 1983. Occasionally, amidst the symbols, we find a legible word or two, providing tiny windows into the content of the films—dance numbers, top hats, and so on. Even so, the movies are essentially absent protagonists in these drawings.

What is the relationship between this cinephilic stenography and the organic abstraction? We might be seduced into imagining that the maker of these images was only concerned with data, and that the resultant designs are the gloriously unintentional byproduct of a non-aesthetic process. But this romantic fantasy of naive creation is false—these images were engineered to be objects of aesthetic delectation. Though the artist's anal-retentive obsession seems absurdly insular, he is clearly savvy and audience-aware. As he undermines the functionality of his notations by swirling and scrambling them, Lund makes it clear to us that he retains a healthy degree of critical distance from his inner nerd.

Many artists share Lund's predilection for turning diagrammatic systems into vehicles for formal effects; artists as diverse as Matthew Ritchie, Julie Mehretu, and the late Mark Lombardi have made this a central mech-

anism of their work. However, these systems play different roles for each artist. In Lombardi's diagrams of scandals and conspiracies, the information remains clearly discernable and central, even as it wears a suit of formal grace. By contrast, Ritchie indulges form to such a lavish degree that the quantum physics, Gnosticism, and whatever else get totally drowned out. Lund's drawings occupy a middle ground between these poles; while he takes formal liberties, these do not disturb the integrity of the encoded information. The information is there, in all its droning specificity, if only we could piece it together. We don't get the easy pleasure of reading a language we understand, nor do we get to marvel with illiterate wonder at the beauty of a foreign calligraphic script—our brains annoyingly keep trying to decode the scribbles. Imperfect mediators of both informational and aesthetic experience, Lund's forms are much more fascinating because of their deficiency.

One may also think of Lund's work as a celebration/lamentation of the unbridgeable rift between the experiences of making and viewing. We observe Lund's fastidious labor through the wrong end of a telescope; it's far in the distance even though it's right up close. Throughout the history of art, certain factions of artists have wanted to close this gap, to draw the viewer close into the act of creation—the gestural marks of Abstract Expressionism, relational aesthetics' audience participation, and so on. But these endeavors have rarely—if ever—gone according to plan. In the Bermuda Triangle of artist, artwork, and viewer, more ships get lost than make it to port.

—Adam Thompson