

Emily Gherard: “Making Presence Known” at Bridge Productions

By AMANDA MANITACH

Emily Gherard’s process is comparable to an archeologist’s: excavating texture and meaning from layers built up gradually with the drift of pencil, brush and time. She demarcates and delineates moments by building and carving, erasing; melding making and forgetting. Her works on paper, sheathed in tens of thousands of marks of frosted, shimmering graphite, have in recent years towered as impressively large-scale works, spanning entire gallery walls. In these pieces, Gherard’s works straddle the cusp of abstraction, with images meted out and ticked out in mysteriously codified patterns that melt into monochrome fields when viewed from a distance.

In her most recent series, “Making Presence Known,” scale has diminished—dwarfed. Many of Gherard’s panels are smaller than the palm of a hand. Yet the bijou-sized pieces are encrusted with material that has a density as yet not experienced in Gherard’s drawings on paper. As objects, some scintillate with layers of graphite accreted into hard, chilly carbon peaks, built up gradually. In a departure that waxes more sculptural, some panels are pierced with hundreds of staples that swell in metal crests, and shimmer as violently as the graphite. Metal and crystalline carbon components play off one another seamlessly. A number of pieces are hung with a sliver of a gap between painting and wall and appear to gently levitate. The backs have been painted fluorescent pink; as a result, a faint glow of neon horizon spreads out beyond the inkiness.

At such a compressed scale, Gherard’s works require close encounter—with nose practically pressed up against pieces—an inspection that asks the viewer to slither side to side to grasp the play of shadow and light and the velveteen sleekness of the graphite. The density of the material at such quarters is gravitational. The reduction is a result of the recent birth of Gherard’s daughter—a pragmatic maneuver to build a show’s worth of work in shorter packets of time. As an artist for whom time has always played a key role in building up surfaces, Gherard risks sacrificing much of the visual impact and rigor that viewers have come to admire in her work. However as a whole, “Making Presence Known” continues to deliver just that, demanding intimacy rather than a catching of breath. The tension inherent to the idea of an image—buried in material, blurred and just out of focus—remains.



“Untitled (Shifting On Your Toes No. 2),”

Originally published in Art Itd Magazine, 10th Anniversary Issue Jan/Feb 2017