

Michael R. Chisolm

Susanne Kessler and The Evolution of Line

Line's ascendancy, in all of its manifestations, characterizes the vast range of Susanne Kessler's work- in the works on paper, collages, paintings, sculpture, and installations. It is not merely the spatial implications of her line, but its transformative nature that ties the vast body of work together. This is a line that reveals and informs the unseen- as in the pieces based on the middle ear and brain cells. It is one that forms grids that begin on paper, appear on canvas as the basis of composition, and wind up in the three dimensions, taking baroque twists and turns along the way.

In its twisted and distorted movements, Kessler's line and plane often recall the work of early Abstract Expressionist Arshile Gorky. Though Gorky's palette is considerably brighter, in both the drawings and paintings, the roots of Kessler's line and plane are evident. Gorky's line gives way to taught planes; Kessler's line becomes multi-layered and moves off the two dimensional surface into real space. Gorky's line and plane are essentially non-referential. Kessler's line and plane are referential in their abstraction. The evolution of her work parallels the evolution of living matter, beginning with the reptilian references and moving to inner structures of the human body within an abstract visual context.

The evolution encompasses transition from the geometric- as grids that become the basis for layers sited over drawings and paintings- to the biomorphic, as line that has been fortified and layered with line of a different material, becoming tangible forms and components of an installation. Or, she combines the two, placing a grid over biomorphic forms. The installations redefine the issue of figure and ground inherent in two-dimensional work and allow the vigour of her line to develop into three-dimensional mass. This protean investigation into line has also encompassed, in recent works, direct references to line in the creation of a floor plan of a Greek temple (*The Flying Temple*, 2006-08).

The various materials used on the grids and lines, such as tar, at times evoke Joseph Beuys' use of materials, but obviously to very different ends: Beuys' are experiential while Kessler's are analytic.

In addition to discrete objects formed by line that is the basis of her current site specific projects, Kessler has also twisted unstretched canvas on an axis across the space of a room, as in her work *Formenkarussell* (1989) in which canvas was supported at various points with wooden poles. These installations, with their radical curvilinear movement, presage the recent installations in that she has, to an extent, miniaturized these torques and rendered them with more intricacy. This development from the large scale installation of painted canvas to the current work, which generally rejects chroma, parallels the multilayered development of her art overall. This shift from the large scale baroque gestures and space to the smaller more intricate tendril forms is the essence of Kessler's continued concern with ideas of evolution and layers of time. Kessler's development reverses evolution- and thus time- as the work moves from large scale, space-encompassing pieces to the smaller microscopic works.

Kessler lives in Rome- a city layered with time that is evident virtually everywhere. She acknowledges the influence that Rome has on her work: the layers of time and civilization, from the geometry of Roman architecture to the intricacies of baroque architecture, parallel the development of her work from the geometric grid to the dynamic lines and volumes found in her most recent **Synaptic Drawings**.

*(text accompanying the catalog of the exhibition "Synaptic Drawings Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville/VA)
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