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REVIEWS

DALLAS

William Lamson

MARTY WALKER GALLERY

John Cage—quoting Sri Lankan philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy—famously advocated for art as the “imitation of nature in her manner of operation.” In much the same spirit, Brooklyn-based William Lamson harnesses the wind and the waves for his recent work. From simple materials, such as empty bottles, twine, and wood, he cobbles together spindly kinetic contraptions that enlist those natural forces to generate pencil or black-pen drawings.

For example, Lamson taped a marker to a water bottle attached to the string of a kite. He then ran the string through a rough wooden tripod, so that when the wind blew the kite, it jerked the bottle around and marked sheets of paper taped to a board lying on the ground. The results—black sunbursts (two of which appear here)—would be regarded as expressive had they been made by hand. Channeling nature’s indeterminacy, Lamson offers the absurd yet fantastical suggestion that the wind is able to draw.

The anti-rationality that seeps through Lamson’s project is countered by his works’ quasi-scientific titles, which list details relevant to



William Lamson,
Automatic, 2009, still
from a color video,
7 minutes 41 seconds.

their production, such as location and duration. *Sea Drawing, March 4, 2009, 9:45–11:50 AM, Coliumo Chile* (all works 2009), is a spidery web of graphite lines made by utilizing the force of ocean waves at that particular place and time. The titles of the kite drawings likewise include the date, location (Uruguay), and duration of the work’s making, in addition to the volume of water in the bottle, as though Lamson were conducting a physics experiment, where exact data is crucial. One title notes that the bottle held exactly 861 milliliters of water—precision suggesting the precariousness of these contraptions, the meticulousness needed to produce a satisfactory outcome.

Central to the show was a projected video, *Automatic*, which documented the making of most of the work on view. In order to create the sea drawings, the video reveals, the artist attached a pencil to twine running down to three water bottles bobbing in the Pacific. This construction—which also employs plastic bottle necks, a roughly assembled wooden box, and a crushed soft-drink can—looks improvised from trash and yet it is almost elegant, with just enough shade-tree engineering to make it work. In close-ups of the apparatus in action, the pencil’s movements appear oddly purposeful, as if a consciousness were driving the mark-making; but in shots from afar, the mechanical process is clear.

The drawing implements Lamson chose were not always well suited to his setups. The pens, for instance, made marks that sometimes seemed too flat and black. Yet when his devices and nature worked well together, he got beautiful results. The four sea drawings, with their tidal variations in line distribution and density, are gauzy and atmospheric delights; regardless of process, they succeed as drawings in themselves.

—Michael Odom