



Grounded

Review by Adrianna Speer / Dec 4, 2019

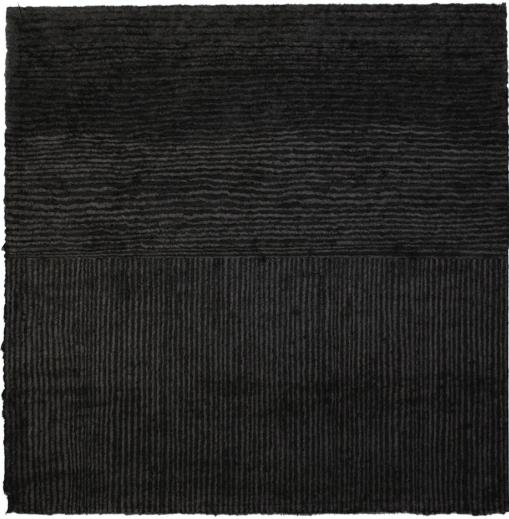


Grounded, RULE Gallery - Adam Fowler, M. Benjamin Herndon, James William Murray, and Jill O'Bryan.

Grounded at RULE Gallery features contemporary two-dimensional and three-dimensional graphite works by national and international artists Adam Fowler, M. Benjamin Herndon, James William Murray, and Jill O'Bryan. The exhibition highlights a range of material manipulations, including treating graphite as near embossment, using it to create sharp, uniformly-drawn strokes, making highly-polished images with graphite rubbed into porous surfaces, and grinding graphite into a fine powder, mixing it with a liquid medium, and applying it as paint. The artists subvert our notions of graphite as a ubiquitous, everyday drawing tool, expanding on its traditional usage and adding conceptual depth to the understated medium. In a time of holiday

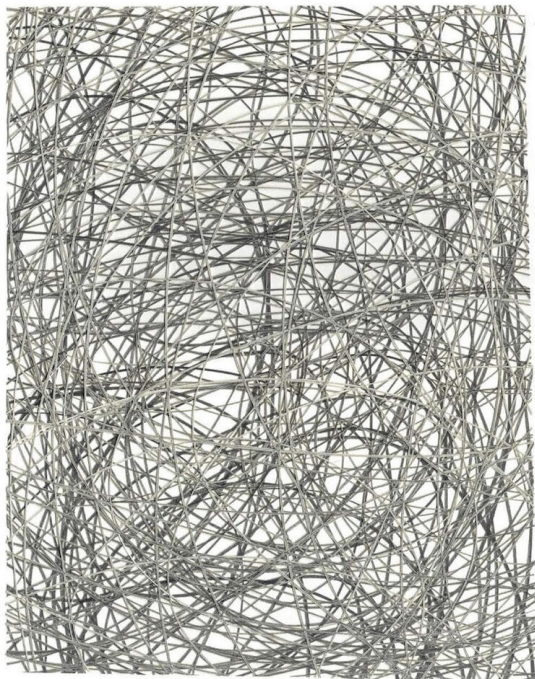
sales and ostentatious displays, RULE is providing space for reflection with this meditative group exhibition.

The artworks on display by Jill O'Bryan and Adam Fowler are methodical, ritualistic, and performative. What seems most important to both artists is the act of making rather than generating a specific outcome. While they each use traditional application techniques and undoubtedly have an end result in mind, their meditative and repetitive processes are foremost. Jill O'Bryan's *Breath Drawings* are physical depictions of meditations she conducted by counting her own breaths.



Jill O'Bryan, 18,792 Breaths between July 29 & August 3, 2018 NM

They are durational records of each inhale and exhale recorded as a graphite, almost incised line. The titles of O'Bryan's drawings, such as 18,792 Breaths between July 29 and August 3, 2018 NM, refer to the exact number of breaths she took followed by the exact dates. Knowing O'Bryan's process, viewers are able to physically feel the weight of each stroke and connect her breathing patterns to each grouping of lines.



Adam Fowler, Untitled (3 layers), 2019

In Adam Fowler's drawings we imagine the artist tirelessly sharpening his pencil in order to create perfect lines. The drawings are gestural and three-dimensional, with various weights of graphite and multiple layers. As seen in Fowler's Untitled (3 layers), the act of making is a performance of repeated strokes yielding a delicate, latticed image. While his works appear to be effortless, Fowler's process is in fact labor-intensive and precise.

James William Murray and M. Benjamin Herndon convert graphite from a drawing implement into a finishing material. They experiment with the medium to create sculptural and painted works, undermining our expectations of graphite. Both artists also seem to be preoccupied with space and producing pieces that concretely or illusionistically manipulate spatial relationships.



James William Murray, Untitled, 2019

In the case of two Untitled pieces by Murray reproduced here, each consists of graphite-rubbed stretcher bars set in various arrangements with selected areas bound by cloth. Instead of using stretcher bars as the structural supports for a painting, Murray puts them front and center. He creates conceptual tension, blurring the line between painting and sculpture with these inside-out paintings turned wall-hangings. Polished with powdered graphite, the wood and cloth objects are scrupulously smooth, giving them the appearance of cast metal with reflective surfaces.



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Transforming graphite into paintings, M. Benjamin Herndon creates spatial illusions through geometric forms. He constructs planar fields of various tones to create volume and weighted structures juxtaposed with unwavering gradients. Many of his works take on a built-landscape quality, as seen in Form No. 4, while others are more abstract, rhythmic compositions. By painting with graphite, he is able to shift the medium into a viscous substance in order to produce flawless surfaces.

Grounded gives us the opportunity to explore the complexities of a material we commonly consider to be simple and rudimentary. Working dynamically with graphite, each artist uses process, materiality, and esoteric execution to make images and objects that are self-reflexive, conceptually and visually nuanced, and spiritual in tone. If viewers are open to the nuance, this exhibition can be physically and metaphysically moving, providing a rich and multidimensional experience.

Adrianna Speer is a visual artist and educator living in Denver. She received her BFA from Louisiana State University and her MFA from Louisiana Tech University. Speer currently teaches at Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design in the Foundations Department. For information and inquiries visit www.adriannaspeer.com.



M. Benjamin Herndon, Form No. 4, 2019