

Reviews

Drawings From Ireland: Noam Elyashiv

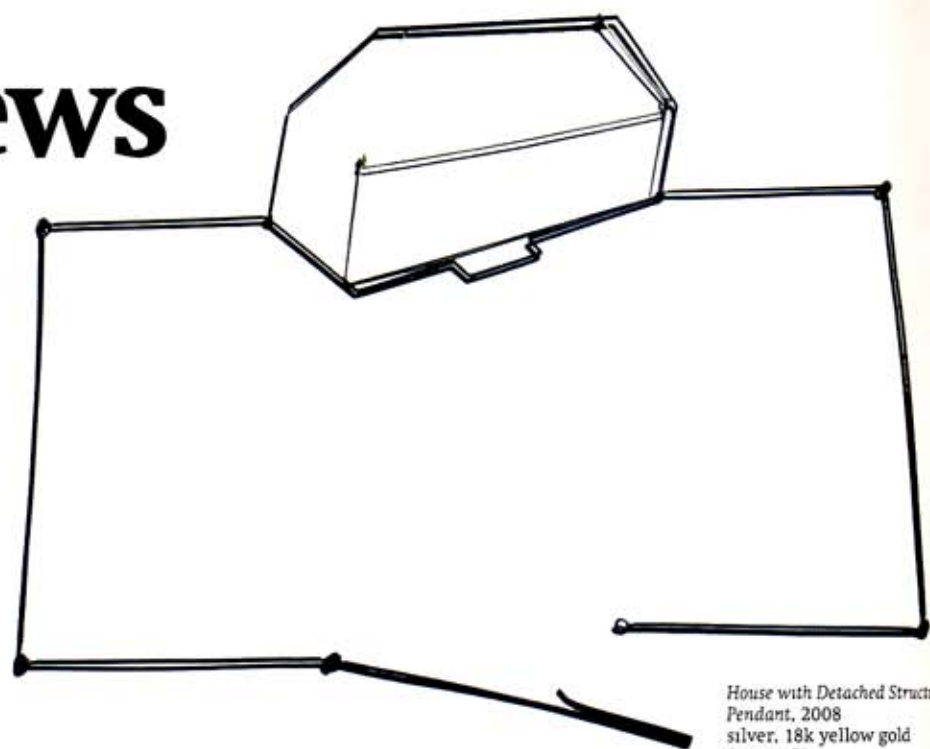
Gallery Loupe, Montclair,
New Jersey
April 6–May 6, 2010

by Martina Windels

Several trips to Ireland over the past eight years have inspired Noam Elyashiv's most recent body of work. Elyashiv, who is known for her sophisticated minimalist jewelry, has a penchant for paring down forms in an attempt to get to the essence of an idea, whether expressed as abstract shape or by creating a wearable piece of jewelry.

Enamored with her surroundings in County Mayo, Elyashiv took in the rural architecture, the light, the vivid colors and the simplicity of farm life. She translated her impression into seemingly simple line drawings directly inspired by everyday objects found in her surroundings: farmhouses, cows, barns, and churches. Elyashiv seems to think in silhouettes, using drawing as a process of understanding an object in space, while simultaneously dissecting it in order to break down its original form.

Upon her return from Ireland, the crisp pencil drawings, some of which are on display, served as the starting point for the jewelry: the clean lines and outlines of (mostly) abstracted shapes developed in these sketches were executed in sterling silver and constructed as movable elements, often



*House with Detached Structure
Pendant, 2008
silver, 18k yellow gold
3 1/2 x 10"
PHOTO RON GILAD*

directly translated into the links of necklaces.

Most of the resulting necklaces are delicate and lightweight, made from wire or narrow strips of sheet. Lacking volume and lending themselves to be displayed as two-dimensional metal drawings, disguises the fact that they are wearable pieces of jewelry.

*Church Necklace, 2008
silver, 14k white gold
5 x 10 x 1/4"*



With the directness of a child's drawing, the outline of a house becomes a five-sided necklace; a barn re-emerges through the use of elongated open links constructed from square wire. Another house shape comes with a solid silver box suggesting a chimney, which turns into a pendant, hanging from a delicate upside-down wire drawing when worn; the church looks like the house, except in place of the chimney sits a cross. Rendered in perspective, the outline of another house is hanging from a light blue cord, hinting at sky. And a configuration of a dozen crosses suspended from a U-shaped strip turns into a cathedral when the strip is inverted. The outlines of a cow and a barn are cut out of black and clear Plexiglas sheet detailed with a green strip (grass) and blue string (sky).

Elyashiv renders fragile and elegant lines with a keen sense of proportion and thoughtful consideration, resulting in necklaces restrained and refined in their execution.

Exact and meditated, the work is minimal, with subtle shifts in proportions and dimensions affecting its look and wear. For example, slightly curving one of the elongated links that imitates the side of the house makes it more comfortable to wear, while at the same time suggests how to place it on the body.

In most cases, gravity adjusts these pieces when put on the body and the laid-out "drawings" disappear. Instead, they become random metal lines, with some pieces feeling awkward and too angular to conform to the human body. Others become accidental configurations, at times struggling to relate to the body, which is in contrast to such considered, masterfully executed, and visually controlled work.

The process of abstraction becomes multilayered: for Elyashiv to translate an object into a necklace, she dissects that form in order to reduce it. This process gets repeated when the onlooker breaks down the metal arrangement carefully arranged in the

gallery setting, and tries the piece on.

The only shape that unintentionally survives this layered dynamic is the cross. Appropriated from the top of Irish church steeples, it does not collapse when worn but instead stubbornly remains as the single recognizable symbol. In fact, the meaning is magnified by its abstracted, minimalist surrounding and emphasized by the title of the show.

Martina Windels is a freelance writer, designer and former gallery owner in Providence, Rhode Island.

Albert Paley: Dialogue with Steel

Grounds for Sculpture
Museum, Hamilton,
New Jersey
October 11, 2009–April 18,
2010

by Susan Myers

Albert Paley's artwork has always been focused on the manipulation and transformation of metal. The exhibition "Albert Paley: Dialogue with Steel" at Grounds For Sculpture highlighted the many manifestations of this career-consuming passion, with more than 40 works on view, including proposal sketches, models, sculpture, and functional pieces. The exhibition focused on Paley's art from 1980 through the present, and all the work was displayed in the indoor exhibition space, with one sculpture, *Stance*, situated outside near the exhibition hall entrance. Given that this venue is known for its collection of outdoor public sculpture, and given Paley's position as one of a handful of contemporary artists who produce monumental art for outdoor sites, this choice was disappointing.

Several of the artist's commissions for public spaces were represented through scaled models. In his detailed models and studies for the Cleveland Botanical Garden and the *Animals Always* gateway at the St. Louis Zoo, the artist relied on the use of sophisticated technology to translate metal into representations of the natural environment. Such works reveal the transformation of the material in a literal, illustrative, and flat manner. While beautifully composed and executed, these models and studies are sterile, rigid, and too removed from the hand of an artist who is known for his applied approach to working with material. I will concede, however, that scale may play a role in how both works can ultimately be read, as the actual commissions are quite grand.

Another scaled-down artwork in the exhibition was *Threshold Model*, a 55 1/2-inch-tall rendition of an 80-foot-tall commission completed in 2006 for the Klein Steel headquarters in Rochester, NY. The abstract visual of *Threshold Model* reads like an explosion: a chaotic arrangement of l-beams, tubes, and planes of scrap pierced sheet metal panels, all painted bright yellow. While stylistically different from his other models, this work is also devoid of the hands-on elements characteristic of Paley's more successful works. And the coating of monochromatic color paired with structural steel components heavily recalls the work of American artist Mark di Suvero, a pioneer in the use of l-beams and structural steel in contemporary sculpture.

To fully appreciate Paley's more nuanced artistic achievements, however, one must consider his art in the continuum of other abstract metal sculptors like di Suvero, David Smith, and Anthony Caro. These artists were all masters at constructing compositions of disparate

scrap metal and industrial steel forms into dynamic abstract sculptures. Works like *Threshold Model*, *Evanesce*, and *Interlace* (the latter two sculptures read as fragmented structures compiled from random sheet metal picked off the studio floor) do not distinguish Paley within the field. Instead, his contribution resides in his working knowledge of the plastic manipulation and refinement of metal as a sculptural material.

These qualities are clearly visible in several of the artist's newer Cor-Ten steel sculptures, as well as in his *Design Study for the Washington National Cathedral Gate*. *Portal*, *Proscenium*, and *Moment* were all created in 2009, and as a group stand out for their carefully crafted composition of forms. More specifically, these artworks seamlessly integrate rational geometric shapes with fluid, organic, ribbon-like decorative elements. The scale of these works was impressive, and although viewed in an indoor exhibit space, they

actually felt monumental.

Paley's *Design Study for the Washington National Cathedral Gate* also illustrated why he is considered a master artist and metalsmith. This work displays the twisting, bending, and coiling elements that have become Paley's trademark. The scale of the gate was irrelevant; the artwork captured the fluid sensual manipulation of the material in every layered detail and is clearly a celebration of the transformative nature of metal. While Paley may have shed his "goldsmith" moniker long ago, it is evident that he never abandoned the discipline of craftsmanship, and he still remembers what the jewelry studio and his hands taught him, even as he maneuvers through the field of contemporary sculpture.

Susan Myers is a visual artist and metalsmith who works as a project manager for a public art organization in Philadelphia.

Furthermore:
www.albertpaley.com
www.groundsforsculpture.org



Proscenium, 2009
Cor-Ten steel
166 x 104 x 51"



Stance, 2009
Cor-Ten steel
213 x 109 1/2 x 90"