

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Opinion

Galleries: Mia Rosenthal show takes several directions

by Edith Newhall, For The Inquirer | Columnist Published Feb 23, 2014



Mia Rosenthal's drawing, "MacBook Pro (Caroline)" (2013), ink, gouache, graphite on paper, at Gallery Joe.

Since seeing Mia Rosenthal's first show of drawings at Gallery Joe two years ago, I've occasionally wondered what she would do for her next solo exhibition there. Would she again develop an idea into one disciplined, project-like body of work, as she had done so nicely in her conceptual revisions of views depicted in well-known Hudson River School paintings? Or would she explore several directions at once, something she seemed eminently capable of doing? It's turned out to be the latter, exhilaratingly so.

Rosenthal's familiar crisp, tiny renderings of flora and fauna in black ink on white paper—crowded together, yet each taking up the perfect amount of space; doodlelike, yet orderly—have been deployed in only two drawings in this large show (she has the entire gallery), and to eye-catchingly eccentric, whimsical effect.

Both titled *Life on Earth*, they show the evolution of man and the plant and animal kingdoms intertwined. In the larger drawing, on a somewhat circular piece of paper, this overlapping of creatures occurs in a spiral, mandalalike composition following the paper's contours. The smaller drawing's cast of creatures unfolds on horizontal lines on rectangular paper, as though etched onto an ancient tablet by a visionary with a sense of humor.

Rosenthal's laptop - a MacBook Pro she has relied on for Googling information for her drawings - and her iPhone have become new subjects, as have the laptops, smartphones, and two iPads of her friends and family, all standing in as portraits of their owners. In these, Rosenthal's drawing has a lighter touch, softened by her use of graphite and gouache (these particular drawings demanded color). A series of informal iPhone portraits stretching along a wall in the Vault gallery offers further testament to Rosenthal's unpretentious wit and openness to change.

In a third group of works, she portrays her own hand-drawn facsimiles of images she sourced from Google Images on a particular subject, making multi-image grid drawings on the themes of John James Audubon, Eadweard Muybridge, and the Hubble telescope. Her "portraits" of Audubon and Muybridge, using more graphite than ink, mark the most obvious departure from Rosenthal's taut ink line drawings; they look like nuanced, soft-focus drawings of the famous bird illustrations and photographic motion studies they're based on.

Google the phrase "pull out all the stops." It might look like this.