

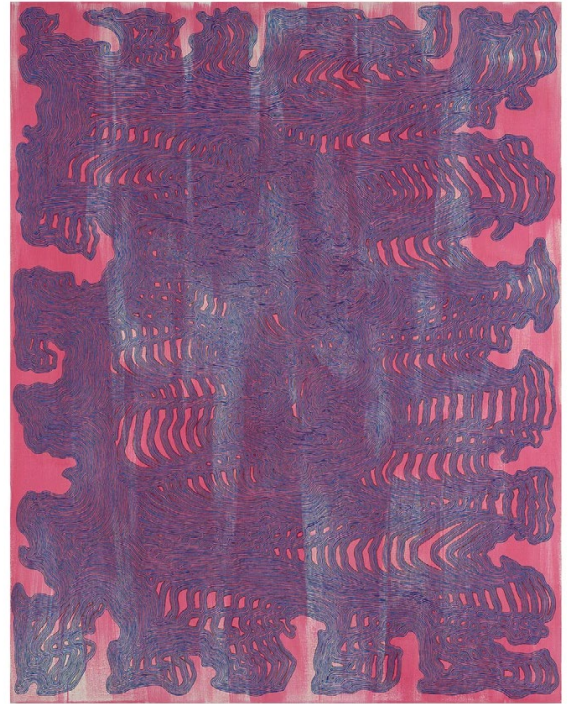
‘Desire Lines’ Explores Drawing With Six Diverse Artists

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An exhibition at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center presents very different works by regional artists who reflect on the medium and how they use it.

James Siena’s arresting works seem like doodles pushed to their natural conclusions. In “Spoolstrata,” a 22-by-31-inch graphite drawing, he creates the kind of outlined, roping squiggles — think spaghetti — that you might find in the margins of meeting notes or a middle school math notebook. The lines loop and cross over each other in a loose weave. The repetition and density of forms create a coherent composition, folded and draping when you step back, mesmerizingly detailed up close.

Siena carries a similar technique into “Artoptichord,” a 75-by-60-inch painting in Pepto-Bismol pink and electric blue. Here, blue lines snake across the canvas, slight variations in thickness reminiscent of ballpoint pen; Siena outlines those lines with more lines, creating a thrumming mass.



Artoptichord, (2020), Acrylic and colored pencil on linen, 75 x 60 inches

The show’s curators have made audio clips from each artist available via QR codes from the exhibition labels — a smart choice that is particularly helpful in personalizing a show in which much of the work is abstract or process-driven. In one clip, Siena describes how, when he tried to draw a tree as a 12-year-old, he thought he needed to picture every leaf. That visual impulse is a through line for his work.

“Allelomorphs, Amended,” a second 75-by-60-inch painting, presents a pair of forms that spill down the canvas, each containing contrasting black-and-white or brown-and-beige blocky patterns. The eye easily gets overwhelmed trying to read them. Throughout Siena’s work, there’s a tension between the repetitive, patient way he makes a drawing and the all-at-once visual cacophony of looking at the finished piece.