

# CITY

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## ART REVIEW: "Leaded"

### Making marks

By [Rebecca Rafferty](#) on January 28, 2009



Mark Sheinkman's "4.11.2007," part of the "Leaded" exhibit currently on display at Memorial Art Gallery. PHOTO PROVIDED



Another piece of art from the "Leaded" exhibit. PHOTO PROVIDED

Individual takes on a simple tool can surprise and amaze. The MAG's current show, "Leaded," enlightens us on the history and versatility of the little old graphite pencil, which is often relegated to the sketching portion of art making. Bring your cell phone to punch in the accompanying codes and learn as you move from drawings to conceptual sculpture, and witness a group of artists stretch the material beyond your expectations.

Near the entrance of the gallery, the gloomy, haunted-looking interior of a theater in Christopher Cook's "Baroque III" is composed of washes and strokes of the graphite, whose shimmering qualities cause the scene to almost shift and swirl under your gaze.

In contrast to Cook's art is the stillness and the stark nature of "December" by Meghan Gerety. Her graphite drawings on clay board are studies of when the world turns white, cold, and hard. Gerety's large panels host cropped and architectural silhouettes of trees bereft of their fragile leaves, sentinels in slow poses.

Mark Sheinkman's "4.19.2007" and "2007" are two large-scale drawings specifically created for this exhibition. The info plaque provided informs that he works in a reductive way, by coating the canvas with a white ground of oil and alkyd, then brushing on powdered graphite, and finally using an electric eraser to remove some of the powder, resulting in elegantly snaking, mesmerizing ribbons of smoke, frozen mid-undulation.

I'd never heard of James Tate, but the visible fragments of "Why I Will Not Get out of Bed" in Molly Springfield's "Selected Poems (James Tate)" have set me on a mission to secure some of his work. Springfield's drawings of photocopies of book pages "raise issues of originality, appropriation, and the effect of technology on labor," per the info card. Though the poems pulled me in, the pieces claim more of a fascination with "the physicality of words, not the information they convey." The artist states that "what is ultimately most interesting about language are its aesthetic and material properties: the way it looks, the way it feels, the way in which it seems, somehow, to actually exist as a thing, in the world."

At least, for now: like most things, books are threatening to move into the ether of software (whimper), but Springfield has reversed this course by creating art that recalls the individual and artistic labor that once went into manifesting words on page. Machine-constructed books were scanned, with special care to the bindings: the words closest to the gutter margins lost to darkness. Springfield then translated the photocopies by hand into graphite drawings, making sure to include the lines and imperfections from the photocopier's screen and delicately rendered the folded corners of the pages.

Stephen Sollins' crinkly mixed-media pieces are easily my favorites. For each of his three contributions, he has taken camping catalog pages and scribbled pencil over the majority of the plane, allowing only a few key images to remain. "Home" is a grid of 12 wrinkly, inky-silvery pages, the not-quite-black sheen of graphite creating a subtly metallic sea. On the left, and second down from the top, is a group of six tents, with eraser-made light pooling in front of the thresholds. In "Terrain," five tents in three groupings resemble a little village, the unseen inhabitants vulnerable in their uncertain solitude. Sollins states that he is "exchanging the noise of the world for the information of silence." The yearning for a simpler time is readable, but the mood of the pieces hovers between that peace, and the defenseless exposure to the elements and the dark. Without our streetlamps and sturdy walls, our thoughts take to wondering what is filling that void beyond our perception. The darkness simply is; light is caused by a presence. Sollins leaves it to our individual imaginations by presenting us with that blank, empty time, where story forms.

Our obsession with taming the wilderness and categorizing information can be extended from housing developments to computer chips. Soaring above Marco Maggi's meticulous patterns in "Drawriter" (a combination of image and writing), viewers spy curves of roadways and stretches of city blocks, or a geometric language of complex patterns crawling all over the surface to evoke the complexity within our efforts to set order to things. The piece is pure graphite-on-graphite action: the artist used a pencil to carve the forms on a graphite tablet. Maggi's own words on his painstaking work: "our time is so preoccupied with the spectacle of macro drama, that delicacy has become subversive."

The exhibition also houses graphite-as-object (instead of just tool) sculptures. "The Art Guys," Michael Galbreth and Jack Massing, created a seven foot-tall model of an intricate, soaring sky scraper, playfully constructed of precisely sharpened No. 2 pencils, and accompanied by a tall architectural model on paper, meant to refer to the use of the humble pencil in the planning of all great buildings.

Creighton Michael's "SQUIGGLE linear B407" is a mixed-media installation of short lengths of graphite-coated, semi-coiled rope in a tangled rectangular mass on the wall, reflected by another mass along the wall on the floor. While your eyes dance over the complex bramble and the shadows cast by the gallery lights along bottom of wall piece, the script of a hidden language teasingly emerges and tauntingly recedes before any sense is made.