

review of Spreading the Influence, Olin Art Gallery, Kenyon College

What started as *Under the Influence*, the exhibition at Girl's Club from October 2008 to September 2009, has traveled from South Florida to Ohio. The exhibit, now called *Spreading the Influence*, is nestled in the Olin Gallery of Kenyon College.

The aim of the show is to showcase contemporary women artists as well as address the encompassing theme of woman art and craft. Naturally, while viewing the works in the gallery, I began to analyze each piece within the lens of this theme. I soon found that viewing the works of art in this way was unsatisfactory. I would rather analyze works of art for their aesthetic value outside of cultural boundaries and labels. When art is categorized into themes of social constructs such as race, gender, and sexuality, these themes seem to be violently stretched to their edges in order to encompass each piece under their labels.

I was reminded of the recent retrospective of Georgia O'Keefe's work at the Whitney titled *Abstraction*. The Whitney sought to diminish the feminine sexuality that has been ascribed to her body of work but instead to highlight the abstract nature of her life works. Similarly, In *Spreading the Influence*, abstract works void of cultural and social symbols had the most visual impact. Theresa Hackett utilized paint, colored pencil, ink, and felt on white canvas to produce subtle forms and shapes that created a visual landscape in which one could stop and become lost. Julie Mehretu combines maps of cityscapes, airports, and landmarks to produce an intricate pattern of lines that swirl with movement and highlight the beautifully delicate use of color.

I would like to judge a piece of work on the basis of its artistic integrity, never questioning whether the voice is male or female. The mere fact that this exhibit included male artists proves that *Spreading the Influence* should possibly reevaluate its current over-arching theme of women in art and further specify exactly in what the show aims to educate the viewer.

Paul Reed
Gambier, OH
February 2010