

LITTLEJOHN/STERNAU GALLERY

41 EAST 57 STREET, NEW YORK NY 10022 212.980.2323

Creighton Michael "Recent Work" by **ELEANOR HEARTNEY**

Webster's Dictionary only gets to the artist's definition of the word "draw" ("to make lines, figures, pictures, etc. with a pencil, pen, brush or stylus") after a bewildering series of equivalents involving such actions as pulling, attracting, eliciting, removing, reaching, stretching and deducing. It is good to keep this order in mind when viewing the works of Creighton Michael. For, whether they consist of graphite marks laid across a sheet of paper or arrangements of found and shaped wood, tin, muslin, or treated paper, his creations deal with the notion of "drawing" in the largest possible sense. * Michael notes that he was deeply influenced by a pair of surrealist strategies. One is automatic drawing, that apparently desultory mode of sketching which is sometimes dismissed as doodling. The other is the use of found materials. Both these techniques emphasize the intuitive, rather than the rational workings of the creative mind. For the viewer, no less than for the artist, such exercises require an active response, as meaning is literally "drawn", in all the senses of the word, from apparently inert materials. * One can see this process at work in Michael's "Conifer" sculptures. Each of these works follows the same basic format—a cluster of paint blackened conifer branches, broken into similar lengths, create a substrate from which an expanse of translucent paper breaks forth like a pool of ice or a frost etched window. The contrast between these two elements sets up a series of oppositions between nature and culture, geometry and biomorphic form, line and space. Even without knowing that Michael has recently moved to the

country and that his back porch overlooks a woodland pond, one can "draw" from these works intimations of the unexpected and ephemeral beauties of nature. At the same time, it is possible to read these works as meditations on the artist's process. The cluster of branches, some left whole, some split to reveal sharp edges, suggest a thicket of brush strokes which seem, somehow, to have slipped off the pure white plane of paper presumably designed to contain them. * Exhibited alongside these sculptures are a set of drawings to which the artist has given the series title "Water Music." Closely related to the Conifer sculptures in both sensibility and inspiration (here again the evershifting surface of the pond hovers as a subliminal presence) they reveal one of the keys to Michael's thinking. Conceived neither as preliminary sketches or after the fact documentations of sculptural works, drawings such as these have always functioned for Michael as fully equal vehicles of expression. In fact, attentive looking reveals that both sculptures and drawings partake of the same aesthetic approach—the intuitive arrangement of marks or elements, the composition which reveals itself in the process of creation, and the delicate balance of light and darkness, mass and void. * Thus, in both his sculptures and his works on paper, Michael sets up a complex interplay between the physical action of mark making and the mental activity of association and metaphor. In doing so, he reveals that there is more to "drawing" than meets the eye.

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CREIGHTON MICHAEL

NEW SCULPTURE AND DRAWINGS
MAY 28-JUNE 27, 1992
RECEPTION FOR THE ARTIST
THURSDAY, MAY 28, 6-8 PM

CONIFER (1292)
1992. WOODS, PAPER AND ACRYLIC, 48 x 15 x 27"