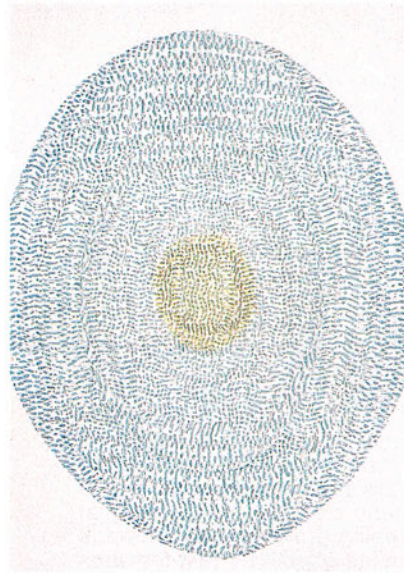


# Art in America

March 1999



John Morris: *Bill Hewlett Tribute*, 1998, wax crayon, graphite ink, colored pencil, 10 1/4 by 7 inches; at D'Amelio Terras.

## John Morris at D'Amelio Terras

This was the first one-person exhibition for John Morris, who has previously appeared in group shows organized by Pierogi 2000, the influential experimental gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Morris makes small-scale drawings on paper (many here measure about 10 by 7 inches) using ink, graphite, ballpoint pen and wax crayon in different combinations. While at first glance these works look like spare, quasi-minimal abstractions, close attention reveals that they are composed of thousands of tiny marks, flecks of color, variations in texture and networks of small circles (or circles within circles). Filled with references to anatomical and biomorphic forms, Islamic architectural ornament and computer circuit-

boards, Morris's intricate designs are painstaking, exquisite and at times frankly cosmic, with tiny patterns indicating vast forces and processes.

Almost 200 drawings from the past six years were laid out in rows on two tables, in a way that suggested petri dishes in a laboratory or specimens from nature. Some works resemble teeming microorganisms magnified through a microscope. With *Untitled* (1993-97), a jumble of small, curving, cylindrical forms suggest proliferating viruses or writhing protozoa. In *Untitled* (1997), seven spare, vaguely embryonic forms cluster in a free-floating circle; this is one of many instances when Morris's delicate marks seem ghostly or withdrawn, inhabiting a borderline between presence and absence.

Other works evoke quite different things. In *Untitled* (1995), dot-filled curving forms resemble architectural structures seen from on high, as if through the telescope of an orbiting satellite. Laying out the works en masse proved effective, for Morris's burgeoning oeuvre is filled with recurring motifs, cross-references and surprising tangents. One unusual twist is that several drawings are titled after technology companies or dedicated to computer-generation entrepreneurs.

This decidedly idiosyncratic artist veers easily between nature, technology and home-made science fiction. Word has it that Morris, a self-taught artist who seems uninterested in fitting into any art-world trend, accomplished many of these works in long, solitary sessions at a Queens library. What's remarkable is the way he makes the low-tech medium of drawing capable of absorbing and transforming a wide range of interests and influences, including Silicon Valley technocapitalism, biology and transcendently tinged design.

—Gregory Volk

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 1998

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## ART IN REVIEW

### John Morris

*D'Amelio Terras*  
525 West 22d Street  
Chelsea  
Through Oct. 3

John Morris burrows so deeply into familiar territory — that of the ultrafine, quasi-abstract drawing — that he finds a bit of turf to call his own.

His first solo show consists of about 200 small, obsessively perfect images made with various combinations of crayon, wax, graphite, ink and ballpoint pen; they are displayed unframed in tight formation on two big tables. As their delicate, transparent motifs can suggest cellular structures and gyrating paramercia, one can feel a bit like a scientist studying slides.

There are pleasant jumps in scale. Certain elliptical structures can look like miniaturized blueprints of stadiums or blowups of dandelions that have released their pods to the wind. Sometimes one is looking at minute fiddle-fern spirals made with superfine graphite that are arranged in larger phallic shapes, creating a weird tension between the decorative and the anatomical.

In others, the materials thicken and, seen closely, are both added and subtracted. This is especially the case with ovals of pale blue and yellow made with wax and crayon whose shiny, delicately gouged surfaces make one think of embroidery or an unusual kind of enamel. Persian, tantric, biological, astral — these are some of the influences that seem to act upon this work.

However, that the few titled works are named after computer companies (“Epiphany,” “Radiant Systems,” “Molecular Dynamics”) or individuals whose inventions and ideas have defined that field puts a quite different spin on things.

Mr. Morris's work seems to demonstrate that the human brain, eye and hand still have, in the face of advanced computer technology, an unexplored capacity for complexity and refinement, one that has the added advantage of physical touch. A problem is that these drawings look better together than they possibly could separately. But one has the feeling that Mr. Morris will keep digging.

ROBERTA SMITH

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**SEPTEMBER 23-29, 1998**

## Drawing Room

John Morris  
D'Amelio Terras  
525 West 22nd Street  
Through October 3

**S**tay-at-home artists, introverted, obsessive, and a bit batty, are stepping into the limelight, with work that harkens back to a handmade era and looks forward to an increasingly digitized world. John Morris appears to be one of their number. This self-taught artist, a 33-year-old resident of Queens, makes his debut with an exhibition, at once vast and scaled down, of six years' worth of drawings (his entire oeuvre) in two rooms at D'Amelio Terras.

Laid out on tables, each accompanied by its own glassine envelope, these small works are displayed like specimens of nature. Drawn and stamped with wax crayon, graphite, ink, and colored pencil, each offers a microcosm of lines, dots, ellipses, and circles, in delicately mutating color—pale yellows, milky whites, aqua blues. At once organic and unearthly, Morris's drawings seem like fragments that have floated free from a parallel universe. Singly, they're cause to linger, but their greatest resonance lies in relation to one another, in series that recall the rhythms of architecture or musical composition.

The artist cites Bach and Klee as influences, but his strange harmonies also draw upon unconscious memories of the hand and body. His few titles are taken from the names of start-up computer companies (*Radiant Systems* or *Concentric Network*, for example) or their stock-market ticker-tape numbers, and he sometimes dedicates drawings to capitalists and entrepreneurs, revealing an interest in self-propelled and proliferating structures. A cosmographer, his work tends toward those remote regions where intimate cellular structure echoes the patterning of the universe. Yet it can also seem as subtly imperceptible and personal as a fingerprint. Amid the noisy commotion of the season's opening in Chelsea, this quiet show commands attention in the manner of a whisper.

—LESLIE CAMHI