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ART IN REVIEW

John Morris

D'Amelio Terras
525 West 22nd Street, Chelsea
Through Sept. 30

John Morris works like a spider, endlessly spinning gossamer webs of wonderfully intricate doodling. Studying the 60 drawings in this absorbing show, you wonder how the Queens native finds time to do anything else — the works seem so labor-intensive. Yet they also look as if he produced them effortlessly, as if drawing for him were a kind of natural, genetically programmed behavior.

Made with graphite, ink, colored pencil, gesso and other materials, Mr. Morris's works are not only marvels of near microscopic delicacy but also are witty and highly inventive in the ways they play with composition and art historical influences. Eye-strainingly fine arabesques, spirals, ovals and nested circles are organized around and within larger structures like yin-yang compositions, leaf forms and egg or phallic shapes. With slight shifts of color — from graphite to pale red ink, for example — the artist layers systems in space.

The formal vocabulary is mainly biomorphic: this is not an art of grids or rectangles. It suggests a vision of constant organic growth from the cellular level on up to the cosmic. Yet in its delirious ornateness, it is intensely artificial, like Baroque music.

Echoes of Klee and Miró, medieval manuscript illumination, Persian and Indian miniatures and Tantric art enhance the playfully mystical resonance. One senses both an erotic and a spiritual joy in these inspirational works.

KEN JOHNSON