

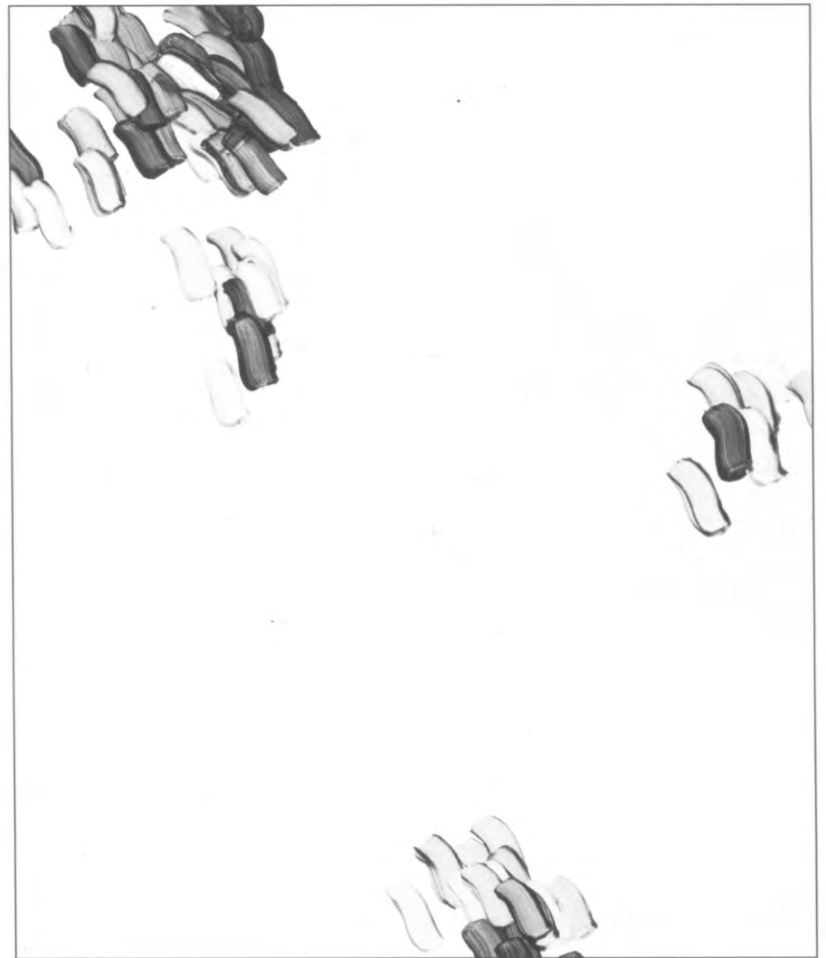
Sharon Louden

17 april – 29 may 1999

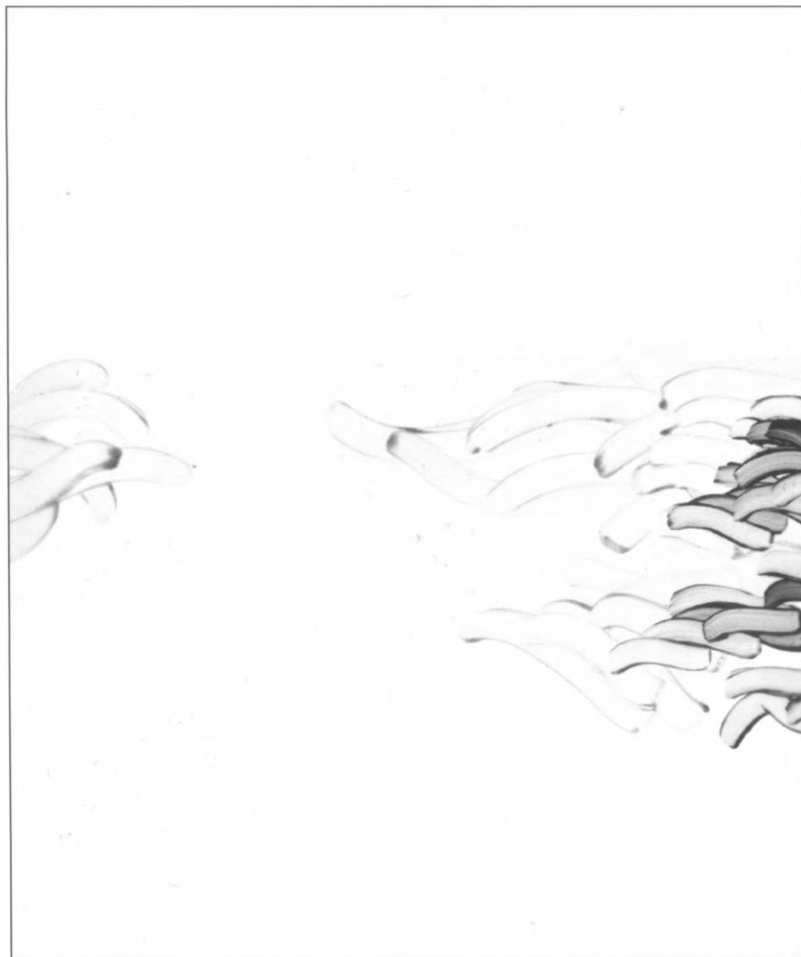
works on paper, inc.

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Flaps
25" x 20" watercolor & gel medium
on prepared acetate, 1999

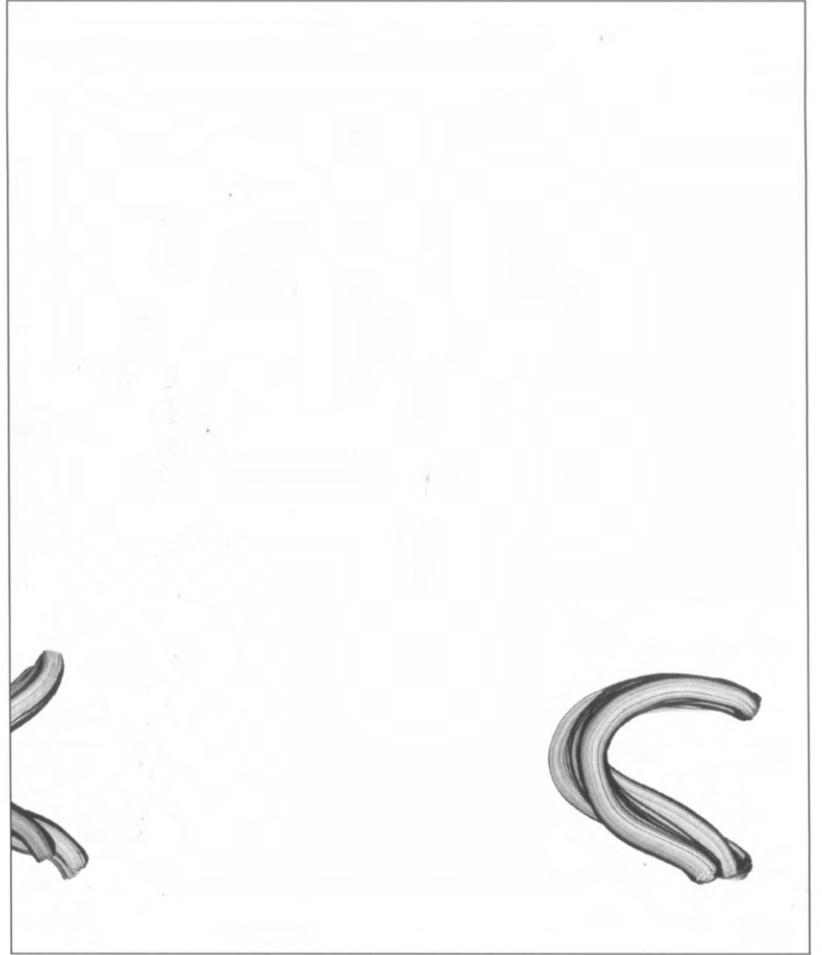


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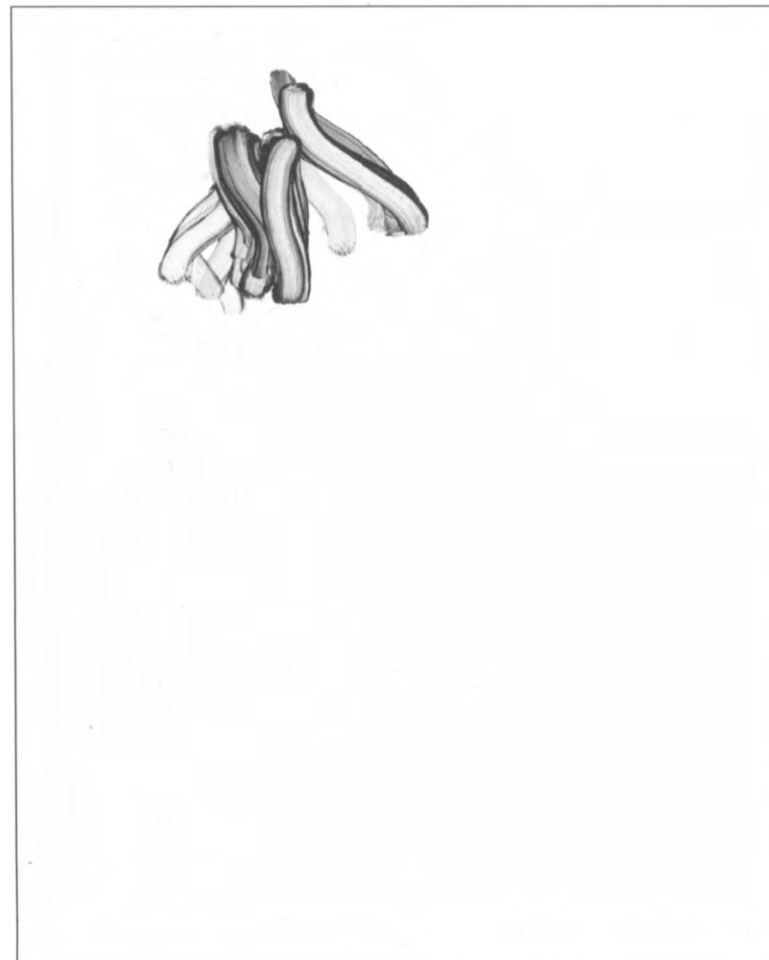
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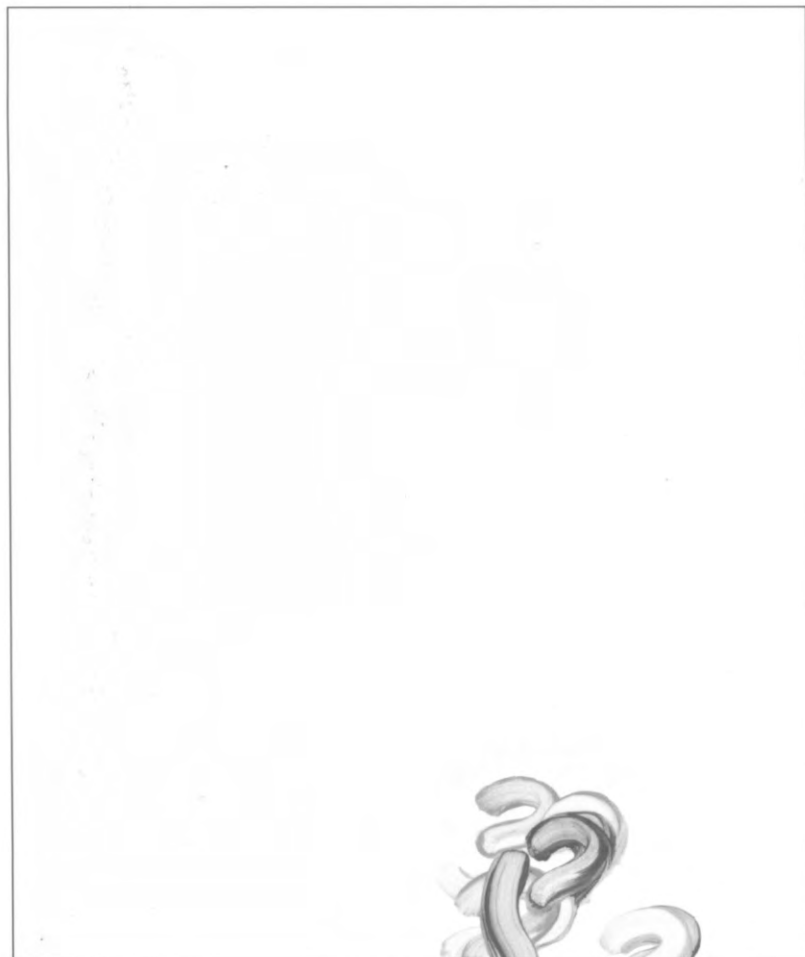
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Flaps
22" x 17" watercolor & gel medium
on Mylar, 1999



Flaps
22" x 17" watercolor & gel medium
on Mylar, 1999



Agents
17" x 11" Ink & gel medium
on Mylar, 1996



(Category Crisis)²

Given: The process of human comprehension begins with placing things, including complex things, in a category, a grouping of similar things. But that being true, art works, or rather their authors, serve themselves well by problematizing that process, generating what is commonly known as a category crisis. No one can defeat this urge and need to categorize, but an artist must strive to slow the process down, forcing the would-be categorizer to keep two or more possibilities in their head for a period of time.

These thoughts came to mind in a recent visit to Sharon Louden's studio. She works in drawing, sculpture and installation—that much is clear—but during the visit I was struck that each piece could fit in all three categories. The media specific qualities, and hence the descriptive language we were choosing to use in her studio revealed the category straddling, mentally and linguistically, into which we were coerced. Louden's drawings refer to sculpture and the sculptures refer to drawing leaving us with no originating media to prioritize. Like a mirror looking into a mirror, our language and battery of referents are left to oscillate forever. Let me be clear, I am not referring to the field of "sculptors' drawings," preparatory sketches, which can be beautiful, but speak the language of sculpture in a conspicuously ancillary manner. For Louden her works-on-paper (or on Mylar or on walls) function as sculpture and simultaneously as drawing.

Her sculptural material of choice is conspicuously linear, which speaks the language of drawing. The *Flaps*, painted on acetate, hover off the wall on pins, which makes them already sculpture/installation. This projection into space causes shadows to fall, dissolving the back wall pushing the whole enterprise further into a 3D yet fictional world. And then Louden wraps them around corners, adding the "installation" quality of site-specificity and the reiterating of location, another quality not usually associated with drawing. Her wall paintings' forms are versions of Louden's *Agents* which also occur in both sculptural and drawn/painted form, and hence feel "drawn," although painted on a sheet rock support.

Different media occur in different temporal modes and, when understood as a language, have different tenses. Drawing is usually considered as a form of thinking in the on going, habitual tense. Sculpture on the other hand, when understood as a cerebral manifestation at all, would be "thought" in the past tense, (or, of course, as a noun). Installation, because it exists for a finite period of time in a particular place that's always passed through in real time, is thus the simple present tense. These different tenses reinforce the separateness of our received categories. So when Louden

collapses the media she creates an impossible tense, past, simple present and habitual present simultaneously with no one form or tense taking priority.

This temporal impossibility makes perfect sense when we realize that Louden's work also makes an obsession of impossible space. Take the grid she sets up to display these drawings. The grid is not merely a way of creating visual overkill by displaying each and every permutation of the *Flaps* motif, but rather Louden's way of invoking the inherent meaning of all grids. The grid is the sign in Western culture of rational thought because it theoretically will map every point of a flat surface with two unique coordinates. Louden's grid is consistently forced to struggle with the irrational. Every *Flaps* drawing in this grid lets its prime motif, the simple flowing flap, run off the edge. In the minuscule space before the next drawing begins it is clear that the flap in question could not reach its terminus. So what are the unique coordinates for the unseen remainder of the flap? Like diagrams in a book of theoretical physics, conventional Cartesian grids, even as multiplied into 3D lattices, cannot describe such impossible effects. The grid, in order to describe the event, must collapse in on itself. As Louden reiterates the density of the missing space, the tension between the manifestly "seen" and "unseen" reminds us that we are in an impossible corner of both space and time.

The wall drawing, a loose constellation of *Agents*, is not manifestly grided by the artist. The forms hover in space and we humans in another form of our mania for categorizations locate the painterly events on the rectilinear wall "as if" it there was a grid there, (but Louden declines to iterate it!). Hence the tangled *Agents* are allowed to remain complete. There is no imposed order that they are called upon to subvert, and in their natural seeming dispersion, they already welcome in the irrational and impossible.

For Louden's final provocations she lets her *Flaps* and *Agents* overlap. In their isolation from one another up until now Louden treats them as isolated specimens or perhaps fighting fish always best kept in separate tanks. When allowed to touch, here for the first time what will the result be? The nature of category crises is one of constant substitutions; substitute the prime category with the conditions of a secondary one. But Louden's crisis is different because there is no prime category. We have only a network of substitutions with no originating source. She has taken the familiar quantity (category crises) and squared it, geometrically expanding the possibilities. This sculptor who makes knot-like forms in both two and three dimensions gives us an intellectual knot that we cannot ever fully untangle, and what resonant fun that is!

Flaps
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on prepared acetate, 1999

