

## **Carol Heft, *Easton Irregular Art Profile*, Nov 2011**

Carol Heft's show of drawings, "On the Road," was up at LaDuca Gallery at 7 Bank Street through most of September, and I caught it just before it closed. In April of 2012 the show will travel to the University of South Carolina at Aiken. Carol makes sensitive, standard-sized pencil drawings of trees and fields while commuting by bus to New York City. She travels to teach drawing at St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn and to work in her studio in Hell's Kitchen. She also teaches locally at Muhlenburg College. She studied at a young age with Robert Brackman, who's famous for his connection to the Art Students League of New York. She received her B.F.A. from Rhode Island School of Design and M.Ed. from Hunter College. Carol shows regularly with the Blue Mountain Cooperative Gallery in Chelsea. Currently, she is assembling painted, paper wall sculptures, freewheeling works-in-progress that tempt me to book a visit to her New York studio.

Carol's "On the Road" drawings recreate movement over land in a rhythm I associate with music and film. I kept moving from one drawing to the next, taking in the various views; the show was so cohesive, order didn't seem to matter. I both actively watched and passively saw each scene, blurry patches recalling the effect of glass bus windows. En route, Ms. Heft props a drawing pad against the seat back in front of her and renders the fleeting landscape from a comfortable, high perspective. She relies heavily on memory while drawing, something she stresses with students. In the classroom, she pins her drawing in front of the class and has to look back over her shoulder repeatedly to capture short-term memories of the subject, a process that is harder for her, yet students can watch every drawing decision. Carol agreed that certain spots on the highway and certain trees or kinds of trees are memory aids. She spoke of a kind of stubby pine tree with asymmetrical branches and a lopped-off top fondly, as if it was an old friend. Trees are often considered substitutes for figures, their shape and stature the profile of an individual's personality. She referred to groupings of trees and fields as "rooms," a clue that, for her, this work makes the broad, open space intimate. As compositions, her landscapes array trees and brushy undergrowth in a line parallel with or perpendicular to the horizon. One playful drawing had two different horizon lines separated by a single tree, hinting that swift observation lets in interesting mistakes. The bus journey is fluid but recreating it is halting and piecemeal. The use of horizon line gave me the sense of linear motion, yet the eye also dives into patterns of branches and undergrowth. I get lost in the tangle of scratches and smudges,

dustbunny balls of wild nature. Etchings by Northern European artists such as Albrecht Dürer and Rembrandt come to mind as I wade through dark lines of different thicknesses searching for recognizable shapes. Carol weaves and presses lines together, working on multiple levels: organic shapes and fabric-like surfaces float over dark, brambly recesses. Is that a bit of trash out in the field or the gesture of moving pencil? Wiry lines like stray hairs and shapes like hollow straws are bound together by eraser smudges and loopy crosshatching; yet, in every drawing, the chaos of the forest is controlled by negative space or parts of the page left empty. The work puts me on the bus with Carol, actively looking and inventing, moving forward as we explore deep landscape.

— Elizabeth Johnson