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San Francisco Chronicle

Fowler Makes the Cut

By Kenneth Baker
May 26, 2012

New York artist **Adam Fowler**'s work at Brian Gross brings that of Cy Twombly (1928-2011) to mind and, like some of Twombly's work, it will surely provoke responses of the my-kid-could-do-that variety. But only from people not paying proper attention.

A Fowler piece such as "*Untitled (Three Layers)*" (2012) begins, as did some of Twombly's, with a churning of lines on a surface - graphite on paper in Fowler's case.

Once he achieves the desired quality and density of marks, Fowler leaves off drawing and starts incising, meticulously cutting away all the negative spaces left on the page. His procedure, it turns out, links his work as closely to the homely tradition of ornate paper cutting as to Twombly's wild-running hand.

Fowler repeated his process three times to make "*Untitled (Three Layers)*," and stacked the intricate tracers to give the work its final form. They overlap not merely as lines would, but as planes. Close inspection confirms it.

Fowler's work provokes astonishment by its unique convergence of spontaneity and discipline. It also serves viewers as devices for intensifying their visual awareness.

How much reality, it invites us to ask, do we overlook every day simply through inattention? A critical motto that I borrow from Alfred North Whitehead fits Fowler's art perfectly: "We think in generalities, but we live in detail."

Fowler dares us to think about how much detail we can sacrifice - to haste, to fear of looking, to fantasy - before we lose the awareness of being alive.