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JENNY SNIDER

Fred and Ginger! The magnetic dance team that captivated America in the '30s with the greatest movie musicals in history has danced their way, once again, into our hearts. This time, however, their vehicle is not the motion picture screen or, more currently, our own television sets, but an ambitious installation at Artist's Space by Jenny Snider.

With the large walls of the main gallery at her disposal, Snider has created an environment that brings to life the spirit of these film classics. Over 400 black and white gouache or acrylic drawings of couples or individual dancing figures encircle us in a medley of postures and movements. Seen as a totality they create an energy and vitality that intentionally sweeps us off our feet. Once we enter Snider's room we are under her spell, just as for decades we have been mesmerized by Fred and Ginger. We also can move gracefully across the floor with a joy and elegance that requires only the slightest of efforts. We believe that their power is our power and every muscle in our body aches to act out what we feel is suddenly possible for us, too!

For several years Snider has been working on a variety of dance drawings. These figurative works have always been paralleled by the artist's better know abstract paintings exhibited last year at Hamilton Gallery and included in the 1978 Guggenheim Exxon Young American Artist's Exhibition. Snider is quick to speak of the relationship among her seemingly different art works, as she is often disappointed by the inability of viewers to grasp

the underlying connections or at least accept the diversity without criticism. Hopefully, this current installation is a more complete artistic statement than an exhibition of individual paintings and will counteract this unfortunate response.

The first dance drawings executed in 1973 and 1974 were composed of stick figures. They were highly calligraphic drawings that isolated and personified the abstract marks seen in the paintings. Snider used these drawings to produce several short animated films shown in 1976 at the Paula Cooper Gallery. Snider decided at this time to produce a longer film, again animated, but with more complete and complicated movement. She found herself poring over books and photographs in the New York City Public Library, studying sequences of still shots from '30s films as well as a variety of live dance hall snapshots. A longtime fascination with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers inadvertently became a source for her art. Snider began a series of drawings inspired by these photographs. Before she realized it, her studio was covered with piles of small black and white drawings. Complete dances were broken down into a series of still poses—frozen gestures that related to individual frames of film. Many dances were studied in order to emphasize different types of movement. The avid Fred and Ginger fan will recognize familiar fragments from *The Barkleys of Broadway*, *Follow the Fleet*, *Gay Divorcee*, *Roberta*, *Swingtime*, and *Top Hat*. Of course, costumes were given careful consideration, for the shape and fall of the clothing greatly affected the way each gesture appeared.

Snider worked on these drawings without thinking seriously about exhibiting them. They seemed too much of a lark and were even more pointedly figurative than the earlier stick dance drawings. As a re-

sult, they presented aesthetic difficulties to many visitors to her studio. The opportunity to utilize them as components in an installation, rather than exhibiting them as individual or small groups of drawings, presented a solution to Snider's dilemma. Once Snider had a specific space to work with, she would be able to make the larger statement that she was striving for. She could now demonstrate and clarify her often made statement that she was neither an abstract nor figurative artist, but rather an *abstractionist* and a joyous one at that. For while the component parts of this installation were to be figurative, the overall effect would be that of carefully choreographed abstract movement.

The installation evolved into four groupings of drawings, each arranged on one of the four gallery walls. Each wall exhibits a unified presentation of dancing figures by focusing on a different type of movement executed in a particular scale and rhythm. Dance sequences are rendered so that the viewer is able to identify specific movements. Fred and Ginger are recognized on three walls, but the fourth is devoted to you and me, that is, to anonymous dancers in everyday clothes executing more popular dance steps. In all the drawings the attention given to minute body changes is striking. Snider's skill in presenting the subtlest varia-

tion appears unending. Given the exaggerated use of repetition as a formal device in this installation, it is extraordinary that each drawing looks fresh and alive. It is because Snider has captured the same ease and fluidity in her renderings that characterize the dance movement themselves. The sequence that focuses on Fred's legs and feet captures the magic in the slightest bend of his knee or shift in weight from one side of his foot to the other. Snider understands Astaire's dance style and bodily idiosyncracies and has developed a visual acumen and manual dexterity to match his.

Snider has utilized both the direct approach of the literal translation of the figurative as well as the abstract suggestion of pattern to achieve the transmission she desires. The four parts function as a musical score, a narrative presentation of gesture. The room viewed as a totality is a black and white installation painting that utilizes variation and repetition to achieve grand, rhythmic movement. Through a process of recognition and identification we are forced to believe in the power of movement as a dynamic source of energy and pleasure. Snider's installation is a joyous and extravagant celebration of life. (Artist's Space, February 23-March 26)

Jean E. Feinberg



Jenny Snider, Backs, 1980. Gouache on paper, 9 x 12". C