

Sid Garrison's work in colored pencil in Limn

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San Franciscan Sid Garrison displays impressive staying power in his fourth show of drawings at Limn Gallery. Garrison works in colored pencil in a manner at once abstract, improvisational and subtly responsive to pressures of the wider culture. His medium exudes a whiff of hobbyism, yet the seriousness of his work, even at its most fanciful, never flags.

Though Garrison seems never to repeat himself, his work looks like no one else's. His show's enigmatic title, "07 08 28," refers to work made in 2007 and 2008 on 28-inch-square sheets. Consider "November 21, 2007," characteristically titled after the date of its completion. A patchwork of irregular shapes in cream, orange and deep charcoal brown, punctuated with carefully mottled passages, it grips the eye - from 5 feet away or 50 - without being seductive.

Garrison's drawings nearly always avoid obvious graces. They come full of awkward turns and jarring leaps among disparate color areas and levels of detail. Despite having all these qualities, "November 21" solves almost offhandedly the old formal problem of giving optical parity to figure and ground. Imagery never surfaces in Garrison's work, but it lives partly by an uncalculating responsiveness to themes on the minds of everyone awake to the world: the graphics of political geography, the anxious-making imagery of microbiology, the ubiquity of camouflage.

If his work made us feel that he contrived these connections, it would not have the power that it does. It materializes something we experience privately and inarticulately: the intrusion into consciousness, unbidden, of collective preoccupations.

Ted Vasin's paintings at Limn offer an instructive - and for him, unfortunate - contrast to Garrison's work. Where Garrison appears to bring a sort of tunnel vision to bear in his work, Vasin seems to have one eye on Japanese comics, another on the geometry of computer graphics and Pixar's palette. Everything in Vasin's sizable canvases feels designed to death, the colors chosen for buzzy impact. An ongoing electronic soundtrack, also of Vasin's contrivance, merely deepens the prevailing mood of unseemly knowingness.

Sid Garrison: 07 08 28: Drawings. Ted Vasin: Paintings With Sound: Through July 19. Limn Gallery, 292 Townsend St., San Francisco. (415) 977-1300, www.limnartgallery.com.
<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/07/05/DDF511IRPU.DTL>