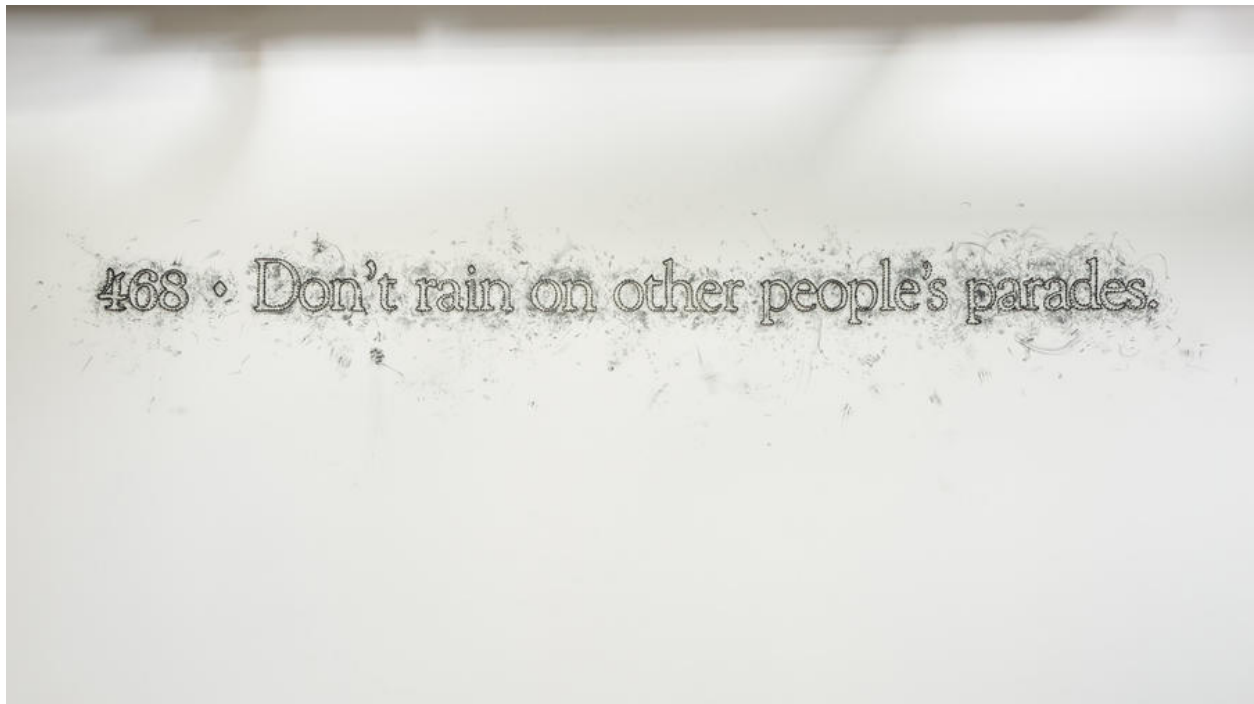


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Review At LAXArt, boundary-blurring drawing as a form of sculpture



Tony Lewis' wall drawing "468 · Don't rain on other people's parades" at LAXArt. (Ruben Diaz)

By **Sharon Mizota**

In a thoughtful, engaging exhibition at LAXArt, Karl Haendel and Tony Lewis explore the practice of drawing in its many modes and guises.

The works include photo-realistic renderings, abstract mark-making, writing and other forms of notation. Together, they formulate an expansive vision of an activity that is often relegated to the sidelines as preparatory sketches or doodles.

The exhibition opens with a work some might not identify as a drawing at all. Haendel's "Hitler/Karl #2" is essentially two handwritten lists comparing characteristics of the German dictator with those of the artist. The disparate terms are often humorous: Where Hitler is a "murderer," Karl is a "jay walker." The Fuhrer is "mean," whereas the artist is "nice." But some hit a little closer to home. Hitler is a "failed artist"; Haendel describes himself as a "failing artist."

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Writing also appears in Lewis' work. His wall drawing "468 · Don't rain on other people's parades." is a platitude taken from the self-help title "Life's Little Instruction Book." The text appears high on the wall, delineated by rubber bands stretched around screws and coated with graphite powder. It is lettering and sculpture and drawing all at once.

Lewis also investigates drawing as sculpture in a couple of floor works. In one, he has carpeted a small side gallery with a solid expanse of graphite on paper. In the show's most spectacular piece, he appears to have done the same in the gallery's large main space, only to rip it up and crumple it in the middle of the floor. It's both a sculptural intervention and a failed drawing.

The exhibition includes more traditional examples. Haendel is an exceedingly skilled draftsman, and his series "Sad Small Animals Somewhere in the Middle of the Food Chain" pairs tender little portraits of said animals — rodents, crabs, frogs, birds — with pithy descriptive statements reminiscent of a children's science book. Some celebrate the creatures' wily survival strategies; others reveal a more human-centric view. Guinea pigs are used in laboratory experiments; the fish called a grunt is "good to eat."

Then there is drawing as erasure. In his rendering of a sheet of "The Simpsons" postage stamps, Haendel has crossed out all the images of Bart and Homer. Lewis covers over parts of Calvin and Hobbes comic strips to create his own enigmatic little narratives. Drawing is as much an act of deletion as it is of delineation.

Haendel's "No title" is a drawing of a circle, a shape repeatedly traced to form a ring of gestural marks. It looks like a meditative abstraction. But the artist has cheekily inserted a shadow beneath the circle. The image operates simultaneously in two registers, as abstract gesture and as a representation of an "object" that has enough presence to create some shade. It's a perfect condensation of the wonder that might emerge from marks on a piece of paper.

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