

REVIEW: *Art on Paper*
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Eleanore Mikus at the Drawing Center

This large survey has drawn quizzical commentary from certain quarters of the art world. Why was it, some writers have mused, that Mikus's exquisitely wrought works on—and of—paper, so critically well-received through the mid-'60s, evidently lost their audience? The answer, so plainly visible now in this expansive selection, was less apparent at the time.

Mikus began her career as a maker of white gridded things: drawings—in pencil or ink, paintings in enamel over cardboard or wood, and related works on paper whose patterned textures were formed by repeated folding and unfolding. Seen alongside the austere white painted fields of the young Robert Rauschenberg or the tremulous pencil and ink grids of Agnes Martin, Mikus's art was too materially present, too overwrought.

In truth, the young Mikus was interested in something quite different than making an art of reductivist asceticism. Were it not for the American biases of New York at the time, her connection to European ideas about the body and desire might have extended her influence. The artist closest to her in attitude may have been Piero Manzoni, whose "achromes" of the late '50s included white painted canvases that were frequently folded or pleated. Manzoni, though, was then much more known in New York for the subsequent proto-conceptual naughtiness of canning his own shit. Like Manzoni, Mikus uses the fold as both graphic device and bodily reference. Just as the pleated canvases of the "achromes" evoke folded flesh, so do Mikus's crisscrossing folds suggest welts and wheals. In the end, and for me the breathtaking eloquence of her art arises from the mixture of cruelty and tenderness with which she has treated her materials.

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