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Distant yet intimate

Peter Krebs' split personality

PUBLICITY PHOTO



WHEN Migration co-owner Rob Jones told me that artist Peter Krebs had created several of his large charcoal-on-plywood drawings of trees with the intention of displaying them on the ceiling, suddenly everything made sense. Prior to that revelation, I had been baffled— even a little frustrated— by the tiny flaws and stray marks I noticed when examining the images in detail.

But Krebs never wanted such close inspection. In his plan, viewers would encounter the works looking up from a distance, where any small blemishes would become inconsequential. The faint lines tracing the branches' gestures in "Aspirant" would go undetected, and the scratches in the background of "Colloquium" would simply disappear.

Hung on the wall at eye-level, however, Krebs' trees are less successful, and the impact of their dramatic skyward perspective is diminished.

In contrast to the grandeur Krebs attempts to express with his tree drawings, his oil pastels and pen-and-ink renderings of park chairs— also on view at Migration— capture small moments of subtle intimacy and alienation. For this series, Krebs visited New York's Bryant Park and observed how the chairs were left at the end of the day. He then used these remnants of human interaction— seats slightly overlapping here, backs turned away there— as the basis for a set of abstract color studies and amusing,

almost cartoon-like, pen-on-paper line drawings.

For his textured oil pastels, Krebs focuses on the architectural elements of the simple metal and wood chairs, isolating interesting compositional relationships and repeating them over and over using different richly saturated color schemes. In one image, he places deep violet chairs against a background of lemon yellow. Next to it, he re-draws the same chairs in blood red against lapis blue. Krebs' close-up of cornflower-blue overlapping slats spiked with yellow screws and highlights on a field of saffron orange is particularly strong.

Unlike his oil pastel abstractions, Krebs' ink drawings are straightforward illustrations of grouped chairs clearly standing in for humans in relationships. In one image, a semi-circle of chairs sitting around a table seem to gawk at another chair collapsed in the foreground. Krebs' lines are loose, clean, and unembellished.

The most minimal of Krebs' drawings is perhaps the most effective piece in the whole show. Two sparsely drawn chairs face each other from opposite sides of the page, a chasm of white opening between them, effectively suggesting that even in the most intimate relationships, there is always distance. ■

Peter Krebs' exhibition of drawings, "Interactions," is on view at Migration: A Gallery through October 2, 119 Fifth St. SE. 293-2200.