

ARTnews

May 2011

Katina Huston

Dolby Chadwick Gallery
San Francisco

In this show titled, "Big Noise," Katina Huston renders a veritable band of brass instruments in her signature technique—tracing the shadows of objects in sumi ink on Mylar. This method imbues her work with both a richness and a sense of tension. The serendipity of sooty, pooled ink is juxtaposed with the rigidity of the traced lines. Depending on the balance, some works are hits and others are near misses. In her best offerings, Huston lets go and allows the ink to have its way. *Fadeout 2* (2010) is a stately beauty, like an arrangement of calla lilies. The fretwork of overlapping inked forms is darkly dense at the base and lightens as the horns rise to "bloom."



French Horn Dynamo, ink on mylar (2010) 46" x 42"

Huston introduces a sense of motion in *French Horn Dynamo* (2010). The centrifugal composition is a wild dance; space seems to be compressed in the center and objects further out seem to be spinning. In *French Horn Dynamo (Silver)*, (2010), she goes even further, letting the instruments dissolve into each other. In *Blast* (2010) and *Scales* (2010) her technique falters, the trombone slides rendered in forced stuttering strokes.

Huston's process is risky. Each layer is painted separately and must dry before the next overlay is added. The ink is unforgiving and the Mylar allows no erasures or reworking. Huston's earlier series of bicycles drawings had great verve and subtlety. The arcs of the wheels, the overlapping lattices of the spokes and the complexities of gears and sprockets were composed with great attention to transparency and the interplay of negative space. The horns of "Big Noise" don't translate as easily. Their bulky, opaque bells, when traced and filled in, seem flattened and smashed, like steamrolled instruments. But at their best, they make a wonderful visual noise

- Lea Feinstein