

## **From Dust to Art**

New York artist Mary Judge has given new life to *spolvero*, an ancient copying technique traditionally used by muralists to transfer full-scale drawings to walls.

In Italian, *spolvero* is literally "dusting." The artist makes a drawing and pricks tiny holes in the outlines. After placing the drawing against a surface, he or she "pounces" it with a cloth bag of powdered charcoal or pigment, creating a dotted outline on the surface beneath.

Judge, a graduate of Moore College of Art and Design and Tyler School of Art, has transformed *spolvero* from an intermediate mechanical process into primary aesthetic expression. She uses it to make abstract drawings on paper, canvas and even concrete blocks.

Two exhibitions of her recent work, at Gallery Joe and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, reveal captivating results, even though the images are so elemental they seem primitive. For instance, Judge has created many variations of a dense design of undulating concentric lines that resemble tree rings. These drawings are made from papers folded in quarters, which produce symmetrical transfers when the paper is unfolded.

But none of these "tree-ring" drawings, which appear in both shows, are perfectly regular. The dusting process produces smudges, creases and aleatory effects that individualize each sheet. This is especially apparent, for instance, in a large drawing at the academy in which one half is much duskier than the other.

Judge's drawings create seductive effects in two way. Their mysterious, mandala-like character suggest cosmic interpretation, as if they were artifacts of lost civilizations. And her emphasis on process and materials ennobles both to the point where they become her primary content.

By Edward J. Sozanski, Inquirer Art Critic  
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