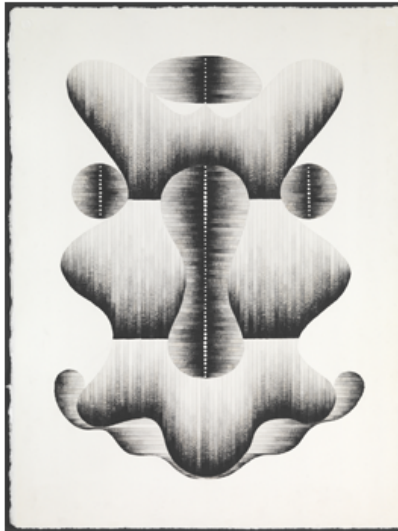


## What to make of chaos



Isabel Riley, *Child's Play*



John Guthrie, *Vertex*

By Cate McQuaid

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### Drawing to confluences

Two strong shows at Boston University's 808 Gallery still don't fill the cavernous space, which seems to swallow them up. Even so, the drawing exhibit "Traces & Places," organized by Lynne Cooney, offers many pleasures, and "Side by Side: John Guthrie/Isabel Riley," in which curator Beth Kantrowitz has paired the works of longtime studio mates whose art at first seems to have little in common, makes wonderful and surprising confluences.

Riley crafts sculptures out of wood, fabric, and more that are both tough and gauzy, exposed and contained. Guthrie's watercolors in shades of gray have a technical precision that seems almost beyond the capability of his medium. He builds abstract forms out of several parallel lines, then adds gritty tones that imbue the shapes with volume and shadow.

"Vertex" features a central, undulant tripartite form, crafted with vertical lines. Guthrie shades along the bottom edges, so they resemble stitched upholstery. Then he adorns that figure with smaller forms made with horizontal lines; there's an hourglass shape right on top, studded with white dots down the middle. It's a perfectly symmetrical abstract composition, with delicate streaks of tone fleshing it out.

Guthrie dovetails formally with Riley in that his lines bring to mind hardwood floors and mattress ticking. Riley's "Survival Kit" is an L-shaped wood structure, covered with a hardwood-floor laminate. Red fabric rolled like a sleeping bag sits in the lap of the L, all curled up in a sheath of crocheted white and held down by bungee cords. There's a wonderful tension in Riley's work between hard and soft, industrial and domestic. In "Child's Play," a pink comforter unfurls like a tongue from between sandwiched boards.

"Traces & Places" spotlights several artists whose gestures usually add up to more than the swipe of a line on a page. Chris Nau draws on the wall for his "Inhabitat XX," but he also carves right into it, making a jigsaw puzzle that doesn't quite fit together. Laurie Reid's lovely, ethereal watercolors feature more water than color; the water seeps into and sculpts the paper, and then she adds breaths of gouache to suggest shadows.

Jennifer Kaufman's jazzy wall drawing "Ricochet and Rhyme V" (supplemented by several smaller works from the same series) dances over three walls in pencil and black tape, stuttering and arcing, and vaulting impressively through space across one corner. Every other drawing show, it seems, tries to illustrate how versatile and out-of-the-box drawing can be. This one does that handily. ■