

Susan Grossman: Film Noir

Birnam Wood Galleries

514 W. 24th St., (212) 242-2270

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Among the various artists' media that are difficult to master, especially in combination, charcoal and pastels must rank near the top of the list. Susan Grossman (b. 1959), who studied with contemporary figurative luminaries Philip Pearlstein and Lennart Anderson, goes around New York taking photos of pedestrians, intersections, latte parlors and the like, which she translates—with on-the-go alterations—into large, loose and almost monochrome drawings. Often, the scenes are especially tricky nighttime views and, just about as often, Ms. Grossman gets the sense of movement she's said is crucial to her work.

There's such a palpable essence of Gotham in her art that you can almost hear car horns honking, and her range of subtly tinted grays is impressive. One hitch, though: She includes in many works a flick or two of pure color—a red traffic light, a yellow street sign in the distance—that's just a little too clever. It prompts the thought that Ms. Grossman ought to let us know a bit more about her feelings about her urban vignettes, rather than merely using them as opportunities to show off her considerable skills.

Mr. Plagens is an artist and writer in New York.



Susan Grossman's 'The Bicyclist' (2013) SUSAN GROSSMAN/BIRNAM WOOD GALLERIES