

Susan Grossman

Birnam Wood

Seen from a distance, Susan Grossman's charcoal and pastel drawings look like big photographs. But when viewed from up close, they're more like Impressionist paintings in a palette of grays. Squiggles of white dashed across inky black describe figures disappearing down cavernous avenues. Blocks of streaky gray define sidewalks and architecture. Part of the pleasure of this work lies in being able to compare the long view and the close-up experience, marveling at the way smudges of charcoal on paper can transform into such realistic scenes. Then there is the paradox that such large works—which are sometimes 70 or 80 inches across—contain images that can seem as casual and immediate as snapshots taken back in the day when hoards of shutterbugs

roamed the city streets, their Leicas, Pentaxes, and Kodaks loaded with black-and-white film.

In this harmonious show, Grossman's works capture the fleeting moments of New York City life. Caught in a blur of motion, figures cross rain-slicked intersections, turn to look into shop windows, or gossip on barstools in downtown cafés. Light bounces off the hard surfaces of stone and pavement as well as off children's sneakers and the chrome of cars. Upon further observation, flecks of color slowly emerge from the blacks, whites, and grays.

In *The Bicyclist* (2013), a night scene on West End Avenue, dabs of red mark the taillights of trucks and taxis, a smear of blue runs across the midnight sky, and a thin line of mustard denotes a traffic lane and the casings of streetlights. These hues established themselves quietly, as if our rods and cones were struggling to perceive color in a somber world of grays.

—Mona Molarsky



Susan Grossman, *The Bicyclist*, 2013, charcoal and pastel on artist board, 60" x 80". Birnam Wood.