

Turning Photographs into Drawings with Ewan Gibbs

By Meredith Deliso, January 3, 2013

Ewan Gibbs has turned his distinguishable pixelated drawing style on topics as diverse as the Statue of Liberty, Chicago Ferris Wheel and hotel facades. Seemingly part-photography, part-drawing, his technique is inspired by grid-like knitting patterns the artist started incorporating into his work two decades ago to turn photographs, both found and his own, into drawings. One of his latest subjects is particularly inspired for his particular line of visual play -- the Arlington National Cemetery.

On a visit to the famous site, Gibbs was taken by the military cemetery's impressive landscape, from its rolling hills to centuries-old trees. In 16 drawings inspired by this visit on view in the lower level of the Museum of Fine Art's Law Building, he alternates between depicting landscapes and, in slightly smaller works, headstones.

The landscapes are the more impressive pieces as Gibbs captures the ebb of the neat, white rows of headstones on the cemetery's hills, as well as the more scattered arrangement of the markers. These are not giant drawings that try to overwhelm or impress you with scale. Rather, they are small, intimate, quiet, and meditative.

The headstones are less effective. Done in his trademark pixelated drawing style, the names, dates and epitaphs on the stone are difficult to make out. No amount of stepping back to let the image come into focus makes it any easier to bring the drawing together. It's partly the point, to turn these images into near abstractions, but that doesn't make it any less frustrating.

Alongside Gibbs's drawings, the MFAH also has on view photographs by artists who have inspired Gibbs. The inclusion is a bit distracting and superfluous, though; there's no context as to why these particular photographs are included, and anyway, Gibbs's drawings are enough on their own to spend time with.