

Joseph Stashkevetch:
Palisade #1, 2009, Conté
crayon on paper, 30 by 32
inches; at Von Lintel.



JOSEPH STASHKEVETCH VON LINTEL

It's easy to be seduced by the technical virtuosity of New York-based Joseph Stashkevetch's large-scale black Conté-crayon drawings. The finely rendered works (all 2009) in this exhibition, Stashkevetch's third at Von Lintel, are based on black-and-white slides he's taken of peonies (some lit artificially, others by daylight), the Palisades cliffs and other subjects. At first the drawings look like grainy photographs. Closer inspection reveals a rich surface of both vigorous and delicate handwork, the details of which are especially evident because the artist displays the images without the barrier of glass.

Six large works (some over 6 feet high) floated in shadow boxes, emphasizing the chiaroscuro effect. A grid of 25 smaller unframed drawings, each showing one peony, offered a dazzling presentation evocative of dying stars pulsating in a black void. Even more impressive, however, was how the works reverberated long after the initial wow had worn off, their staying power due in large part to the artist's process.

With a large squirrel-hair brush, Stashkevetch washes down a sheet of heavy, smooth watercolor paper. He next rubs the dried surface with sandpaper, creating a fuzzy velveteen ground for the

Conté. Working from printouts or projections of his slides, he draws, obliterates and re-draws, tearing into the sheet with erasers, small bits of rolled up sandpaper and sharpened stumps, or scrubbing in loose Conté with a brush. The result, an accretion of revisions with traces of previous incarnations, suggests what Jim Dine (referring to his 1983 series "Drawing from van Gogh") has called the pentimenti of destruction.

A passion for the baroque comes out in Stashkevetch's flower works, in which petal shapes create dynamic rhythms and abstractions. Though the drawings usually feature single blooms, *Cascade* (93 by 30 inches) depicts 10 peony heads, a composite made from as many individual photographs. A flower at the top of the picture seems to pour light down onto two others, one partially obscured in darkness. Backlit, squeezed together and running off the edges of the paper, the remaining peonies that fill the bottom appear to have tumbled down. By contrast, *Palisade #3* (also 93 by 30 inches) evokes the meditative landscapes of 10th-century Northern Song scroll paintings. Stashkevetch zooms in on a section of cliff, a subject that allows for a wide range of nuanced tones and refractive edges. In a recent conversation, the artist, who grew up making pictures of buildings and later did architectural renderings, said that Piranesi's series of etchings of imaginary prisons was an early influence. Stashkevetch recently traveled to the Grand Canyon sans camera, and plans to go back. It will be interesting to see how that monumental subject impacts new work.

—Elisa Decker