

Sol Lewitt making origami in math class and you'll get some idea of Thomas' flighty, contradictory art.

The Storefront show is divided into four sections, respectively: travel diaries, "studio wall," sketches and text-based pieces, the last of which transcribe overheard snippets of talk ("A head butt to the nose can really ruin your whole day") to marginally clever effect. But it's in the approximation of Thomas' workspace wherein her scattershot delicacies take root, thrive and, ultimately, win us over. [Mario Naves] Through Oct. 17, Storefront, 16 Wilson Ave., Brooklyn, 646-361-8512.

### **Works on Paper: From Cézanne to Freud**

More than most categories of art, "works on paper" suggests the intimate: artworks smallish in scale, delicate in technique. Acquavella Galleries, however, has put the category to expansive use, employing it as the common thread of a broad range of master drawings, prints and watercolors spanning the last 120-odd years. The result—a brief and uncritical overview of art trends since the beginnings of modernism—exhilarates with the quality of much of the work, and sometimes bewilders with its juxtapositions.

French masters preside in the gallery's front space. Cézanne weighs in with a single watercolor of a still life, in which pears cluster and a goblet soars with almost Romanesque gravity. Three sketches by Matisse affirm his unsurpassed genius for melding the serene and the rigorous. While Picasso's indulgent revisitations of the historic can be tiresome, his drawings provide the greatest revelation here. Despite its compact dimensions, the thrusting diagonals and textures of his colored-pencil drawing "Courtesan and Warrior" recall much of the forcefulness and variety of the monumental "Guernica." His "Homme Assis," too, stands out; unusually for Picasso, his line yields contentedly to the force of color in this watercolor and ink drawing of a man contemplating an antique bust.

In Acquavella's larger gallery, a Braque collage humorously but convincingly locates a fragmented guitar behind a corrugated-cardboard bottle. Evocative landscapes by Degas and Redon hang next to three especially fine portraits by Lucien Freud. These etchings show Freud at his best, conveying character through plastic invention; one face sags powerfully, inevitably to the print's lower margin; another lifts as an angling pillar of intensity.

On to the New York School: the lively, biomorphic shapes of Arshile Gorky's ink-and-wash drawing pave the way for pure abstraction—Jack Tworkov's proclamatory square of dense charcoal marks and Philip Guston's field of pulsating ink blotches.

For postmodernists weary of all such compositional investigations, other works focus on the very process of cognition. Against a field of blue dry pigment, Ed Ruscha places two words on stilts: "Quality," and then below, in smaller letters, "Other." (Refreshingly up-front, this dangling intimation about perceptions of value might be resolved, one suspects, only over a beer with the artist.) Andy Warhol's silkscreen print, based on a photograph of the violent 1963 Birmingham riots, evokes the modern media's propensity for making real-life traumas generic. Looking rather lonely alongside, a small Diebenkorn gouache from 1956 earnestly captures the likeness of a seated figure in a striped dress.

Among such extremes of sincerity and disengagement, Jasper Johns' ink and watercolor depiction of an arm stretching among stenciled names of colors feels like a hybrid. It vaguely probes Braque's plastic vitality, while tinkering with Ruscha's free-form mental flight. His work points to the dilemma of this rewarding installation, and indeed, any brief overview of modern art: What kind of conversation might exist between Degas' tradition-wise landscape and Warhol's tradition-indifferent print?

**[John Goodrich]**

Through Oct. 29, Acquavella Galleries, 18 E. 79th St., 212-734-6300.