

**Jessica Curtaz**, *Vanitas 2*, graphite on panel, 36" x 36", 2008.  
Courtesy Bert Green Fine Art.

## *Jessica Curtaz*

Bert Green Fine Art, Los Angeles

**J**essica Curtaz's series of eleven graphite-on-panel *Vanitas* drawings, depicting objects at various stages of their useful product life cycles, occupies the space between abstraction and representation. The artist works from direct observation, yet the internal relationships within the drawings raise them well above mere hyperrealism; Curtaz draws so as to induce an air of artifice, purposefully engaging the pictorial plane as reality.

Curtaz's drawings have a weighty presence. She coats her fastidiously prepared panels with multiple layers of gesso and sands them to a satiny sheen. More durable than paper, and seeming like boxes perched on the wall, these smooth, gleaming surfaces prove suitable grounds for Curtaz's delicate, mirage-like images, which exert a gravitational pull. The lightness of the imagery requires close examination, and the drawings exude an elusive quality that plays nicely off the panels' geometric heft.

The objects in the drawings — chicken wire, chain link, plastic bags, and articles of clothing — appear like figments of the imagination, as if they straddle the worlds of objects and ideas. They possess a slightly aged look; in particular, the plastic Target bags, devoid of the consumer goods they are designed to contain, appear like empty vessels. Three drawings of Target bags, *Vanitas 4*, *5*, and *6*, depict the empty plastic sacks in various configurations, creating the impression of a useless discard being whipped about by the wind. Meanwhile, the interlocking threads of a carelessly cast-aside cable-knit sweater provide the intricate patterns and visual texture of *Vanitas 11*.

Curtaz draws on the Renaissance tradition of *Vanitas*, still-life paintings of everyday objects that function as reminders of human mortality. Yet her drawings intersperse lightness and levity with their seriousness. Viewing them, one feels almost able to float above the floor, much like the plastic bag that serves as her main protagonist.

— Christopher Michno

February 2009

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## Jessica Curtaz

**Charles A. Hartman Fine Art**  
**Portland, Oregon**

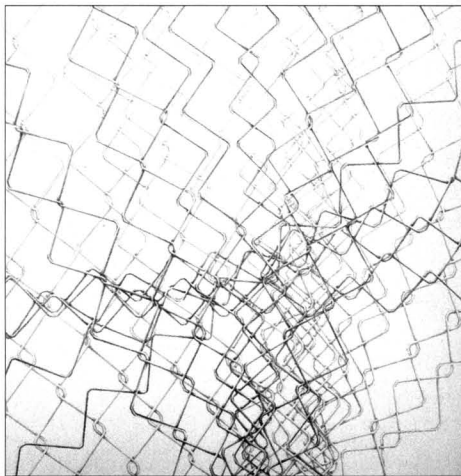
Jessica Curtaz's graphite drawings of chicken wire, plastic bags, and other everyday items have an unassuming air that belies the complexity of their draftsmanship. For the works in this show, titled "Through the Wire," the Los Angeles-based artist built up immaculate white surfaces by applying and then sanding more than a dozen layers of gesso to wood panels, imparting the impeccable smoothness of porcelain.

Graphically busy works such as *Untitled (Chickenwire #2)*, 2007, refer to fencing, with large loops of wire in the foreground yielding to ever-smaller ones in the background until the little arcs evoke flocks of birds or, more sinisterly, swarms of insects. Other pieces present themselves more minimally. In *Untitled (Jade)*, 2007, a shock of stylized botanical imagery occupies the bottom-right quadrant, while the remainder of the panel remains empty, blanched, and frigid. By leaving broad swaths of space blank, she gives the impression that her intricate freehand drawings float somewhere over these pristine planes.

The subjects are rendered with preci-

sion, yet they are so isolated they at first appear to be abstract filigrees. Curtaz's long-standing interests in botany and printmaking have served her well in this fastidious, process-driven style, which is not so much photorealistic as it is architectural, laying bare the structures of leaves, paper and plastic bags, and intertwined wires. Manic in their detail and scientific in their rigor, the works communicated a vulnerability in their austere and brittle patterns. The quietly virtuosic drawings demonstrate an ability to take pictorial inspiration from the most quotidian of objects and sustain that inspiration through inventive compositions.

—Richard Speer



Jessica Curtaz, *Untitled (Chainlink #2)*, 2007, graphite on gessoed panel, 22" x 22". Charles A. Hartman Fine Art.



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- TV/Film
- Music
- Dining
- Visual Art
- Books
- Performance

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- On Display: Jessica Curtaz, Juri Morioka, Thomas Orr
- Veterans tell story of war in their own photos
- Pacific Northwest College of Art and Oregon College of Art & Craft Collaborate
- An interview with artist Andrea Zittel
- On Display: David Maisel at Blue Sky Gallery

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- Affair @ The Jupiter Hotel (RSS)
- Book Review (RSS)
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- Curators (RSS)
- DeSoto Project (RSS)
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- Events (RSS)
- Last Thursday (RSS)
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- Media News (RSS)
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- Photography (RSS)
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## On Display: Jessica Curtaz, Juri Morioka, Thomas Orr

Posted by [D.K. Row](#), [The Oregonian](#) October 16, 2008 16:00PM  
Categories: [Visual Arts Subject Stories](#), [Visual Arts Top Stories](#)

After a little more than a year in Portland, the Charles A. Hartman Fine Art gallery has cultivated a very particular kind of refined aesthetic, even taste.

Whether or not he is showing photography -- what he exhibits most of the time -- or painting and drawing -- as he does this month with an exhibit by Jessica Curtaz -- Hartman prefers the minimally refined, maybe even the minimally colored, too.

If the work of his artists, including Curtaz, were part of the walls instead of hanging on them, they could disappear with one swipe of a wet sponge.

All of this is to say that Curtaz's graphite-on-gessoed-panel drawings are works of virtuoso delectation.

The drawings are fragments, and the subjects are strangely disparate: chicken wire, paper bags, ribbons and bows that you might use to decorate a Christmas gift. At times, you can't tell what Curtaz is drawing, mainly because she never draws her subjects in their entirety.

Most of the time, it hardly matters; you're too absorbed by Curtaz's technique, and by extension, by her way of looking at the world. Literally.

Curtaz apparently studied plant biology in college, and all of these works have a cool meticulousness that suggest the eye of scientific scrutiny.

Curtaz draws with prickly precision and intention; this is not the loose-limbed spontaneity of artists wearing scarves in a cafe but more like the tense, fingers-clenched passion of the scientist wearing a lab coat.

That's a positive thing: Curtaz aims for a number of effects -- a mastery of line and optical illusion but also calculating objectivity. These works, with their almost sheen of porcelain slickness, recall everyone from Karl Blossfeldt's photographic botanical studies to the sensuousness -- albeit an emotionally closed-off kind of sensuousness -- of Philip Pearlstein's nude bodies.

Ranging in price from \$1,500 to \$6,000, Curtaz's drawings are also expensive pieces of rapture. Like the artist he is showing this month, Hartman's exhibiting a statement of purpose in aiming so high. We should admire that, however few red dots end up on these works this month.

*11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; Charles A. Hartman Fine Art, 134 N.W. Eighth Ave.; closes Nov. 15*

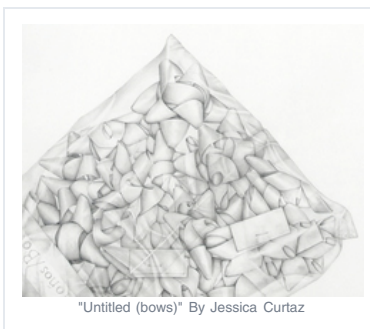
### Morioka's musicality

Juri Morioka has a deep love of music and, according to recent interviews, even paints and draws to music. She also apparently paints and draws with few, if any, plans before she renders her first line or shape or curve or whatever. That's sometimes evident in the works in her show at Butters Gallery.

There are two bodies of work on display, and for me, they capture what's at least mildly enjoyable and not so good about the New York artist's work.

Morioka's larger works are usually paintings, and they usually include horizontal striations the length of the canvas and of varying thickness. There also are other rectangular, circular and triangular forms woven into these striations. Morioka loves color, too: She suffuses these works with a child's sense of indulgence, which is to say the artist ascribes to more rather than less.

There's supposed to be a kind of formal struggle going on in these works, but I get the feeling they're arbitrary, intuitive purgings. I don't sense an intellectual framework guiding the artist;



"Untitled (bows)" By Jessica Curtaz



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