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Art & Design

Art review

Robyn O'Neil

By Lauren Weinberg

Tony Wight Gallery, through Oct 31.



O'Neil, *Hurricane*, 2009.

After spending eight years drawing an all-male society that confronts the apocalypse in workout gear, Robyn O'Neil has killed off the last of her tracksuit-clad little men. The nine excellent graphite works in "On sinking," all completed this year, free the Houston-based artist from that signature narrative, a critical darling that—O'Neil explains when we see her at the show—ultimately felt stifling.

The new drawings elicit the same how'd-she-do-that wonder as the old, thanks to the artist's bravura draftsmanship. Her realistic renderings of light and shadow endow even inanimate objects with life, as in *The Dismantled Ship*, and make the waves in drawings such as *Hurricane* (pictured) and *Almost Quiet* look as though they could leap off the paper.

Artists can't coast on realism alone, however. O'Neil's work succeeds because she convinces viewers to believe in fantastic scenes such as *Hurricane's* giant upside-down wave and *Ship's* ghostly ocean liner.

O'Neil's depictions of men in "On sinking" depart significantly from her earlier work's casually dressed, doomed schlubs. While we see only the backs of their heads, the new guys sport shiny, neatly trimmed hair and handsome profiles. But as they float, disembodied, in expanses of blank paper, acknowledging neither each other nor the occasional dark cloud overhead, we wonder what fate the artist will pencil in for them.