

Art in America

Allyson Strafella

By *Janet Koplos*

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From across the room, Allyson Strafella's drawings look like simple abstract color blocks, somewhere between Milton Avery and Ellsworth Kelly. But what her drawings are really about is paper and repeated actions. Using a typewriter and carbon paper she creates not concrete poetry nor structural shapes as Carl Andre does in his typed works nor whimsically obsessive arrangements like Elizabeth Zawada's. Instead the 14 works (most 2010) address the beauty of mark-making reduced to its nonnarrative essence. At the same time, these fragile pieces of paper, abused by the intensity of her repetitions and, when just pinned to the wall, tattered by fluttering in the draft from the door, suggest the vaporous quality of human efforts to communicate: a mark or a sound is so small and so brief in the vastness of existence.

Strafella uses a customized typewriter with an expanded carriage that allows these works to range in width from 5 to 28 inches. She chooses red, green and especially cerulean blue carbon paper in addition to black, so the show is not monochrome, although all but one of the works employ only a single color on a contrasting ground.

Usually she applies one typewriter key—often a colon—repeatedly to form an oval or fan shape. She continues typing until the carbon paper or the receiving paper begins to dissolve. In the gallery, she may show either part, or both. *Outgrowth* is a sheet of carbon paper 13 by 8 1/2 inches, the colon-perforated edge curling under. On another wall, one of the few framed works in the show was *path: right*, in which a satiny blue paper, 16 1/4 by 10 3/4 inches, bears the black residue of *outgrowth*. Another drawing, *downshift*, is a sheet of red transfer paper with a curving wedge of colon-induced perforations that makes the whole recall some ancient, moth-eaten, cochineal-dyed textile.

The fine repetitions of the various marks more than once resemble textile weaves. The parallel lines of typing still faintly visible despite her layers of transferred carbon might make you think of the twill weave of jeans or the rounder minuscule pattern of knit nylon stockings. It's an older sort of pixelation, encouraging an intimacy that is as rewarding as the more distant views, which suggest simple graceful compositions.

Photo: Allyson Strafella: *downshift*, 2010, typed colons on red carbon paper, 10 3/4 by 7 7/8 inches; at Von Lintel.