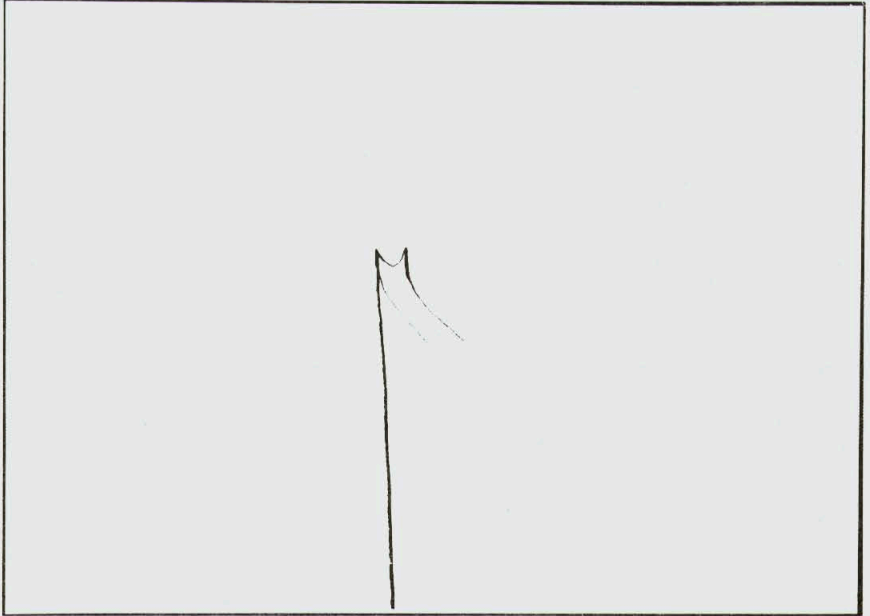


Untitled, 1978



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Jan Groth always draws on the same kind of paper--white, smooth but not glossy, and $34\frac{1}{2}$ by $24\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size. The long dimension always runs horizontally, and Groth always makes his line with black crayon. For him, the medium of drawing is something like a world to which he can return again and again, sure that its fundamental properties will be unchanged. Yet this is not quite correct. Groth's art in its entirety is a world. Drawing constitutes one of its hemispheres. The other is tapestry, which opposes drawing at all the crucial points.

While the drawings are small and uniform in size, the tapestries are large and variable. They show white lines against black (or black-brown) expanses, instead of black crayon on white paper. The drawings record Groth's intimate response to the paper's emptiness, while the tapestries are a loom's mechanical translation of hand-rendered designs. Though it is Groth's hand which produces these designs, the weaving proceeds in full collaboration with his wife Benedikte. This shared process gives the tapestries a public--even monumental--nature, despite their refinement and their reticence. Groth is best known for these works, which have been widely exhibited in Europe and America. By concentrating on his drawings, this MATRIX exhibition points us toward the less-known, more private hemisphere of his art.

The show covers seven years, 1971 to 1978, a time in which Groth's images seem, like evolving organisms, to come closer to a grasp of their own nature. The eye reads a biological exuberance into these drawings--hints of flourishing leaves and stems. The artist has no objection to that. Still, Groth's stated goal is to charge the blank surface of the paper with "formal activity." Sheer white is to be given particularity, a life of its own. As the artist

adds, "I have no clear concept when I start." Concepts are general. They're never much help in achieving the strength of the particular. Groth must plunge unguided into the white expanses of the surface. He says that for every fifty attempts, two might be successful.

In the untitled drawing of 1971, horizontal lines echo the left-hand edge of the paper, then a stately curve leads upward to a cluster of lines that vibrate in their compactness. So the surface is animated by two sorts of line--one reaches and measures, running straight along edges and curving toward the center; while the other sort of line seems to recoil into itself and send hints of unspent energy into the surrounding blankness. For all Groth's unconscious allusions to leaves furling and unfurling, wings filling out or withering, his line invariably suggests muscle stretched, contracted, stretched.

He says, "When I work, the image registers the weight of my body--even my feet. The process is not exactly wild, but my whole body is involved." In becoming more and more alert to this involvement, Groth has found ways to activate the surface of the paper with increasingly sparse means. By 1975, shifts in pressure on the crayon charge its traces with nuance powerful enough in its delicacy to vibrate throughout the surrounding emptiness. As Groth's forms compress more significance into fewer lines, they grow larger in their impact--much as a gesture in a desert would gain authority from concision. Of course, the gesture must acknowledge the desert. Groth's imagery must admit that it belongs to the paper, to that wasteland of white.

As he works his way from 1971 to 1978, Groth becomes clearer and clearer about the wasteland's risks. And it becomes clear to the eye that, as the artist says, he "always starts in the middle. Then I must sense my way out to

the edge. I'm not safe until I arrive at the edge of the paper." At that point, he has returned to the world we all share, having drawn an image of a self--eye joined to hand, body to mind--sustaining its particular nature against the generality, the utter nothingness, of flat white.

Groth's restraint has led some to link his forms to Minimalist geometries, all those gray cubes and white lattices. While it's true that Groth arrived at his mature style in the 1960s, when the Minimalists were consolidating their initiatives, his severities are very different from theirs. Those artists are impersonal. Groth is the opposite--"Puritan, possibly, but still an expressionist," as he puts it. With his line immersed in white, he expresses his most inward sense of himself in the world. If he is a Puritan, it is not because he denies his energies but because he works hard, even ascetically, for a pure and unobstructed vision of them.

Carter Ratcliff, Guest Curator
New York City
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Born in Stavanger, Norway, in 1938, Jan Groth attended art school in Norway during the late fifties. In 1960 he went to Amsterdam to study at the renowned tapestry school "de Uil." There he met his wife and collaborator, Benedikte, an Aubusson-trained Dane who was the technical leader at de Uil workshop. In 1961 they moved to a small village fifty miles from Copenhagen where they set up a studio with two very large century-old upright tapestry looms, a gift from the Danish government. Since that time the Groths have divided their time between Denmark and Norway.

Works in MATRIX:

Untitled, 1971, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Untitled, 1975, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1975, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1976, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1977, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1978, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1978, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Untitled, 1978, crayon on paper, $24\frac{1}{2} \times 34\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

All works are courtesy of the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York City, unless otherwise noted.

Selected one-man exhibitions:
Museum of Decorative Art, Copenhagen Recent Tapestries and Drawings '71; Betty Parsons Gallery, NYC '72, '73, '76, '78, '80; Wadsworth Atheneum Recent Tapestries and Drawings '72 (travelled to Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh and The Art Institute of Chicago); Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge Drawings by Jan Groth '73; Museum of Fine Arts, Odense, Denmark '73, '76; Aarhus Kunstmuseum, Denmark '73; Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo '74; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark '75; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris Autour de la Ligne '76; Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter, Oslo Jan Groth '78 (travelled extensively including Aarhus Kunstmuseum; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden; Städtliche Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford).

Selected group exhibitions:
Lausanne International Tapestry-Biennale '65, '69; Musée des Gobelins, Mobilier National, Paris '69; Maison de la Culture, Grenoble Tapisseries XV.-XX. Siècle '70; Wadsworth Atheneum Recent Acquisitions '73; Grand Palais, Paris Art Danois 1945-1973 '73; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NYC Recent Acquisitions '73; Musée des Art Decoratifs, Palais du Louvre, Paris Tapisseries Nouvelles '75; Museum of Modern Art, Rijeka, Yugoslavia Fifth International Exhibition of Drawings '76; The Art Institute of Chicago Selected Acquisitions Since 1973 '77; The Art Institute of Chicago Twentieth Century Drawings '78.

Selected bibliography about Groth:
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Hjort, Østein. Jan Groth, Henie-Onstad Kunstsenter (Oslo) '78.

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