

# Susan Manchester at Edith Caldwell Gallery

The particular beauty and appeal of botanical drawings are derived from their quality of otherworldliness, often the result of considering plants or their parts in isolation, removed from their natural environment, and from the thrill of the exquisite rendering that attempts to capture the essence of the object. Both of these elements are evident in Susan Manchester's selection of conté crayon drawings. For

Manchester, botanical inquiry "stands out from the usual disorder that characterizes most perceptible things." She is attracted to flowers as subject matter not only as a means of ordering the seeming disorder of the world, but as a "vehicle for exploring the play of light and dark on form and as a metaphor for the profound and grave transformations always occurring in life." There is order, but one that suggests mystery.

Manchester's drawings are quite large, and mostly in black conté, though occasionally tinctures of color suggest a field of reflected color and warmth. The surfaces are built-up, like paintings, with added layers, some to the point of damaging the paper, creating an effect of fragility combined with the physical evidence of work. The interaction of light and dark is dramatic, reinforcing the sense of mystery and demonstrating the artist's mastery of chiaroscuro, which she learned as a printmaker and from her study of Giorgio Morandi. The tradition of rendering plants and flowers is long and complex, and in her drawings, Manchester displays her intimate knowledge of this history and her awareness of the ways in which she wishes to extend it in her own work.

—Frank Cebulski



Susan Manchester, *French Tulips*, 1994, conté & pastel on paper, 52" x 40"

February 16-April 1, Edith Caldwell Gallery, 251 Post St., San Francisco.