

**Art in America:** 'Beatrice Caracciolo at Gracie Mansion', by Aruna O'Souza, November 1999

## Beatrice Caracciolo at Gracie Mansion

Beatrice Caracciolo, an Italian painter who was educated in New York and now resides in France, presented 23 modestly sized abstract drawings of extraordinary beauty (ail 1998-99) in her first New York solo show. Her complex process begins with paper that is stained-with coffee, tea or diluted pigments of ocher, gray and white-and repeatedly soaked in great quantities of water. With a watersoluble crayon she renders fat, jerky lines in steel gray and black that have the gestural confidence and density of a child's markings. Additional lines are scratched into and gouged out of the support. Cellulose glue (also water-soluble) is applied to the surface with thick brushstrokes and is eventually removed as the paper is bathed again and again. At the end of it ail, Caracciolo has an image that exists in various states of erasure , some areas having been wholly or partly protected by the glue from the onslaught of water, others having been almost completely washed away, leaving only a ghostly trace of veil-like translucency. In addition to employing this densely layered drawing technique, Caracciolo incorporates collage elements into some of her drawings, pasting thin sheets of beige, brown and gray tissue to stained and whitewashed paper, then sanding the surface until it is perfectly smooth. The collaged tissues could be read as bandages on the battered support underneath, and they bring to mind Alberto Burri's scarred and stitched burlap works of the 1950s, in which a symbolic healing was effected on «wounds» (critical as well as physical) inflicted on the pictorial surface. A certain vulnerability is apparent in one of Caracciolo 's untitled collages of 1998. Here delicate tracings etched into the surface are the result of emphatic lines made with water-soluble crayon that have since washed away. Scraps of almost transparent tissue are pasted over these scarred sections, il'] a poignant effort to render the surface whole again. At first glance, Caracciolo's work seems to evidence the immediacy of gestural abstraction, as if the mark could be an unmediated link to the artist. But if Caracciolo proposes a seemingly pure form of expressionism, she does not have a naive notion that the self may be directly revealed. Although her drawings begin at the frenzied speed of automatism, their labored, weathered surfaces are more likely to suggest the passage of time than the existential instant. But if one conceives of the subject as the accumulation of experience and history, then Caracciolo's marked, washed and stratified drawings are a more than apt metaphor of subjectivity.



-Aruna O'Souza