



Moments that aren't so fleeting
Leah Ollman,
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The best of Gale Antokal's beautifully executed new drawings recall black-and-white snapshots. Not because they have a high degree of verisimilitude (largely, they don't), but because what drives them is a compulsion to grasp the fleeting moment. Like a photographer, Antokal overtly engages time, responding to life as a continuum of ephemeral moments and gestures. These moments, isolated as still images and standing in for a larger whole, have the potential for a kind of synecdochical power.

Many works in Antokal's show at Couturier realize that potential with grace. A group of drawings of birds is especially resonant. In each, the birds seem to have just scattered upward, speckling a pale sky with a flurry of upturned wings and blurred feathers. The birds are not in flight but in transition from earth to air. They hover and flap; their suspension feels palpable.

Passage and movement give these drawings a gorgeous vitality, but it's the tension between that continuous motion and the instinct to capture it, savor it, that gives the work such soul. Antokal defines her figures softly, with a bit of blur, true to the elusive quality of the moment.

Another series of drawings features people walking, toward us and away, often seen only from the waist or the knees down. Some bring to mind Harry Callahan's Chicago street pictures from the '40s and '50s, of individuals embraced by a collective urban anonymity. Others, though, hint of deeper loss and displacement. Antokal has explored Holocaust themes in earlier work, so it doesn't seem a stretch to suggest that some of these images, particularly those of groups of people carrying large bags and cases, might refer to the forced deportation of Jews.

Only a few of Antokal's drawings (one of a mountain range, another of a lone rower) feel static. The rest engage a sort of emotional motion, an ongoing processing of experience and memory. Her materials reinforce that. In addition to chalk and graphite, Antokal draws with flour and ash, flour evoking latency, ash conjuring ruin. She calls her show, "We Are So Lightly Here," but the images within it imprint deeply upon the mind.

Couturier Gallery, 166 N. La Brea Ave., (323) 933-5557, www.couturiergallery.com; through April 2. Closed Sunday and Monday.