

The Philadelphia Inquirer

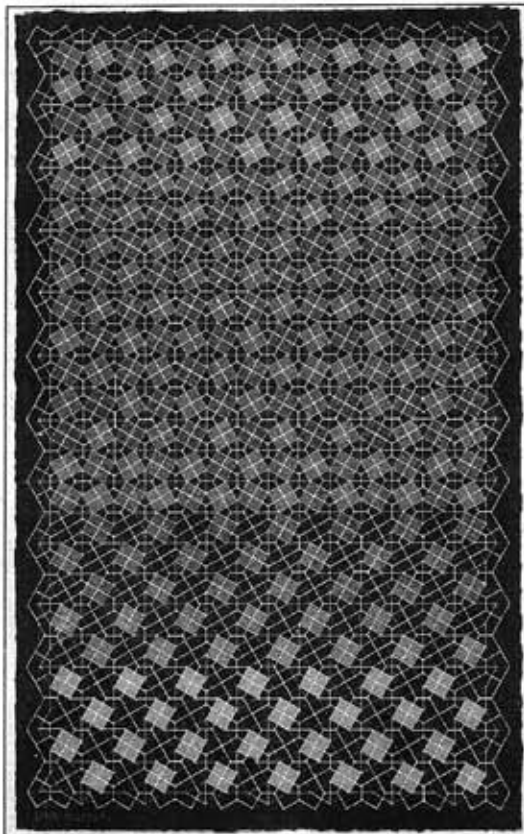
Exhibit at Woodmere dips back into early realism.

A more complete Edna Andrade

By Edith Newhall
FOR THE INQUIRER

Sensational: Edna Andrade's Drawings is one of the more timely and sophisticated exhibitions the Woodmere Art Museum has ever mounted, and that's saying something, considering this museum's recent track record of interesting, ambitious shows. Not only does it focus on a Philadelphia artist who unquestionably deserves attention, it illuminates the trajectory of her career in a way that larger museum surveys of her work have not attempted, by including works she produced before developing her signature geometric op art style (exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and the Institute of Contemporary Art concentrated on the latter), as well as her recent graphite-on-canvas drawings of rocky coastlines.

Some might interpret the word *drawings* in the title as slightly misleading; I take it as a sign that the Woodmere is keeping up with the times. More than half this exhibition's works are bona fide paintings; then again, painting and drawing are increasingly inseparable these days. Some of Andrade's earliest efforts, such as *Balancing Act*, a 1950 painting of circus performers that shows her working in a meticulous magic realism vein, make it clear that drawing has been a linchpin in her work from the beginning. Even the thousands of tiny daubs of black that coalesce to form the exquisite 1961 ink-on-paper seascape *Moon Rise* are a kind of drawing (if a young artist had made this particular work within, say, the last 10 years, no cutting-edge contemporary gallery would hesitate to call it a draw-



Edna Andrade's "Arabian Sea" (1984), colored pencil and acrylic on black paper, at Woodmere Art Museum.

ing).

The treat of this show is to see Andrade

move from her early, fairly realistic depictions of land and sea to works like the large vertical collage *Dark Figures* (1962), in which scraps of artfully arranged colored paper hint at a crowded city street, and then to her first geometric op art painting, *Cross*, executed in the same year. It's at that pivotal moment that Andrade finds the style that will absorb her completely over the next three decades.

The entire middle section of the exhibition is devoted to Andrade's geometric paintings and drawings, and it's exciting to see the varieties of patterning that her compositions evoke, from Islamic tile decoration, to the spirals of a Slinky or a modernist building, to the ocean's waves.

Andrade's drawings of the rocks and stones that form the shore of Great Cranberry Island in Maine — a body of work that she began in 1990 — are the organic, gestural, nonabstract version of her geometric works. The grid, ever-present in her earlier abstractions, has softened to allow for nature's idiosyncrasies. These are the "painterly" drawings of the exhibition, rendered, ironically enough, on canvas.

Last but not least, there's a charming 30-minute video documentary, circa early 1980s, in which Andrade discusses her artistic development and is shown painting, and in which former gallery owner Marian Locks and painter Diane Burko discuss the impact of Andrade's work.

Woodmere Art Museum, 9201 Germantown Ave., 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays.

215-247-0476 or www.woodmereartmuseum.org. Through June 24.