

## NY ART BEAT

### **Alyssa Pheobus "Lay in the Reins"**

**January 22, 2009 – February 21, 2009**



The exhibition, Alyssa Pheobus's first solo show, features a group of large-scale text drawings that excavate the lyrics of love songs and other fragments of language through an elaborate process of performative inscription. Positioning her disciplined and labor-intensive drawing practice as an analog to other subjective performances of text, Pheobus both "covers" and "samples" in an attempt to engage her source material critically and libidinally.

Many of the texts that Pheobus "performs" through drawing are stirred by a fascination with the threatening eroticism of violent sexuality. They also mark intersections between the language of aggressive desire and the hyperbolically "masculine." Juxtaposed with escape fantasies in which acts of abandonment become expressions of agency, these themes remain carefully contained within a system that imagines both the limits of language and the experience of desire as prison-like. The perpetual chafing against captivity that is a palpable subject in Pheobus's work is mirrored by her drawing practice, which is at once restrained and workmanlike, compulsive and devotional.

The tactile surfaces of Pheobus's drawings, composed on cobbled-together sheets of handmade cotton rag paper, are incised with stitch-like graphite characters that form the building blocks for an austere visual language. This idiosyncratic graphic vocabulary simultaneously evokes instruments of confinement—barbed wire, cells, cages, nets, straps—and the psychic calendar of tally marks scratched upon a wall.