

Art: Csernus in New York Debut

By VIVIEN RAYNOR

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Joan Witek (Rosa Esman Gallery, 70 Greene Street): For her second solo at this gallery, which has recently changed its address, Joan Witek shows 13 works, 6 in that blackest of mediums, oilstick, on canvas, the rest drawn in black oil pastel or ink on paper. The artist's vocabulary consists of two basic shapes, one a smooth oblong that she calls a "billy club," the other a shaggy oval with a slit in it. Despite their inescapably Freudian implications, the shapes exist in perfect harmony — or perhaps plainsong is the better word, for there is a liturgical kind of obsessiveness operating in the work. In "Sleeping Beauty," for instance, six of the doughnut-like shapes are piled up in pairs, each of which is guarded at either end by a brace of billy clubs. In another work, it's the clubs that are piled up horizontally — in four tall columns, each of them resting on a single "female" form. Executed with great precision, these variations on a simple theme make very handsome patterns indeed. But at the same time, they exude a moral intensity that threatens to drain the atmosphere of oxygen. (Through March 31.)