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ART IN REVIEW; Ewan Gibbs -- 'Drawings'

By GRACE GLUECK

Paul Morris Gallery

465 West 23rd Street, Chelsea Through Jan. 22

Seizing on the empty, anonymous rooms appearing in hotel advertisements and brochures, the English artist Ewan Gibbs subverts their purpose, using them as metaphors not for holiday relaxation but for rootlessness and isolation. In this display of seven pen-and-ink drawings, his first solo show in the United States, he evokes these drab but guest-ready chambers by the meticulous application of thousands of tiny, pixel-like symbols to a grid. Light, shadows, shapes and figures are conjured up by adjusting the pressure of his pen on each pixel.

The resulting black-and-white images seem veiled by a hazy screen, giving the viewer information that's tantalizing but not quite enough to bear witness to. Like a Chuck Close painting, they become more readable as you back away from them.

In the Hopper-like "Dressing Table," for instance, a young half-dressed -- or half-undressed -- woman (could she be a hooker? or merely a lone guest?) sits at a dressing table, head turned toward the viewer. Maybe she's smiling; maybe not. A mirror hangs above the dressing table (in reality a low bureau) and a large bed

occupies the foreground of the scene. A drapery at the right indicates the presence of a window.

In "Doorway," the only occupants of the room are twin beds and a turned-on television facing them from a low chest. In the background might be draperies. "Windows" is the most ambiguous of all. You might be seeing a pair of beds with flowered spreads, and there could be a lamp and a window next to them. These pallid, ghostly images are very persuasive at suggesting anomie.

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