

Mary Ellen Carroll
Heide Fasnacht
Kim Jones
Loren Madsen
Rebecca Quaytman

an exhibition and essay by
Nancy Princenthal

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Mary Ellen Carroll Study for Parks
(Tijuanas) 1999 Ink on paper 22" x 30"

Children have no problem with infinity; limits are what give them trouble. At first, it all happens in a vast open field, unbounded and uninterrupted. Then slowly it dawns that the place where we live is better described as a road, a path, a finite line (call the realization maturity, or a mid-life crisis). But as soon as we really look at it, that line begins to behave in peculiar ways. It doesn't conform to the laws of Euclidean geometry, but to fractal topography, or particle physics. It is wavy, and discontinuous.

Taken in hand, that lifeline begins to look like the artist's fundamental descriptive mark. Some are more comfortable than others with its instability, and some take considerable pleasure in watching it squirm and falter. By its nature, the drawn line is almost always unequal to its subject, an inequality that can take any dimension. If it is any good, it prevails regardless, and makes itself real. Actual size.

All of the artists in this show work in more than one medium; all of them consider work on paper a critical aspect of their jobs. For all of them, what is put down in two dimensions is not simply shorthand for, or a window onto, some fuller, three-dimensional experience. It is, quite deliberately, an interference pattern, a screen, and a visual fact as robust as any other.

That, of course, is a fairly general characterization. What Loren Madsen does with social statistics has very little superficial resemblance to what Kim Jones does with war. The explosions in Heide Fasnacht's work negotiate transactions between two, three and four dimensions in a very different way than Rebecca Quaytman's perspectives on what's left of conventional representational space, or Mary Ellen Carroll's meditations on landscapes fashioned in the image of arbitrary symbol systems.

For roughly five years, Loren Madsen has been working with readily available, quantified information about social issues (the Internet is a big help) to generate graphs and their three-dimensional representations. Massaging the numbers with considerable deftness (and some wicked humor), he has created visual analogs for public opinion about what constitutes society's most pressing concerns (options are economy, crime, drugs, jobs), about the relationship between murder rates and the number of prisoners (the right guess is that the first has declined as the second exploded), and about fluctuating preferences in methods of suicide (poison, firearms, hanging, other). The Consumer Price Index, the earliest of the works shown here, renders the changing cost of living over time as a curvaceous and beautifully crafted wooden sculpture; the amenability of raw numbers to the language of biomorphic abstraction only adds to the variables at Madsen's disposal.



Heide Fasnacht Sneeze 1997 Graphite on paper 40"x60"

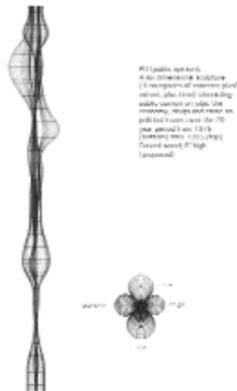


Rebecca Quaytman *The Sound in Fall* 1999 Silkscreen on wood 61" x 40"

"How does a sideways picture look? And what is a good painting to hang next to a sideways picture?" asks Rebecca Quaytman. Of more general interest to her is the question of how people look, both actively and passively—her concern, broadly, is with unexamined habits of perception as well as representation. Some recent small paintings consist of arrows, directing attention to neighboring works and thereby showing that the active, performative linear device lends itself to the most diffident—passive—of attitudes. In recent photosilkscreens, perspectival space is digitally attenuated or compressed and, as in the example shown here, binocular perspective is taken apart and reassembled wrong: the slightly cross-eyed view of a rural house's deck has two misaligned vanishing points, as if seen through improperly focussed field glasses. With a photosilkscreen of shelves in exaggerated recession, which causes them to resemble arrows, or a painting depicting ranks of bevel-edged, laminated boards shown in profile, there are hypnotic flip-flops between flat and three-dimensional readings. There is also a nearly audible hum of cross-talking spatial paradigms, as one work invites another to untwist its skew, corroborate its evidence, or simply share a view.

The crosshatchings and raster dots in Heide Fasnacht's recent drawings stand for the atmospheric effects of subatomic combustion, in some cases, and, in others, for droplets of snot. Sometimes the subjects are geothermal explosions: geysers, volcanoes. All are things that can't be arrested, and are no more inherently susceptible to solid representation than pictorial. But neither, exactly, are they poetic—they're not ineffable, just scaleless, without useful linear or volumetric definition. Perhaps not coincidentally, they slip off symbolic registers as well, nuclear blasts being too catastrophic for easy conceptual (or emotional) assimilation, and sneezes too negligible, though a good one can be a very satisfying thing (a subject that was, a little weirdly of brief but intense interest to Freud). Working faulty lines between two and three dimensions has always interested Fasnacht, who is mostly a sculptor; in recent sculptures (one is included here), tendrils of wiry, clotted form, supple as calligraphy, point to almost architectural rendering techniques in the drawings, and thence back again.

Retaining abstract schema while dropping out particularizing detail, Mary Ellen Carroll has produced three vacuum-formed plastic renderings of peripheral urban areas that she calls, with poetic license, Parks. (They have no relation to nature preserves, but are related to a series of prints based on parking lots; in both, figure/ground relationships are switched.) The inverted street plans in Parks, taken from maps of the kind of ring-city zones that are a peculiarly contemporary form of "natural" social growth, provide, like a bit of anthropological spade work, an illustration of abstraction in the field. Betraying (in both ways) the universalizing promptings of high Modernism, these perfectly alienated images show anonymous landscapes reduced to inter-



Loren Macdon *Historical Abstracts: PO (public opinion)* 1998 Iris print 20" x 30"

changeable, equally pleasing geometric compositions. Articulation and its opposite are the twin poles of Carroll's work, whether her medium is visual text, photography, architectural plans, or, as here, street maps; that changes of scale can slide information from one pole to the other is one lesson of Parks.

Kim Jones' drawings are rooted in the (firsthand) experience of war; alone among the work here, they are explicitly retrospective, reaching first to his military service in Vietnam and, further, to childhood games of battle. But they've got another order of temporality: these drawings can be played, and in fact the creation of each reflects that usage. "The 'troops' are moved—or killed—by erasing and redrawing them," Jones explains. "The remaining ghost image becomes a history of their moiment." Based on imaginary encampments, the drawings depict an epic, endless, highly elaborated confrontation between "x-men" and "dot-men," whose bunkers, barracks, infirmaries, and prisons are rendered in

precise shorthand. The battle zones are labyrinthine, the rules byzantine: vulnerability of walls, ranges for armored tanks, protocols for taking and interrogating prisoners, even provision for R & R are all specified. None of this is conclusive; none of it is even fixed, as the drawings are often worked on, intermittently, for years. Jones has had a long career as a performer, in the persona Mud Man; for all their evident labor, the drawings are, in a sense, no less ephemeral than his haunted appearances.

Scale is relative, size fixed—that's a truism in art. Some basic measurements (a linear foot, for instance, in a benighted country like ours) fudge the difference by alluding to subjective standards—which for growing children only confirms the perceptual chaos of a world understood relative to a body that keeps changing. In adulthood, that woozy immeasurability becomes a big part of nostalgia—of its subject, and its temper. Some among these five artists engage it more openly than others. But all the work here homes in on the soft spots between fact and memory, linearity and wishful thinking.

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Kim Jones *Untitled* 1978 Pencil on paper 15" x 25"