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 Quayman’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. Managing the numbers with considerable dexterity (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.

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 (all the realizations are but a middle size). But 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 ever changing, and disconforming.

Taken in hand, that lifetime 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 flare. By its nature, the drawn line is always almost unequal subject to its subject, an inequality that can take any dimension. If it is any good, it is revealing, 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.
The crosshatchings and raster dots in Heide Farnacht’s recent drawings stand for the atmospheric effects of subatomic combustion, in some cases, and in others, for droplets of rain. 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 poetics—they’re not inefable, just scaleless, without useful (near- or ultrametric definition. Perhaps not coincidentally, they app all symbolic registers as well; nuclear blast being too catastrophic: for easy conceptual (or emotional) assimilation, and sneers too negligible, though a good one can be a very satisfying thing (a subject that was, a little wistily of brief but intense interest to Freud). Working fact and illusion between two and three dimensions has always interested Farnacht, who is mostly a sculptor; in recent sculptures (one is included here), bands of woven cloth form, supply as calligraphy point to almost architectural rendering techniques in the drawings, and thence back again.

“How does a sidewalk picture look? And what is a good painting to hang next to a walkway picture?” asks Rebecca Quaytran. 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 photoscience, perspective spacing is digitally attenuated or compressed, and as in the example shown here, linear perspective is taken apart and reassembled wrong the slightly cross-eyed view of a rural house’s deck has two maximized vanishing points, as if seen through improperly focused field glasses. With a photoscience of shives in exaggerated recession, which causes them to resemble arrows, or a painting depicting ranks of level-edged, laminated boards shown in profile, there are homotypic 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 unsettle its slate, corroborate its evidence, or simply share a view.

Relaxing abstract schematic while dispelling a particularizing detail, Pliny Allen 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 foregrounds relationships are switched.) The inverted street plans in Parks, taken from maps of the kinds of ring-city zones that are a peculiarity of contemporary form of “natural” social growth, provide, like a bit of anthropological space work, an illustration of abstraction in the field. By (in both ways) the universalizing prompts of high Modernism, these perfectly alienated images show anonymous landscapes reduced to inter

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; changes of scale can slide information from one pole to the other in one lesson of Parks.

Kim Jones’ drawings are rooted in the (first-hand) 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 tropes are moved—or killed—by arranging and rearranging them,” Jones explains. “The remaining great image becomes a history of their movement.” Based on imaginary encampments, the drawings depict an epic, endless, highly elaborated confrontation between “knees” and “dirt-men,” whose bunkers, barracks, infirmaries, and prisons are rendered in precise shorthand. The battle zones are labyrinthine, the rules bypassing 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 cumulative; 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 persons Plaid Men: 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 bightened 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 additio

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