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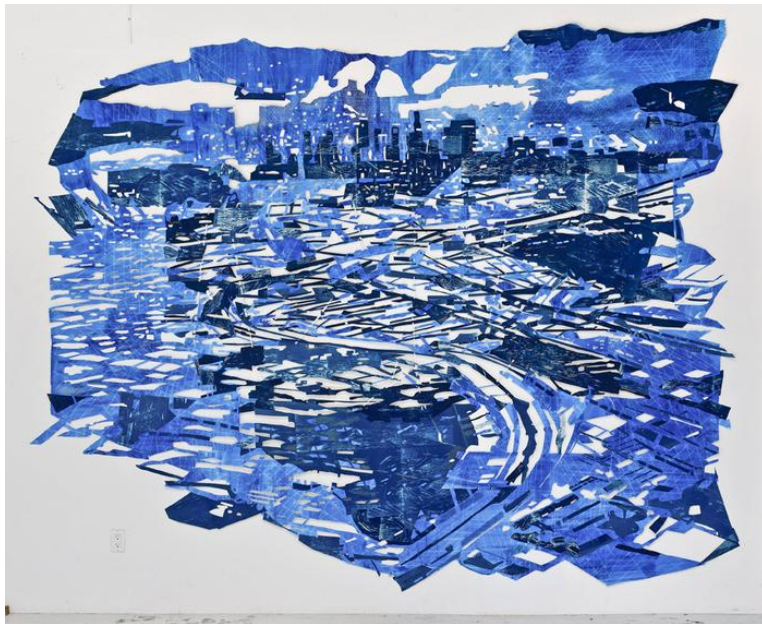
Mapping the City: Fran Siegel at Lesley Heller Workspace

by **Stephen Maine**

Plans and Interruptions

October 18 to December 1, 2013

Lesley Heller Workspace
54 Orchard Street
New York City, 212-410-6120



Fran Siegel, *Overland 16*, 2013, Cyanotype, ink, pencil and pigment on cut paper, 96 x 140 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Lesley Heller Workspace.

A New Yorker who relocated a decade ago to the Los Angeles area, Fran Siegel has a longstanding interest in the growth and form of urban centers. In the eight drawings in *Plans and Interruptions*, Siegel's current exhibition at Lesley Heller Workspace, the artist reflects on how the history of population movements in and around a particular city determines its manifestation in geographical space and, in turn, the myriad ways that that predominantly horizontal spatial manifestation might lend itself to pictorial representation. In her drawings, Siegel works with familiar materials: pen, pencil, colored pencil, paint and pigment on paper and mylar. Her procedure involves a tremendous amount of collage, so that cut edges and the gaps between them—where the wall often is visible—are crucial compositional devices. In fact, it is useful to consider this work drawing *as* composition, since the way the pieces are knit together is fundamental to their significance.

Siegel has recently begun to use the cyanotype process, the distinctive blue of which, in a wide range of values, pervades the exhibition. The densest concentration of it is in the commanding *Overland 16* (2013), which is 96 by 140 inches, one of an ongoing series of large drawings derived from aerial photographs of LA's amorphous sprawl. Like its ostensible subject (and in keeping with the other drawings in this remarkable series), *Overland 16* is an aggregation of bits and pieces, a collection of discrete parts that are stitched, stapled, glued and laced together, tab-and-slot fashion, to form a provisional, inarguable whole. There are glimpses of anonymous buildings, vacant lots, parking lots and, inevitably, the distant mountains. In the midst of this complex visual texture, a serpentine curve—representing a freeway, one supposes—makes its way from the bottom edge through the middle ground, fragmenting and disappearing as if into a hazy distance among the drawing's many component shards and facets.



Fran Siegel, *Navigation*, 2010-201, colored pencil, ink, and cyanotype on cut and folded papers, 116 x 116 x 4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Lesley Heller Workspace.

The press release declares that other drawings relate to the cities of Siena, Havana, Manta and Genoa; I surmise that the last is embodied in *Navigation* (2010-11) 116 x 116 x 4 inches. At the bottom center—like the trunk of a family tree—is a rendering of a Renaissance sailing ship under oar power, as it would be when leaving or entering a port. Elsewhere in *Navigation*, the graphical vocabulary alludes to diagrams, maps, flow charts and the like; but the informational value of such documents is subsumed in a whirl of overlaps, shadows, incomplete tracings, graftings, and translucent overlays.

The viewer's compulsion to decipher such clues is rewarded by Siegel's assiduous encoding of them. A tangle of tendrils, possibly route maps or boundary markers, appears near the top of the cruciform *Tre* (2012), 132 x 132 inches; variations on a roughly circular shape (dome? amphitheater? caldera?) appear below, along with hundreds of other notations of equally elusive significance. What comes across beyond any doubt, however, is an idea—and a feeling—about the city as an organism made of interpenetrating systems of which the design, placement, function, and development continually, inexorably change. Siegel tells me that every graphical feature of these elaborate drawings, and the way those details are assembled, is informed by her research into the location. That is easy to believe, as the specifics feel textual—not whistled up out of thin air, not improvised, but rooted in history and arranged according to some kind of plan—more-or-less rational, always evolving, endlessly interrupted.

- See more at: <http://www.artcritical.com/2013/11/02/fran-siegel/#sthash.IXsmX2Ry.dpuf>