

FRAN SIEGEL

at Lesley Heller Workspace through December 01
by Dar Dowling

I hesitate to call Fran Siegel's work beautiful, although it is most definitely stunning, and will no doubt blow you away when you check out her new show at the Leslie Heller Workspace. However, her work is more than beautiful, using the power of creativity and dare I say the soul, she draws you deep into each piece, whether you were planning on going or not. In essence making you an integral part of the intriguing world she's created, and perhaps getting you to think about the "real" world in a very different way.

In Overland 16, one of my favorite pieces, she weaves a road leading to a city made of so many shades of blue that I wish it was real. Yet perhaps it is, because to create her pieces she delves deep into actual cities, exploring their relationships with the people living within them and the natural world surrounding them.

Recently I caught up with Fran, discovering that the women behind these amazing pieces is just as compelling as her work.

When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

I always knew I would be an artist, even early on I would draw and paint, but I was always a messy artist – and that hasn't changed. If someone walks into my studio when I am making a piece, they might think it is very chaotic, but its organization crystallizes during the process.

I've never had an interest in making something look real, and I still don't. I am much more interested in documenting and creating a dynamic viewing experience.

Overland 16, 2013 , Cyanotype, Ink, Pencil and Pigment on Cut Paper 96 x 140



***Urban areas and nature both play a role in your work – can you elaborate on that?
Does it play a role in this show?***

Light, perception and movement, and their relationship to urban environments are major aspects of my work. This means exploring the innate conflict that arises between cities and nature –how a city plan can be defined by geography such as how L.A. hits up against the sea and the mountains. So with each piece I am looking to bring this relationship alive visually, so it can be seen as a living, breathing organism.

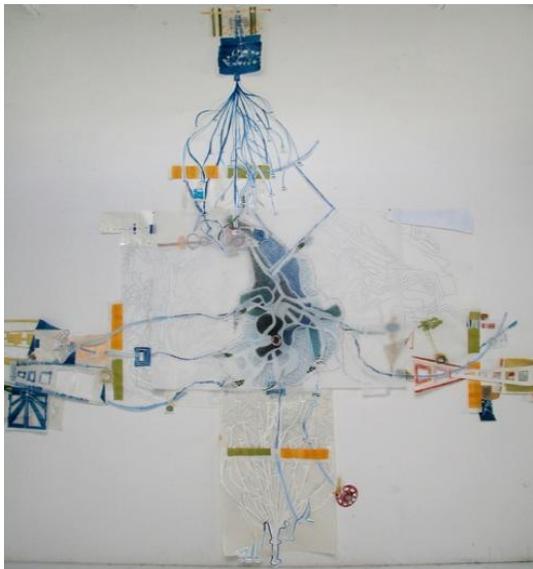
As is the case with all my work “Plans and Interruptions” also reflects my interest in these areas, as well as my curiosity about how populations move around urban areas. I included plans of Siena, Genoa, Havana, Manta, and Los Angeles into this series of drawings. The plans are woven into each piece, revealing the cultural priorities of each city, while the “interruptions” refer to the people living within them.

I understand that your move from NYC to the West Coast was pivotal in the evolution of your work - how so?

Even back then my work involved light and perception. While my studio was in lower Manhattan I was interested in the shifting patterns of light in the tiny sliver of space between the two trade towers and the ricocheting reflections off of adjacent buildings. As a result the space was much more compressed.

In Los Angeles the distances and panoramas are much more vast. This newer city’s lack of a master plan, combined with sprawling vistas, diverse geography, unique light conditions, and affordable studio space has enabled my work to thrive. Many of the drawings refer to this city’s layered patchwork infrastructure.

Tre, 2013, pencil and pigment on cut and collaged paper - 132" x 132"



Your pieces bring together a variety of mediums, including cyanotype, ink, pencil, and pigment on cut paper. Can you give us a glimpse of your art making process?

In some ways I imagine my process as a visual anthropologist, so I begin by taking photographs and gathering diverse bits of visual data. In Los Angeles I decided to work from aerial photos because unlike the gridded plan of older cities like New York, there is no real master plan to its design. Because the only way to see its structure was from above, I began taking photographs during landings on commercial flights.

Recently, a private pilot who is a fan of the arts, let me hire him for the cost of gas, which was exciting. On this trip I was able to fly lower and into areas that commercial flights don't usually cover, giving me more detail and perspectives to use in my work.

When it comes to hands on art making, I begin by pinning all the fragmented images to the wall and then start cutting, joining, or weaving, everything together. Drawn marks are used to modify the light value of the image or to fold-in an alternative viewpoint. I have started to use a photographic cyanotype process directly into the drawings' surface. This level of detail captures the viewers attention and draws them more fully into the piece.

What are you doing when you are not making art?

In a sense I am always making art. When I am not in the studio I am usually out looking at exhibitions. I am very passionate about seeing internationally curated shows such as dOCUMENTA and various Biennales. I love to travel internationally, which I have been fortunate to do through residency fellowships.

I am also on the Contemporary Practices faculty at The School of Art at CSU Long Beach, which is the largest publicly funded art department in the US. And I do enjoy sunset walks along the Palos Verdes cliffs and hiking in the desert around LA.

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Balancing Act 1, 2013 - Colored pencil, paint, ink and collage - 44" x 42"