

# The Brooklyn Rail

## Fran Siegel *Plans and Interruptions*

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LESLEY HELLER WORKSPACE | OCTOBER 18 – DECEMBER 1, 2013

Using an assortment of Arte Povera type materials, Los Angeles based artist Fran Siegel constructs dense, eclectic visualizations of the history and demographic composition of different urban environments through the media of drawing and collage. Her exhibition, *Plans and Interruptions*, at Lesley Heller Workspace consists of a series of layered paper works that weave together topography, narrative, and images of architecture into large indiscrete assemblages reflect the unfettered development of the cities they portray.

The pieces are an interesting counterpoint to many of the prosaic demographic visualizations that now are a mainstay of cable news election coverage and online poll-aggregation. Siegel looks at urban spaces in a tried modernist mode; with a clear debt to Guy Debord's development of psychogeography, an approach to urban mapping that incorporated subjective perspective. Much like Debord, she treats the urban plans of cities like Los Angeles and Genoa as records of human exploration and invention. "Navigation" (2010-11) sets a cutout of a classical sailing ship against images of the ocean and a vertical overview of the port of Genoa. It uses tracings of the ship's directional markings as a kind of figurative boundary for the city's walls. Constructed from fragile, common materials—colored pencil, blue ink, and folded and cut paper—the precarious construction of "Navigation" perhaps mirrors Genoa's agitated ancient history—its constant changing of hands and persistent civil discord.

"Overland" (2013) presents the Los Angeles horizon on cuttings of paper and cyanotype prints, and is overlaid with an intricate hard-edged pencil design that suggests plot-points on an architectural model or a fractal visualization. A more immediately recognizable cityscape than that portrayed in "Navigation," its intricate construction nonetheless suggests the organic and haphazard expansion of Los Angeles' urban sprawl. Los Angeles' skyline collapses into a fragmented mosaic of blue and white paper that resembles a cubist abstraction.

The monumental collage "Tre" (2012) renders the movement and outgrowth of the walls of Siena in a haphazard crucifix. Long blue lines portray the movement and extensions of the city's walls. A satellite map of the city becomes a kind of Rorschach test, wherein one might read different figurative objects—wheels, smokestacks, and ladders—assembled from the layout of the city's streets. Transparent paper creates different levels in the collage, suggesting varying scales of urban development and at times making the collage appear to project in three dimensions.

Another series of Siegel's, "Balancing Act," pushes even further into the realm of complete abstraction. Still, certain figurative elements—images of circuses, stairways, and pyramids—emerge. "Balancing Act 2" (2013) uses opaque paper to obscure different parts of the image, which at first appears to represent the front face of a building, with some windows open, revealing a myriad of scenes. However, look at the image from a different angle and it resembles a topographical map.

Viewing *Plans and Interruptions* one wonders to what extent Siegel's pieces are decorative or whether they offer social commentary. On one level, they appear as obscured records of gentrification and social migrations, and on another as adroit abstractions. In the era of Google Maps, where every map is homogeneous and presented in the same bland interface, an argument can be made for the re-appropriation of maps as a political statement.

In one moment in John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, cited by Marcel Proust in *Time Regained*, Ruskin describes the uneven cobblestones that pave Venetian streets, one of which he trips upon. While falling he is both literally and figuratively thrown headlong into the history of Venice, and the sensation of hitting the ground triggers some latent memory of the private histories of all of the inhabitants of the city, and of the legacy of its development. Siegel's collages seem to gesture at this same intersection of private experience and public architecture, stressing the confounding, chaotic intersection of individuals' private lives with the larger organization of their environments.

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