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Moment of Pause: Perceiving the Unseen

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***Moment of Pause:
Perceiving the Unseen***

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Prerequisite for Honors
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I. Introduction

It has been a daily exercise for me to take a moment to observe a space, draw a quick sketch, and take notes. John Singer Sargent, an American artist considered the leading portrait painter of his generation wrote, “Wherever you are, be always, ready to make slight notes of postures, groups and incidents. Store up in the mind without ceasing a continuous stream of observations from which to make selections later. Above all things get abroad. See the sunlight and everything that is to be seen.”¹ His words are written on the first page of my visual sketchbook to remind myself of the continuous power of observation.

In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan examines the interaction and implication of space and place with the perspective of experience. We pass by, walk through, and inhabit architectural spaces every day. However, these fundamental spaces are easily overlooked and dismissed. He wrote, “What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... if we think of a space as that which allows movement, then place is a pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.”² Revisiting the image, whether through sketches or drawing from memory, generates unexpected meaning and raises questions I have not thought to ask. To have been in that space is to learn, respond, and create from what is given. The transformative process of observing, reacting, and finding new relationships allows me to reinterpret the space over time. Thus the reinterpretation of a space is a construct of experience from moments of pause. This

¹ Evan Charteris, *John Sargent by the Hon. Evan Charteris, K.C., with reproductions from his paintings and drawings* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1927), 286.

² Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 6.

project attempts to portray the visual structure of such spaces and investigates their implicit compositional qualities through an iterative process of drawing and printmaking.

My thesis project culminates in my realizing, exploring, and examining my passion of formal symmetry and graphic forms. Exposure to studio practices, especially printmaking and photography, triggered and developed my ongoing fascination of compositional tendencies. My interest was further developed by projects in the Gap between 2-D and 3-D (ARTS 324) course in spring 2015, taught by Andy Mowbray and Daniela Rivera.

PNW was a project in response to the renovation of Pendleton West at Wellesley College. I addressed, questioned, and documented what was soon to become a space in the past. Using photography and collaging the self-developed photos, I created a new space. Light and shadow serve to connect different spaces in the building. The collage was exhibited on a floor plan of the old Pendleton Hall to memorialize it (figure 1). Later for the final project of this course, I documented highly recognizable architecture on the Wellesley campus. I attempted to alter the viewer's reactions to the buildings by emphasizing strong cast shadows. When iconic features of each building were removed, the geometric structure of the cast shadows became the dominant elements in the compositions (*figure 2*).

Such geometric compositions from the interactions of light and shadow have been a recurring theme in my work. Shadows not only provide visual causes cues about where the light is coming from, but also suggest temporal and momentary qualities. Yet, there are immeasurable layers and dimensionalities to shadows. Despite their ubiquitous presence, shadows are easily forgotten and overlooked from our views. I explored shadows cast upon existing architecture and revisited the same scenes from different positions and of different times of the day. The changes in compositions and forms were repeatedly documented through drawing quick sketches as well as

through taking photos with a manual black and white SLR camera. I purposely emphasized the two-dimensionality of the space to capture and visualize intangibility and temporality of the shadows (*figures 3 and 4*). Even slight variation in external forces, such as light source, location of the object in relation to its surrounding, position of the viewer, alters the visual forms and the viewers' experience dramatically. As seen in *figure 3*, minor adjustments in angle of the light source result in changes of overall configuration, negative space, and orientation of the shadow. The more I studied the compositional tendencies and tensions between stable structures and dynamic shadows, the more I realized that I had been taking a rather literal approach. Exploration in different media confirmed that focusing on one subject was not working for me and in fact was narrowing the potential of my imagery.

In the meantime, I visited the 2015 International Fine Print Dealers Association Print Fair in New York City. Despite the overwhelming numbers of prints displayed, I was primarily drawn to prints with black and white, relatively small scale, and abstract forms. I was captivated by a particular series of prints, Arturo Herrera's *Dance*³ (*figure 5*). These photogravure prints interwove fragments of found images and pre-existing narratives into a collage of prints. Herrera's experimental work used objects found in the Niel Borch Jensen print shop in Copenhagen, such as strings and strips of metal. He then layered them over transparencies of photographs by Serge Lido. When completed, the dancing figures are familiar to the viewers, yet the artwork remains ambiguous. His work is, "... a bridge, but it is paved with the viewer's own reference and associations."⁴ Herrera responds to the momentary experience of a dance via the collective process of photography, collage, and photogravure, and his intervention revives the moment.

³ Arturo Herrera, *Dance*. 2014, photogravure, various sizes

⁴ Josiah McElheny, "Arturo Herrera." *Art: Interview*: BOMB Magazine, 19 December 2015.

Inspired by Herrera's series of prints, I shifted my focus to the visual structure of spaces and their implicit compositional qualities. All of the images come from spaces I observed, experienced, and recorded in my visual journal. The transformative process of observing, reacting, and finding new relationships allowed me to reinterpret the space over time. The graphic reinterpretation changes the viewer's perception of the space and enhances the dialogue between graphic images. Thus, my work depicts visual formations within a space that evokes different associations.

Printmaking is an ideal medium for a graphic project exactly because of the nature of inversion, reproduction, reverberation, and the potential of multiples. Every stage of the production method is in response to the previous stage of the image; printed images come from reversal drawings and dialogues between graphic forms come from building up layers. The process of printmaking makes the existing connections visible. The constant exposure to reversal, repetition and layering encourages the interplay of instinct and intention. Therefore, resulting prints capture the observed space, introducing variation in lines, diagonal lines, new kinds of proportion, balance, abstraction of the scene, and the overall dynamic and composition.

II. Moment of Pause

Despite the fact that our eyes constantly search, for the most part, we are not aware of our surroundings. Tuan states, “Abstract knowledge about a place can be acquired in short order if one is diligent. The visual quality of an environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist’s eye. But the ‘feel’ of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences.”⁵ Experience with a space all starts from a moment of pause. Observing, learning, and familiarizing a space takes time. On the other hand, the more familiar a space becomes, the more we tend to take it for granted. This tendency is parallel to my creative process. I record and make notes of new spaces that catch my attention rather than spaces I spend a long time in. The brief yet intense experience matters more than duration.

As Kyna Lenski points out rightly, “Really, really good observation—meaning perception unburdened by preconception and judgment—is how discoveries are made.”⁶ The intimate moments of exposing myself to new encounters are the roots of discovery and invention. In the moment of sketching, I look ahead without knowing where I am going. Only when I pause, reflect, explore, and revisit, the connections are made. Thus, the “... creative process comes from displaying, disturbing, and destabilising what you (think you) know.”⁷

⁵ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 183.

⁶ Kyna Lenski, *The Storm of Creativity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2016), 95.

⁷ Kyna Lenski. *The Storm of Creativity* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2016), 13.

III. Perception of Spaces

i. Exploration in Material and Method

All of the images come from spaces I observed, experienced, and recorded in my visual journal. Each image springs from an experience I have drawn of a particular space but is then altered and expanded upon by translating this information into printed matter. As described in the previous chapter, sketching is an integral component of my process. Visual records are done in black ink pen on an unlined paper, with the focus on linear characteristics of a space disregarding tonal values. Lines force me to make permanent decisions and such spontaneous decision-making is the key to the rhythm and repetition in my sketchbook. Lines not only show boundaries between structures, but also animate initially unnoticed configurations. Such linear quality of the image opens up endless possibilities of formal discoveries. Letting go of the known and discovering new information allows me to reinterpret of a space.

The spaces propelling my thesis come from a lecture room at the Park Avenue Armory, NY, the posterior of an old apartment as well as a kinetic art exhibition in Seoul, South Korea. However, the reinterpretation of the observed space was neither about replicating nor narrating progression. My sketches were from observation, and incorporated spontaneous modifications, such as changes in proportions, patterns or textures, or positions (*figures 6 - 12*). Having been in these spaces, I explored specific perspectives and examined the shapes, whether they were pre-existing or discovered on my page. I revisited the images multiple times to find recurring patterns or compositional trends through repeated drawings. This ritual of repetition was like, “Creat[ing] the experience of walking the same path again and again with the possibility of discovering new

meaning that would otherwise be invisible.”⁸ The transformative process of observing, creating, reflecting, reacting and finding relationships highlighted the unrecognized forms and enhanced my understanding of the space.

I made fresh iteration of these drawings and transcribed this information into a larger scale (*figures 13 - 15*). These new images were photocopied and painted with watercolor using different systems, such as highlighting parts with horizontal or vertical elements and frames and framed areas. Starting with this formal exercise allowed abstract forms, imagery without support of facts, to develop within the reinvented structures. Although I was in control, I set up chances for unexpected occurrences. This exercise revealed new references, resemblances, and repetitions within the existing composition. For me, accepting the immediate thoughts and reactions is the beauty of uncertainty. The highlighted abstract forms will be cut out as stencils in preparation for future steps.

With the multiple layouts, I transferred each image to a sheet of acetate. At this stage, the density of each line was an important factor as the image will be exposed to the photolithography plate exactly as it appears on the transparency. After exposing the plate to 26 light units of UV light, I sponged the plate with a conservative amount of developer until all of the emulsion, except for the image, disappeared. When the plate was rinsed with water and dried, the image was coated with image cleaner using a damp sponge. The proofing process required a repetitive process of sponging with water and rolling up ink. When the oil based ink was applied to the damp plate, the ink only stuck to the positive lines and was repelled by the water. After running the plate through a printing press, the reversed image got transferred to a sheet of paper (*figures 16, 19, 22*). After printing a number of these prints, I was able to make variations to the first state by printing a layer

⁸ Jennifer New, *Drawing From Life: The Journal as Art* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 64.

of black ink with transparent base using the stencils I prepared earlier. The interaction between highlighted stencil areas, black lines, and grey layers of ink reinforced the movement of each graphic form moving back and forth (*figures 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24*). Overlapping layers and abstract forms alternatively supported and negated each other, enhancing the dialogue between graphic images.

In response to the photolithography prints, I shifted to a life-size vinyl cut installation. Lithography has been historically a method to reproduce high quality prints in commercial quantity. Similarly, vinyl is also used commercially. Redrawing graphic images, I used these media to reproduce images in an unexpected way. The image for my installation in Jewett Arts Center was derived from *Untitled 3* (*figure 25*). The image was reinvented so that it was proportionate to the dimensions of the windows in the Sculpture Court. The illustration contains an overlap of an image that has been flipped vertically. It was important to me to draw the mirrored image by hand, although I could have used a computer application. The idea of mark making in a physical site was more important than having a perfect symmetric imagery. I have been working solitarily, whether drawing privately or printing in the Book Arts Lab. In this case, I shifted my working station to the Media Lab and got to collaborate with Jack Wolfe, the Media Technology Lab Assistant, by explaining my project and learning how to use the vinyl cutter. The vectorized image was cut on a black matte vinyl. This project created a tactile experience during the process of peeling off the negative spaces of the vinyl. In doing so, I was connected with the directionality of the lines and aware that each piece had a place.

ii. Scale

My method of creating artwork begins with free drawings on a small sketchbook. Sketchbooks are special documents that reveal my creative process. Sketchbooks can be picked up anytime, held in one hand, flattened on a table, or held up. Having two open pages as a picture plane, sketchbooks liberate me from the common practice of reading or writing from left to right. The sequence, orientation, or format are no longer restricting factors; my sketches and writings are not necessarily in chronological order, orientation can vary from horizontal to vertical, and multiple unrelated images can be drawn on the same page. My sketchbook has become a place of development for visual memory. The act of collecting, listing, and cataloging offers strategy for adapting imagery to my understanding of the space. Thanks to its portable size (4.5''x6''), the sketchbook remains private and intimate, free from public exposure. The diminished scale provides comfort in which I could pause in any moment, whenever a space catches my attention, and fully engage in the moment. As Tuan observes, "Each pause is time enough to create an image of place that looms large momentarily in our view."⁹

From these small drawings, I re-draw and print the same image to a larger scale of 8''x10''. I think of my daily practice in terms of printmaking. I look back at my drawings and think how they would be reversed and projected when printed in larger scale. For me, color is superfluous; the only colors that are present in my sketchbook, series of prints, and vinyl cut are black and white. Such high contrast yet flexible lines are easily translated to a graphic medium like printmaking. The portrayal of a diminutive scale of a life-size architecture is beneficial. The change in dimension leaves the context behind and encourages the viewers to fully immerse in graphic configuration within a space.

⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 161.

Working in large-scale has been out of my comfort zone for so many years. However, after exploring life-size architectural structures in a relatively small scale, I felt necessary to bring my marks back to a physical site. My most recent work encompasses large-scale vinyl cut installation (*figure 26*). Through the 40''x 85'' installation in the Sculpture Court, my marks have been translated into a modernist building. The Jewett Arts Center (1958) is a work done by an American architect Paul Rudolph. His use of modernist material and structural framing, such as clustered columns, metal 'built-in-ivy', and expansive windows, assimilates into the surrounding Gothic setting. The cantilevered stairs, aluminum screens, and different spatial levels add to its unique space.

The marks immediately demonstrate a meaningful connection to their environment and generate a dialogue between organic lines and structural elements. By placing the vinyl against the center window of the Sculpture Court, I create subdivisions of the space from the metal ivy to the glass to my installation. The juxtaposition of the flat black vinyl lines and the architecture of Jewett emphasizes similar traits found in the process of printing photolithography prints: projection, layers, overlapping, and reversal. The marks in space hold light and movement. Therefore this circles back to my original idea of shadows. The natural light carries through the window and artificial gallery light shapes the shadow. The combination of two light sources creates different shadows during different times of the day, making the shadows an object of the space. As the vinyl cut is adhered to a clear mylar and hung, the installed piece is sensitive to movement in its surroundings. There will be slight movements in response to air from the heater located below and to people walking by, affecting the shadows cast into the space. The shadows live, breath, and take abstract forms from this environment.

IV. Conclusion

I find abstraction satisfying. It has a similar effect on me when working with a small sketchbook. Abstraction allows me to play with certain boundaries, which are very private and intimate. These intimate experiences are difficult to express as “they may be personal and deeply felt, but they are not necessarily solipsistic or eccentric.”¹⁰ I introduce my experience and memory with the space in a visual language. The point of view in abstraction is complex and perhaps not fixed, yet I attempt to derive these graphic forms from either hidden compositional patterns or simplified shapes from a different point of view. My images trace time, perspective, and movement and they stir within us a new perceptual awareness. The process of perceiving undefined forms is successful in revealing the unnoticed areas. Each of the final images embodies my personal exploration and visual perception as the basis for the projective geometry in the final prints and vinyl. By using printmaking as a means to question my experience with a space, I offer viewers the opportunity to perceive a space differently by following their own visual curiosity.

¹⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), 147.

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Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. 1977.

VI. Appendix



Figure 1. PNW. 2015, photography, 24''x 36''

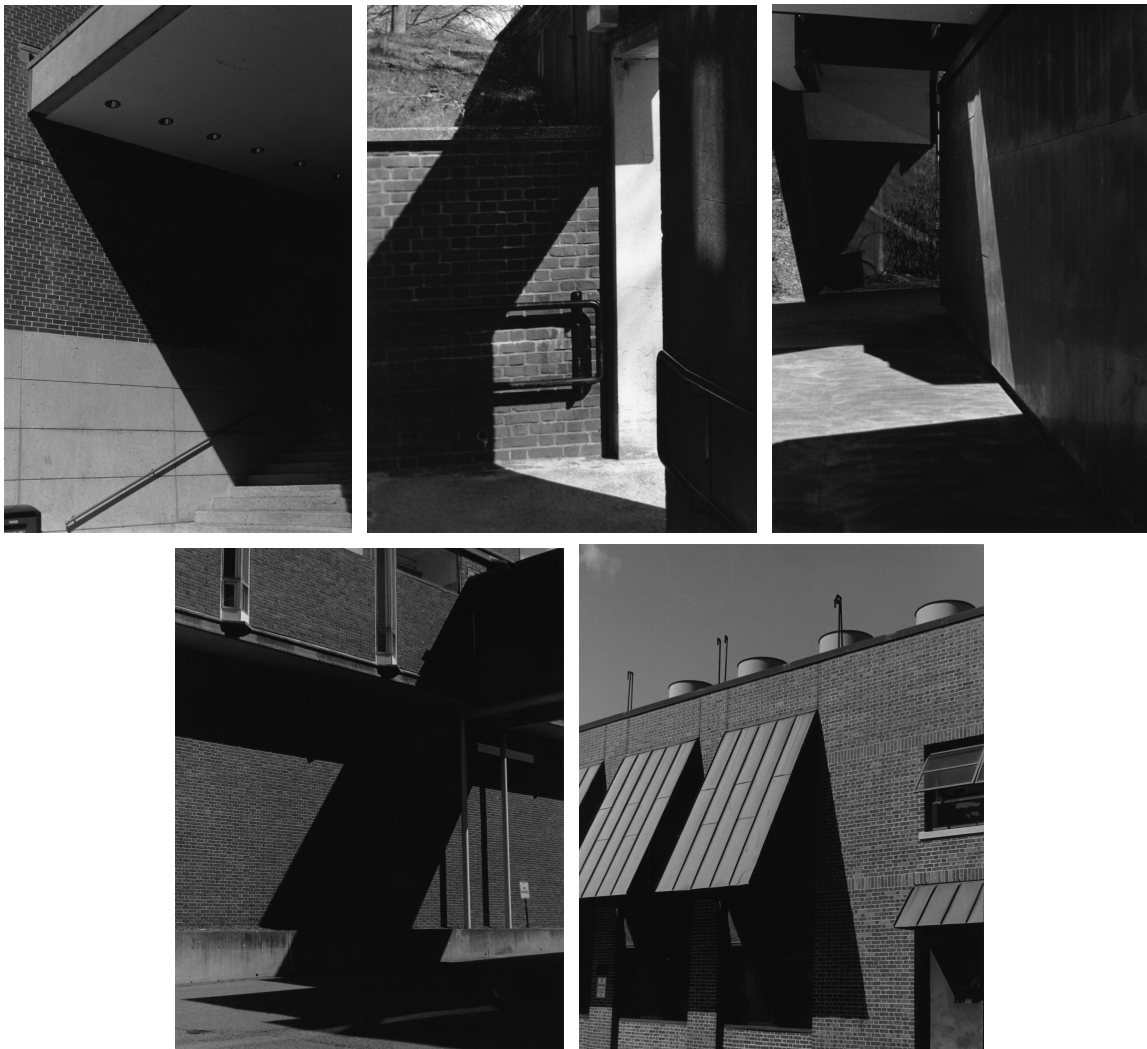
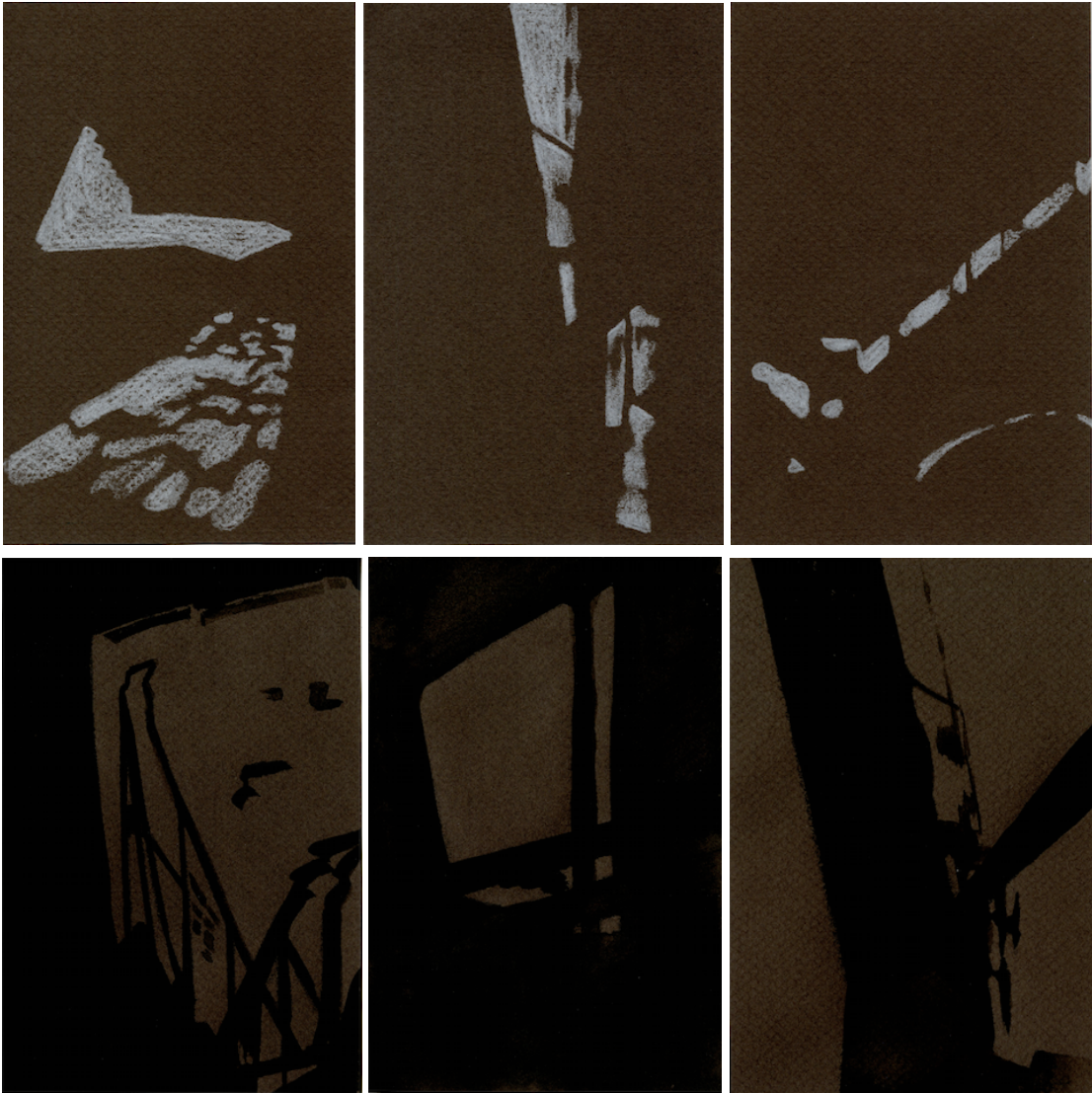


Figure 2. Details of *Unrecognizing*. 2015, photography, 10'' x 14''



Figure 3



Figures 4. Studies on shadow. 2015, color pencil and watercolor on paper. 4''x 6''

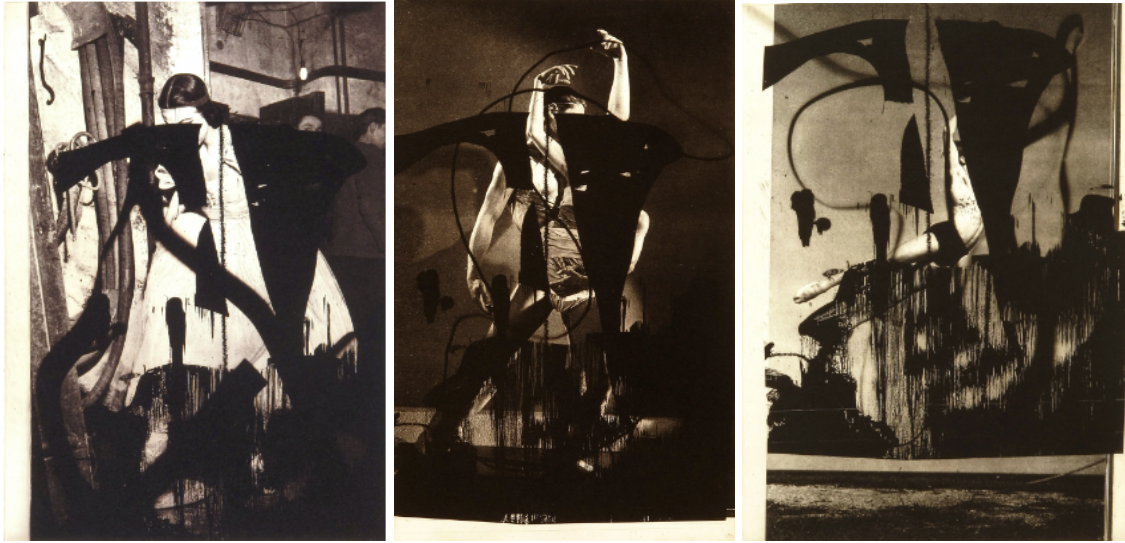


Figure 5. Selected images from Arturo Herrera, *Dance*. 2014, photogravure, various sizes.

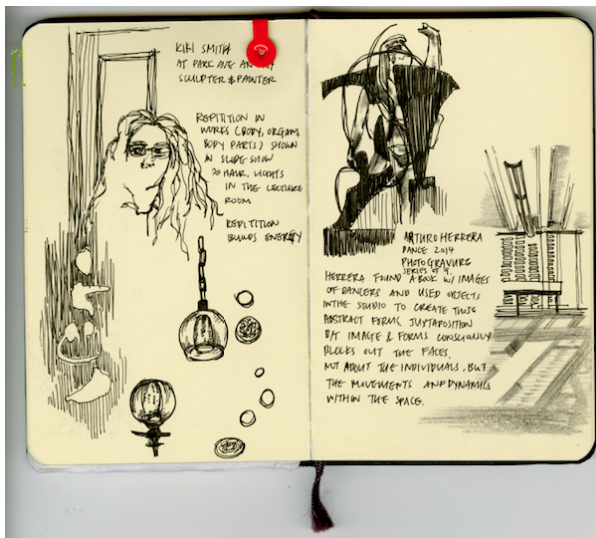


Figure 6.

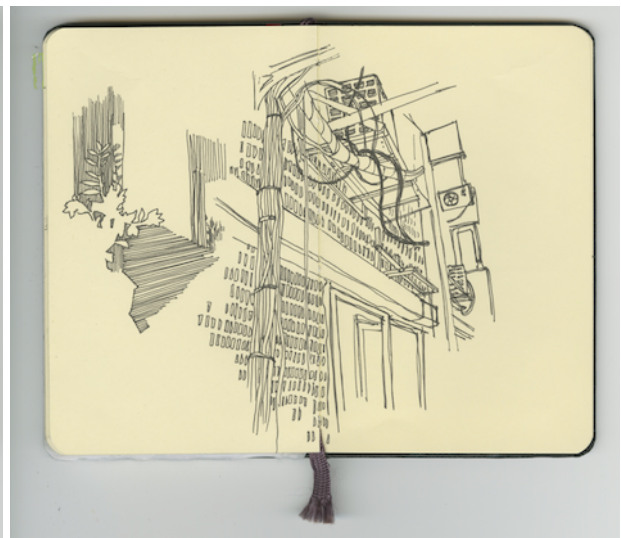


Figure 7.

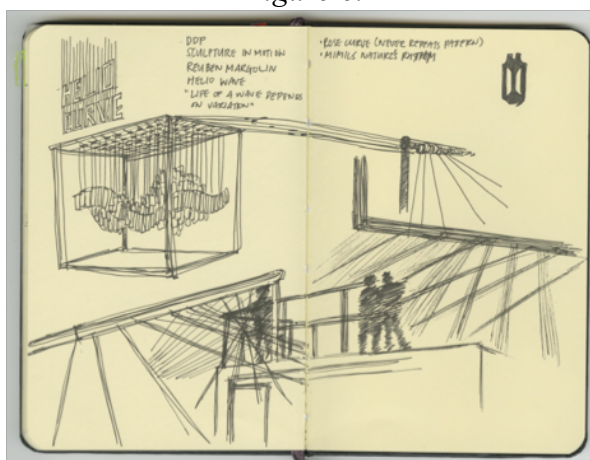


Figure 8.

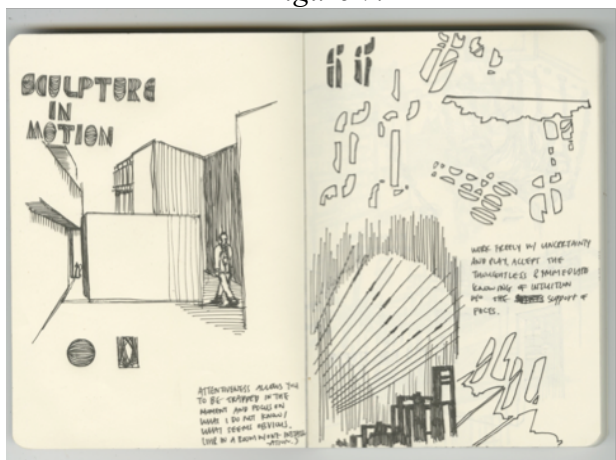


Figure 9.

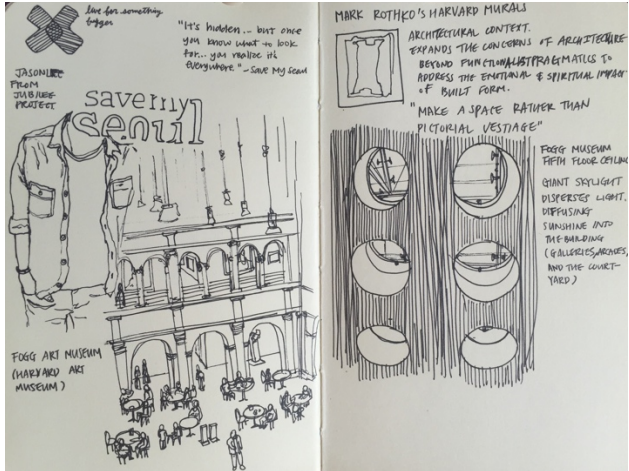


Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.

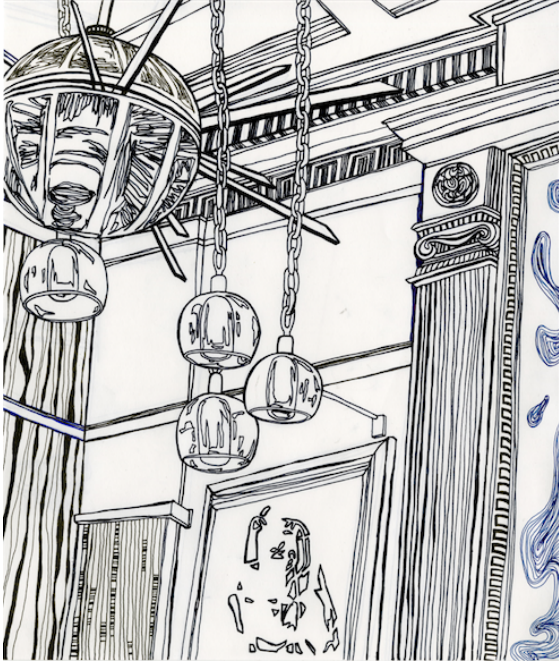


Figure 13.



Figure 14.

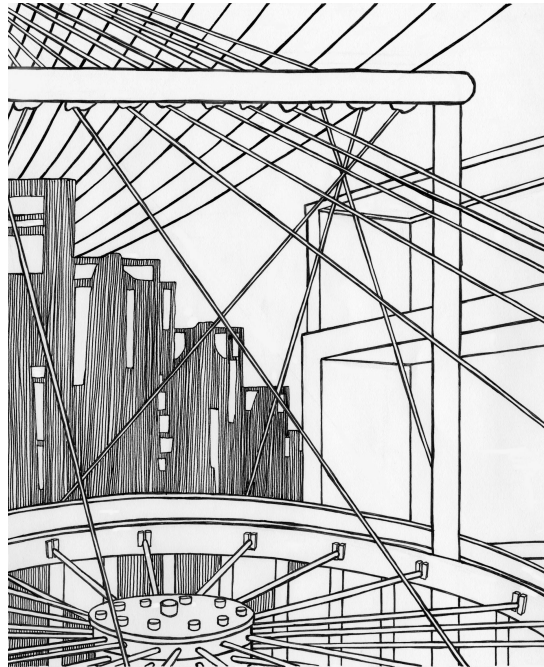


Figure 15.

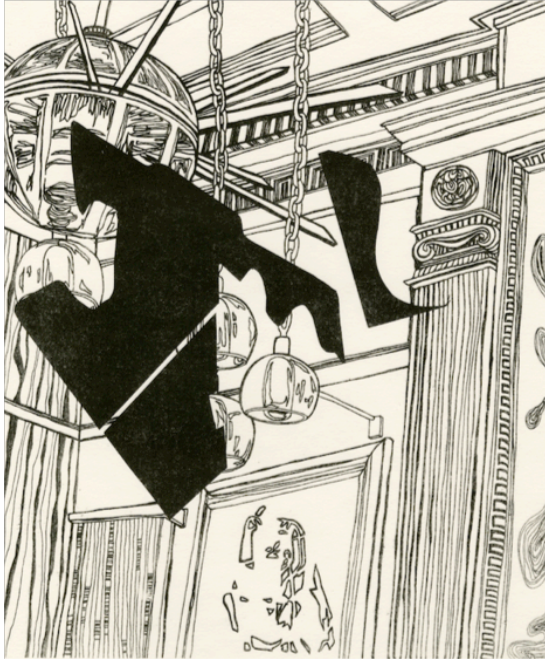


Figure 16. *Untitled 1*. 2015, print on paper, 8''x10''

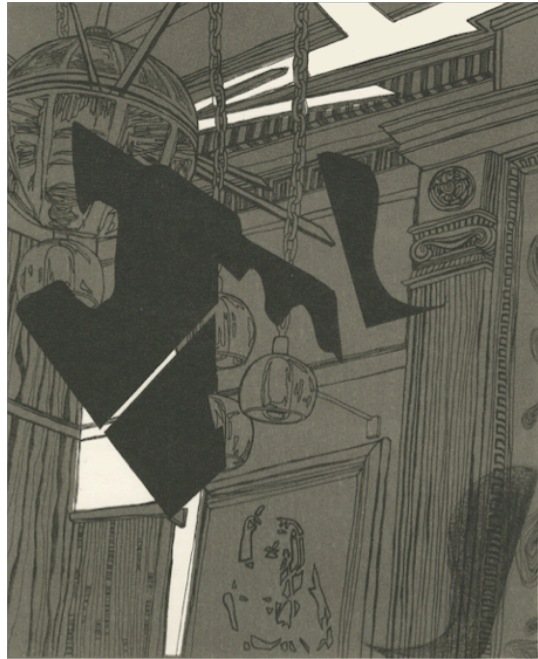


Figure 17.

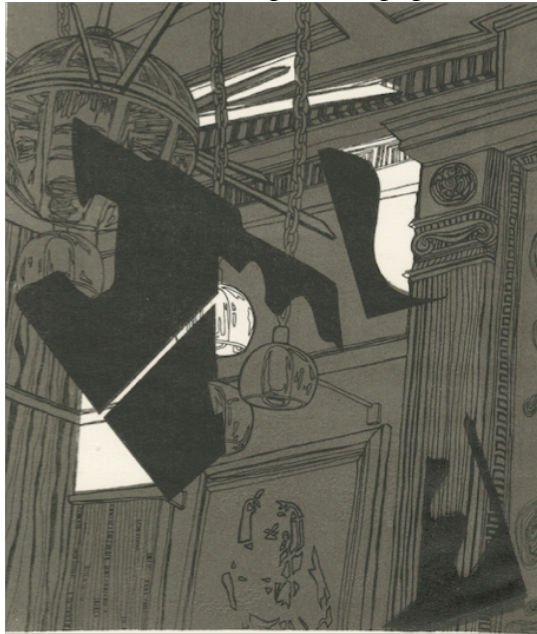


Figure 18.

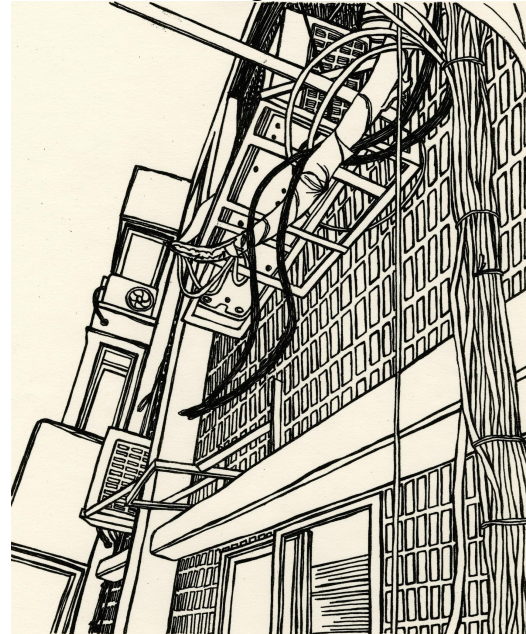


Figure 19. *Untitled 2*. 2016, print on paper, 8''x10''



Figure 20.



Figure 21.

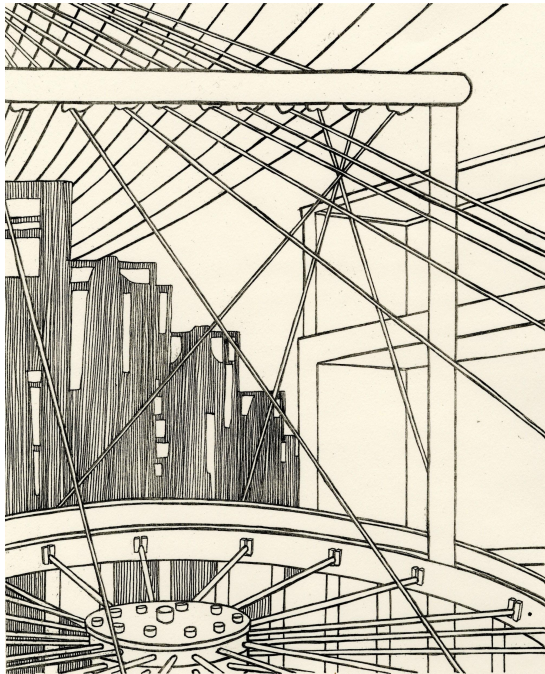


Figure 22. Untitled 3. 2016, print on paper, 8'x10'



Figure 23.



Figure 24.

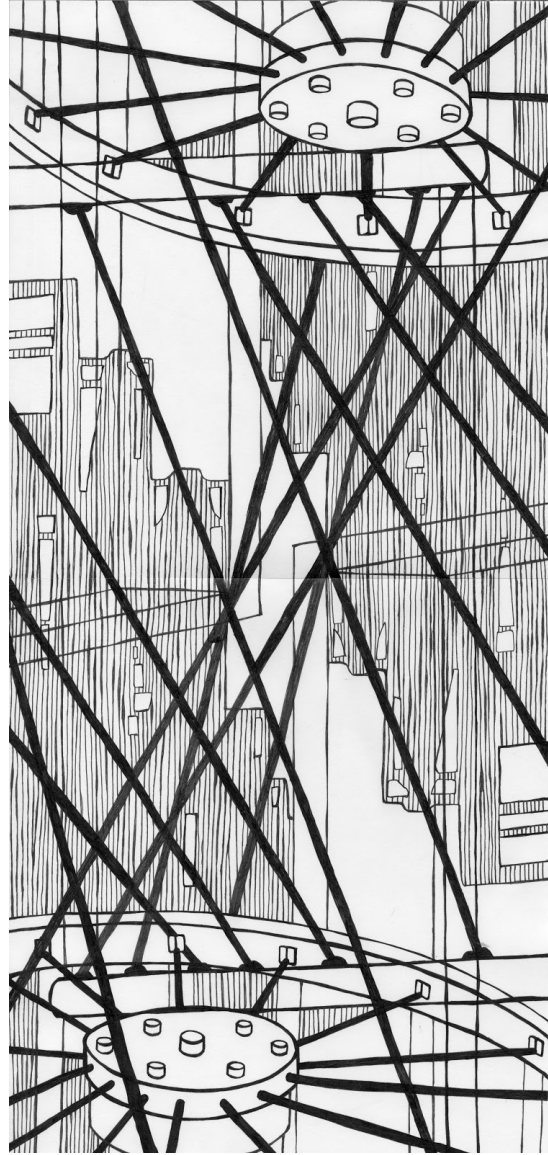


Figure 25.



Figures 26.