

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

Melanie Colosimo's *Midpoint*

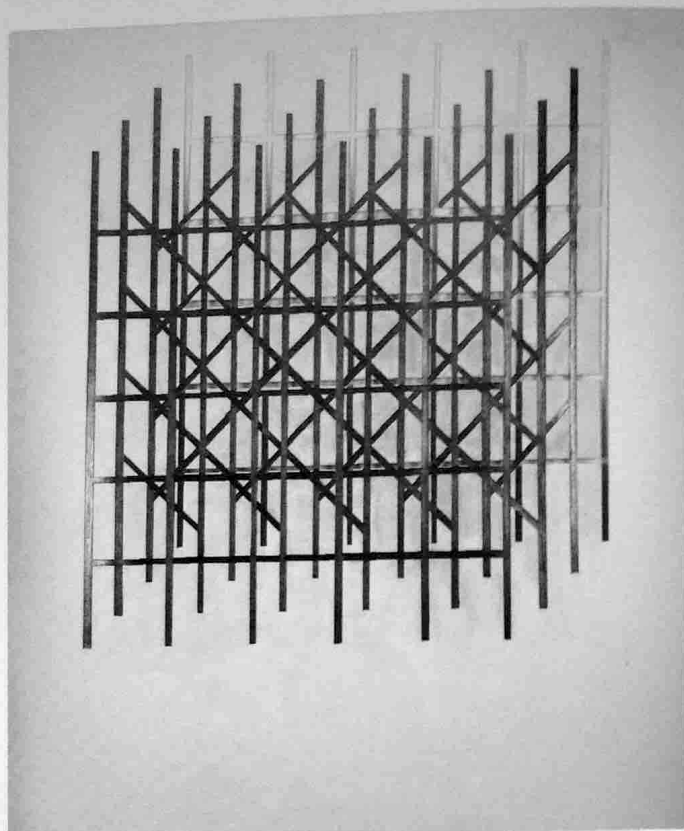
Melanie Colosimo's drawing process alternates between illustrative and poetic. Her lines are deliberate in their description of architecture. As a whole, her work is clearly driven by an attraction to both material and process. Varying thicknesses of pencils determine layers that create depth. Cut-outs in paper confuse that depth, flattening the work even as they create shadows. Her hand describes an object until that observation breaks open into a mere remembrance. Colosimo's *Midpoint*, a body of work she exhibited at Halifax's Parentheses Gallery & Art Projects in January, is made up of four components. Scaffolding-like drawings were exhibited as *Structure*, at AKA Gallery in Saskatoon in the fall of 2013. She created the rest—*Grids*, *Chain Link Fence* and *MTN* (drawing and sculpture)—during a residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts this winter.

Over coffee, Colosimo described a transitional state both artistic and psychological as she and her drawings ricocheted from a peninsula to a flat plain to a mountain valley. The prairies, like Nova Scotia, felt expansive—a horizon line similar to that of the ocean giving its inhabitants a shared understanding of the vast and minute. By comparison, there was no horizon to be found in Banff. She describes feeling locked in. The landscape likely echoed any studio concerns as she faced the lull that naturally follows an exhibition. Instead of having time to reflect, she found herself in a studio, amongst a group of colleagues, in the mountains.

Landscape—both natural and built—informs the people who live amidst it and the community that is built within it. Like much of the West, Banff was planned around the CP railway. Little pockets of isolated communities were born around stops on the line. The railway was, in essence, a line drawn to create structure in an otherwise open landscape.

The meaning that arises from Colosimo's work is more than simply descriptive; it is a study of resilience. At once reinforced and broken, a community's buildings are braced by scaffolding and scotch tape. *Grids* buttress recognizable buildings—farm, church, factory, bowling leagues—while others describe only their own structure. *MTN* sits atop a persistent mass of graphite. *Chain Link Fence*, built to keep divisions divided, stretches, condenses and eventually breaks wide open.

A nuanced metaphor, this latter drawing begins with the simple pattern of a chain-link fence. Walking the length of the drawing, I read Colosimo's studio concentration; she focuses on where the chain connects and where it opens, where the links close again. I witness the representation give way to drawing as it heads towards a pattern. This system struggles to stay together with the human hand's errors.



Melanie Colosimo, *Grid 1*, 2013. Graphite on paper & cut out
97cm x 102cm. Photo: Mary Ellen Oxbly

Colosimo worked on a roll of paper twenty-five feet long, allowing the drawing to roll up behind and ahead of her. The process before her had no past, no future. Building only on the lines drawn just before, she refused to study what she'd already drawn. Like an exquisite corpse, her drawing was done more from imagination than reality. Unlike the Surrealists—for whom the more dreamlike the exercise, the more successful—Colosimo's exquisite corpse was born of a desire to draw a real object. Drawn primarily from memory, her result recreates the idea of a chain link fence.

We discuss drawing's immediacy and how this project was designed to teach her to let go of elegance and rigid planning. She describes her return to such concerns as "hiccups," wondering occasionally, "will it be good when I'm done?" The poetics arrive mostly when she falters. I can observe her marks as her hand desperately seeks to mend the fence as it parts. At the end of the roll, she ceases trying to connect it, allowing the chain to break away, and leaving a tear in the drawing. ■

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