
UNBOUND:

DRAWINGS FROM THE BOOK
DRAWING THOUGHT

Andrea Kantrowitz

SEPTEMBER 6 - OCTOBER 1, 2022

MAKING IS THINKING:

AN EXHIBITION OF ARTIST
EDUCATORS FROM COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY TEACHERS COLLEGE

Kigin Yang
Savannah Nielson
Evelyn Olvera
Carolina Rojas

Curated by Olga Hubard and Andrea Kantrowitz





Image: Unbound

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Unbound is an exhibition of original drawings from Andrea Kantrowitz' book, *Drawing Thought: How drawing helps us observe, discover, and invent*, published by MIT Press in 2022. Drawing takes advantage of the ways cognition evolved to make sense of the environments in which we find ourselves. It allows us to leave visible traces of ideas and observations that would otherwise remain hidden or lost. We can play with our thoughts on paper, turn them upside down, take them apart and put them together again in new ways. It's not just about rendering something already seen or imagined. Drawing reveals uncertainties, ambiguities and lines of inquiry. In anyone's hands, and in many forms, it is a broadly useful tool of thought.

The book, *Drawing Thought*, originated in the artist/educator's cognitive-ethnographic dissertation research on contemporary artists' drawing practices at Columbia University Teachers College. As a doctoral student at Teachers College from 2009-2014, Kantrowitz co-founded the Thinking through Drawing Project. She co-organized 10 years of international drawing and cognition research symposia and workshops, in collaboration with colleagues from around the world. *Drawing Thought* reflects and responds to the deep practices and research shared by Thinking through Drawing colleagues and fellow travelers.

Andrea Kantrowitz, an artist and educator, is Associate Professor and Director of the Art Education Program at SUNY New Paltz. She leads workshops and symposia on art and cognition around the world.

CIRCLING AROUND UNDERSTANDING

Drawing, I locate my thoughts, myself, in time and space. Marks on paper connect inner and outer worlds. Observing, I draw in the world, becoming aware of the place in which I find myself; sounds, smells, the temperature of the air... When looking back at my sketchbooks days, weeks, even years later, I feel the breeze on my cheek, hear the conversation at the next table, the dog barking in the distance. I notice details I was not conscious of at the time; a child quizzically looking up at her dad, an unseen passageway.

From inside my own mind I draw out images, fuzzy and indistinct at first, slowly taking shape on the surface before me. Ideas, feelings, memories, and insights I didn't know I had appear on the page. I play, exploring forms, pulling them apart and putting them together again... Vague impressions coalesce. I layer and revise lines and shapes until something unforeseen emerges.

I draw what is, what if, and what might be. I draw to make the world and my own thoughts new again...

THE THINKING HAND

Drawing helps us take advantage of the ways we can use our hands to observe, discover, and invent. Human hands are capable of an astounding range of deliberate and reflexive actions. The movements of our fingers and wrists can be both powerful and precise, especially when they are well-coordinated with movements of our arms and shoulders. At our fingertips, we possess a remarkably detailed and subtle sense of touch. We make and use tools with our hands. Hand gestures help us think and communicate in important ways. Drawing integrates tool use with our abilities to think and communicate symbolically through gesture. When we move a pen or pencil across the drawing surface, we leave the traces of our movements behind to be reexamined and revised later on.

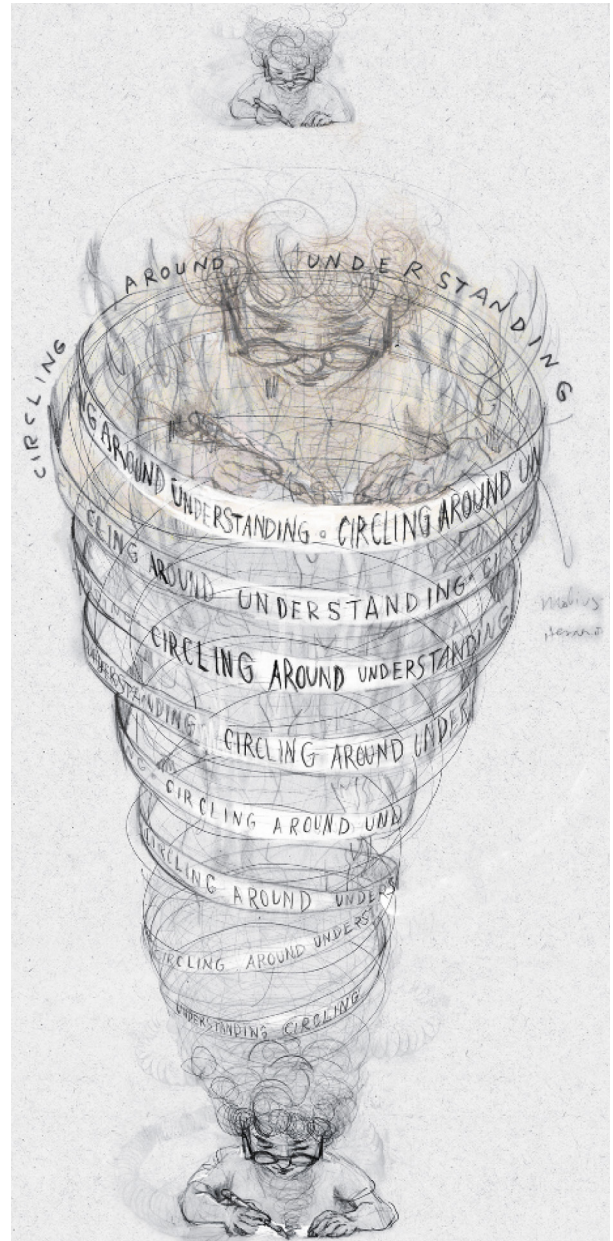


Image: Self-Portrait







Image: Many stories

IMAGINARY FRIENDS

Drawing helps us harness the tendency of the human mind to perceive order, pattern, meaning, and agency in seemingly random events. The human imagination is a by-product (an exaptation) of the drive to discover patterns of the drive to discover patterns of cause and effect in the natural world. Observation, discovery, and invention are close companions: our imaginations are close companions: our imaginations fill in gaps in our vision, sometimes without our even realizing it. We interpret random events as meaningful: we "see" the man on the moon or the castle in the clouds. Drawing creates a space to play with the drive to find meaning where there may be drive to find meaning where there may be none. As we draw, we reveal and construct previously unknown aspects of complex phenomena, both real and imagined.

As humans, in the course of our daily lives, we are continually called upon to interpret ambiguous situations, form hypotheses, and invent stories to fill in missing pieces. We are wired to jump to conclusions,

thinking fast in order to respond to potentially critical situations as quickly and accurately as possible. We can also think more slowly when circumstances allow, by a deliberative process of trial and error.

When there may be a saber-toothed tiger in the bushes or a snake in the grass, better respond immediately and be wrong because you think you see one than not notice and be wrong. In the case of the saber-toothed tiger, a false negative can be a lot more costly than a false positive. We have a number of innate cognitive biases that lead us to make systematic errors especially when a mistake in one direction might be a lot more costly than the other.

Within the safety of the drawing surface, we can slow down and enjoy the possibilities uncertainty unleashes. Drawing affords us the opportunity to look and look again, revising and improving upon our first thoughts. We can explore our "mistakes," let our imagination go astray, and allow ourselves to "see" things that a camera could never capture.

Through experience and experimentation, an experienced drawer learns to keep things open. Sketches allow for modifications and elaboration of thoughts that could not happen in the mind alone. Marks and the gaps in between leave room for (re)interpretation and inference. By regrouping and recombining parts, we allow new configurations and possible revisions to emerge. Ambiguous marks can suggest multiple alternative meanings. There are many stories that could be told.

THINKING SPACE

The blank page can be a physical extension of our minds. We DRAW out two- and three-dimensional models of REAL and INVENTED objects, actors, and scenes, pull them apart, and put them back together in new ways.

We sometimes say we need to "turn things over in our minds" when we feel the need to analyze a subject thoroughly. We want to get "on top" of a situation, "cover" a topic, "uncover" the facts, or put something "to the side." Spatial analogies permeate our thinking so completely that we usually don't notice them.

SPATIAL reasoning is the ability to retain, retrieve, generate, and transform visual images in the mind. ANALOGIES compare two phenomena as a way to understand one (the target) by identifying common features it shares with another, more familiar phenomenon (the source). Both spatial and analogic reasoning rely on our ability to perceive deep structural relationships beneath superficial appearances.

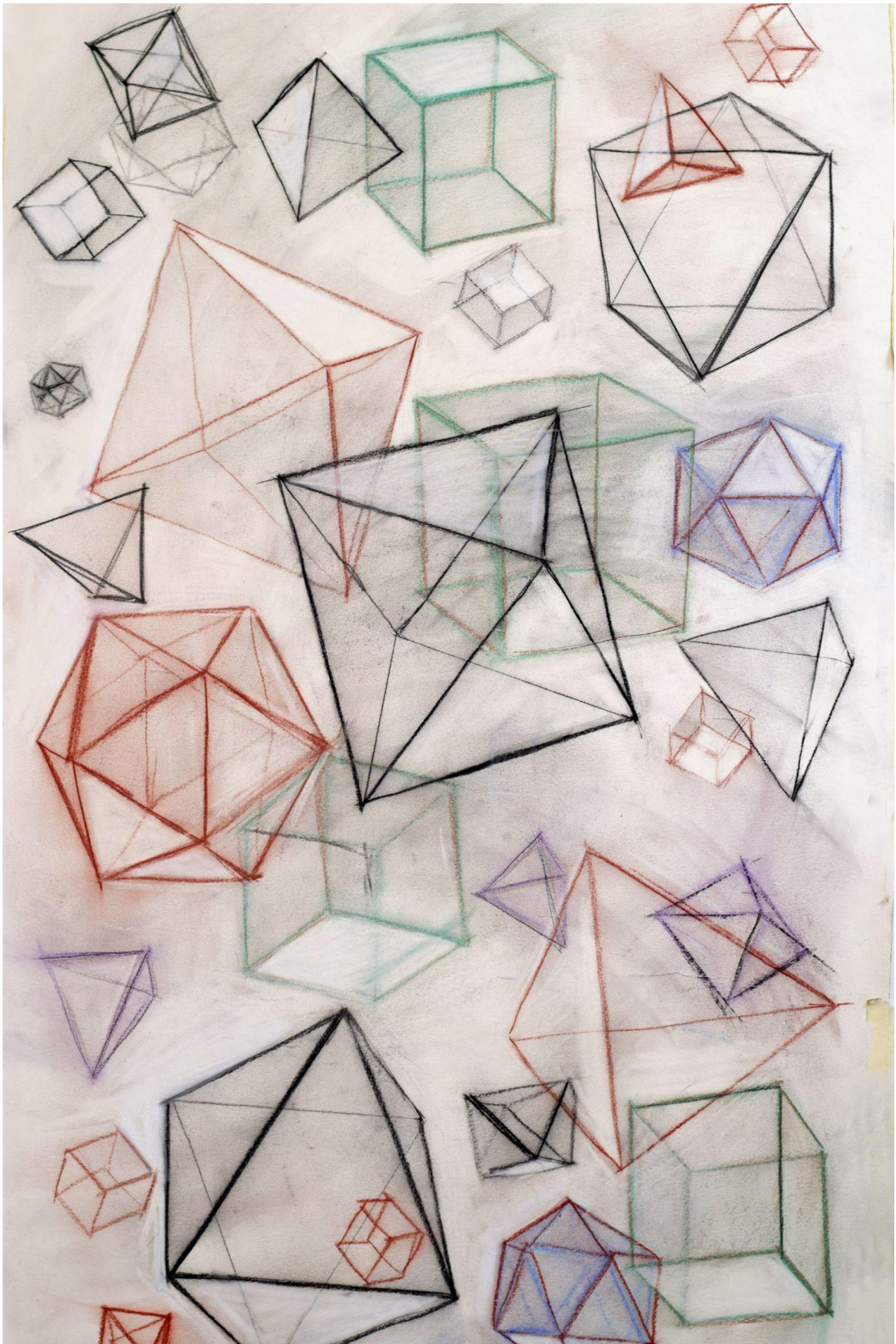


Image: Polyhedra

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Artists think with materials and with other people to create works of art and design, drawing meaning from the qualities of lived experiences, in order to imagine and invent novel objects and events. For artists who teach, an experiment or demonstration in the classroom can turn into a new direction in the studio; an artist's personal passions can give rise to engaging learning experiences; observing a student's joy in exploring new materials and techniques can reignite excitement and curiosity about art-making in her teacher.

The studio and the classroom both provide spaces for thought, for making and doing, and for the imagination to flourish. For noticing. They are spaces where, in the best of times, ideas and observations flow freely. Within their walls, we think with and through materials, see the world as it is and imagine how it could be otherwise.

What ways of thinking does art-making reveal and release? Art-making can give form to thoughts and feelings that cannot readily be put into words. Thinking through materials and with our hands and bodies, we observe, discover and invent, cultivating knowledge and understandings otherwise out of reach. This exhibition explores the ways of thinking that art practice makes possible. Underlying the variety of the artworks is a palpable delight in working with materials and ideas that mirrors the mutual give and take of student and teacher.

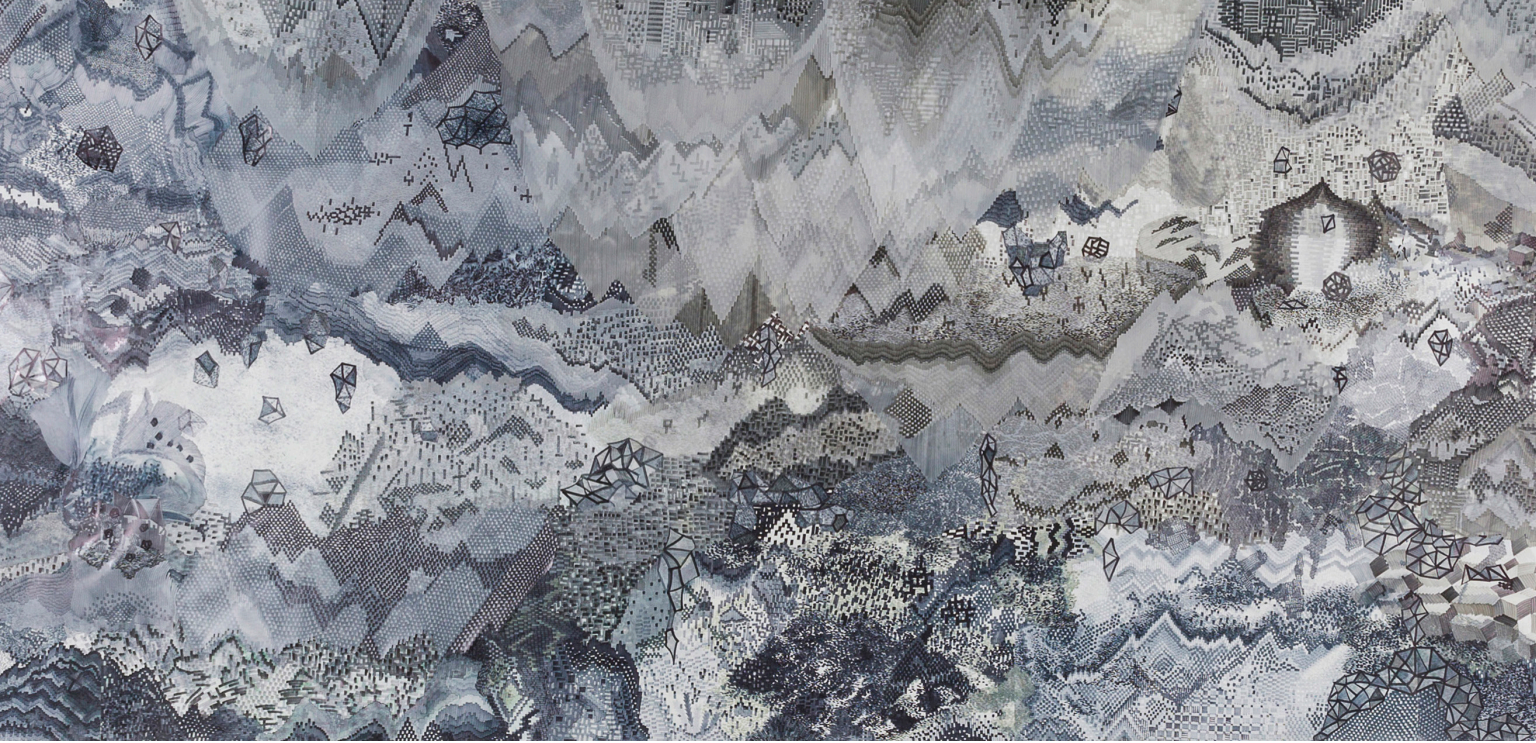


Image: In the Shadow

**KIGIN
YANG**

“What I can draw” can be far richer and more specific than “What I know.” This is the primary premise for my creation. This idea enables me to expand my experience beyond rationalistic and commonsensical thinking. By drawing without any concrete goal, I can deeply focus on the process of drawing itself and this makes me explore and discover unexpected elements in my work.

This drawing attitude has affected not only interest in organic abstract forms, but also the way they are drawn. On the one hand, I am fascinated by the visual form of objects which imply irregular organic growth. On the other hand, for me, drawing is not just a means to an end but the end itself. My drawings are carried out in an unformatted and unpredictable manner through chance, openness, and variability, which makes the relationship between individual features keep changing.

By watching this process of an object being assimilated into another, I have come to regard drawing as an accident that continues to grow and change, rather than having a single fixed message. I work under the assumption that this kind of unstructured drawing can reveal or extend new meanings: the process of drawing becomes a continual path of discovery. My drawing style is not a well-organized garden, but a dense wild forest. It is difficult to know the beginning and the end, and various factors are grown together. The drawn images are combined with other drawings in accordance with the flow of the image, and gradually become a single image. In the newly formed relationship, I find another world at the beginning, which leads to the next piece, and the aforementioned process is repeated continuously.

SAVANNAH
NIELSON



Image: Mending Memory

Self-reflection is possible through many versions of art-making. The viewer and the maker can experience similar or vastly different interpretations with emotional and physical responses. My art practice allows me to evaluate and process my connections to those who are close to me. In an increasingly vulnerable and unprecedented time, I along with others have found it challenging to connect with people. This leaves us and our memories of what was seemingly mundane and feels increasingly unattainable. The body of work I have been developing is a tribute to my loved ones and my personal efforts to reconnect and heal. My work is a therapeutic, ritualistic practice that makes me feel less alone while providing growth. My work creates a space that encourages reflection and allows the audience to relish nostalgia for one's past. While the work embodies my individual experiences, it breaks the barrier between the personal unconscious and invites its viewers to seek recollections of their own special moments in time.

My art practice references my understanding of memory and how I perceive intimate connections and personal experiences as time passes. Using traditional and contemporary textile-making in combination with photography,

my work visually represents the concept of memory fading. My personal history is layered into the patterns, fibers, and photographs of each piece. The openness of the material visually depicts what it feels like to have your memory fleeting. The bits and pieces of the image that are dropped through the negative space of the substrate reference the loss of information as time passes and the bleeding images mimic how memories blend together, making moments difficult to differentiate. My work attempts to create a feeling of familiar nostalgia and perhaps a bit of melancholy that the viewer can connect to their own fleeting memories.

**EVELYN
OLVERA**

As a Latina multi-media artist based in Los Angeles, my most recent work was created in response to the housing crisis, gentrification, and climate change. I have limited influence or control over these issues as a single citizen; however, dedicating my art practice to these topics has helped me uncover the dire consequences many people are facing directly and indirectly. Having been raised in the Coachella Valley and later move to Los Angeles at the age of eighteen, I noticed the drastic changes that once defined Los Angeles and how these changes affect the suburbs and exurbs of Los Angeles.

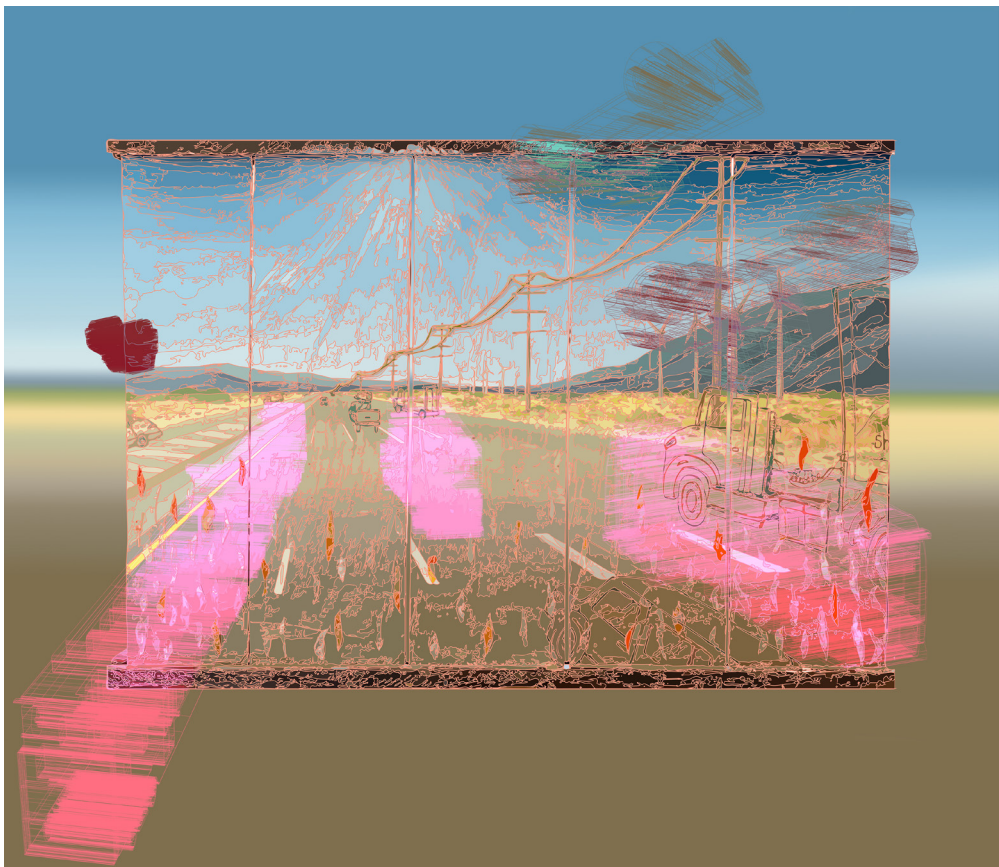


Image: Burning Exurbia

My work is created to catalog what these landscapes were like for me and how I experienced them. When I make art, I think of my unique environment, how it impacts me and my community, and what it could be in lieu of what we have been dealt. My way of thinking is fixated on making sense of the generational poverty many low-income families are unable to escape. Ultimately, the wealth gap is widening and low-income families in Los Angeles are being priced out of their neighborhoods due to a housing shortage, are forced to move to the exurbs, and must face the extreme effects of climate change.

My work is multilayered, employing drawing, painting, and digital media, as dissecting my environments and alternating it has led me to accept that the landscape is forever changing. Having lived in Los Angeles where the housing crisis has resulted in inflated home prices, it is easy to feel that my frustration with the lack of affordable housing is overlooked and dismissed. Painting the consequences of low-density housing at a large scale makes it harder for people to ignore and, hopefully, address.

**CAROLINA
ROJAS**

My art practice aims to explore and display discoveries by drawing in the fashion of scientific field studies and natural history illustration. This type of depiction is a universal means of communication that frees knowledge from language barriers. Biological sciences have been closely linked to this type of illustration because drawing is a fundamental pillar in morphological descriptions and serves as an essential guide to species, their study, and conservation. Collaborating with the natural sciences and practicing drawing of species significantly improves one's drawing abilities, observation, and representational skills. Furthermore, these interdisciplinary connections inform my art practice to create a critical dialogue about our relationship with nature.

I create visual installations that resemble natural history collections and cabinets of curiosities and situate them within contemporary cultural contexts. These assemblages are composed of scientific drawings and taxidermies embedded in vitrines. I propose a spin on traditional scientific illustration that arises from staging death. I depict bird skins preserved in ornithological collections for scientific studies; some are even labeled. They are literally skins filled with cotton that allow the types of benchmarking exercises necessary to identify life in taxonomic terms. The spin I am referring to is precisely in showing spectators the character of a practice that consists of collecting animals, sacrificing them, and taking them to a collection where other relations take place. Therefore, what was once a bird becomes a specimen that science has drawn from anonymity into the world of humans. In each of my drawings, taxidermies, and installations, I want spectators to think about the animal perishing, the scientist's work, and the fine line that separates life and death. The power of my drawings is aligned with emotions and demands that we think about how we relate to nonhuman animals.

Image: Mourning Birds





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