

Observed
Ratios

Shoshana
Dentz

Caitlin
Masley

Seher
Shah

Exhibition
and
Programs

Sep 5	Aneta Szylak
Sep 24	Katherine Carl Shoshana Dentz Caitlin Masley Seher Shah
Sep 27	Esther Allen Susan Bernofsky Peter Cole Jason Grunebaum Christi A. Merrill Richard Sieburth Rosanna Warren Eliot Weinberger
Oct 2	John Mollenkopf Stephen Zacks
Oct 10	Claire Bishop Rimini Protokoll

Observed Ratios
Shoshana Dentz
Caitlin Masley
Seher Shah

The James Gallery
The Center for the Humanities
The Graduate Center, CUNY

365 Fifth Avenue at 35th Street
New York, NY 10016

centerforthehumanities.org/james-gallery

Free and Open to the Public
Tue to Thur, 12-7pm
Fri and Sat, 12-6pm

Aug 14–Oct 19, 2013

Sep 5
Exhibition Reception

Exhibition

Debates about representation, metaphor and the status of objects ignited by modernism more than a century ago are still very much alive in an array of forms and artistic processes that could not have been predicted at the start of the modern era. In particular, modernist ideas about observation, part of a larger reconsideration of scientific and humanistic principles, have undergone rigorous questioning by phenomenologists, feminists, and critics in visual and data studies. *Observed Ratios* brings together contemporary New York artists Shoshana Dentz, Caitlin Masley, and Seher Shah whose precise observation of movement of line, form and proportion in space are steeped in modernist notions. However, their engagement with modernist forms and visual vocabulary are inflected with their own individual histories and interests to produce invigorated and updated responses to modern inquiries. These artists' methods grow out of drawing and work on paper but extend to sculpture, painting, installation, and photography. Mark-making in dialogue with structures and systems are prevalent throughout the oeuvres of these artists.

Caitlin Masley's wall painting and sculptural installation *Symmetric Tectonics*² (*ode to patch dynamics*) made specifically for the James, uncovers basic forms in modernist architectural and urban schemes that she reports from skewed perspectives, continuing her longstanding visual and spatial examination of modern architecture across the globe. Here she consciously takes the house of the artists in Zagreb, Croatia, as her point of departure. Her dynamic process—sometimes slow and other times spontaneous—of removing as well as applying layers of iconic gold paint in a process akin to print-making, echoes the layers of history which make up this modern circular building. Created by sculptor Ivan Mestrovic in 1938 as an artists' guild, it became a mosque in 1941 and a museum of the revolution in 1945, before being returned to the artists again in 1990. The building is situated at the center of radial axes leading to the city center and

to the old town, with its Christian cathedral. With the rapid political and economic changes in Eastern Europe starting in the 1990s, the unresolved and turbulent legacy of urban transformation and repurposing that was prevalent throughout the modern era in Europe was exposed, along with a need for new definitions of modernism.

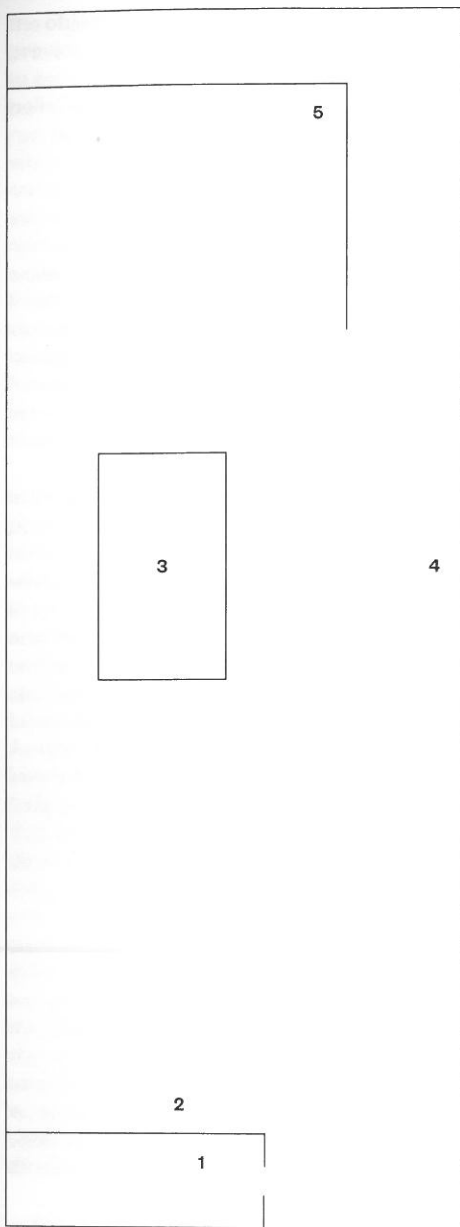
Seher Shah proposes visual adaptations to urban forms on macro and micro levels by working with scale and proportion, two elements of spatial language that modernism weighed in on heavily. In her photographs *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape Proposals* black linear shapes that can be read as massive anonymous structures are inserted coolly in aerial views of landscapes. Referencing utopian modernist projects that have been rejected subsequently (by some) as brutal and inhumane or that have become collaged commentaries by architects—including Superstudio in the late 1960s—the photographs create a dizzying instability of ground. The boundary between man-made forms, the landscape, and the artist's manipulation becomes uncertain. In one project, Shah may represent brutalist modernist building, and in another, move on to investigate geometry and ornament with a fluid, intricate line. There is a strong interplay between line and space, drawing and structure in her sculptural and photographic installations. Both are informed by her drawings of architecture, which in turn unfurl out into space—becoming an installation of up to ten feet of graphite on paper or framed sequentially like a photograph. Trained as an architect, Shah is particularly sensitive to sequence and timing, seen in the lyrical procession of miniaturized skyscraper forms in her *Object Repetition (line to distance)*.

Likewise, Dentz's practice is exacting. She employs direct and sustained observation in her process to investigate the visual and bodily relation to the volume of enclosures and containers. Shoshana Dentz's head-sized paintings in the series *Within without*, are very precise drawings of a space of indeterminate size and form. Moving beyond fascination with the process, attention shifts to meditation on

the object itself. Although the works seem to provide all the data that is needed in order to ascertain what is being presented, the thing being observed constantly elides accurate representation. It is impossible to grasp from which angle the artist is creating the work, and in what relation we are standing or looking into the space she creates, therefore confounding usual markers of distance and scale, and even more profoundly volume. Modernist in means, Dentz wrangles with illusion to question how enclosures of any type—bodily, man-made or geographic—physically function and create meaning when presented in their bare form without ideology to back them up.

In the exhibition *Observed Ratios*, whether positioned inside or outside at eye level, hovering above something much larger or smaller than oneself, or enveloped in relation to an indeterminate perspective, the artists' and the viewers' attention becomes focused on the act of looking in real space. Such spontaneous and inhabited attentiveness takes on new meaning. What are the stakes of Austro-Hungarian city planning being turned inside out in Masley's *Symmetric Tectonics*² (*ode to patch dynamics*) or of an enclosure that instead of being bounded, has more to do with a Mobius strip, as in Dentz's *Within without* series. Similarly, Shah's playful scaling and arrangement of monoliths also reveal the possibilities and problematics of seemingly stable, planned forms. Although Dentz, Shah and Masley do not wholly reject metaphor, the object—more precisely the contingent object—is primary. *Observed Ratios* brings together three artists who are ensconced in modern concerns and propose new spatial conundrums with objects that we can walk through, hover over, and look at, head on.

—Katherine Carl



Exhibition Checklist

1. Shoshana Dentz
Within without 16, 2010-12
 Oil wax pencil on canvas
 9 x 12 inches
 Courtesy of the artist

2. Caitlin Masley
Symmetric Tectonics² (ode to patch dynamics), 2013
 Site-specific installation
 Pigment acrylics, spray paint, and whiteout
 with hand-cut foamcore
 Courtesy of the artist and Lu Magnus

3. Seher Shah
Object Repetition (line to distance), 2013
 1000 cast hydrocal objects with ink
 Dimensions variable
 Courtesy of the artist

4. Seher Shah
Mammoth: Aerial Landscape Proposals, 2012
 Photographs by Randhir Singh
 21 Archival digital prints
 17 1/2 x 13 1/2 inches each
 Courtesy of the artist

5. Shoshana Dentz
 All courtesy of the artist

Within without 24, 2011
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 12 inches

Within without II 02, 2011
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 12 inches

Within without 16, 2010-12
 Pencil on paper
 9 1/2 x 12 1/4

Within without 25, 2011
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 12 inches

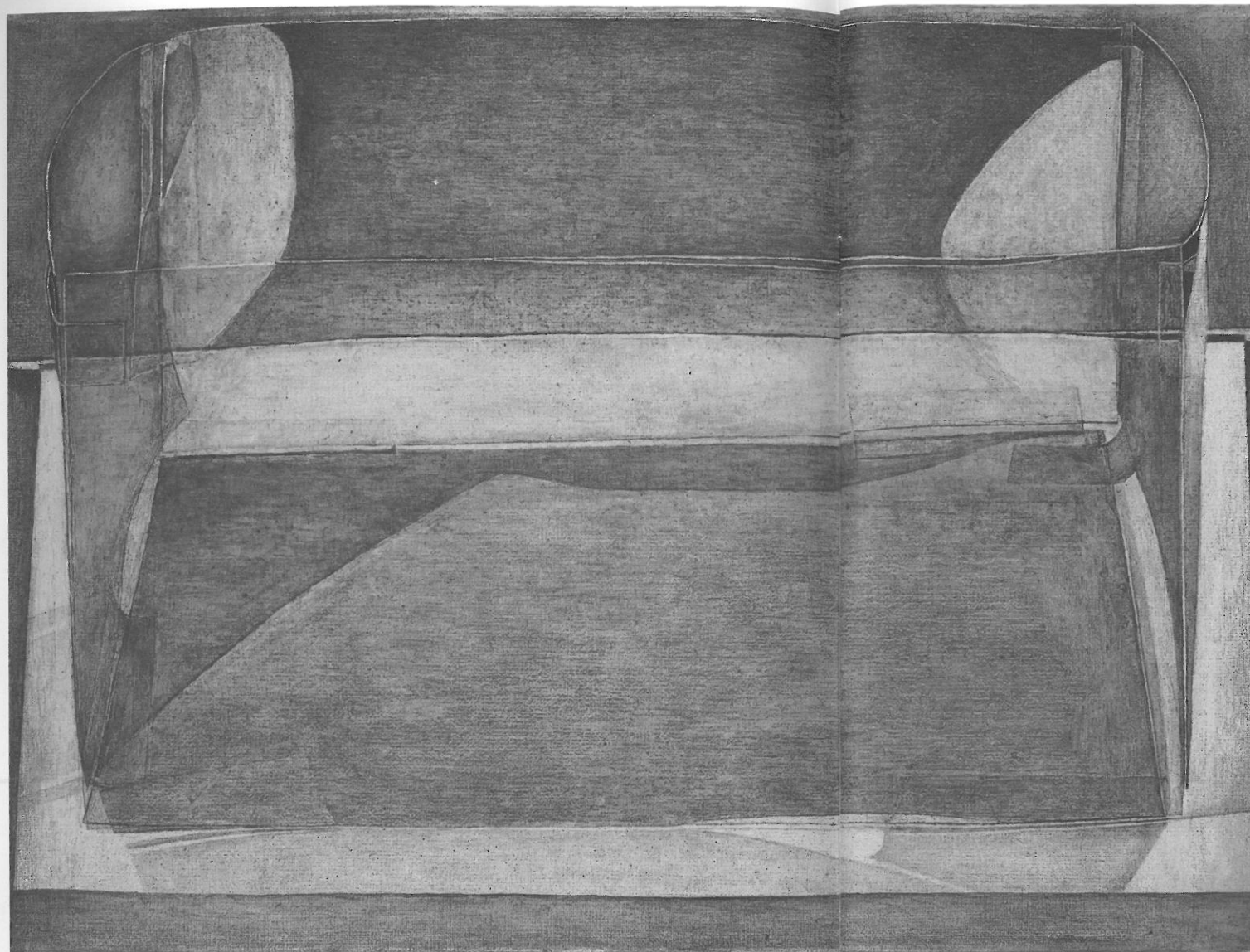
Within without III 01, 2012
 Pencil on paper
 9 1/2 x 12 1/4

Within without II 03, 2011
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 12 inches

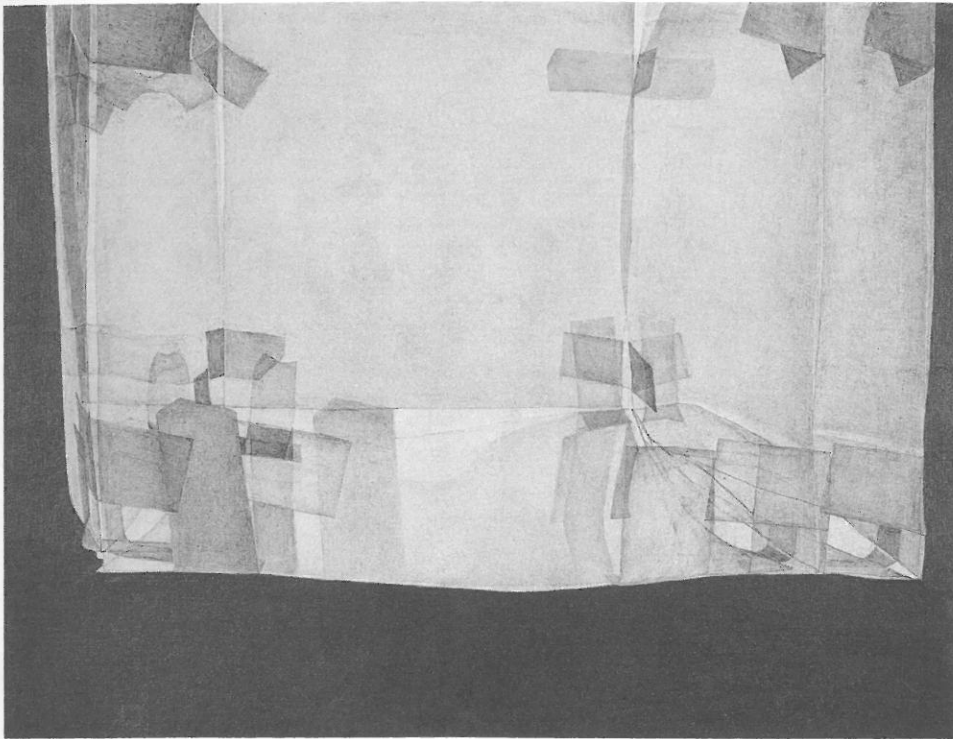
Within without II 01, 2011
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 9 inches

Within without IV 02, 2013
 Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas
 12 x 12 inches

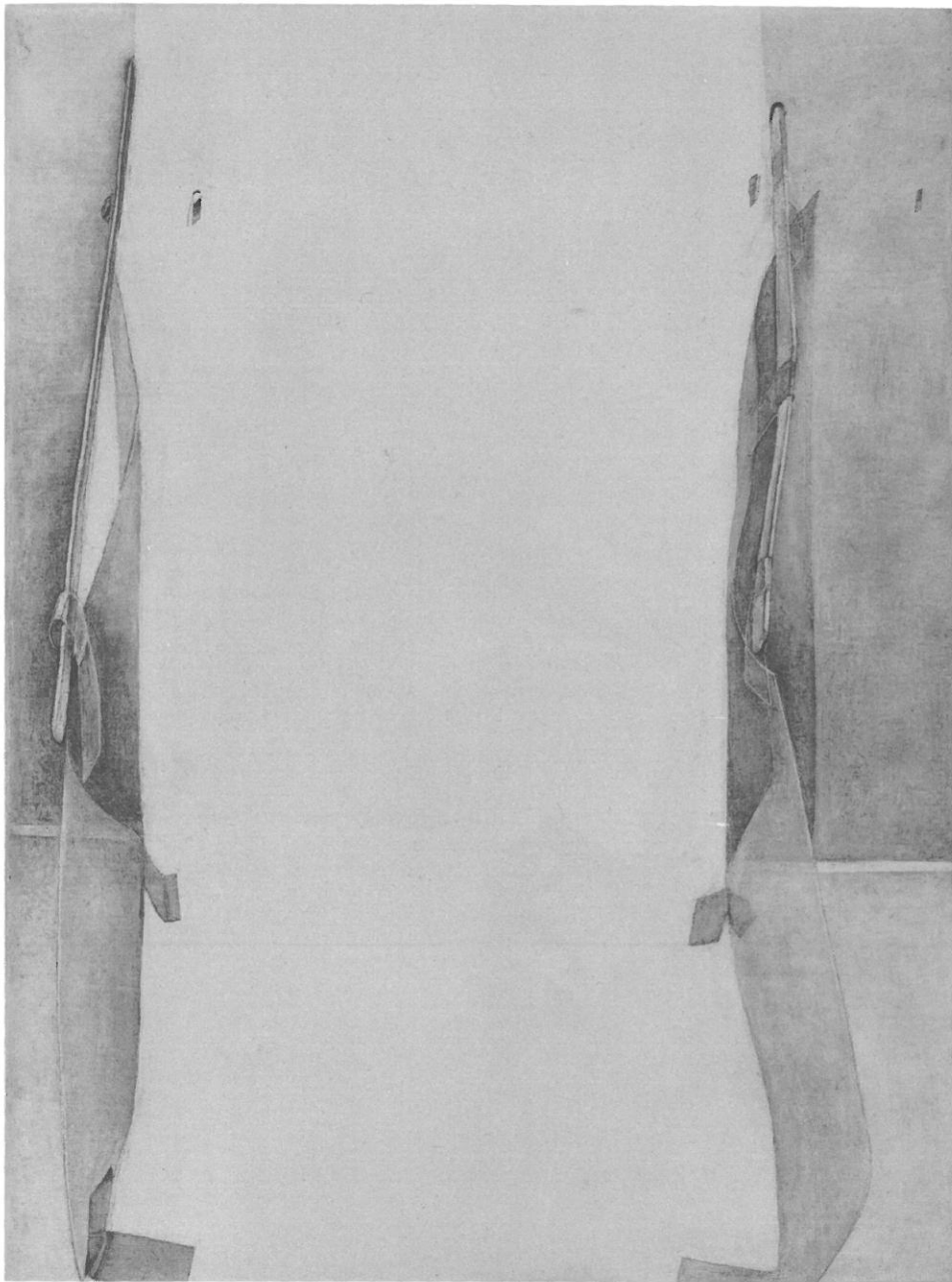
Within without III 04, 2013
 Pencil on paper
 9 1/2 x 12 1/4



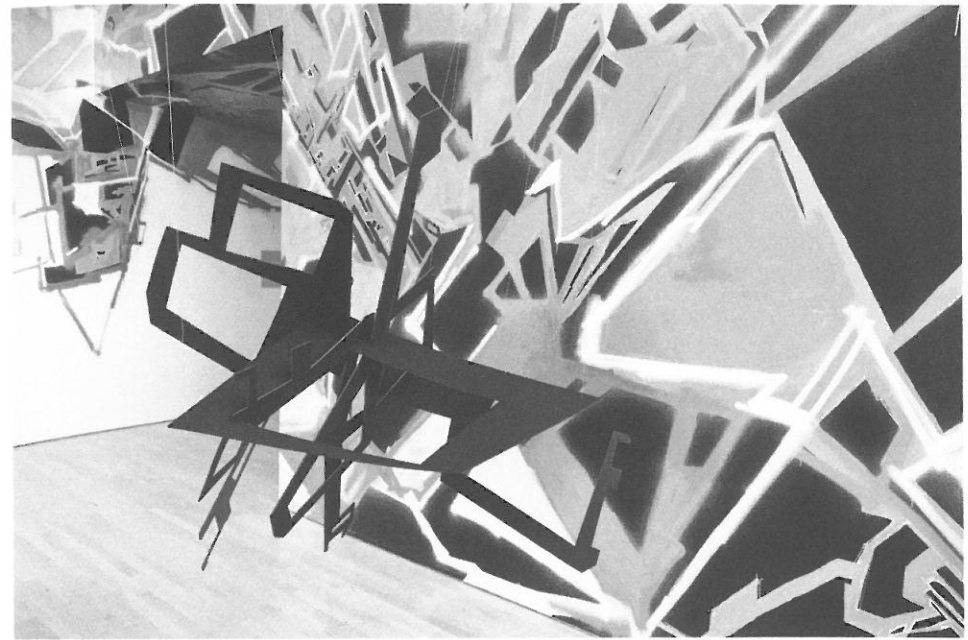
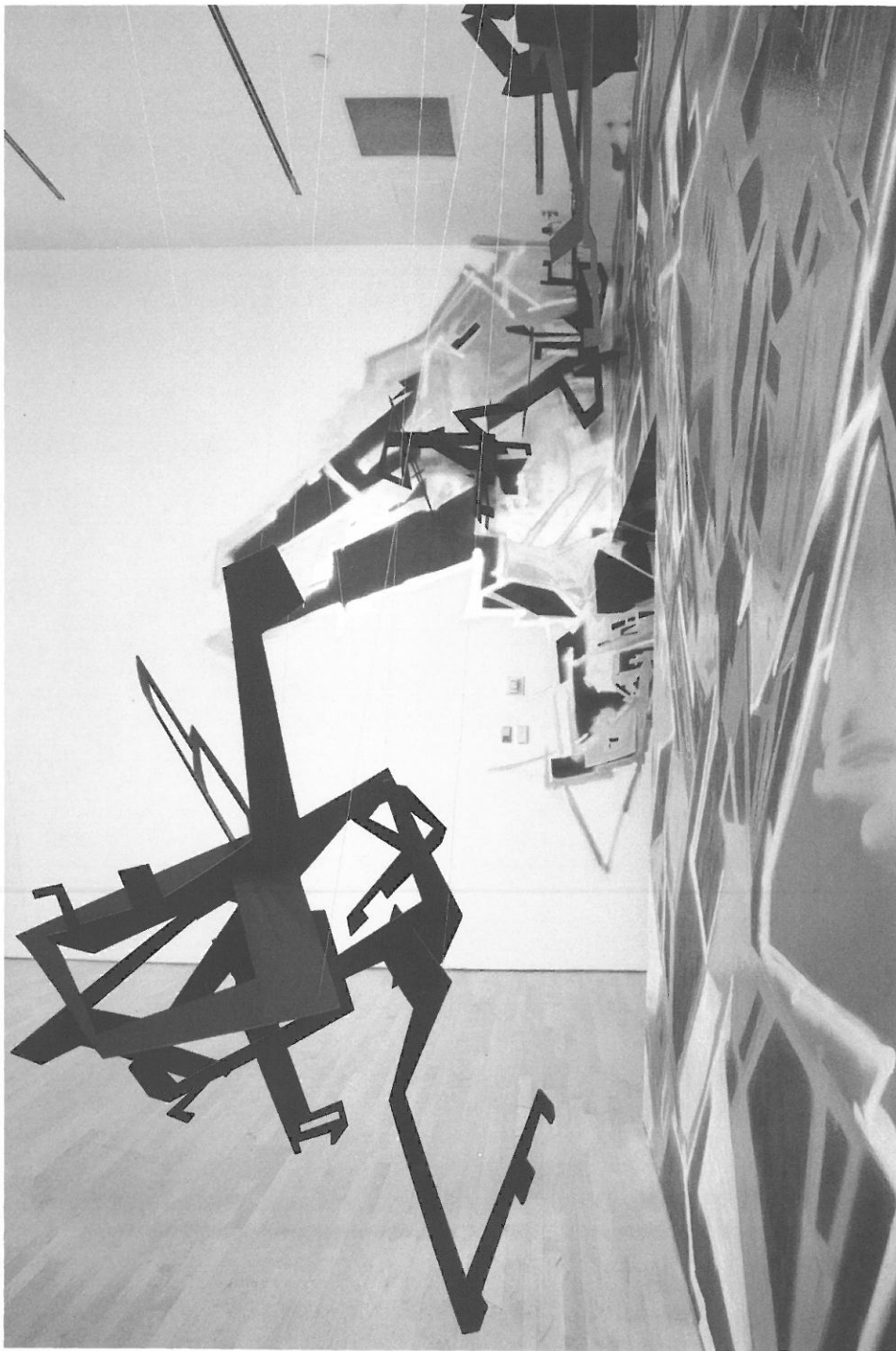
Shoshana Dentz, *Within without 16*, 2010–12. Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas.
Photo: Frank Oudeman.



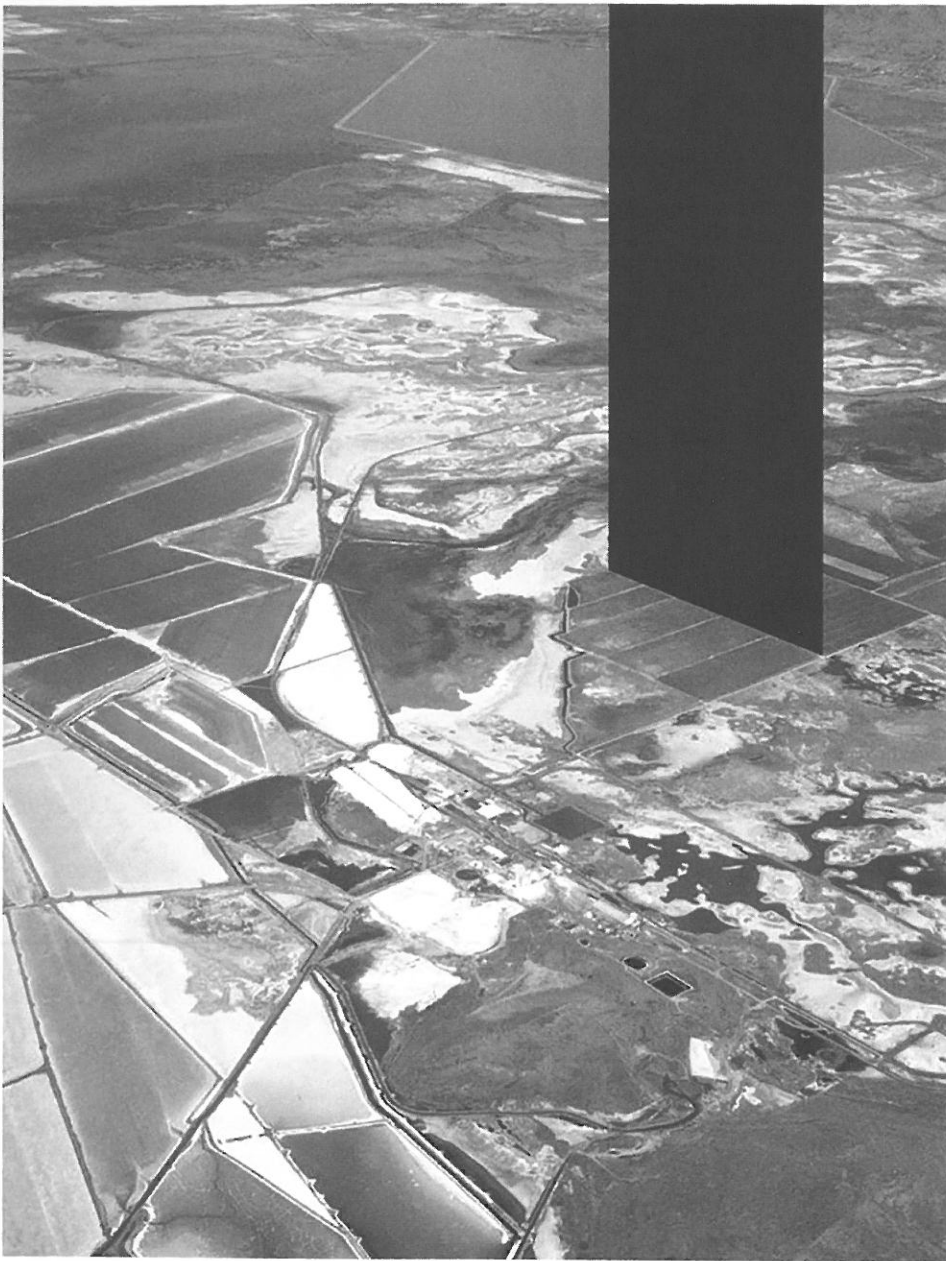
Shoshana Dentz, *Within without III 04*, 2013. Pencil on paper. Photo: Frank Oudeman.



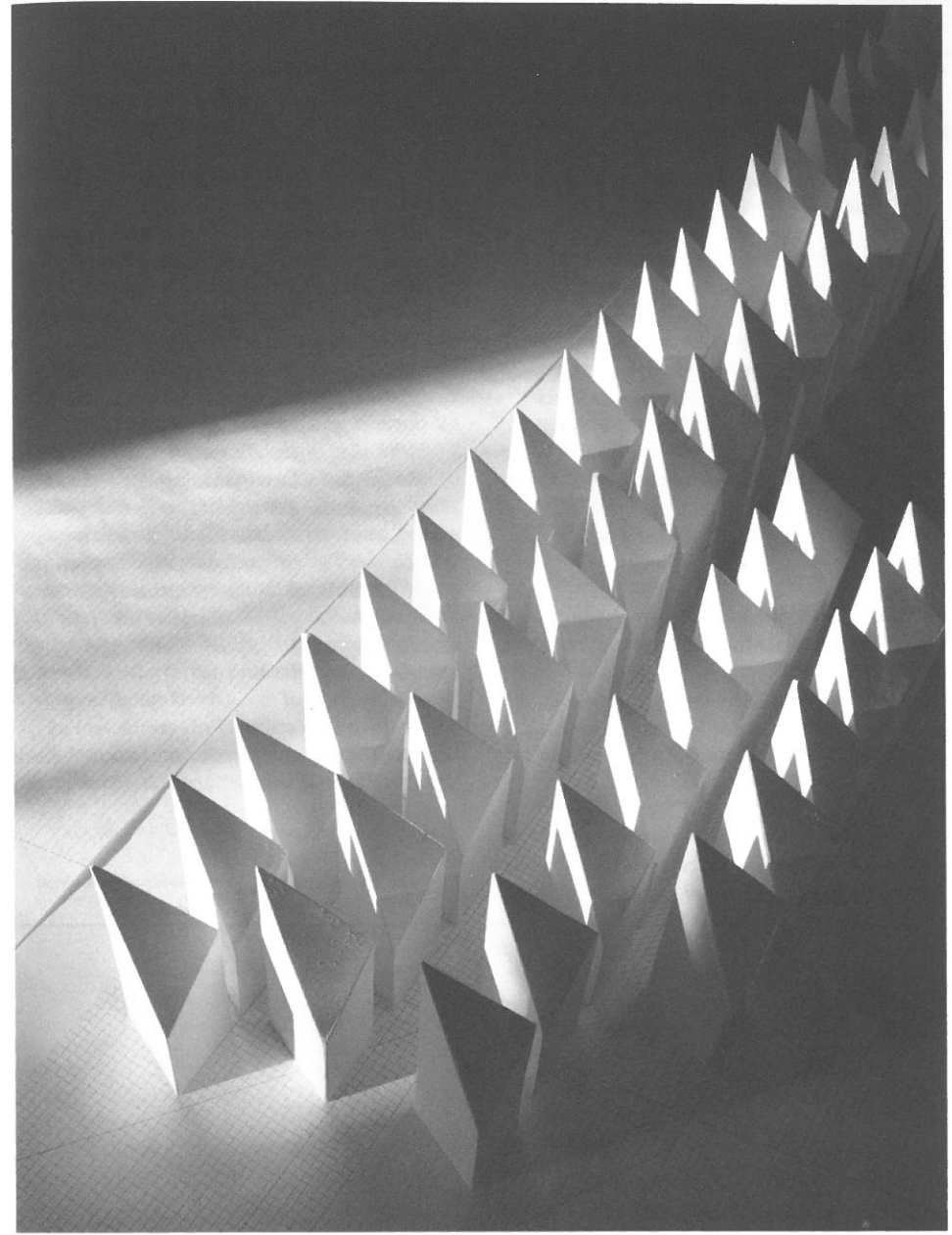
Shoshana Dentz, *Within without II 01*, 2011. Oil, wax, and pencil on canvas. Photo: Frank Oudeman.



Caitlin Masley, *Symmetric Tectonics² (ode to patch dynamics)*, 2013. Site-specific installation, The James Gallery. Pigment acrylics, spray paint, and whiteout with hand-cut foamcore. Photo: Carrie Kinsella.



Seher Shah, *Mammoth: Aerial Landscape Proposals*, 2012. Photographs by Randhir Singh.



Seher Shah, *Object Repetition (line to distance)*, 2013. 1000 cast hydrocal objects with ink. Photo: Randhir Singh.

Thurs Sept 5, 7pm
 Conversation
 Curator's Perspective: Aneta Szylak

Aneta Szylak, curator.

In Poland and across Eastern Europe in the 1990s and 2000s, factories and other post-industrial icons of the former economic and social structures were being repurposed into sites for contemporary art. What is the dual impact today of this type of critical social and spatial practice in art making as well as in formulating new communal cultural institutions? Join Curator Aneta Szylak for an examination of these issues through her curatorial projects of site-specific art in massive disused architectural complexes in Poland. She forged new cultural institutions out of spatial fragments of the legacy of communist labor and with this made room for new types of critical political and large-scale artworks as founder of Laznia (Bathhouse) Centre for Contemporary Art (1998–2001) and later in 2004 as founder and current Director of Wyspa Institute of Art in the Gdansk Shipyard. She is currently a PhD candidate at Goldsmiths College, London and Copenhagen Doctoral School, Copenhagen University.

Martin E. Segal Theatre

Cosponsored by Independent Curators International.

Tues Sept 24, 6:30pm
 Conversation
Observed Ratios: Exhibition Panel

Shoshana Dentz, artist; Caitlin Masley, artist; Seher Shah, artist. Moderator: Katherine Carl, curator.

How do “traditional” art-making processes of observation and proportion continue to play a role in contemporary art after modernism? Particularly in work related to geometries of enclosure and spatial relationships of objects—on the intimate human scale of the hand to the page and the macro scale of the structures of cities these questions become entangled with social and political resonances. Continuing the James Gallery’s investigations in contemporary perspectives on modernism, artists Shoshana Dentz, Caitlin Masley, and Seher Shah whose work is on view in the current exhibition *Observed Ratios* will be in conversation with James Gallery curator Katherine Carl.

The James Gallery

Fri Sept 27, 3:30–6:15pm
 Symposium
 What Translation Means

Mysticism and Translation (3:30–4:45 pm)
Peter Cole, writer; Richard Sieburth, translator; Rosanna Warren, writer.
 Moderator: Susan Bernofsky, translator.

What makes mystical texts mystical, and what happens when they are transported to a new language and cultural context? Translators of the Kaballah (Cole), Nostradamus (Sieburth) and Jewish Catholic mystic Max Jacob (Warren) discuss the challenges and paradoxes of translating these complex bodies of thought and the mysticism inherent in the act of translation.

5:00–6:15pm
 India, In Other Words

Christi A. Merrill, South Asian Literature and Postcolonial Theory, University of Michigan; Jason Grunebaum, translator; Eliot Weinberger, essayist. Moderator: Esther Allen, Department of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, Baruch College, CUNY.

What forces make contemporary Indian literature written in English so globally prominent, while the literatures of the nation’s other languages remain obscure and largely untranslated? These translators and aficionados of Indian literature discuss the particular obstacles faced by its translators and the challenges of translating work from and for such a spectacularly multilingual context.

The James Gallery

Cosponsored by Walls and Bridges, the New York Institute for the Humanities, and Amazon.com.

Wed Oct 2, 6:30pm
Conversation
FreeCities

Stephen Zacks, writer; John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, The Graduate Center, CUNY. Moderator: Katherine Carl, curator.

What are the ingredients that generate success in urban centers in the United States today? How can the terms of this success be defined and measured? Rather than impose a formula, how can the civic and cultural life of places in transition like Flint, Michigan or Greenpoint, Brooklyn, be acknowledged statistically so that small positive change can leverage larger effects? Join a conversation between writer and producer Stephen Zacks who founded the Flint Public Art Project in Flint Michigan three years ago and is currently writing a book on the art scene in the Lower East Side in the 1970s and John Mollenkopf Distinguished Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the Graduate Center, and has written extensively on urban politics, urban policy, immigration, and New York City.

The James Gallery

Cosponsored by the Flint Public Art Project and the Center for Urban Research, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Mon Oct 7, 3pm and 6:30pm
Screening and Conversation
Reality + Fiction: Berlin's Rimini Protokoll

Rimini Protokoll, theater group; Claire Bishop, PhD Program in Art History. Moderator: Frank Hentschker, Martin E. Segal Theatre Center.

When people tell their own stories on stage, where are the boundaries between theater, reality, documentary, participation, and fiction? Berlin-based theater group Rimini Protokoll creates participatory and documentary theater experiences that explore topics such as Egyptian muezzin resisting the consolidation of their profession (*Radio Muezzin*), Athenians grappling with the Greek economic crisis (*Prometheus in Athensand*), and jet-setting children of corporate executives who feel most at home while in transit (*Airport Kids*). An afternoon screening of recent major works (*Wahl Kampf Wallenstein*, *Prometheus in Athens*, the 100% series) will be followed by an evening conversation, moderated by Frank Hentschker, between the artists of Rimini Protokoll and noted participatory performance scholar Claire Bishop.

Martin E. Segal Theatre

Cosponsored by the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center.

Shoshana Dentz has received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant (2006), a Fellowship in Drawing from New York Foundation for the Arts (2005) and held artist residencies at Art OMI (2005) and Lower East Side Printshop (2004). Her drawing has been presented at White Columns, Rhode Island School of Design, The Jewish Museum, and the Weatherspoon Museum, and Dentz created site-specific painting installations at The Drawing Center, The Center for Fine Arts at Wesleyan University, and The Rubin Museum of Art.

Caitlin Masley received a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant (2007), and has held a number of artist residencies at Abrons Art Center (2009), Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Swing Space (2007) and Socrates Sculpture Park (2002), and across Europe. Her work has been presented at MoMA/PS1, Vox Populi in Philadelphia, Center for Built Environment, Storefront for Art and Architecture, and Islip Art Museum and international non-profit organizations in Austria, Croatia, and Israel.

Seher Shah was an artist in residence at Headlands in 2010. Her work has been shown at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell University, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, The Drawing Room, and Victoria and Albert Museum. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum of Art, Devi Art Foundation, the Progressive Art collection, and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation.

Special thanks to Lauren Miller, Mary Rynasko and Carrie Kinsella at Lu Magnus, Jennifer Dennis, Girlie Giagucas, Karen Jernigan, Aurica Kastner, Jamie Lai, Alexander R. Prosser, Meena Sajwani, Katie Simpson-Spain, Huong Sutliff, Cristina Tafuri, Catherine Tapia, Natalia Vega-Forero, Colleen Watkins, Frank Ouderman, Randhir Singh, Joshua Schwartz, Kyle Lanning Smith, Vincent Brigante and the Engineering staff, Charles Scott and the Facilities staff, Ray Ring, Chris Lowery, and Jennifer Wilkinson.

The Amie and Tony James Gallery catalyzes research and knowledge production in contemporary art, and joins the Center for the Humanities' mission to create dialogue across disciplines. Located in midtown Manhattan at the nexus of the academy, contemporary art, and the city, the James Gallery brings a range of pertinent discourses into the exhibition space through innovative formats. While some exhibitions will remain on view for extended contemplation, other activities, such as performances, workshops, reading groups, roundtable discussions, salons, screenings will have a short duration. As a space for interdisciplinary artistic and discursive activities, the gallery works with scholars, students, artists and the public to explore working methods that may lie outside usual disciplinary practices.

The Center for the Humanities at The Graduate Center, CUNY, was founded in 1993 as a forum for people who take ideas seriously inside and outside the academy. Through its public programs, seminars, conferences, publications and exhibitions, the Center puts CUNY students and faculty from various disciplines into dialogue with each other as well as with prominent journalists, artists, and civic leaders to promote the humanities and foster intellectual community across the city.

The Graduate Center, CUNY, defines the standard of contemporary graduate education: rigorous academic training and globally significant research. It is recognized for outstanding scholarship across the humanities, sciences, and social sciences, and is integral to the intellectual and cultural vitality of New York City. Through its extensive public programs, the Graduate Center hosts a wide range of events—lectures, conferences, book discussions, art exhibitions, concerts, and dance and theatre—that enrich and inform. Finally, the accomplished and diverse student body exhibits an intellectual curiosity that enhances the learning experience for both faculty and students. At the heart of the Graduate Center's mission is knowledge creation. gc.cuny.edu

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Gallery**

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