

# The Solace of Captivity

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*The eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages.* Virginia Woolf

*By breaking logical perspectives I create illusions of impossible spaces, non-places or Utopias that shift the viewpoint to the panoptic. The all-perceiving viewer is suddenly graced with the ability to see above and below, to look upon and into all at the same time.* Yulia Pinkusevich

In *Captive II (Sandra the Orangutan)*, an early drawing within a group of black and white drawings called *The Captive Series*, Yulia Pinkusevich develops a narrative of containment. The hegemonic geometry she creates refers to both physical and psychological captivity, and, subsequently to space as construction and embodiment. Light and dark battle against each other and recede to a shadowy presence, which is both a presence and the lack of one. In a similar way, these drawings give a sense of the artist placing herself within the construction and yet removing herself from it in the same gesture.

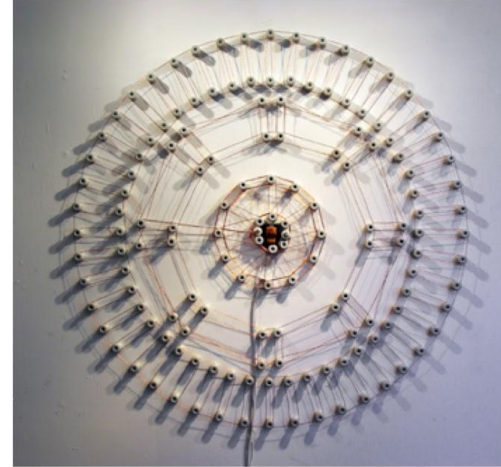
The act of mark making becomes a way to lift Pinkusevich out of the very construction she places herself in. This tension corresponds not only within the architectural composition of the drawing but in its tonal composition.

Pinkusevich uses beeswax and charcoal on paper to add greater depth to the color, giving a translucent luminosity to the black that belies its suggestion of blockage. This black conveys both captivity and immensity, giving it temporal and spatial dimensions. It construes a narrative of its own in addition to the figure that is captured within it. The eternal gaze of the captive figure animates the charged space, evoking a drama that plays out in certain questions: is it the figure or the viewer who is captive? Are we looking or being looked at? The opaque, amorphous figure stands against a starkly demarcated white line that intersects the receding black space and the picture plane, providing an extra dimension to the dark. In this image, white simultaneously delineates encapsulation and articulation of the space whilst black is used to express a more psychodynamic configuration. The juxtaposition

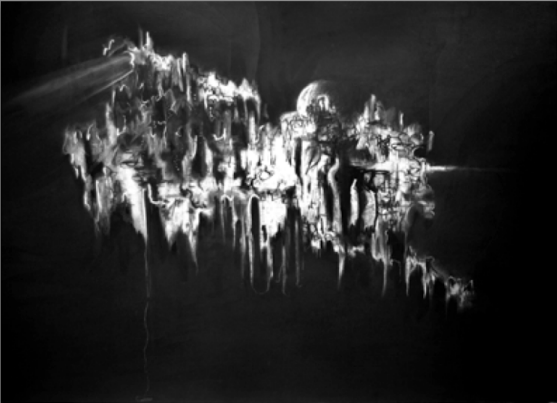
of each presents us with frames within a frame, alluding to the power of the refracted line as a transgressive gesture that disembodies the constructed narratives of space and presence in this image. Captivity for Pinkusevich is a complex and dynamic interrelationship of potential architectures, perspectives and narratives that slowly evolve and dissolve into each other.

The disembodied presence of the captive becomes embodied through the presence of the viewer in *Sentiment of an Invisible Omniscience (Electrified Wall Drawing)*. The work is a physical incarnation of Jeremy Bentham's classic eighteenth-century totalitarian panoptic structure of a spheroid prison, designed to perpetually see and be seen. Pinkusevich transposes its aerial plan rather than its actual structure into an electrified wall drawing. There is a play on the concept of drawing here: the work is both a three dimensional object that encompasses its complete architectural enclosure, but also a drawing that is a quotation of an architectural plan. It is Pinkusevich's addition of an electrical charge, however, weaving into the work like a living thread, that invests it with both textual and textural currents. For these currents encode Foucault's concept of the 'unequal gaze' inherent in the panopticon and animating the work beyond its architectural enclosure. The structural geometry of the work allows us to see the panopticon in its entirety beyond the vision of the human eye, but the electric current, triggered by contact to emit a tiny shock into the toucher, implicates us in the circuit of the enclosure. We feel ourselves simultaneously empowered and captivated by the work because we are both the activators of invisible omniscience and yet merely actors within it.

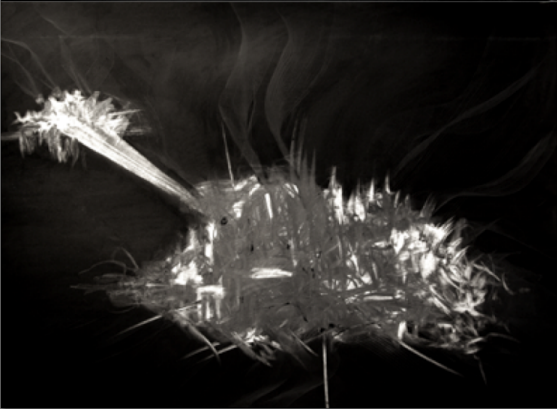
Temporal dissolution, then, occurs alongside spatial distortion. Captivity within Pinkusevich's work elides temporal stasis with perpetual movement. Color and materiality play a role in this elision. Immense blackness against white, a recurring trope within Pinkusevich's work, enfolds lines within space yet alludes to the incommensurability of measurement and motion. The line for the artist is a semiotic gesture of containment and continuation. In *Sentiment of an Invisible Omniscience*, there is no single point of origin; it is bound within itself and to itself, "always already," to invoke Althusser's description of ideology. If anything, origin begins with the viewer's contact with the work that engenders violence and contains it. The tensions of captivity infer notions of gender



*Sentiment of an Invisible Omniscience (Electrified Wall Drawing)* 2011. Copper wire, ceramic insulators, electric fence charger. 49 x 49 x 1.5 in.



Left: *Gravity Free Modular City (Island 2)*, 2012. Charcoal on paper 16 x 20 in.



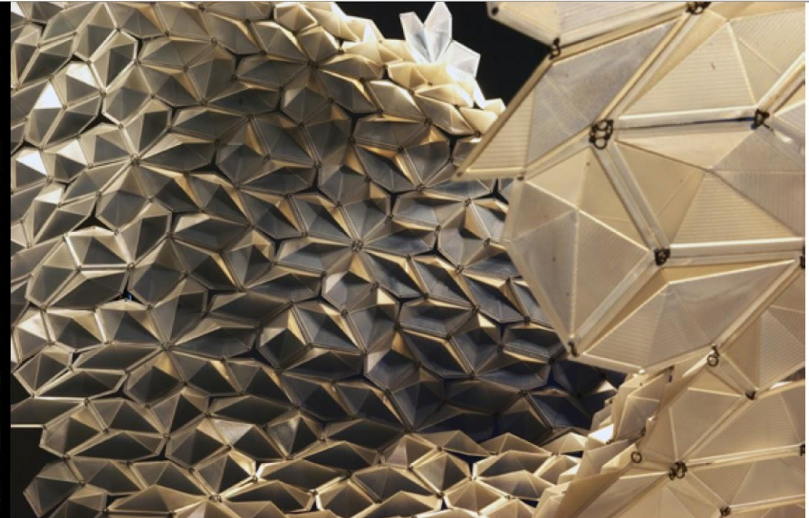
Left: *Gravity Free Modular City (Island 3)*, 2012. Charcoal and graphite on paper 16 x 20 in.



Right: *Gravity Free Modular City (Island 1)*, 2012. Charcoal on paper, 16 x 20 in.



*Untitled (Frag)*, 2011, Oil stick and chalk on polycarbonate, 12 x 24 in.



*Polyscope*, Detail, 2012, Recycled polypropylene, aluminum rings, dc motor, 168 x 216 in.

and sublimated sexuality within this work. Electricity as a tactile experience induces both pain and pleasure; when coupled with power and violence, it exerts a gendered code of masculinity into the installation. Yet if the masculine drive is to exert will and desire, then the all-encompassing geometric circle is a sign of subsumed yet omnipresent femininity. Texture and tactility play against each other so that the explicit dichotomies at work – black and white, hard and soft, male and female and crucially, time and space as different modes of beings – are deconstructed and reconstructed so that optical perspective and spatial experience reference the ontological.

The re-inscription of being is evident in Pinkusevich's large-scale installation, *Polyscape*. The work is a reconstituted polymorphous "ecoscape" and a type of breathing cyber-organism that undulates in sonic waves activated by human breath. Pinkusevich remodels recycled plastic polypropylene (the plastic used for everyday "disposable" items such as drinking cups, bags and bottles). Employing the same industrial process to refashion interlocking pentagonal tiles, she hand sews the pieces into a translucent, flower-like lattice. These interwoven forms become an enveloping "living" material, what Pinkusevich calls a "three-dimensional, tessellated, poly-fabric." The installation is suspended above the viewer, with monofilament cables attached to a direct-current motor, which causes the fabric to move. The motor is linked to a fiber-optic input sensor that measures the rotations of a small pinwheel engineered to respond to human breath. While the sonic waves mimic the movement of water, the sound of the motor completes the kinetic experience.

The dichotomies present in the previous works dissipate through the process

of *Polyscape's* inception and production. Its material construction collapses the focus on the graphic line and cubic constructions of *The Captive Series*. The pentagonal, three-dimensional petals of the recycled plastic forms signify liberation from geometric linearity and recuperation within it. In reconstituting forms and material outside the norms of architectural vernacular, and giving them sound and motion, Pinkusevich deconstructs the panoptic dystopia of other works via *Polyscape*. If the invisible omniscience of the electric wall drawing has liberated itself through form and matter, there is a visible prescience of liberation and reclamation in this work.

Pinkusevich's work delineates the psychological architecture of interiority that is reclaimed by the multi-perspectival and transubstantiative possibilities of sculpture. Such psychology contains within it a mimetic desire for the materiality of mass-production. Nonetheless there remains the autonomy of the artist who handcrafts a tapestry of her own awareness and capacity to create exterior spaces. *Polyscape* is both the inward manifestation of material captivity that subverts its own material origin whilst offering the possibility of reconfigured architectural and psychological vernaculars. The sublimated masculine drive to control by touch and vision is recast as feminine recreation and procreation. The breathy, sonic movement of the poly-fabric is a sensual and organic cooption of reductive and synthetic constructions. If *Sentiment of an Invisible Omniscience* presents human interaction that draws endlessly into and of itself, then *Polyscape* is an intuitive exploration of alternative visibilities that revokes human containment into an utopia of coexistence and mutual interdependence with the material world. Temporal dislocations have been

replaced by the iteration of the wave. A mode of seeing has become an awareness of being.

A series of drawings titled *Gravity* *Free Modular Islands* accompanies and reinforces *Polyscape*. The linearity, tonal and psychological composition of *The Captive Series* comes full circle in *Gravity* to be displaced by floating "non-places," undefined and unconstrained by geometric perspective or reiterated articulations of chiaroscuro patterns. The color black becomes a marker of spatial possibility rather than containment. The drawings take on the attitude of sculpture through a focus on depth and the illusion of tonal recession. As the word 'Islands' implies in the title, this is an exercise in free-form habitation and perspective. Pinkusevich denies architectural regularity and matter itself in the concept of negating gravity as a spatial construct in her drawings. In unchaining her images from the great chain of being, spatial and aesthetic possibilities are conflated as well as liberated from, in a Newtonian sense form and matter – the very constituents of material and aesthetic space. For Pinkusevich, "utopia is an idea, a non-place like these islands, which float within proximity to one another without exchange of resources, inhabitants or without ever touching the ground...a heavenly prison, the perfect control of regulated freedom." The articulation of form and matter as aesthetic containment is an oxymoronic concept for Pinkusevich. Control and freedom from control, space, and non-place as an embodiment of ideas attest to the containment and inevitable exploration of Pinkusevich's own aesthetic forms and sculptural practice. Captivity is a site of potential threat and refuge providing endless permutations of spatial and narrative possibilities.



*Captive III (Sandra the Orangutan)*, 2007.  
Charcoal and beeswax on paper, 33 x 25"