

JANAKI LENNIE & MONA MARSHALL

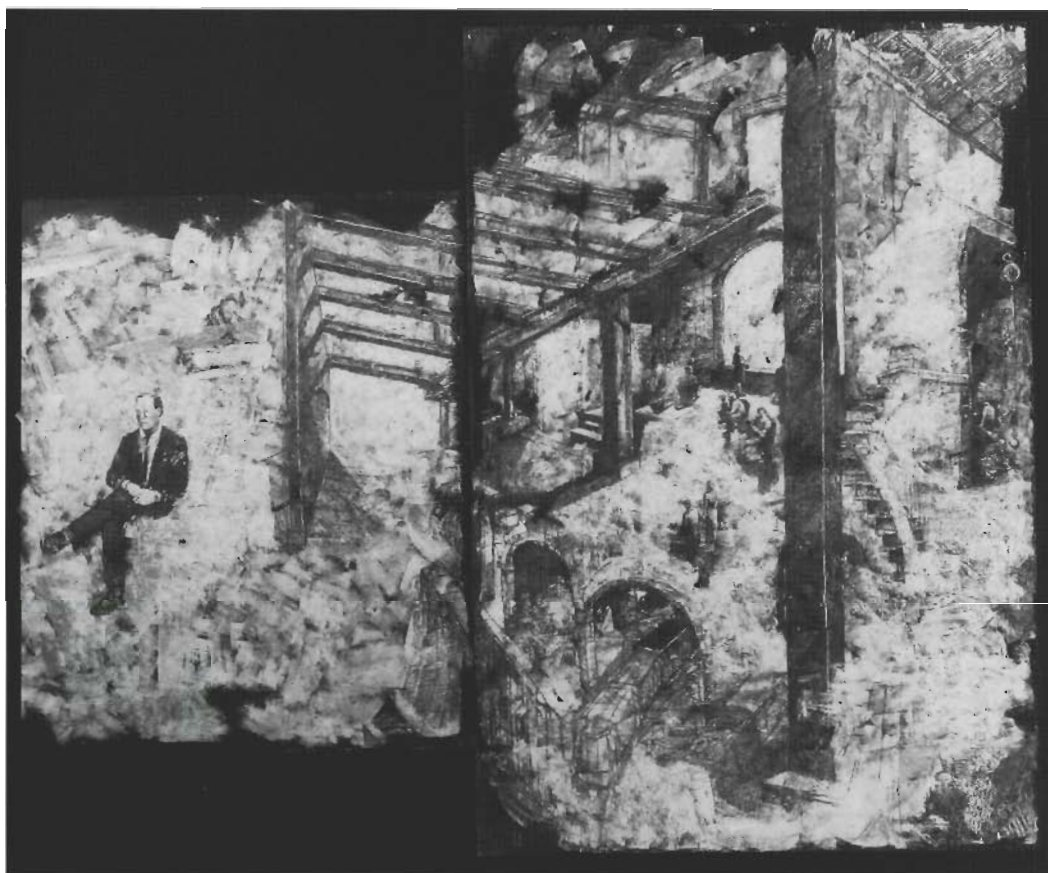
LINE OF SIGHT



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 2 - NOVEMBER 8, 2003

AUSTIN, TEXAS



Mona Marshall. *Point of Entry, The Station*. 2003, Encaustic on paper. 73" x 116"

MONA MARSHALL
&
JANAKI LENNIE
LINE OF SIGHT

The spaces Mona Marshall invokes in her large encaustic drawings, *Point of Entry* are vast interiors populated by sometimes-large casts of characters. Their vaguely period dress suggests the 1930's or 40's. Janaki Lennie evokes the human presence in her graphite drawings by the barest possible means, careful tiny strokes that place her figures in enigmatic open spaces titled *Future Conditional*. Her drawings are as spare as Marshall's are filled. And this is as far down the path of compare and contrast as I intend to go. Neither the gallery nor the artists have conceived of this as a collaborative project, although I feel certain

that once these two equally sophisticated and very different bodies of work appear together, the dialog circumstance imposes on the work will be exciting to listen in on.

MONA MARSHALL
POINT OF ENTRY

You know what it is like to wake up in a strange room. Disorientation gives way if not to familiarity then at least to acceptance of what you find. Soon it's all right that a doorway leads to a closet and not the bathroom, and that the window opens onto a city street and not your own backyard. It is a fleeting experience, quickly forgotten as you get up and begin your day.

Mona Marshall's *Point of Entry* drawings heighten and sustain that experience. These

are spacious works, usually 72 x 60 inches with one two panel work twice that in width, and white or lightly tinted encaustic against a black ground gives the drawings a strong physical presence. Marshall has a theatrical vision and the rooms she depicts are like grand stage settings with an unsettling mix of the familiar and the strange, or of the familiar behaving strangely. The architecture is grand and sometimes oppressive. Wide stairways lead nowhere, vertiginous spiraling staircases serve no apparent purpose. An incongruous baroque dome, complete with foreshortened putti, occupies the upper right of a drawing that elsewhere contains the dreariest office imaginable. The boundaries between interior and exterior are fluid, as though many of these occupied structures might still be under construction.

The light is abundant, but its frequently multiple sources within a single drawing further disorients the viewer. When it



Mona Marshall. *Point of Entry, The Station* (Detail). 2003, Encaustic on paper. 73" x 116"

floods through the waiting room windows of a beautiful old train station, you get the sense that the people waiting there may be there for eternity.

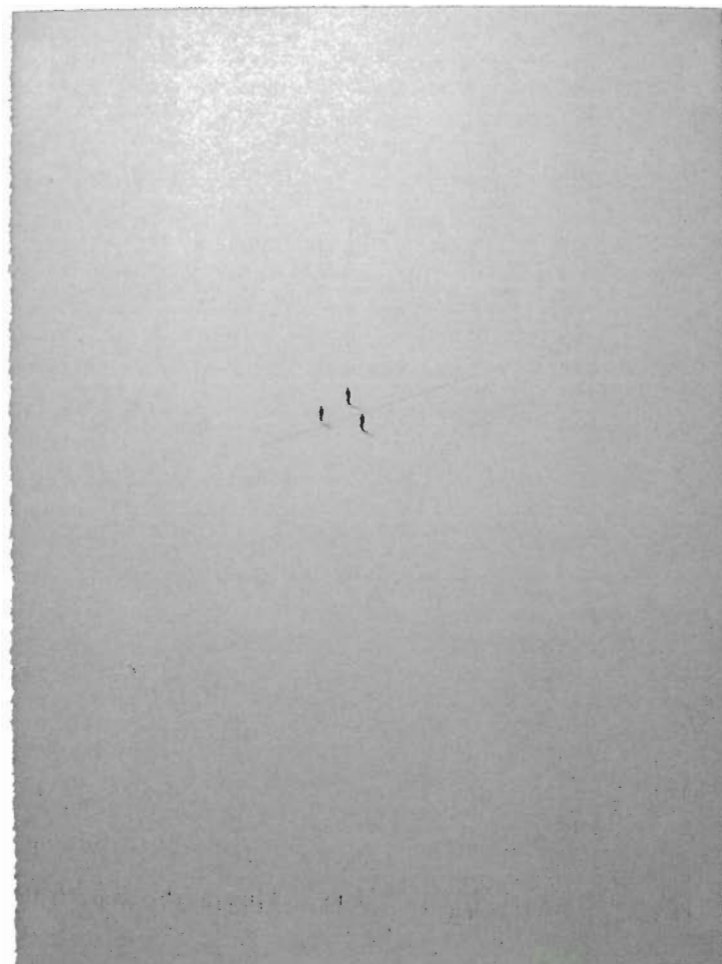
Waiting is a major activity in Marshall's drawings. Waiting and what sometimes appears to be conspiring. The two activities are carried on by two distinct types of people. The waiters are just everyday folks, waiting for a train, idling in a hallway, or pausing in their work. Marshall identified one vaguely familiar figure as the usher from an Edward Hopper painting, but she seldom quotes so specifically from art historical sources. Her subtle use of period distances the images and encourages a kind of voyeurism. Marshall knows that people like to look, and she gives us not only the figures but many nooks and crannies to explore.

The dark suited men Marshall depicts may not be conspiring, but they are often deep in discussion. They are seated comfortably in their own quarters, away from the waiters. In one case they are separated from the rest of the space by a pretentious tasseled rope. That drawing is titled *The Directors' Room*, further emphasizing that these men are somehow in charge. An isolated man sits away from the scene that involves the train station. It's tempting to project onto this figure the role of the architect or the dreamer who has created what we see elsewhere in the drawing.

I said earlier that Marshall had a theatrical imagination. When I saw these *Point of Entry* drawings I felt like the curtain had just gone up on a performance that would be held forever in suspense. Reflecting on her title for this series, you realize that the drawings all depict the sorts of spaces we

normally pass through rather than inhabit—waiting rooms, hallways, staircases. In *The Station* drawing, a train is leaving a tunnel. In another drawing you can see an underground garage at the end of a hallway. These are places we tend to endure rather than seek out. That is why these static performances can be so unsettling.

Recently, Marshall has removed the protagonists from her work and focused on specific types of architecture. In these 54 x 52 inch drawings, the considerable skill she has mastered in using encaustic is put to its best use. Encaustic can often produce an impressive but inert surface. Marshall applies it thinly and fluidly, using it at times almost like a wash. She draws back into it, scratching it away to reveal the dark ground of the painted paper. Her line can define the rise of an arch or the stones of a pillar, but by scratching and smearing the wax she can also produce a shimmering light. It's the light that breathes life into these three architectural studies, most triumphantly in one that depicts a view up into a primitive wooden tower. Light pours into the tower, producing a radiance that is paradoxically the waxiest, most solid element of the drawing. If the architecture in *Point of Entry* series becomes oppressive, here architecture combines with light to create a transcendent vision. This is perhaps what the characters in *Point of Entry* have been waiting for.



Janaki Lennie. *Future Conditional 22203*.
2003, Graphite on paper. 30" x 22"

JANAKI LENNIE *FUTURE CONDITIONAL*

Among the best ways of getting to know a body of work is to realize that everything you initially assumed about it was wrong. It certainly gets you thinking.

When I first saw a group of Janaki Lennie's graphite drawings with their tiny figures casting elongated shadows onto an expanse of white paper, I would have confidently described them as "men facing the setting sun." But then I remembered that a similar angle of light occurs in the early morning, so they could be facing the rising sun. And when I looked closer

I could see the surprising amount of variety she gives her less than inch-high figures. Most were clearly facing the light, but others were walking across the paper, a movement evoked by the slightest twitch of her pencil.

The economy of Lennie's drawings is impressive. Each involves no more than a handful of figures, at times there is only one. A short ruled line finds its way into some of the images. Although its presence organizes the composition – you can't help but consider each figure in relationship to it – it never settles into a representational function. It is never the horizon, or a finish line, or anything so substantial that you can imagine one of the figures standing on it. It is simply, undeniably there. Not unlike Lennie's drawings themselves.

Lennie arrives at these drawings by an exacting process of experimentation and elimination. Although she has produced many, she discards most. None of the drawings I initially saw have made the cut for this exhibition. The next drawings I saw were slightly larger, necessitating slightly larger and more defined figures, but not so large that they have acquired faces. She is also now working on gessoed boards and canvas stretched over board, in sizes both larger and smaller than the works on paper.

These drawings demand and reward close inspection. There is one more concrete fact that can be said of them. The perspective is distinctly airborne, and, as a sidebar, I'll note that Lennie is a licensed glider pilot. Having said that, from here on out, anything I could add is projection and speculation on my part, and always subject to revision. My response that the figures seemed lost and wandering is another of my certainties that has failed me. It could be that they have found one another. But there is a sparseness to the work that argues against the depiction of a joyful reunion. I can imagine at most a sort of forlorn camaraderie.

I don't know that I have ever seen a sheet of drawing paper so successfully imply a vast and barren space. Lennie herself has suggested that when they are arranged in a series of drawings on the wall, she likes to think of them as a musical score. To continue that image, the melody they note is a sad one.



Janaki Lennie. *Future Conditional 52203* (Detail).
2003, Graphite on paper. 30" x 22"

Charles Dee Mitchell
Dallas, Texas
August 2003

JANAKI LENNIE resides in Houston, TX. She has a B.A. Art Honors (First Class), Curtin University, Australia and an M.F.A. (painting) University of Houston, TX. She is currently Reviews Editor for Artlies magazine, TX. She has taught at Curtin University, Australia, University of Houston, Houston Community College, Glassell Junior School of Art Houston. She has exhibited in Texas and throughout the US and Australia.

MONA MARSHALL resides in Austin, TX. She has a B.F.A. from the University of Michigan and M.F.A., San Francisco Art Institute. Marshall has exhibited in Texas and throughout the US, and recently won first prize from Celebrating Texas Art, 2003, Houston, Texas. She has received four fellowships from The MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, N.H. in 2002, 1983, 1986, 1975 and wishes to acknowledge them for the invaluable time and space that allowed her to do much of the work for the current exhibit.



This Panel: Janaki Lennie. *Future Conditional 32203*. 2003, Graphite on paper. 30" x 22"
Cover Panel: Mona Marshall. *Point of Entry, Rock*. 2003, Encaustic on paper. 54" x 52"



Mona Marshall. *Point of Entry, The Directors' Room.*
2003, Encaustic on paper. 85" x 52"



Janaki Lennie. *Future Conditional 42203.*
2003, Graphite on paper. 30" x 22"

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Now celebrating its 25th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,708 artists in 219 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 272 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches

over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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