



# Alice Aycock's Creative Process - Two Exhibitions of Drawings Offer A Comprehensive Look

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by Pat Rogers

**DISPATCH - APRIL 20, 2013 (8:30 a.m.)**

## **WATER MILL, NY-**

Two connected exhibitions of drawings by Alice Aycock opens this week, representing the first comprehensive exploration of a vital aspect of the sculptor's creative process. "Alice Aycock Drawings: Some Stories are Worth Repeating" traces Aycock's career from 1971 to the present and highlights the major themes that have governed her artistic practice. One section is exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum. The other is presented at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University.

The exhibition at The Parrish opens on April 21 with a museum members opening held on April 20. The exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery at New York University opens on April 23. Both sections were organized by Parrish Art Museum Adjunct Curator Jonathan Fineberg, Gutgsell Professor of Art History Emeritus at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

While Aycock is best known for her large-scale installations and outdoor sculptures, her drawings reveal the full range of her ideas and sources, according to the Parrish. The two exhibitions present around 100 of her drawings.

The 55 works at the Parrish Art Museum were made from 1984 to the present. During this time period, Aycock developed an increasingly elaborate visual vocabulary, drawing upon a multitude of source. The use of some source imagery was facilitated, in part, by the use of computer programs, according to the Parrish. The Grey Art Gallery's exhibition presents drawings from 1971 to 1984. Comprised of around 48 works, they include detailed architectural drawings, sculptural maquettes and photo documentation for actual or imagined architectural projects.

"Aycock is an artist who thinks on paper," writes Terrie Sultan, director of the Parrish Art Museum, in the catalogue introduction. "Her spectacular drawings are equal parts engineering plan and science-fiction imagining. As in all of her work, fantastic narrative writings weave in and out of her images, inspiring her production of sculptural objects, drawings, and installations."

Language and architecture have informed Aycock's drawings in ever-changing imaginative ways.

At the Parrish, *The Rosetta Stone City Intersected by the Celestial Alphabet* (1985) and *The Garden of Scripts (Villandry)* (1986), shows Aycock use of architectural elements These can include

Egyptian hieroglyphics, Mesopotamian cuneiform, Native American pictographs, and Chinese and Sanskrit characters, according to an exhibition description.



*"The New and Favorite Game of the Universe And The Golden Goose Egg"* by Alice Aycock, 1987. Ink, pastel, and watercolor on paper, 102 1/8 x 60 inches. Private Collection, Richmond, Virginia. On display at the Parrish Art Museum.

Board games are another source of inspiration for the artist. *The Celestial City Game* (1988) is based on the heavenly city of Jerusalem, with snakes and ladders in a central checkerboard, surrounded by a city plan derived from an 8th-century illuminated manuscript. The deep whirlpool in the middle of *The Glass Bead Game: Circling 'Round the Ka' Ba* (1985) was inspired by a photograph of people whirling in a rapturous, hypnotic dance around Mecca's sacred site., according to the museum. Instead of the actual Ka' Ba, however, the black structure hovering above the center is a depiction of a wooden shanty the artist saw in Cairo's City of the Dead.

"Aycock's built projects and her drawings achieved new complexity in the 1990s with the advent of computer graphics programs, which enabled her to view forms from multiple perspectives, create mathematically perfect curves, generate precise construction drawings, reduce and enlarge at will, scale a piece perfectly in a site, and imagine points of view that are extraordinarily accurate," according to the museum.



*"The Glass Bead Game: Circling 'Round the Ka' Ba"* by Alice Aycock, 1985. Pencil and Pastel on paper, 57 1/2 x 83 inches. Collection of Stephen Kramarsky, New York. On display at the Parrish Art Museum.

Aycock's vocabularies in her drawing reflect the melding of diverse sources and trajectories of thought that encapsulate her conceptual ideas and reveal the formal depth found in the artworks, explains the museum. The drawings on view also demonstrate Aycock's anticipation of systems-based drawing, used by artists today, as a method of cultural speculation, the exhibition description points out.

For instance, a suite of seven drawings from 1993, *The Eaters of the Night (A Continuing Series)*, encapsulates many of Aycock's concerns. These include cities, wars, mechanical movements,

games, universe schemes, languages, and dances, according to exhibition information. The intricate drawings rendered with white ink on black paper reveal various schemes—city plans, dance steps, game configurations and mechanical movements—atop canopies of stars.

*Rock, Paper, Scissors (India '07)*, from 2012, was inspired by a visit Aycock made to the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur. Using a computer program, Aycock redrew the five-story structure repeatedly to produce a high tower of many stories that tapers to a peak. At its base, a turbine machine twists from a central axle while the structure is encircled by red and white curvilinear forms.

*From the Series Entitled "Sum Over Histories": Timescape #5 Over the Landscape of the Pacific Ocean* (2011), Aycock appropriates a topographic rendering of the Pacific Ocean floor from an old exhibition catalogue. She scanned the image into a computer and stretched it horizontally, thus distorting the image across a flat sheet which seemingly floats in space. The computer program was used again to superimpose forms that include whirlwinds and spinning tops, ribbon-like pathways doubling back and wrapping around themselves, helices and circular blades, and other complex forms.

According to Fineberg, "This is the crux of Aycock's work: peregrinations through unpredictable networks of meaning, in many directions at once, into the breathtaking landscape of a place you've never been before."



From the Series Entitled, "*Sum Over Histories*": "*Timescape #5 Over the Landscape of the Pacific Ocean*" by Alice Aycock, 2011. Inkjet print and hand-painted watercolor on paper, 47 x 64 inches. Collection of the artist, courtesy Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin. On display at the Parrish Art Museum.

Aycock first began producing working drawings for imaginary projects in the early 1970s. At the same time, she also began making site-specific structures on an architectural scale.

The Grey Art Gallery's installation includes a broad selection of drawings from this time period. The works range from conceptual idea-making to detailed working documents for the construction of intricate and challenging monumental installations. The exhibition also presents photographic documentation of projects executed before 1984.

Some drawings depict imagined architectural constructions such as *Project for a Vertical Maze* (1975) and *Project for Five Wells Descending a Hillside* (1975). The artworks are designed to elicit a broad spectrum of emotions, ranging from comfort and security to anxiety and distress, according to the museum.



*"Project for Five Wells Descending a Hillside"* by Alice Aycock, 1975. Pencil on vellum, 21 1/2 x 37 1/2. Collection of Lauren Ewing, New York. On display at Grey Art Gallery, NYU.

In the late 1970s, language began to figure more prominently in Aycock's work, including an increasingly elaborate and allusive titles and narratives, according to the Parrish. The texts reflect the multiple sources Aycock mined for ideas. These sources included contemporary and obsolete science, philosophies and belief systems, mythology, fantastic architecture, archeology, family history, literature and clinical psychology texts-especially those dealing with the language of schizophrenia.

Several major drawings from this period are included at the Grey such as *Project Entitled: "A Shanty Town Whose Lunatic Charms..."* (*Project Entitled: "A Shanty Town Inhabited by Two Lunatics..."*), from 1978. The work depicts 36 different buildings and is accompanied by a 1,000-word "story" that mixes genres to create a faux film treatment complete with background music, characters, and action, all of which turn narrative conventions on their heads.



Detail from a project Entitled: *"A Shanty Town Whose Lunatic Charms..."* by Alice Aycock, 1978. Pencil on vellum, 96 x 42. University Museum of Contemporary Art, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Purchased with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. On display at Grey Art Gallery, NYU.

*Project Entitled "The City of the Walls: A Narrow City, A Thin City..."* (1978) is complemented by a similarly disjunctive, free-ranging text set in the Middle Ages and referencing multiple sites such as Cairo's City of the Dead; Bloomfield, Indiana; Sarajevo; and Reykjavik.

During the early 1980s, Aycock's interest intensified in machinery and mechanics and cross-bred with imaginary science of the *Ghostbusters* variety, according to the museum. A series of these works are also included at the Grey Gallery. They include *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden* (1980); *From the Series Entitled How to Catch and Manufacture Ghosts: "Collected Ghost Stories from the Workhouse"* (1980); *Rotary Lightning Express (An Apparatus for Determining the Effects of Mesmerism on Terrestrial Currents)* (1980); and *The Savage Sparkler* (1981).

Commenting on *The Miraculating Machine in the Garden*, Fineberg writes, "It is a romantic scientific apparatus, like something from an old Frankenstein movie, seemingly capable of harnessing

awesome natural forces.”



*“Three-fold Manifestation II (maquette)”* by Alice Aycock, 2009. Aluminum, 30 x 15 x 15 inches. Collection of the artist, courtesy Fredric Snitzer Gallery, Miami. On display at the Parrish Art Museum.

Aycock emerged in New York City during the 1970s after being educated at Douglass College and Hunter College. Her approach to art exemplified the ways artists radically redefined the trajectory of art during that decade, according to the Parrish.

Through her artwork and her teaching, Aycock has had a profound effect on succeeding generations of artists, according to the Parrish. Aycock has taught at the School of Visual Arts since 1991 and is currently a visiting artist at Mount Royal School of Art at Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD. In addition, Aycock was a member of the Public Design Commission of the City of New York from 2003 to 2012.

Aycock’s work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Parrish Art Museum, among many others. She has exhibited at galleries and museums throughout the world. Her permanent public art works are on display throughout the United States including New York, Washington, D.C., Nashville, Sacramento, Tampa, Dallas, Kansas City, Ann Arbor, and at the Omi International Arts Center in Ghent, NY.

A fully illustrated catalogue, featuring an interpretive essay by Jonathan Fineberg and an introduction by Parrish Art Museum Director Terrie Sultan, accompanies the exhibition. It is the first scholarly exploration of the pivotal, enormously productive role drawing has played in Aycock’s career over the course of her 40 years as a professional artist. The catalogue is published by the Parrish Art Museum and distributed by Yale University Press.

Aycock has homes in New York City and Sag Harbor.

**“Alice Aycock Drawings: Some Stories are Worth Repeating”** will travel to Santa Barbara, CA next year. Both parts of the exhibition will be on view at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and the Art, Design & Architecture Museum, UC Santa Barbara, from January 25 through April 19, 2014.

**BASIC FACTS: “Alice Aycock Drawings: Some Stories are Worth Repeating”** is being presented in two venues: The Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill and the Grey Art Gallery at New York University in New York City. The Parrish Art Museum exhibition opens this weekend (April 20 and 21). The Grey Art Gallery exhibition opens on April 23. Both shows remain on view through July 13.

**At the Parrish,** "Alice Aycock Drawings: Some Stories are Worth Repeating" has a Museum Members Opening on Saturday at 6:30 p.m. The exhibition opens to the public on Sunday. A Curator's Talk will also be held on Sunday at 11:15 a.m. The talk is sold out but a waiting list will begin at 11 a.m. The exhibition was curated by Parrish Art Museum Adjunct Curator Jonathan Fineberg.

**At the Grey Art Gallery,** the exhibition opens on April 23.

Three programs will accompany the exhibition at the Parrish.

On Sunday, April 21, at 11:15 a.m., exhibition curator Jonathan Fineberg will give an intimate talk in the exhibition galleries. Space for *The Curator's View: Jonathan Fineberg on Alice Aycock* is sold out. A waiting list begins at 11 a.m. for the 11:15 a.m. talk.

On Friday, May 17, Alice Aycock will deliver an illustrated lecture on her work from 1971 to the present at 6 p.m. in the Lichtenstein Theater of the Parrish Art Museum.

On Friday, June 28, Robert Hobbs, author of *Alice Aycock: Sculpture and Projects* (M.I.T. Press, 2005) will discuss Aycock's work at 6 p.m.

Tickets to all programs are \$10 or free for museum members, students and children. Tickets include museum admission.

The Parrish Art Museum is located at 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, NY 11976. [parrishart.org](http://parrishart.org)

The Grey Art Gallery is located at 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003. [www.nyu.edu/greyart](http://www.nyu.edu/greyart)

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