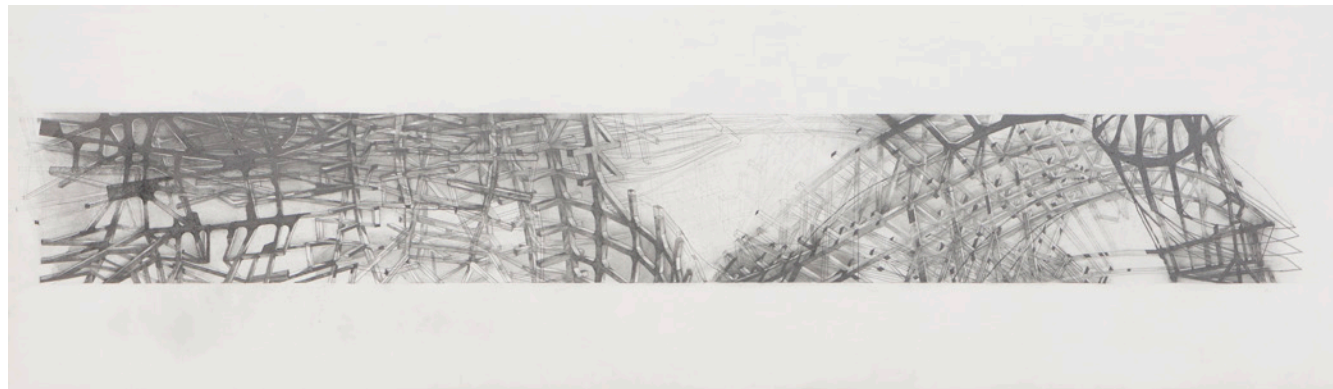
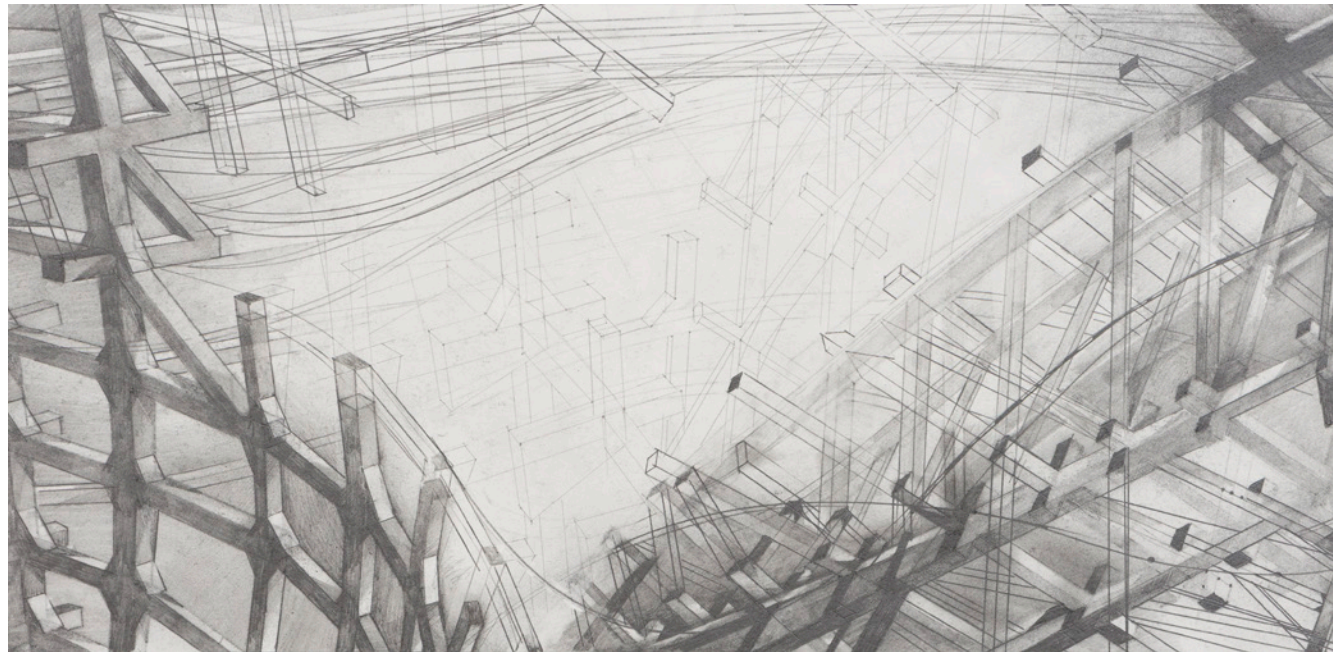


STEPHEN TALASNIK

Habitats (with detail), 2015–16
Pencil, 8 x 60 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST. PHOTO CREDIT: JEFFREY SCOTT FRENCH

JOANNE M. CLARKSON

Hemlock at Ten

for Kerry

I was never adventurous except in the drama of lives, acting out disharmonies and brash love scenarios in the four rooms of my dollhouse. You were all about limbs. So one Saturday we walked deep into the woods adjacent to our neighborhood where you knew a hemlock with branches child-wide. You ascended animal agile, your voice calling green and firm. I sighed and grasped the first handhold the exact diameter of my fist, found a stirrup for my left foot. “Only look up,” I could hear you far above. My damp hands worked the branches, opening and closing in mute speech. My red Keds found horizontal tightropes. Up and up, forfeiting thought for the thrill of lift. “Hurry up.” You had settled on a vantage just beneath the spindle, this tree taller than its brothers, and began enticing me, “I can see Jill’s backyard swings.” Jill who lived a half mile away. “I can see the cars on tenth.” The road behind the forest. “I can see the horse field.” The one we visited with clover and longing. Finally, breathless, I rested on the bony perch across from and slightly below you, wrapping my arms around the rivuleted trunk so tightly I skinned my cheek, bartering blood for pitch. We swayed. I moaned with the wind in my throat. A single cloud in the distance and echoing crows. I never did look into those backyards. It took an hour for you to talk me down. I was not afraid of dying; had no concept, then, of death. There was motion to the green spiral radiating from the tree body and I was hypnotized by the joy of falling not down but in. Once I was on the ground, the earth still spun. It was late afternoon. I never climbed again no matter how often you tempted me. But the scripts in my small rooms changed, the plastic women dancing with tall, rugged men, their embrace harsh and weightless.

Joanne M. Clarkson's fourth poetry collection, *Believing the Body*, was published in 2014 by Gribble Press. She was awarded a GAP grant from Artist Trust to complete her next full-length volume. Poems have appeared recently in *Rhino*, the *Baltimore Review* *Emrys Journal*, the *Healing Muse*, and *Fjords Review*. Joanne has master's degrees in English and library science. Her upcoming poetry book, *The Fates*, won Bright Hill Press's annual contest and will be published in spring 2017.