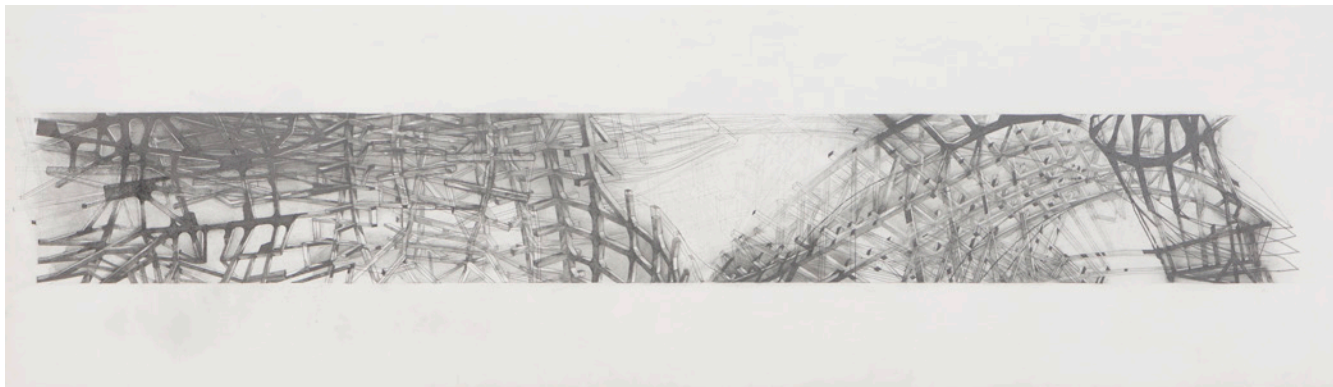
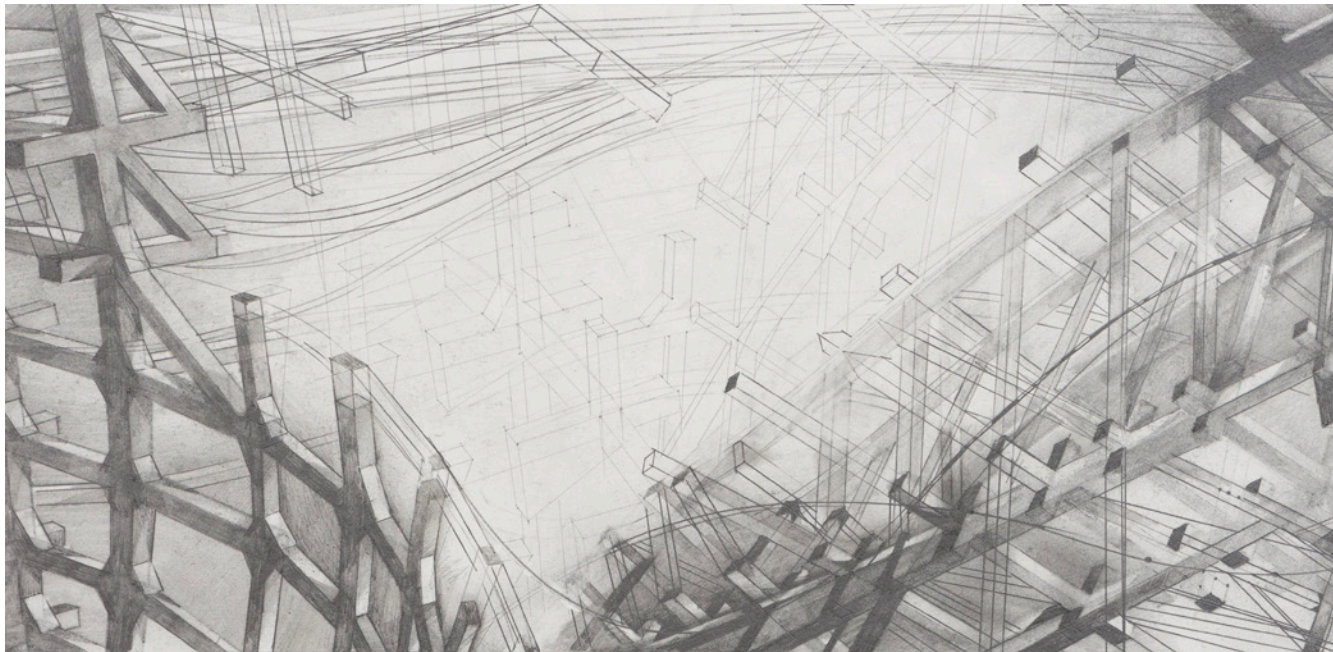


STEPHEN TALASNIK

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.