



*The Space Between Us*

**CLAUDIA PARDUCCI**





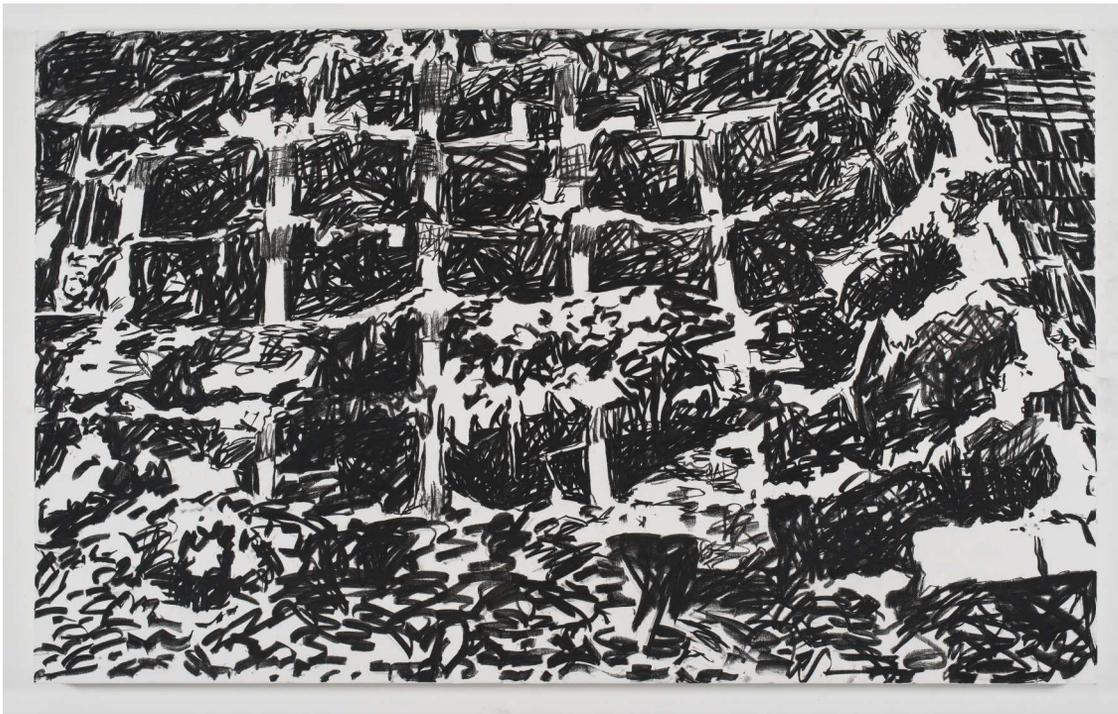


**CLAUDIA PARDUCCI**

***The Space Between Us***

**OCHI PROJECTS**

**January 16 - February 20, 2016**



*Oklahoma City 8 (B/W#9)*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 78 in

Dr Kit Messham-Muir  
The University of Newcastle, Australia

*Trauma and the Political Sublime in Claudia Parducci's The Space Between Us*

Aleppo, northern Syria, 2015: we see the back of a Kurdish soldier in a camouflage jacket and fatigues, rifle now at rest, as he looks over a landscape of porous stalagmites where once stood the city of Kobanî. Not coincidentally the image, taken by Agence France-Presse (AFP) photographer Bulent Kilic, echoes that of a robed stone figure looking down upon the decimated city of Dresden from the rooftop of the town hall, taken in late 1945. Both images acutely articulate the bitterness of Pyrrhic victory.

Distantly, but perhaps more deeply in Western cultural psyche, the figure of the Kurdish soldier in Kobanî resonates with the lone figure in Caspar David Friedrich's iconic painting, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818. The walking stick has become a rifle and the craggy peaks the shells of buildings. Painted at the height of the romanticist tradition of the sublime landscape, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* is in fact not a landscape. Its vertical 'portrait' orientation emphasizes the figure, not the background, because the presence of the lone 'wanderer' is vital to how we read the scene. He is a surrogate of the viewer, and we must 'see' this scene through his eyes to grasp it on a human scale. Without the 'wanderer', there is no sense of the power of the scene's overwhelming vastness. Likewise, the presence of the Kurdish soldier places the scale of the destruction of Kobanî on a human scale. We must see these scenes through their eyes to understand, paradoxically, the incomprehensibility of their scale.

In his discussion of war and art during the 'War on Terror', Boris Groys argues that through photographs, such as Kilic's, we experience the "political sublime."<sup>1</sup> He borrows this term from Enlightenment thinker Edmund Burke, whose work on the sublime in the eighteenth century heavily influenced Romanticist painters such as Friedrich and JMW Turner. Burke argued that, despite the human capacity for thought and for controlling our environment, confronted by the sheer power of nature we lose the ability to think or act. Artists like Friedrich and Turner attempted to capture this sense of fear in the face of the power of nature in 'sublime' landscapes, depicting blizzards at sea or storms in the Alps. However, Groys argues, Burke intended for the notion of the 'sublime' to go beyond the natural landscape and into the political: "Burke uses as an example of the sublime the public beheadings and tortures that were common in the centuries before the Enlightenment."<sup>2</sup> The political sublime thus relates to the overwhelming terror evoked from human violence.<sup>3</sup> In Kilic's image, the Kurdish soldier who looks over the rubble and semi-collapsed structures of Kobanî stands in for us. Like Friedrich's wanderer, we look over his shoulders onto the very scene that he sees. We cannot see his face, or any of the emotional cues for understanding his response, so we must adopt our own. He injects a human gaze into a scene that is depopulated and inhumane.

The images in Claudia Parducci's *The Space Between Us* are also images of the political sublime; however, there are never any human figures in them. There are no surrogate eyes to see through in the images of semi-collapsed buildings from Gaza, Beirut, Baghdad and Kirkuk, Aleppo and Zamalka. There are no first responders and rescuers in Parducci's repeated images of the bombed Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma. Yet there is a human presence of a different kind in Parducci's

images of semi-collapsed buildings.

Parducci's disarrayed grids, fractured lines, deep recesses and torn concrete function in a way similar to Max Ernst's painting of butchered buildings, *Europe After the Rain II*, 1940-1942. Ernst's painting is a post-apocalyptic landscape of hybrid fleshy and built structures, tattered and eviscerated. The panoramic painting imagines Europe after the war that, at that time, had already destroyed cities like Coventry in England. It is a premonition of Dresden, Kassel or Berlin in 1945. Parducci's images similarly condense destroyed buildings with human trauma.

The disarrayed buildings in Parducci's images are not fleshy but equally as anthropomorphic, monstrous and abject. These semi-collapsed buildings symbolically collapse spaces that are seemingly binary opposites – the protected, homely, enclosed, safe and private becomes dangerous, unhomely, exterior, vulnerable and public. These images condense the destruction of a physical structure with the annihilation of social order, of 'civilisation' itself. These are apocalyptic images. The collapse of these seemingly opposite spaces is not only symbolically abject but is visually evocative of the human body in an abject state. The violence of their brutal exposure rips apart the internal infrastructure of the building, its wiring, water and waste pipes, struts, trusses and beams. The flimsy skin of dry wall, paint and wallpaper is torn away. In the tangle of metal, concrete, wires and debris, as in Ernst's painting, its guts are exposed.

Architectural theorist William W. Braham argues there is normally an absence of an anthropomorphic face in the façade of much modern architecture. He draws on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea of 'facialisation'.<sup>4</sup> In short, Deleuze and Guattari talk about "a very special mechanism" in European culture – when someone speaks, their face becomes the intersection of systems of both subjectivity and language. The face is where what is said becomes tied to a subjective position. Zeroing-in on the significance of the face, Deleuze and Guattari strip faciality down to a visual system of "the white wall/black hole".<sup>5</sup> As Braham summarizes it, the "Identification of a face begins by associating two adjacent holes as eyes – nose and mouth are optional".<sup>6</sup> It is not uncommon to see some kind of 'face' within the façade of pre-modernist buildings – windows as eyes, perhaps a door as a mouth, in a building of one or two levels. The façade of modernist architecture, on the other hand, suppresses any anthropomorphic faciality, effacing it with sealed walls of glass rather than discrete openings, such as windows.<sup>7</sup> The visual repetition of multiple floors further suppresses the faciality of a building. Denuded of its façade, however, modernist architecture regains some aspects of its faciality. With no slickly glazed modernist skin, we see the building's internal structures, with dark recesses, similar to the eye sockets of a human skull or a gaping silent mouth. A semi-collapsed multi-story building exposes its internal grid, which Braham argues, "can play across a grid of openings, producing a monstrous multiplication of faces."<sup>8</sup> In Parducci's images of the Murrah Federal Building, stripped of its monolithic wall of glass, monstrously deranged faces are revealed.

Although the human presence in Parducci's images follows a different and more abstracted model from that of a figure overlooking a scene, these are nonetheless landscapes of the political sublime. The bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma on April 19, 1995, was a political act marking the second anniversary of the Federal Government's forceful ending of the Waco Siege. Parducci's images of destroyed buildings in Palestine, Iraq and Syria arise from even fiercer political conflicts. When a modern high-rise building is partly destroyed, we understand that the physical force required is beyond human scale.

We cannot comprehend the immeasurable power needed to lie to waste a building, or obliterate an entire city such as Kobani or Dresden. These images convey the fearful and awesome power of political violence, which reduces human lives to dust.

Parducci's repeated image of the bombed Murruh Federal Building perhaps also reveals another level for the artist. For over a year, this image – through repetition, now a generic image of destruction, loss and internal threat – has become the locus of the artist's anxieties at a difficult time.<sup>9</sup> These images of collapsed buildings possibly speak of a more subjective kind of collapse, of the collapse in time that ties us to a personal traumatic moment. In her book, *Traumascapes*, Maria Tumarkin says, "Because trauma is contained not in an event as such but in a way this event is experienced, traumascapes become much more than physical settings of tragedies: they emerge as spaces, where events are experienced and re-experienced across time."<sup>10</sup> In Parducci's repeated images, her work proposes that an image of one trauma, which marks the distance between then and now, can become a space to reconcile our own traumas and anxieties. At a broader level, America's now-perpetual foreign conflicts and, as Parducci says, the "media assault on your nervous system" that arises from them,<sup>11</sup> continue to erode the space between 'there' and 'here', and the sense of homeliness at home.

Perhaps the most disturbing visual aspect of these destroyed buildings, is that they are so unremarkable and generic. As Kobani in 2015 echoes Dresden in 1945, so do the images from Oklahoma, Iraq or Gaza. They join a growing matrix of traumascapes, with little to determine one from another. And we know that we will see more images such as these, of buildings that at this very moment stand intact, or are even yet to be built. We know that, at this very moment, people live and breathe in the apparent shelter of rooms that will, tragically and inevitably, be reduced to these same generic, crumbling recesses. And the only power we possess is to wander above this sea of fog.

## Bio

Dr Kit Messham-Muir is an art theorist, educator, researcher and critic, based in Australia and working internationally. Since 1997, he has worked in universities in Australia and Hong Kong, and is currently an art historian at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Dr Messham-Muir has won multiple awards for innovative teaching and publishes in magazines such as *Artforum* and *The Conversation*, as well as in scholarly peer-reviewed journals. He also directs the *StudioCrasher* video project. In 2015, his book *Double War: Shaun Gladwell, visual culture and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq* was published by Thames & Hudson.

1 Boris Groys, *Art Power*, (London & Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2008)

2 Groys, *Art Power*, 127.

3 Groys, *Art Power*, 127.

4 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) 167.

5 Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, 167.

6 William W Braham, "Erasing the Face: Solar Control and Shading in Post-Colonial Architecture," *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 5, 2000: 110.

7 Braham, "Erasing the Face", 110.

8 Braham, "Erasing the Face", 110.

9 Claudia Parducci quoted in 'Kit Messham-Muir: 'Claudia Parducci: The Space Between Us', 2015', *StudioCrasher*, URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3hmll8VVKU> accessed 29 December 2015.

10 Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005) 12

11 Parducci quoted in 'Kit Messham-Muir: 'Claudia Parducci: The Space Between Us', 2015'

*After Murrah*, 2016, Natural Fiber Rope, 14 x 6 x 7 ft, Installation View







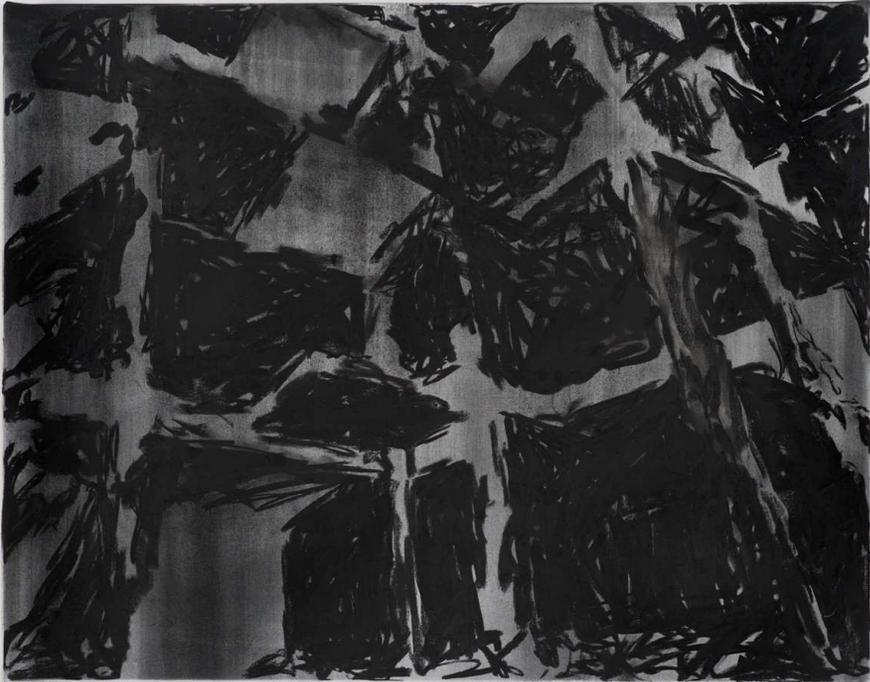
*After Murrell* (Detail), 2016



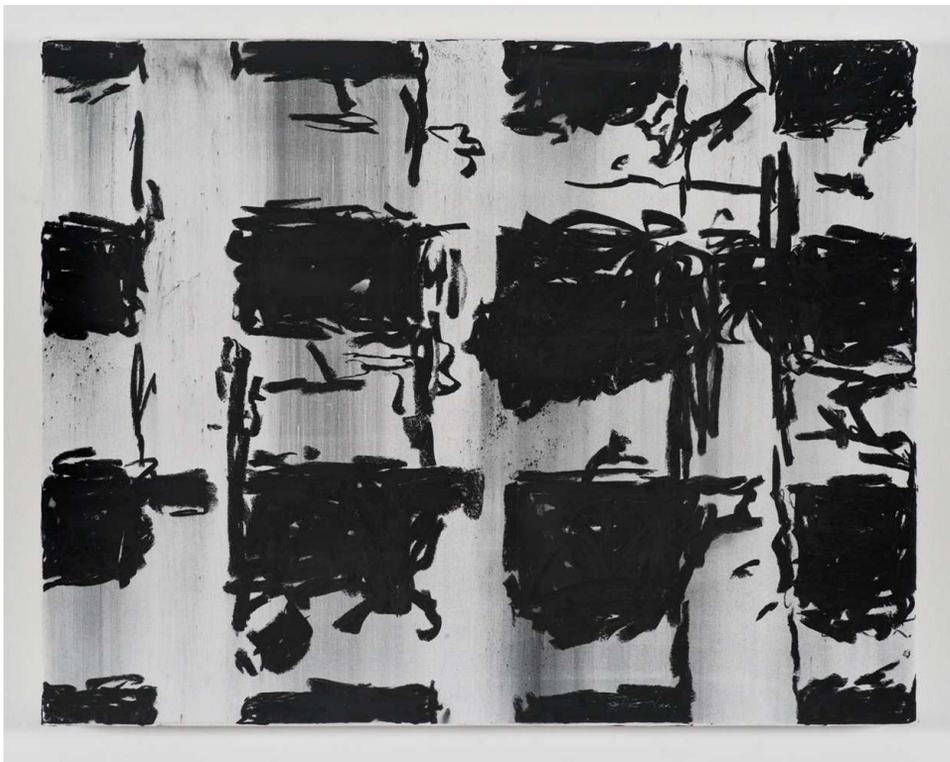
*Aleppo*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in;



*Aleppo II*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in



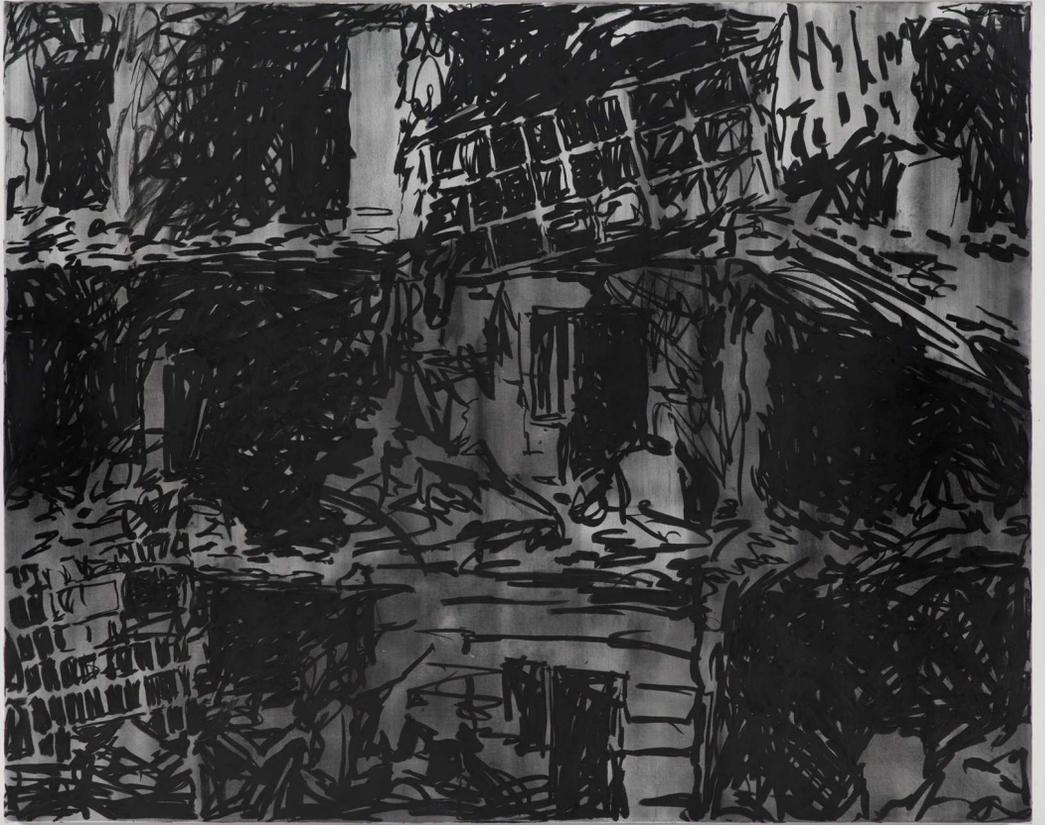
*Baghdad*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 22 x 28 in



*Beirut*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 22 x 28 in



*Samalka*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in



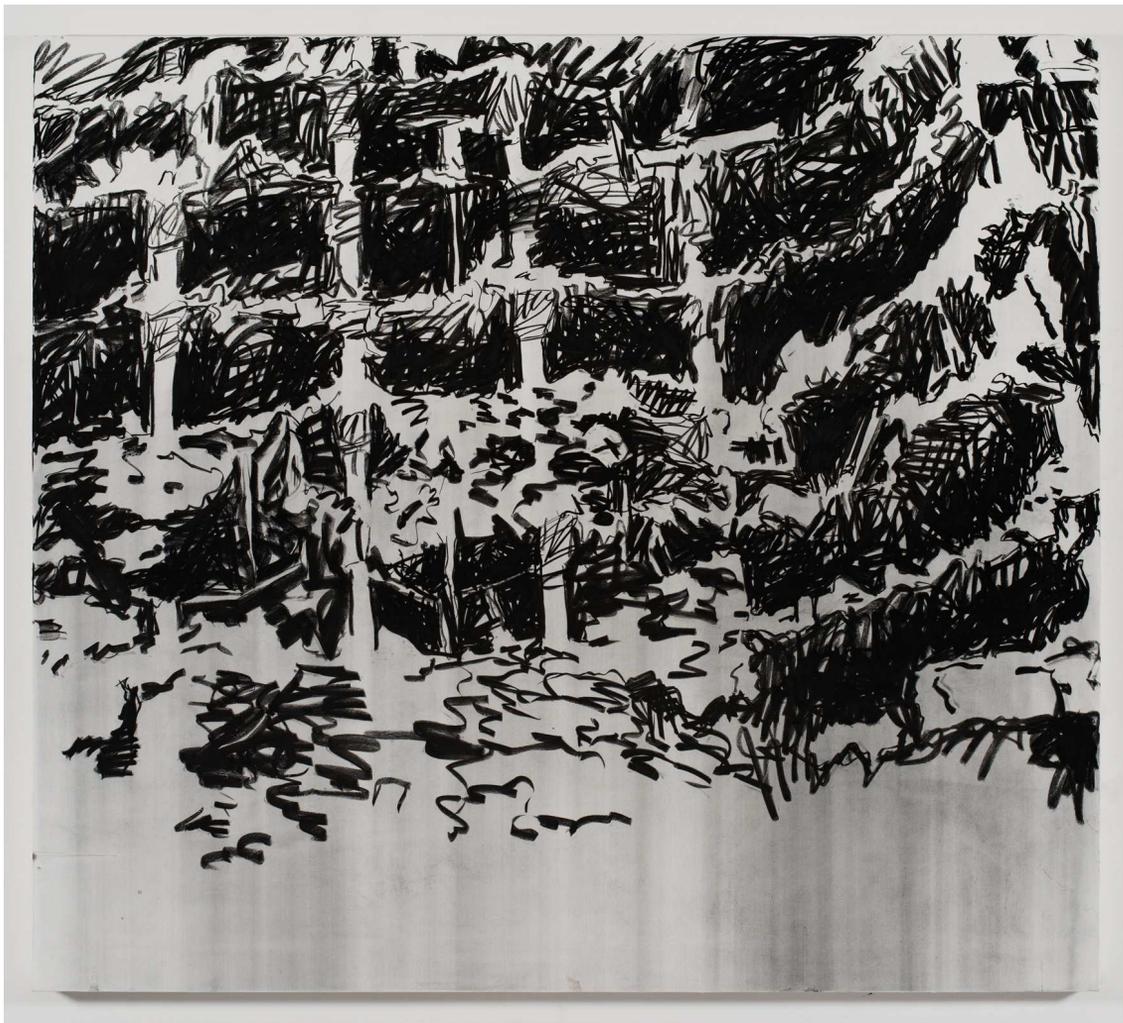
*Brit Lahlia, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in*



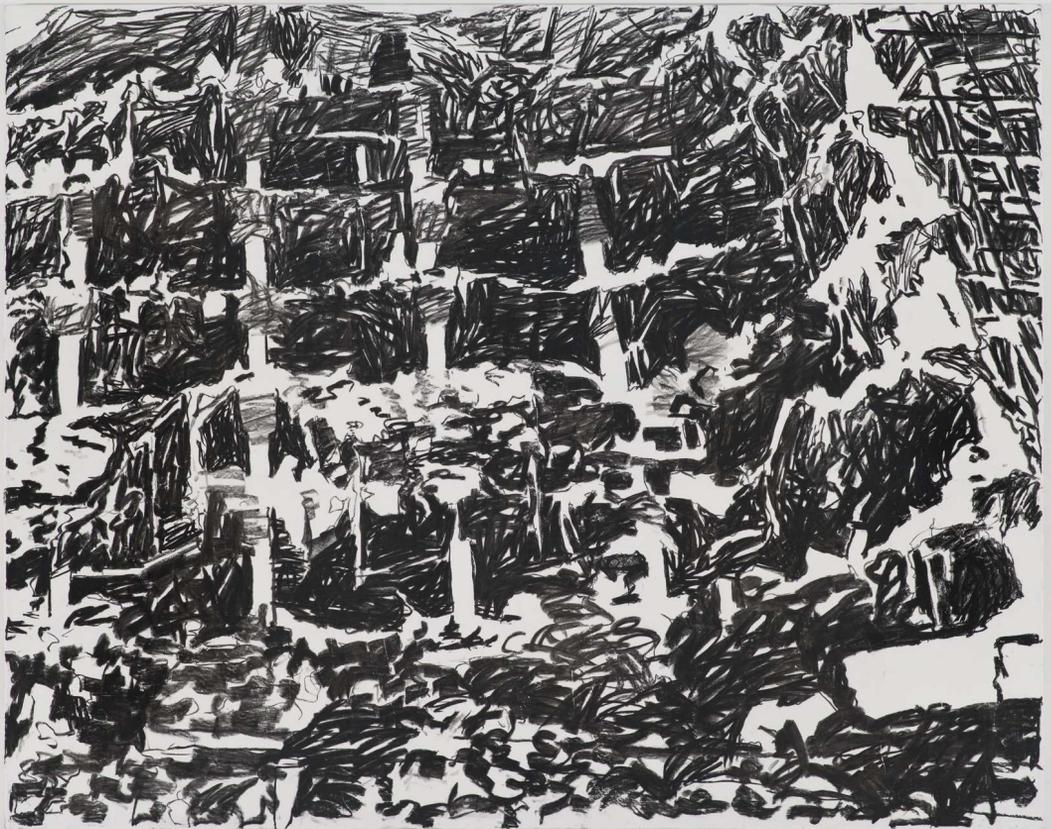
*Kirkuk*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in



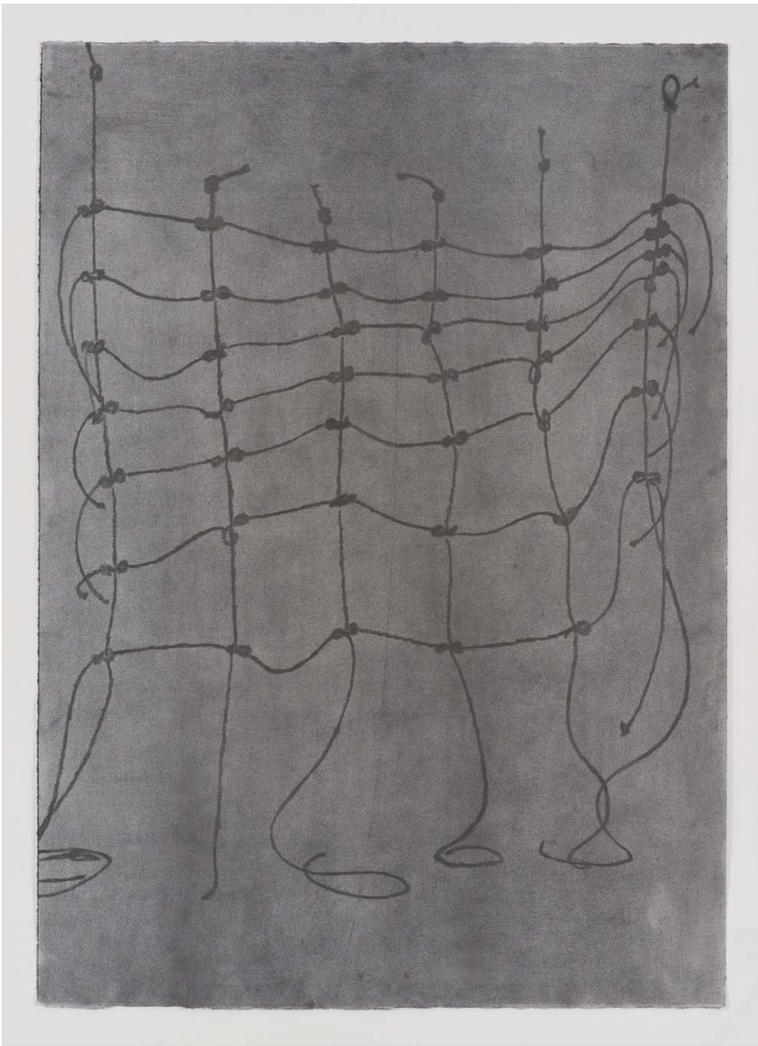
*Rafah*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in



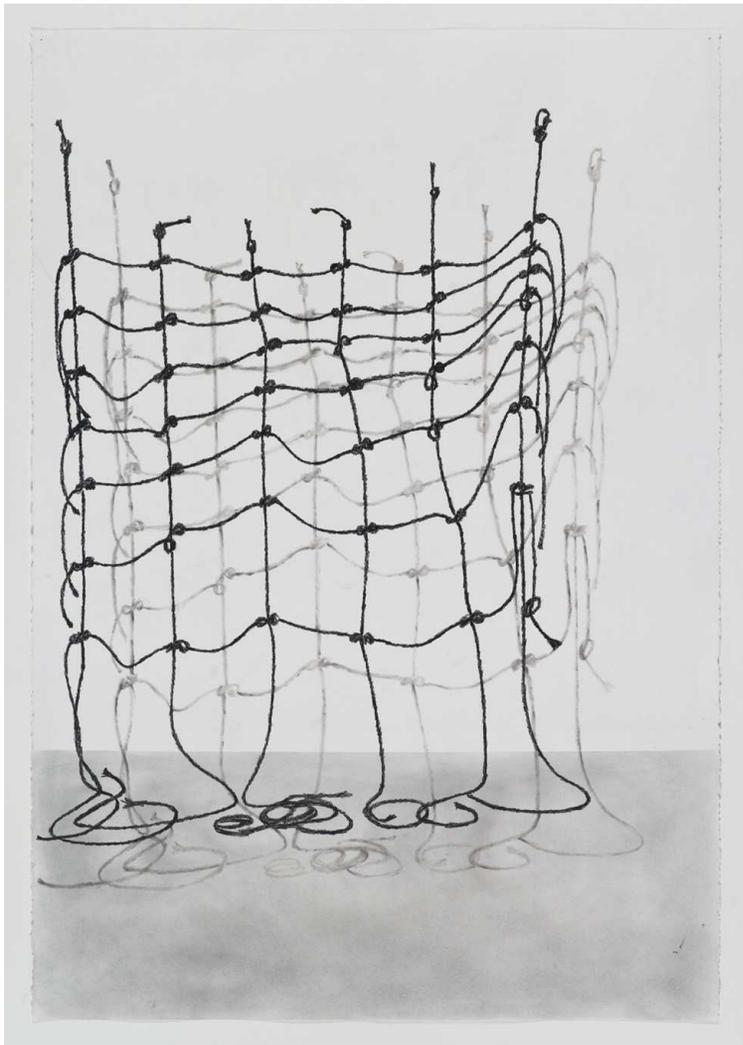
*Oklahoma City 14, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 70 x 78 in*



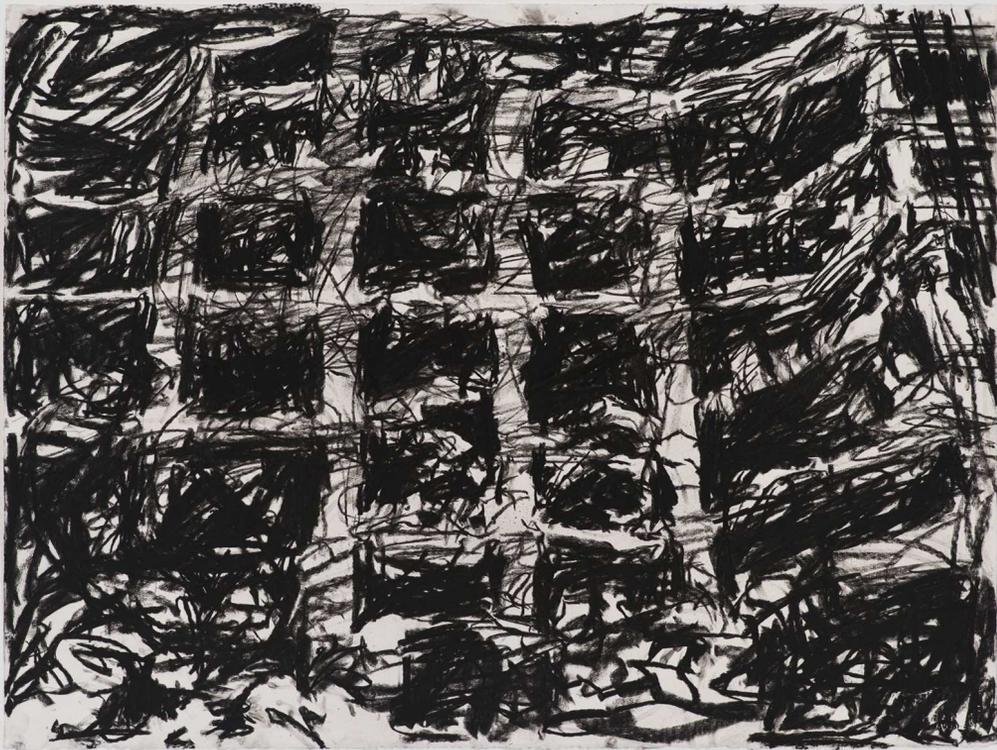
*Oklahoma 7*, 2015, Charcoal on Canvas, 48 x 60 in



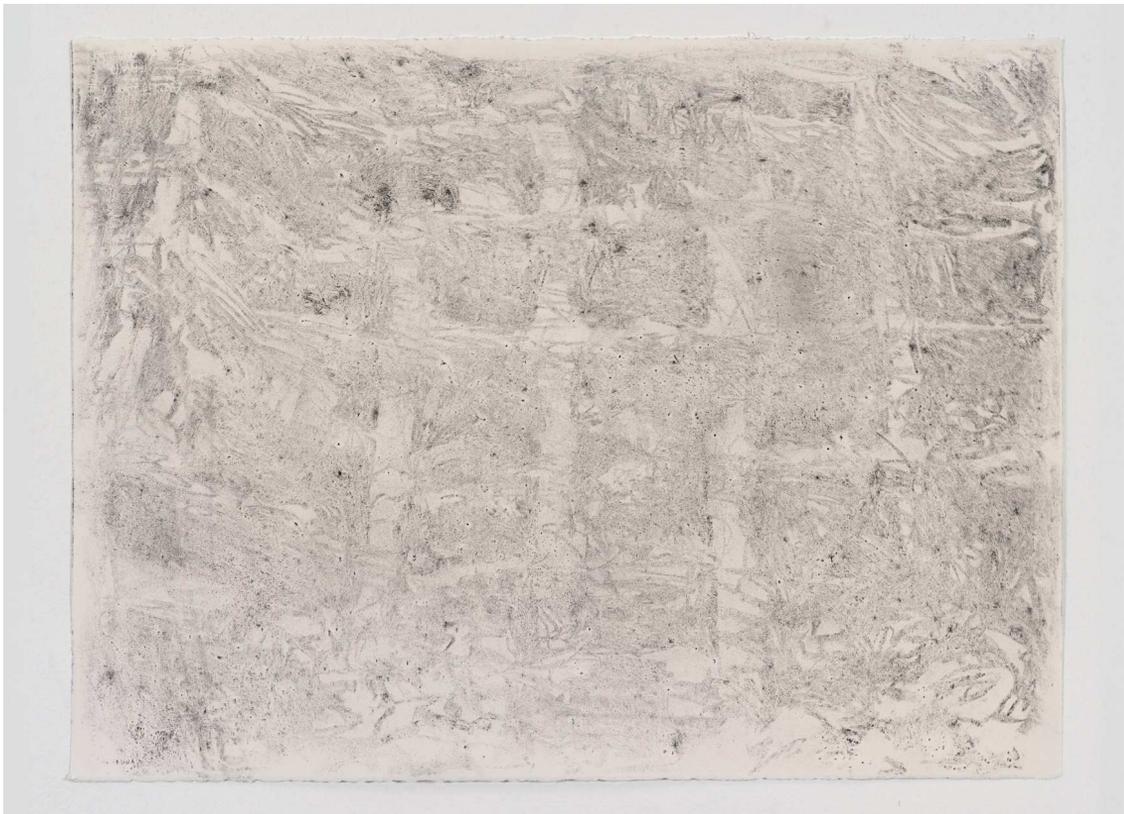
*Murray Building Rope Drawing 1, 2015, Graphite on Paper, 42 x 30 in*



*Murrah Building Rope Drawing 2, 2015, Graphite and Charcoal on Paper, 42 x 30 in*



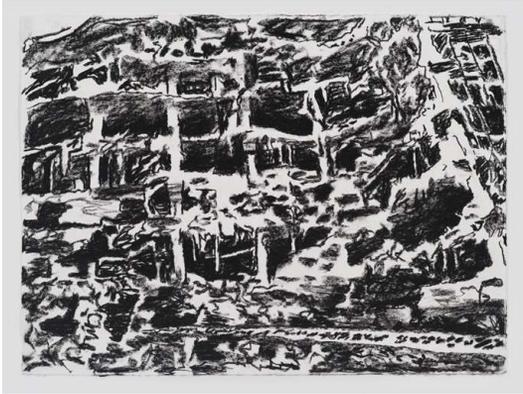
*Oklahoma City 5a*, 2015, Charcoal on Paper, 30 x 42 in



*Oklahoma City 5b*, 2015, Charcoal on Paper, 30 x 42 in



*Oklahoma City 1*, Graphite on Paper, 22 x 30 in; *Oklahoma City 2*, Charcoal on Paper, 22 x 30 in; *Oklahoma City 6*, Acrylic on Paper, 22 x 30 in; *Oklahoma City 7*, Charcoal on Paper, 22 x 30 in; All works 2015



*Oklahoma City 3*, Charcoal on Paper, 22 x 30 in; *Oklahoma City 4*, Charcoal on Paper, 30 x 42 in; *Oklahoma City 11*, Charcoal on Paper, 30 x 42 in; *Oklahoma City 12*, Acrylic on Paper, 30 x 42 in; All works 2015



Claudia Parducci's work explores the desperation that is born of catastrophe and violence. Based in Los Angeles, the artist has exhibited both at home and internationally.

Credits:  
All images courtesy of the Artist and Ochi Projects  
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