DEANNA PETHERBRIDGE

Working almost exclusively in monochromatic pen and ink, Deanna Petherbridge has dedicated herself to drawing for over forty years. Her work conflates bold geometries with the imagery of pistons and machines, merging industrial and architectural motifs. More recent large-format pieces feature urban landscapes characterized by vortigious perspective and dramatic shifts in scale. Everything is beheld from gravity as objects float freely amid constant spatial and perspectival contradictions.

The effect of Petherbridge's work is both disorientating and exhilarating. Alongside her drawings, the artist has made murals and theatre backdrops. She has also written extensively, advocating for the medium as a teacher and public figure.

In later works buildings are turned inside out and cities are depicted in cyclical states of construction and carnage. Petherbridge's vision of the metropolis is mediated through the prism of daily news broadcasts and science fiction films. We are reminded of the ubiquity of cranes and building sites in urban spaces and cities uneasily reshaped by conflict. Wars, natural disasters and economic impulses each shape the city in different ways, leaving behind psychic and physical scars.

The Destruction of the City of Homs (2016) references the ancient Syrian city that was obliterated during the Syrian civil war. Over three large pieces of paper, the dense image portrays high-rises that have been reduced to concrete skeletons with rebar jutting out of crumbling mortar. We view the bombed-out city flooding amidst the ruins from a drone's eye view. Petherbridge's art is ominous and highly dramatic, her pen and ink picking out the details like an expert cinematographer. Bridges cut across the image suggesting transit, yet the environment has long been evacuated – the city is left as a contemporary ruin ghosted by its previous community.

The Wall (2019) is similarly claustrophobic. A wall occupies the foreground of the image. Behind it is another barrier. The picture is like a prison and leaves little space for manoeuvre. While much of Petherbridge's work reminds us of the violence of displacement, this image focuses on the aggressive infrastructure of containment. It is impossible to look at it and not think of real and imagined walls around the world and the plight of desperate people trying to climb them to find safer and better lives. These are tangled drawings that invoke the speed in which urban spaces are made and unmade. Yet, for all their evocation of velocity, Petherbridge asks us to slow down and pay attention to the role of images. She makes drawings with cinematic ambition, situating the discipline alongside filmmaking, music and literature as a cultural form capable of articulating the crises that pervade our current moment.

George Vasey