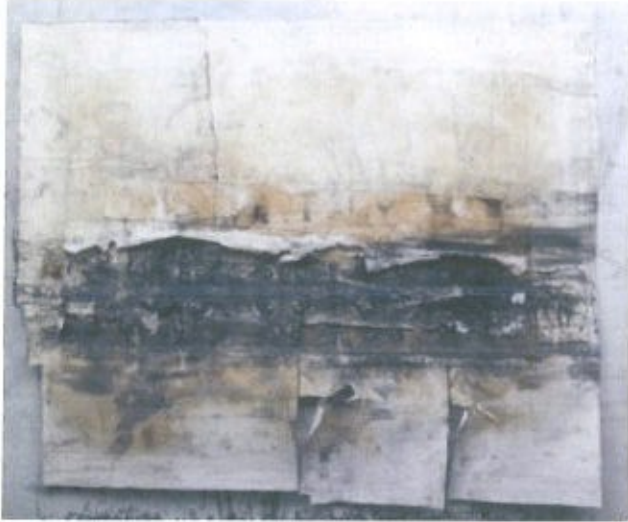


[Matthew Woodward: Catalogs of Anonymous Forms](#)

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Woodward's "Huron Street" 71"x87" Graphite and coffee on Paper, 2011

The gritty, aggressive, large-scale works of [Matthew Woodward](#) are a kind of contemporary art anomaly. Without that self-conscious level of remove that dominates much of contemporary work created by artists with their terminal degrees, Woodward's practice is centered around an unabashedly emotional drive. Like emotions, his work is not necessarily difficult to understand, but is decidedly difficult to approach intellectually. Though admittedly, getting a viewer to go beyond the personal expression and the drama of the gesture and surface is often a challenge for artists who work in this manner, Woodward's practice contains content that can be accessed at varying points of entry.

Viewers are inevitably drawn to his remarkably consistent aesthetic: the heavy-handed mark-making enacted upon the artist's ubiquitous trope of isolated, decorative architectural forms. A violent treatment of his materials, primarily graphite on paper, takes place through erasure marks, scratches, tears, and other traces of glue and grit by whatever means necessary, paralleling the layering of deterioration and buildup indicative of the wear of urban life. These decorative forms of winding, vaguely floral reliefs, lifted from their original context and hand-drawn onto Woodward's works on paper, are a composite of anonymity and specificity.

"Through scale, dramatic chiaroscuro, and composition, these rather unimportant decorative images are transformed into grand icons."

The artist's employment of these architectural details is discernibly more complicated than it may seem at first sight. Through manufacturing, patterning and reproduction, the forms' uniqueness has been lost, and their original authors unknown. Through time and familiarity, the forms are overlooked and taken for granted, almost un-seeable to those who live amongst them. Woodward uses these architectural forms in every piece with an urgent repetition that, given their homogeneity, becomes a kind of catalog of anonymous forms in the urban landscapes.



Detail of Woodward's "Huron Street"

As the forms are moved from the street, to the photograph, to the studio and into the drawings, they are further and farther removed from their original context. In his drawings, Woodward isolates each of these forms, enlarging them, centering them in the composition, and rendering them in a classical technique that is offset by his heavy-handed marks and the tattered surfaces of the abstracted ground. Through scale, dramatic chiaroscuro, and composition, these rather unimportant decorative images are transformed into grand icons, elevating their importance, though without establishing what it is that they have become symbols of.



At the end of all this layering, rendering and recontextualizing, after the forms have been moved and removed, cataloged and elevated, their meaning really hasn't been changed. They are each assigned a title specifying the location in which the artist first encountered them, but that is where the explanations end; their ambiguity has remained intact and perhaps that is the very space left open for viewers to linger long after they have been drawn in by Woodward's tactile surfaces and expressionistic hand. I suppose these works necessitate the use of your gut to appreciate their emotional content, though I think that a patient viewer will find herself able to spend much more time thoughtfully engaged in Woodward's open-ended subject matter.