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A.I.R. Gallery: Enterprising Machines

Jessica J. Gondek

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A.I.R. GALLERY

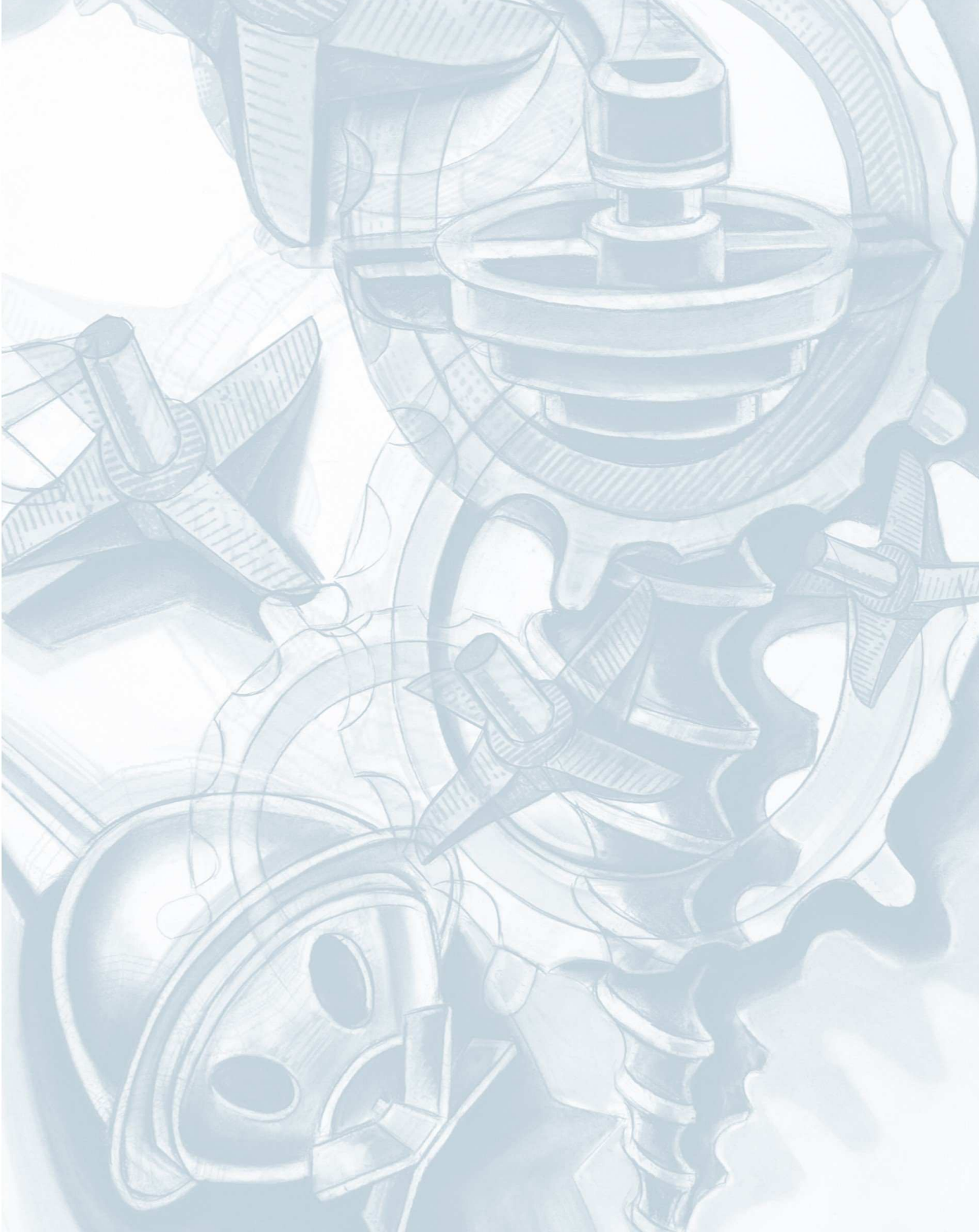
Enterprising Machines
Recent Drawings
by Jessica Gondek

Enterprising Machines: Recent Drawings by Jessica Gondek

A.I.R. Gallery

155 Plymouth Street
Brooklyn NY 11201

June 29th-July 30th, 2017



Jessica Gondek's *Enterprising Machines*

Essay by Paula Wisotzki

Jessica Gondek's recent drawings consider the relationship between human beings and machines – a theme she has explored since the early days of her career. In the complex world Gondek sets before her viewers, machines are not simply friend or foe, but tools contributing to the quality of human life while at the same time challenging and even threatening human beings' central position in the universe. Today, this problematic relationship remains as important for understanding the modern human condition as it was a century ago when such concerns were taken up by Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Hoch, Francis Picabia and Man Ray. In fact, Gondek acknowledges the influence of these early twentieth-century artists, and just as they frequently incorporated found objects – two-dimensional images of machines or machine parts – in their collages and photomontages, she, too, has turned to popular culture for her sources. In the works on view in the current exhibition, her source images also date from the beginning of the last century. At one level her incorporation of materials from this period reinforces her connections to the artists whose examples have influenced her, yet, at the same time, her choices carry with them the patina of history and cannot escape a certain nostalgia owing to the relatively uncomplicated nature of the machines parts – for example, simple gear wheels and hand-operated cranks -- she has chosen to reproduce. This historical gulf is intensified by her manipulation of the source objects via computer-aided design and the digital printer; a process made possible by machines far more sophisticated than those elements depicted in the drawings themselves. Finishing the works with hand additions in charcoal and pastel, Gondek employs a range of artistic tools, commenting on the artist as intermediary between tradition and innovation.

Gondek's exploration of this new source material began with a small, early twentieth-century booklet *The Enterprising Housekeeper* published by the Philadelphia-based Enterprise Manufacturing Company in 1902. Masquerading as a cookbook aimed at women with helpful tips about food preparation and "200 tested recipes," in reality the publication was a marketing tool for the hardware manufacturer's domestic devices. It included detailed illustrations and extensive prose explanations of Enterprise's meat choppers, cherry stoners, and fruit presses distributed among the pages of cooking instructions for dishes such as "Fig Pudding." When combined with the title, the cover image of a rosy-faced woman who smiles while holding aloft a serving dish and wearing a tidy, if fanciful, domestic uniform made it clear the publication was aimed at women and their role in the household. *(figure 1)*



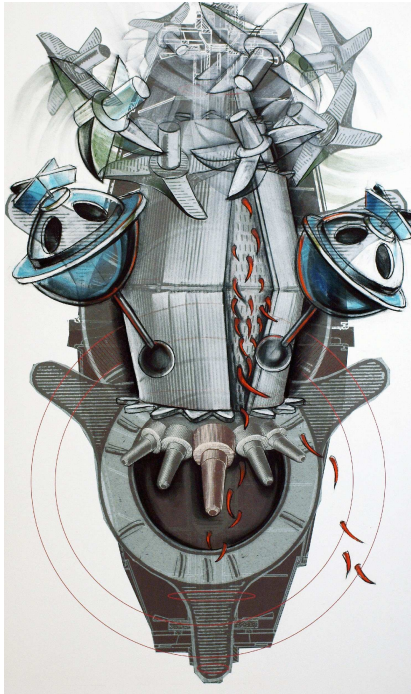
Figure 1 Catalogue Cover

The book's title itself is a pun on the manufacturing corporation's name, yet manages to imply that the woman who wisely chose to use Enterprise machines would herself be creative and resourceful at her work. Having paired "enterprising" with "machines" to form the name for her recent body of work, Gondek has foregrounded the anthropomorphic qualities of the machines she depicts. The product of her creativity, the machines, become occupants of a parallel universe where they operate independently, wielding their own power.

The resulting tensions between creator and machine, organic and inorganic, even playful and dangerous are part of the complex of binaries explored in these drawings, and the sources Gondek mines for her mechanical parts are no exception. The femininity of the Enterprise publication contrasts with the masculinity of a 1900 Pratt and Whitney Company catalogue of tools and the machines which produce them – another source for Gondek's mechanical objects. The Pratt and Whitney illustrations are similar in style to those in the Enterprise booklet – linear and straightforward, without any flourishes to distract from the information communicated. Yet the Enterprise book masks that information in a cloak of happy homemaking while the Pratt and Whitney catalogue is aimed at the presumed male-dominated manufacturing world and offers no more than an austere statement of the facts. (figures 3-4) Once Gondek has scanned her source images, she sometimes has employed three-dimensional modeling to plumb relationships between two dimensional illustrations and three dimensional objects. A transformation ensues resulting in the creation of a form possessing visual dimensionality unique to the computer age. Gondek likens this procedure to working on a lathe – not incidentally one of the machines illustrated in the Pratt and Whitney catalogue – a fact that once again signals the complex interweaving of process and image in these drawings. And, although Gondek reasonably identifies these works as drawings, they are initiated with a substrate composed of layered computer-generated images that are often printed in a blue that evokes a template or model for the more complex shapes that will be built above it. The early-twentieth century illustrations that serve as her sources were originally printed without half tones, providing her with "clean" images she is able to manipulate and layer on the computer without the distraction of Ben-Day dots interacting with pixels.

Additional strata of observed forms are then drawn with charcoal and pastels, so the material closest to the viewer transmits the artist's hand in a more traditional fashion.

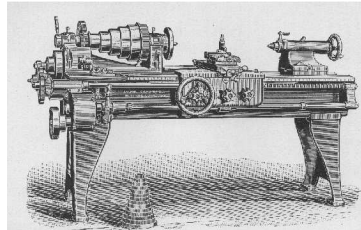
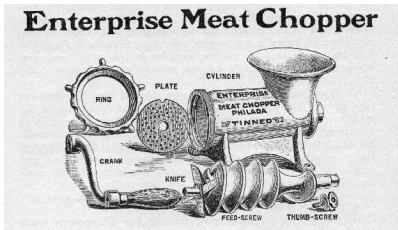
As these forms are layered, the individual mechanical elements morph into new machines. Their function is not clear, but the visual impact is of an object greater than the sum of its parts; a sense that is further strengthened by the anthropomorphic, vertical orientation of the machines. Successive positioning and lines of force – stylistic devices associated with Futurism, another early twentieth-century influence on Gondek – convey movement and aid in communicating the machines' likeness to animated beings. Specific details reinforce associations with a mammalian-like life force. In one drawing, red organic shapes appear to fall from the surface of a metal grater, like drops of blood from a wound. (*figure 2*) In other instances, tubes or cords connect various parts of a mechanical form, suggesting a vital link that passes energy or a life source from one area to another. The contrasts between interior and exterior, strength and vulnerability are evident here, as are implications of organic and inorganic and ultimately life and death. Although the demeanor of these constructions is often mysterious, even threatening, they have playful aspects.



For example, the repeated appearance of a simple hand-operated mixer shown upside down with its handle taking the role of a rudimentary body that supports the mixing blades. Because the blades are seated on a round shape with two dark openings, they become spikes of hair atop an infant's over-sized head with large eyes – a playful presence that Gondek has likened to a charming creature who keeps watch over the other machines.

The hand-worked surfaces of the drawings similarly serve to tame the inhumanity of machines that occupy this brave new world, but the implications remain disquieting. Therefore, Gondek challenges the viewer with a universe inhabited by machines that seem as contradictory in their behaviors as are human beings. Through the many, shifting binary oppositions she sets before us, we are left to question how it is that we are to come to terms with these tensions.

Figure 2 Enterprising Machines Drawing by Jessica Gondek



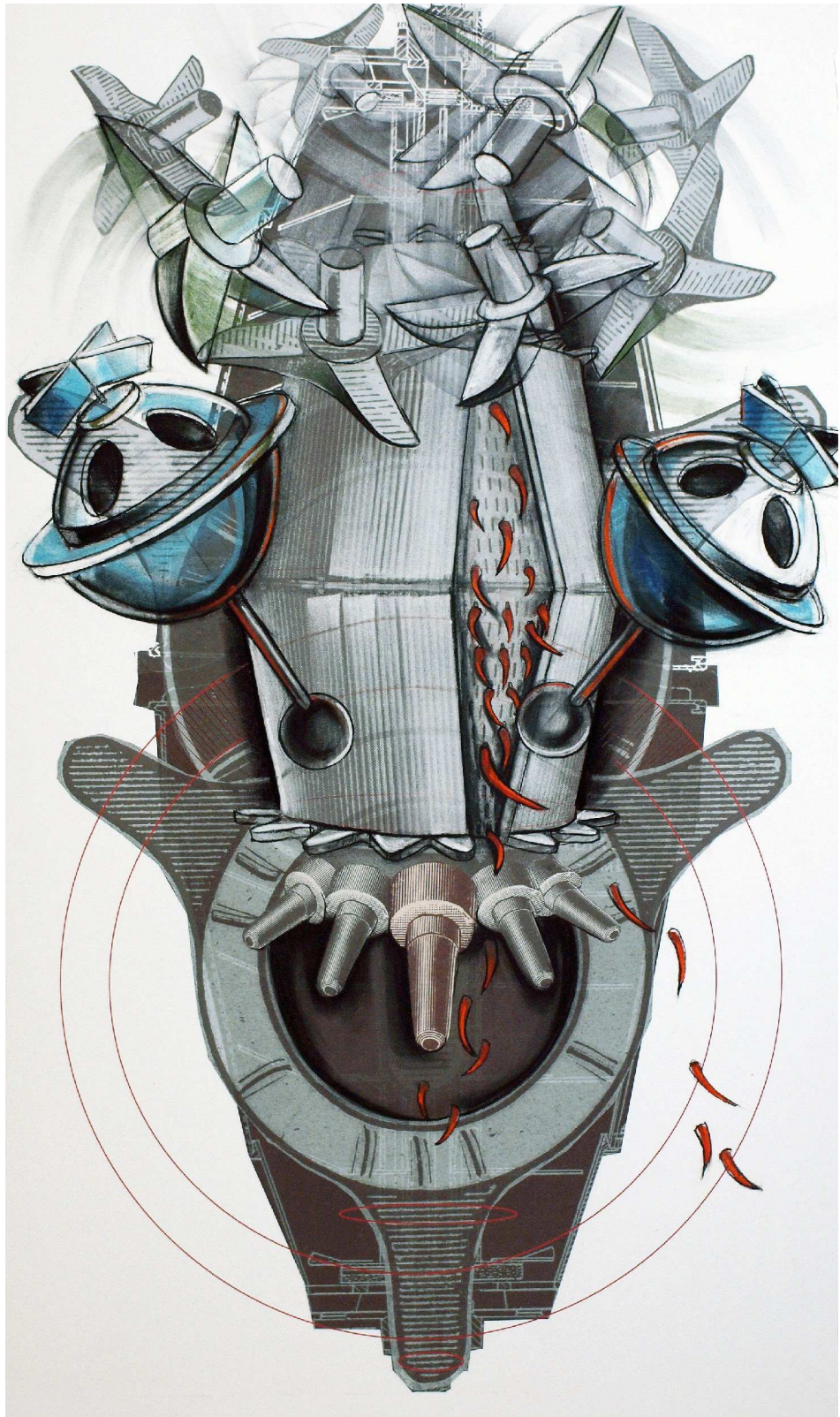
Figures 3-4 Illustrations from *The Enterprising Housekeeper* and *Pratt & Whitney's Machine Tools*

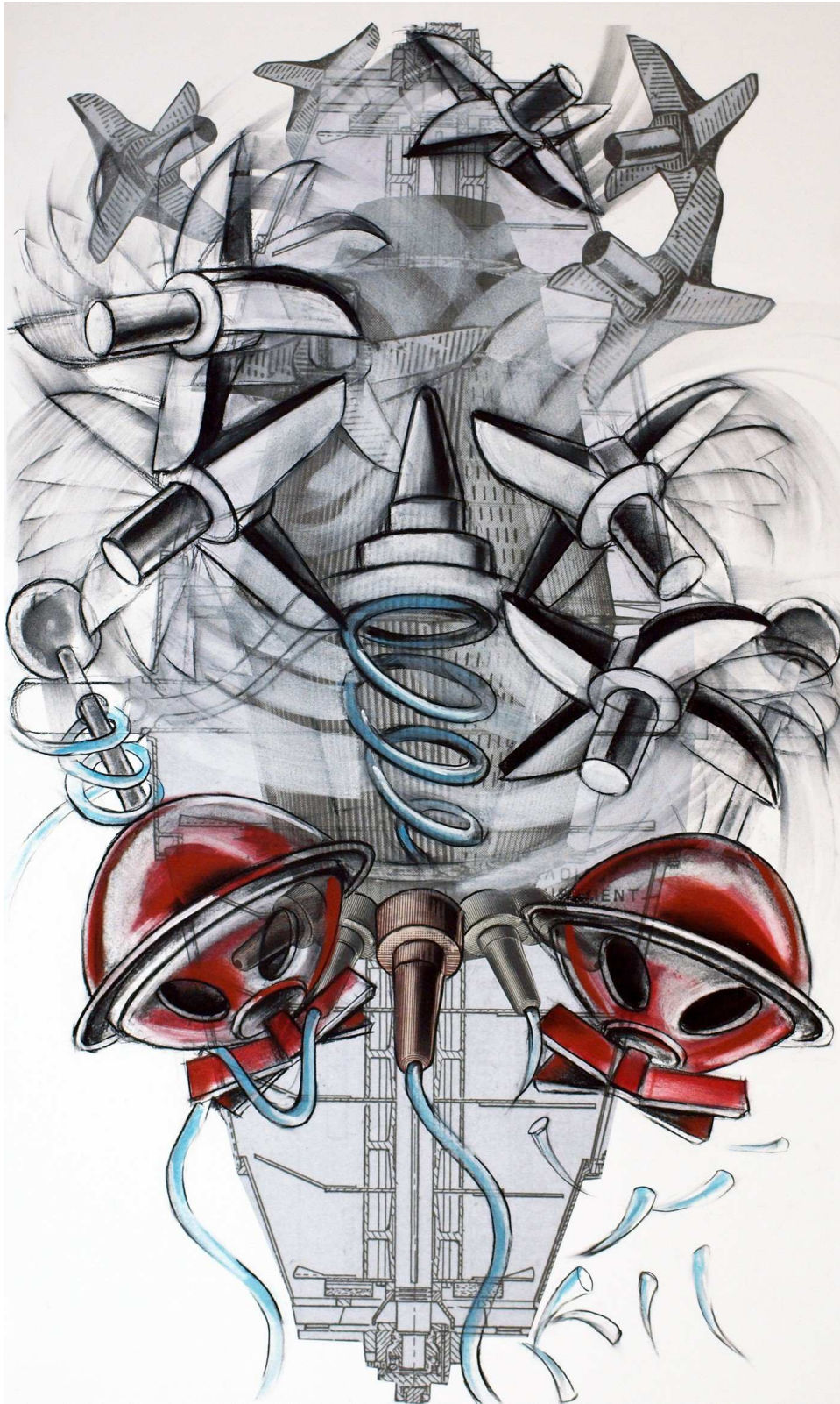
Paula Wisotzki is an Associate Professor of Art History at Loyola University Chicago where she is also affiliated with the Women's Studies and Gender Studies Program. She is co-editor with Helen Langa of *American Women Artists, 1935–1970: Gender, Culture and Politics* (Ashgate, 2016) and has published articles exploring David Smith's art through the lens of his political engagement. Her recent research has focused on Dorothy Dehner's early career and her 2016 essay "Dorothy Dehner and World War II: Not Just 'Life on the Farm'" appeared in *Archives of American Art Journal*. She earned her Ph.D. at Northwestern University.

Enterprising Machines

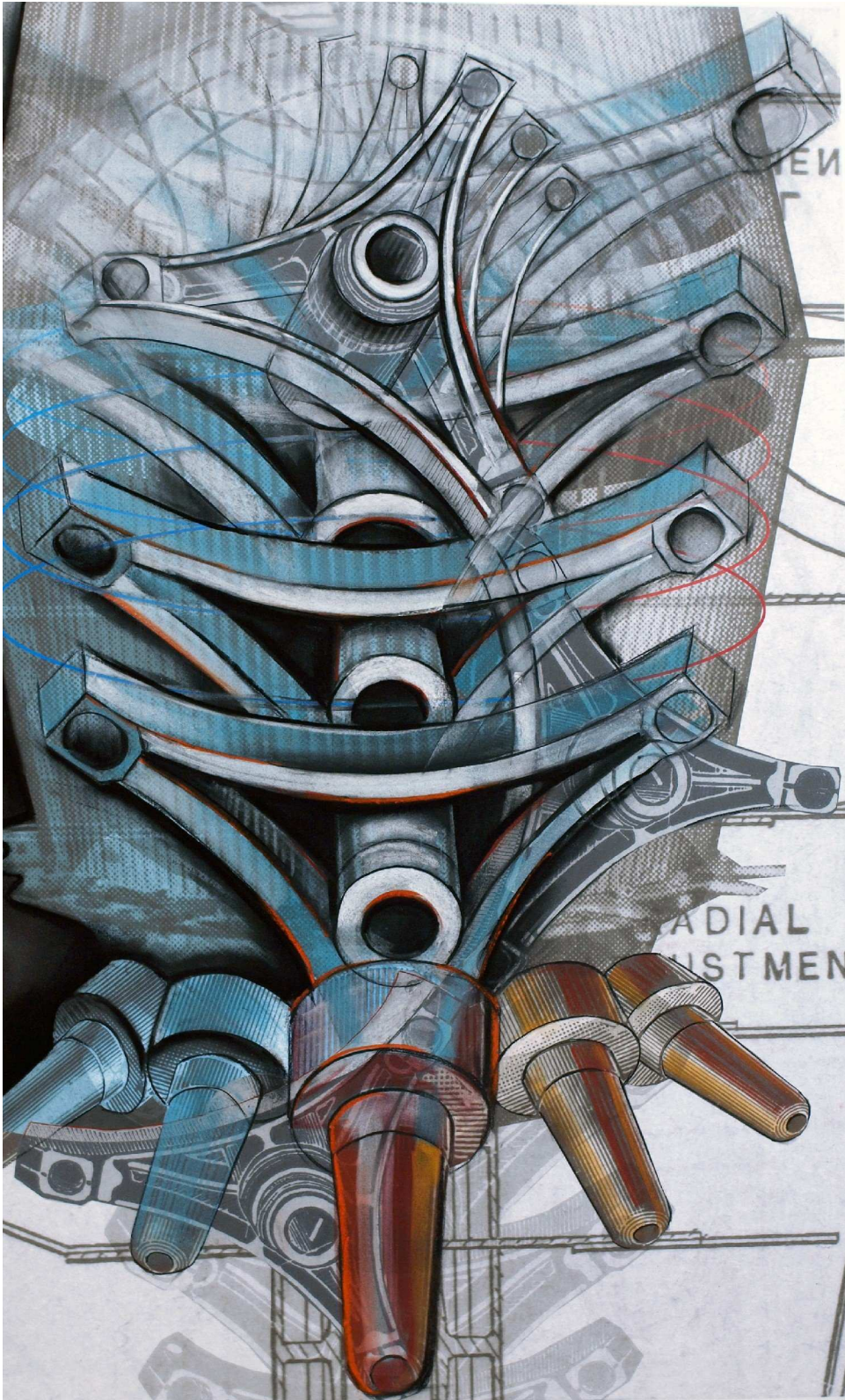
Recent Drawings by Jessica Gondek

*Drawings are produced on Stonehenge Paper
Medium- Charcoal, Pastel, and Digital Print
Size- 46"X29"
Dates- 2014-2016*



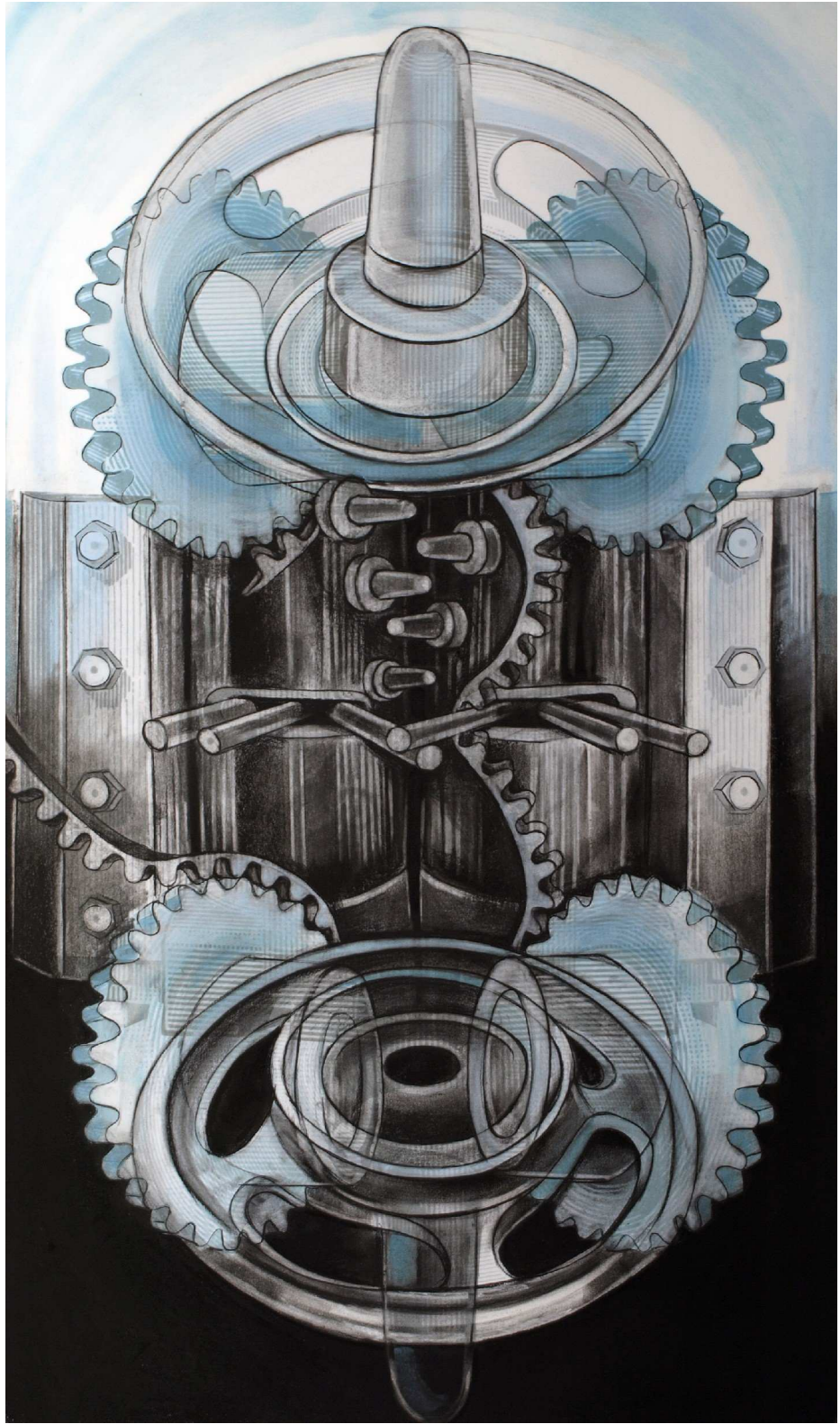




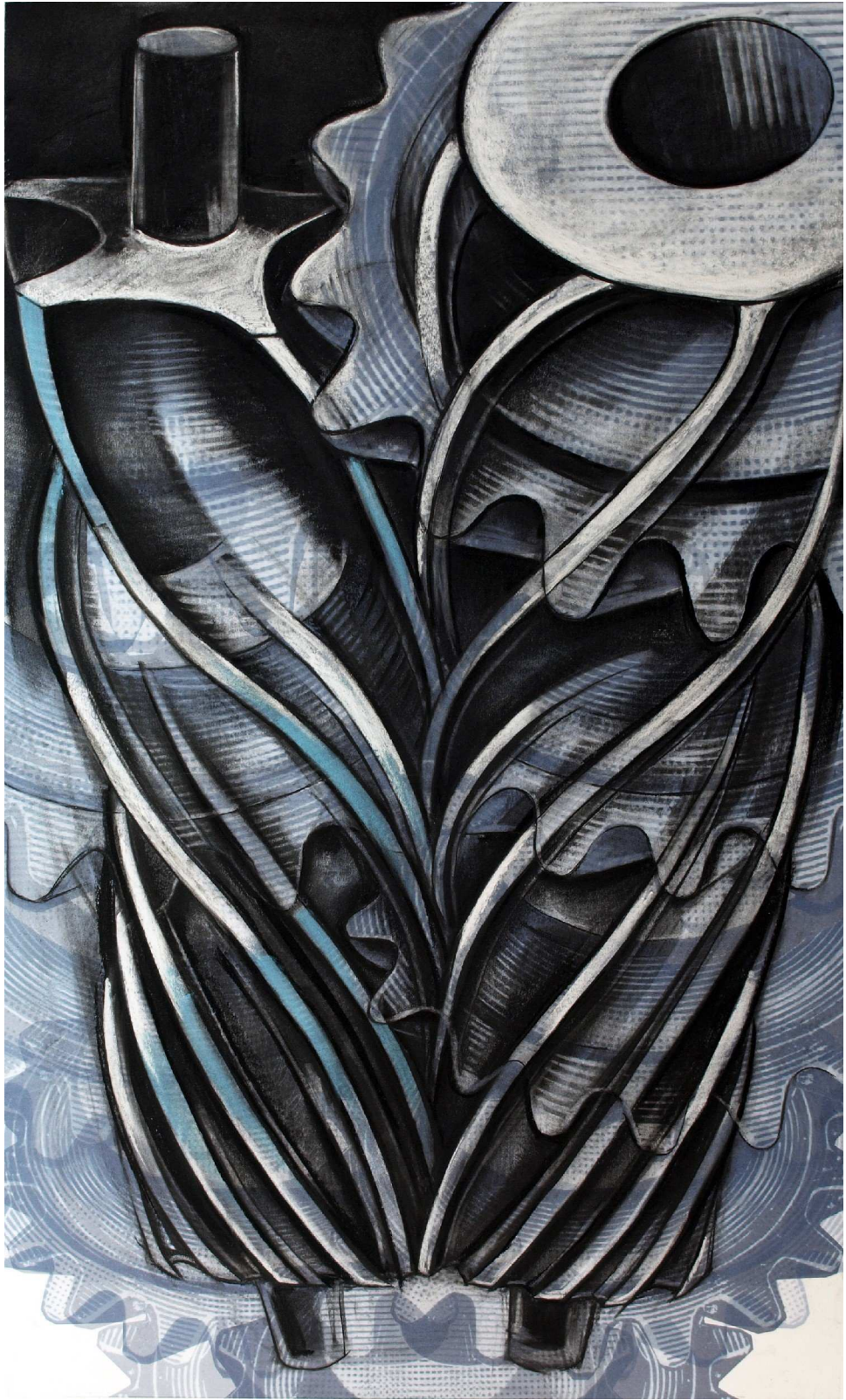


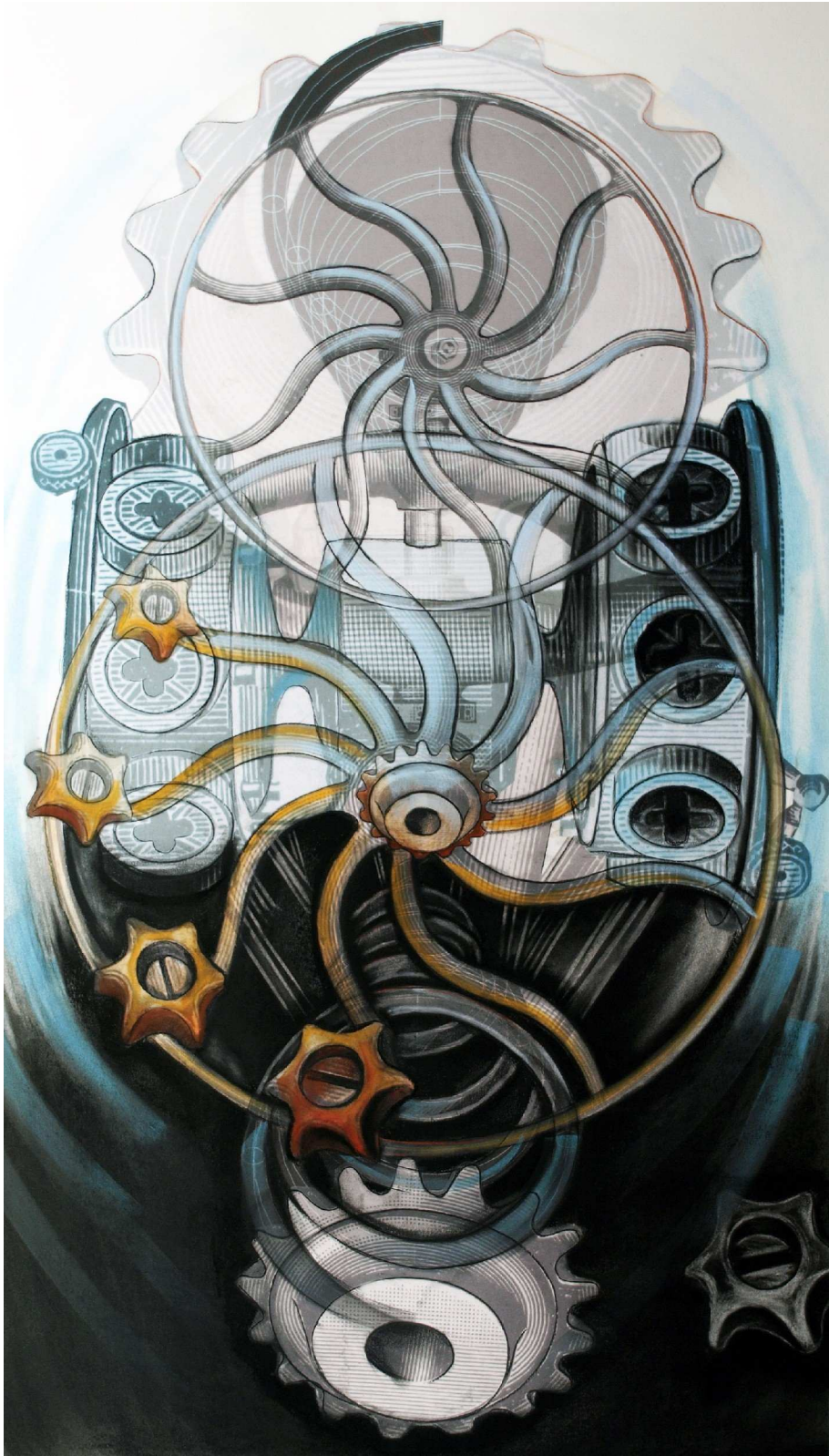




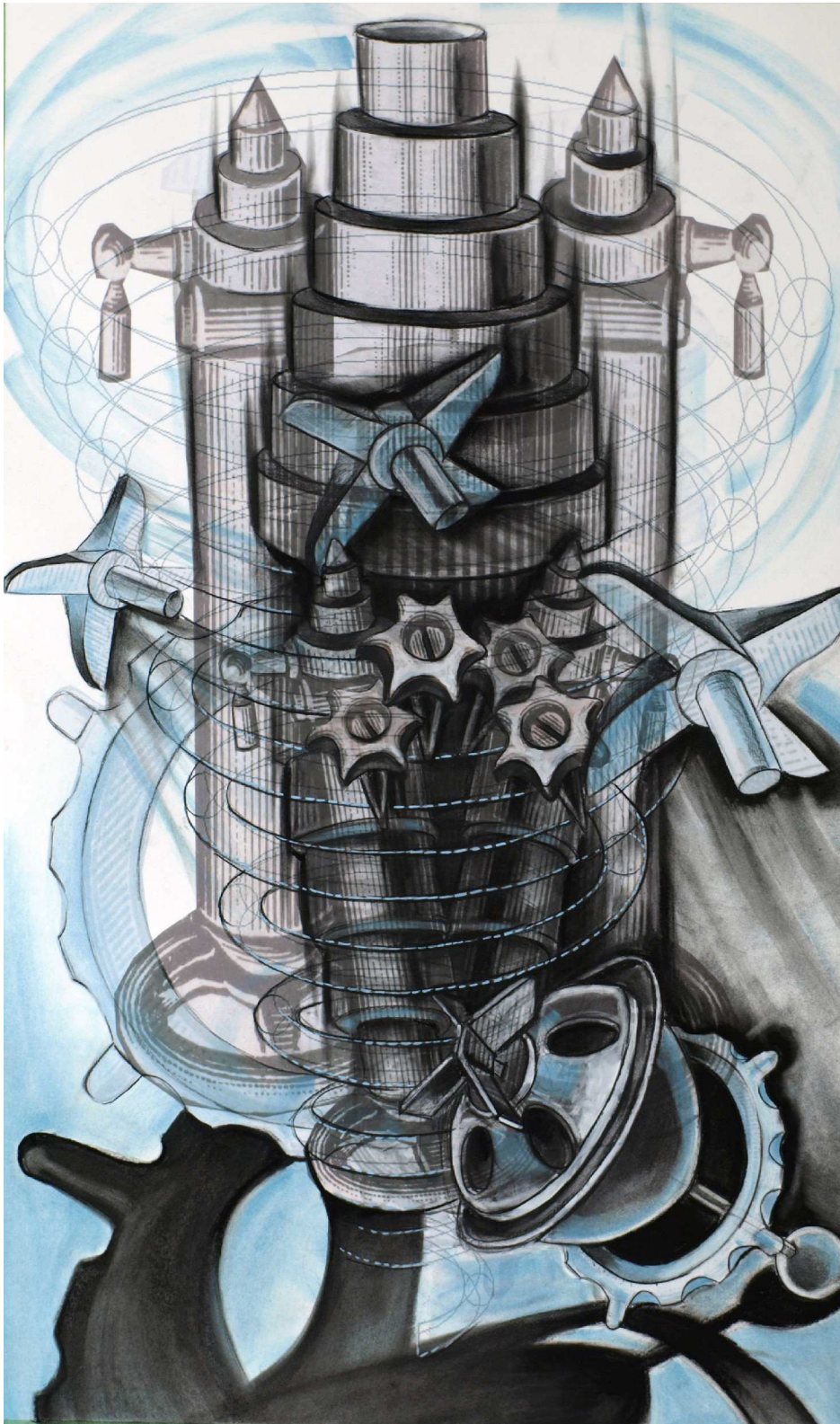




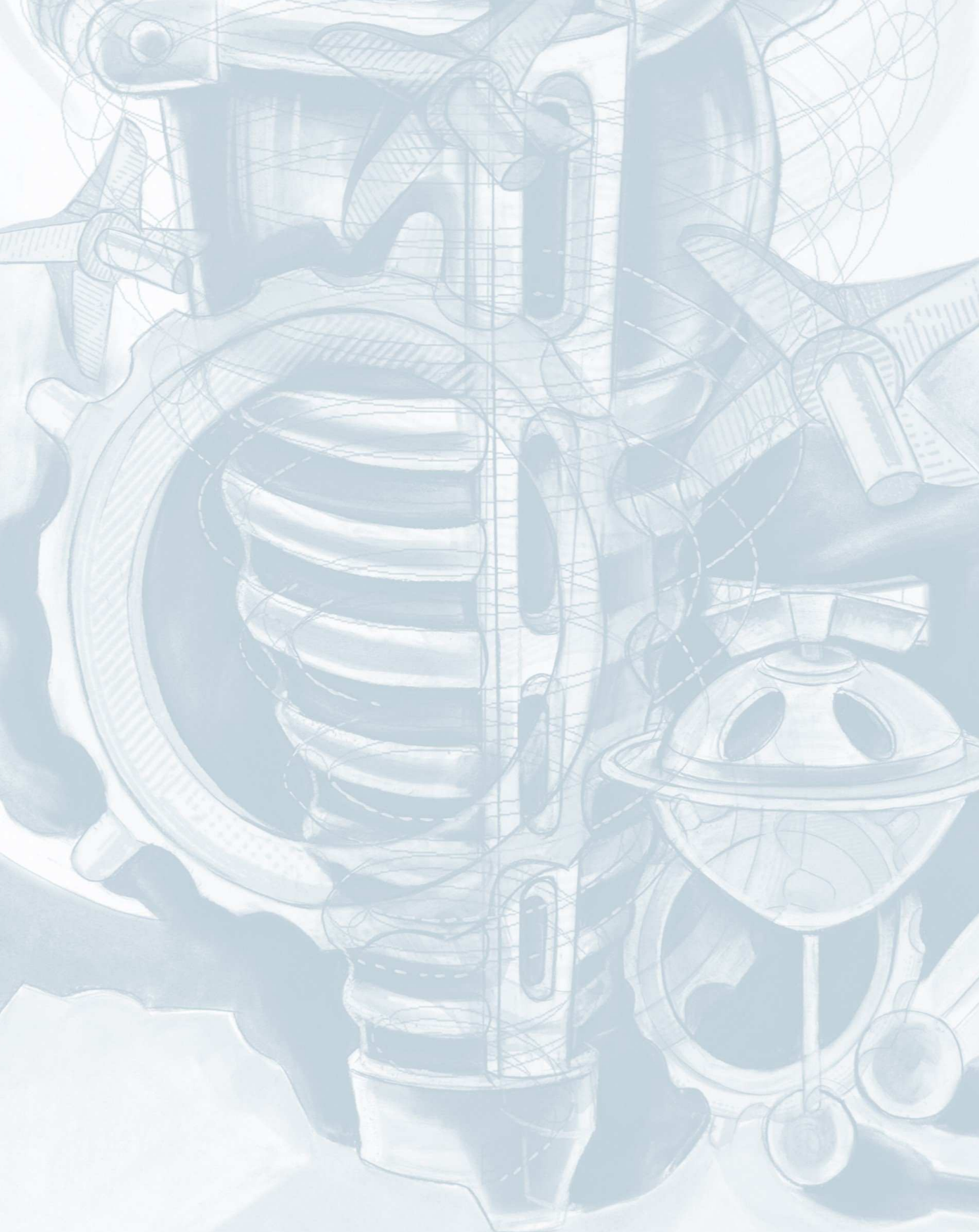














Jessica Gondek is an artist/teacher living in the Chicago area. She received her M.F.A. from Washington University in St. Louis, and her B.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

She is an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at Loyola University Chicago, and teaches Drawing and Painting in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts.

Ms. Gondek has received a number of prestigious awards recognizing her creative work. Notable are a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Artist Grant, a Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts Grant, and a Mid-America Arts Alliance National Endowment for the Arts Grant.

Ms. Gondek has been recognized with a number of international artist residency awards. She has been an artist in residence at the Can Serrat International Art Center in Spain, and at the Frans Masereel Center in Belgium.

Jessica Gondek has exhibited her work nationally and internationally and is represented in many public collections. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at the Northern Illinois University Art Museum, the Loyola University Museum of Art, and Butler Institute of American Art Beecher Center.

She is a member of ARC Gallery and Educational Foundation and Woman Made Gallery in Chicago.

Artist website:

<http://www.jessicagondek.com/>

This exhibition has been supported in part by Loyola University Chicago, Department of Fine and Performing Arts



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