

# Campo Vaccino

**Production of the drawing took place over nine days, requiring nearly 200 hours to complete. Most of the time was spent in complete solitude, stopping only to use the bathroom, eat, and rest fatigued muscles. Financially the piece required a fifteen dollar investment in Sharpie® Permanent Markers. No compensation for the time required to carry out the work was billed to the University of Michigan. At the closing of the exhibition, two months after the drawing's completion, it was painted over, permanently buried into the surface of the wall.**

## **A DRAWING EXERCISE NOT FOUND IN THE CHING BOOK**

The photographs presented are of a 96" x 236" line drawing installed directly on the East wall of the Taubman College Gallery at the University of Michigan. The drawing was created using a digital projector and sixteen Sharpie® Permanent Markers. It was conceived and executed by the author of this paper as part of the 2014–2015 Fellowships in Architecture Exhibition.

The drawing does not attempt to alleviate the problems associated with architectural labor, but it does attempt to spark a conversation about the role drawings have within the work we do. While the production of drawings is an assumed part of our professional services, the drawing presented here could easily be labeled purposely purposeless, a drawing that doesn't serve a practical function. Such drawings are actually common within our field, particularly within disciplinary conversations. For hundreds of years such drawings deal with, are motivated by, and attempt to raise questions and talk about analytic and formal concerns. These are drawings that are often worked on because they comment on and help us learn something about architecture through activity of drawing. For the most part they are invested in issues and shared conversations that are internal to creative work.

The activity of drawing is directly and inextricably tied to architectural production, but how can we account for the labor associated with our visual thoughts? The rigorous intellection and execution of representational objects that attempt to advance or perform maintenance on architecture's visual language seems to operate outside of the realm of imagery and commodity. While culture at large looks to architecture for the delivery of a recognizable image, a significant dimension of architectural drawing is analytic. How does one account for such labor, the cost of ideas, the invested effort, of projected thoughts?

Advancing or moving the discipline often depends on conceptually motivated questions, discursive conversations that occur around and through the specifics of how architects draw and model things. Such representational investigations are rarely commissioned by clients, yet, like an extracurricular activity, architects regularly find themselves exhaustively working on these problems voluntarily. The history of techniques associated with the production of

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architecture through drawing is an incredible archive that continues to grow as new generations of architects obsess over representational work.

Most of this hard work is done for pleasure, without compensation. How might we understand the significant role such work plays in the ongoing production of architectural knowledge? Should we be disturbed by the reality that such work is done outside of profession obligations or embrace the notion that such work maintains a degree of autonomy within a disciplinary enclave? Discourse that is specific to an architecture community gives weight to idea that we have an expertise. Perhaps there is value in shaping and sharpening our own awareness of architecture as a body of knowledge.

The drawing sought to confront and bring attention to ways of working on and living with architecture through a drawing. The investigation amplifies the level of absorption and interaction one can have with a drawing to a level of absurdism. It suggests that the materials and technologies associated with architectural drawing need not be expensive or precious, but they must be held accountable to longer collective conversations and covey intent.

The aspiration was to create a drawing that is both legible and uncommunicative, simultaneously pictorial and abstract. A drawing that on one level is easily consumable, even dumb, while on another level of attentiveness demanded spending time with it, reading its nuances closely. Additionally, something that appears to be full of meaning from one point of view can also mean nothing from other viewing angles. Meanings may or may not linger, they might even multiply, but then, the translation overcomes the associated meanings all together. For some, the drawing creates a context, for others it's simply present in the room. Super literal meets conceptual signification meets critical intellection meets drawing on a drawing.

The piece draws inspiration from the illusionary qualities of trompe-l'oeil and the disciplining effects of twentieth century line exercises by Josef Albers. The potential conflation pointed toward the medium of etching and the rich archive of architectural prints made through the technique of engraving. After surveying the work of several notable engravers from the eighteenth century, the height of the activity, I decided to create an interpretation of Guiseppe Vasi's 'Campo Vaccino' plate.

Figure 1: Campo Vaccino, 96" x 236"  
*Wall Drawing in Sharpie*

Figure 2: Drawing on a Drawing,

The drawing explores several themes around the act of producing an architectural drawing. It considers the renewed attention being paid to architectural drawing, a very old discourse in architecture. For several contemporary practices, drawing is something of an obsession, something to capitalize on, and something with a strange kind of value, a discursive one. While architectural drawing has a rich past, the renewed interest is neither nostalgic or reconciliatory. Many of us find ourselves exploring possible ways to take something with anachronistic tendencies and mobilize it in the production of architecturally specific knowledge. The drawing presented here is invested in the potential implications and present effects drawing can have in the production of possible architectures.

#### **LINE WORK—LIFE SIZE DRAWING**

Nine days, an arbitrary but necessary self-imposed limit; I had to draw the line somewhere. Production of the piece was done on my own volition, a self-imposed disciplining activity. Few people were allowed access to catch even a glimpse of the drawing as it came into being. Because the process of making the drawing was done in isolation, the work ultimately relies on the artifact to communicate the extreme endurance required to complete it.

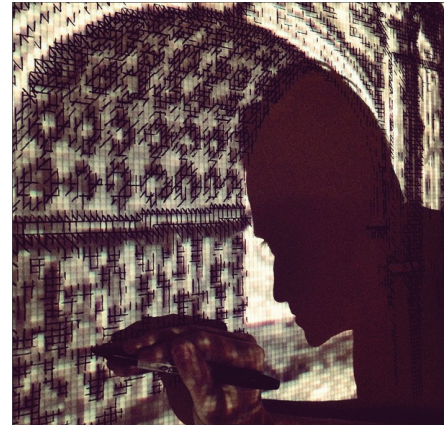
While there are thousands of marks on the wall, the precise number does not account for the mental and physical demands the undertaking placed on me as a draftsman. The scope of the piece contemplates the pleasures and hardships that accompany the activity of architectural drawing. In taking on this project there is an attempt to ruminate on the personal exploitation and sacrifices that almost always accompany aesthetic production. I essentially stood face to face with a wall for a length of time that most would consider punishment, yet, for me, it felt like exercise or practice. It made me think about how my education and training, my formation, prepared me for this moment, that subscribing to such behavior was not only acceptable, but perfectly normal.

Production of the work consisted of constructing an enormous drawing, one of heroic proportion, so large it appeared inhabitable yet unrealistic. The desire to create a drawing that exceeded the constraints of paper was an attempt to take something as inherently fake and fantastical as representation and make it more physical to both me and visitors to the exhibition. There was an attempt to see if a drawing was capable of producing its own context. Its scale was both impressive and odd; it was clearly too big for the room. A perspective too vast to be taken in from a stationary point of view; it demanded visitors keep moving and making use of their full visual field, both central and peripheral vision, long and short sightedness. A three dimensional image that intentionally embraced its flatness. The picture plane was an enabler as much as it denied the ability to take the drawing in all at once. Drafting the drawing was a lot like working in AutoCAD, Rhino, and Illustrator; the way we pan and zoom around a file.

#### **REPETITION—HISTORICALLY FORMED WORK**

The drawing on the wall is a close but inexact redrawing of Guiseppe Vasi's view of the Roman Forum as it existed in 1747. It is neither a blown up copy nor a recomposing of the source. The size of the work increased exponentially without an equivalent scaling the line weight and crosshatching, or addition of more detail. The resolution and features of the source drawing are present in the wall drawing. From the outset the intention was to leave the identity of the reference intact, to essentially under-translate it while at the same time thinking about the discretionary tendencies of how lines operate to generate intricately rendered engravings. The source is literal and legible at times, yet up close it is an abstraction of an abstraction, the presentation of a representation through enlargement.

The efforts of undertaking such a drawing and the presence of a historical referent should not be seen as a desire to emulate, work in the manner of, or recreate previous works and





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Figure 3: Big Drawing, *Oblique Viewing Angle*



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Figure 4: *Let Them Eat Cake, A small group of friends gathered to watch the drawing get painted over.*

techniques, but instead an attempt to study and be attentive to it with the ultimate desire of mobilizing it to do contemporary work. How we read, look at, and make drawings, our literacy and the ability to do so, is done with a degree of specificity that makes it not just a drawing, but an architectural drawing. In other words, it is not a drawing that is about the image on the wall, it is a drawing that is invested in potentially advancing architecture's habits, vocabulary, and projects—issues—that have largely preoccupied the minds of architects for the past several hundred years.

The conceptual logics of this drawing involved inserting myself into historical conversations; approaching, working on, and positioning myself as an architect, not a historian. The drawing argues that history and precedent, existing architecture, is too rich with potential to be left to professional historians alone. The activities of the scholar are distinct from the architect; our obligations to the same material are different. While both may suggest why something from the past has relevance or value in the present, the architect's creative pursuits aim to manipulate and advance, through studio based work, some persistent issue that is an architectural concern, not a historical. The ongoing construction of a discipline demands drawing on history, an inheritance of sorts, both conceptually and literally. Rather than a suppression or rejection of things from architecture's past, the work presented here argues that new knowledge can come from designers interpreting and directly confronting history.

Participating in and embracing the activity of redrawing is an act of translation where the convergence and exchange with historical content is motivated by a belief in the ongoing formation of a discipline. Architecture is a form of institution, or at least a dysfunctional family, where ideas move from one mind to another across historical time. The conflation of the reference drawing's history and the contemporary interpretation, the idea that the viewer can immediately see the reference material was old but the execution was new, was critical to the project. Both discreteness and collapse was important.

Ultimately, ideas of repetition establish a ground and form a way of working on architecture. I understand myself and the formation of the work I produce in relation to previous work. The idea that the activity of discussing architecture through drawing, the discursive drawing, is a means to move ideas. In this specific case, the referenced etching was something to study and comment on. I would argue the approach is more akin to the public intellectual's

engagement with artifacts than the scholar. The legibility of a known thing, when redrawn, leads to a new abstract condition of it.

#### **INTERPRETING VALUE—PROJECTIVE RECONSTRUCTION**

Giuseppe Vasi was an eighteenth century engraver who made his living in the once burgeoning commercial market of selling views of Rome as souvenirs to tourists. He was apparently very successful in this line of work. However, Vasi's historical significance is as the teacher of the more influential Giovanni Battista Piranesi. During my survey of engravers I began to think a lot about what makes something legitimate, terms of economic value and success in comparison to what something offers intellectually.

Selection, or choice, of Vasi over Piranesi as source material for the wall drawing was important in part because of his minor role in history, part of the supporting cast. The non-iconic status of his work made it feel expendable, something open to new interpretations and ideas, something that lends itself to reinvention. I was interested in working with a source familiar to the genre, but one that even the most well trained eye might not recognize. To put something on the wall that wasn't about citing the source. To this end, the intention was to project an image on the wall that is important but has little value.

The drawing on the wall is both an homage to Vasi, and it is ambivalent about Vasi. In the act of drawing it on the wall, Vasi's authorial presence is diminished, and simultaneously, because I am primarily translating an existing work of representation, my own authorial relationship to it is at least partially removed.

The Vasi engraving is an important work, but it is not canonical. While the source image appears to demonstrate attributes of a masterly skillful, well-executed, piece of representational work, Vasi did not challenge or question the content or techniques of engraving in ways that would result in it having significant artistic value. For this reason, the new interpretation of the Vasi engraving is less about the historical value of what is drawn and more about the idea of how it is redrawn and presented in the gallery. In many respects the wall drawing's visual language attempts to unconventionally use conventions.


On close inspection the drawing reveals that it is analog, freehanded. Yet, each line was meticulously drawn with as much Cartesian mechanical precision as possible. This gave the work an aura of being crafted, unique, a one off. There is evidence work is being done on the particularities of the technique. While the overall size of the drawing exuded a sense of importance, the fact that it is just a bunch of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal marks on the wall, all about but inexact the same weight, rendered it somewhat unsophisticated.

This layer of unsophistication was exacerbated by the line drawing being drafted using Sharpie® Permanent Markers, a cheap utensil not typically associated with the careful consideration of line weights, types, and styles of meticulously crafted architectural drawings. Sure, some architects subscribe to markers for sketching, but not for detail oriented line work. The decision to work with markers instead of graphite or pens attempts to comment on the perceived status of certain best practices, tools, and materials. The markers argue that materials or ways of working do not have inherent essential truths, but instead are what the author makes them do, how he or she works on the problem at hand. As the drawing came into existence on the wall, there was something refreshing about seeing really fat lines in the context of an architecture school. The inconsistent stroke weights contributed to the overall aesthetic qualities of the drawing. There was something delightful about the way the markers forced me to turn imperfections into assets and opportunities. The whole thing evoked a sense of articulated crudeness.

The wall drawing is not a precious object, in fact it is commercially worthless. From the initial thoughts about the piece, I sought to make a drawing that could not be bought, a drawing that would be about some kind of exchange that is not economic, not a commodity. I consider the destruction or unmaking of the work to be a critical component of this drawing. Erasing it, in contrast to the fetishistic tendencies that went into making it, seemed like a necessary kind of dialectic. In many ways the various states of the drawing, the ephemera of it, was critical.

Having said all of this, it is worth mentioning that all of this work started with a source object I initially found and took from the trash. I made it my job to riff on it and represent it in a way that made it appear significant, if only for a moment. Gallery visitors quickly acknowledged and some became emotionally concerned with the inevitable fate, the impending doom, of the site-specific drawing within the temporary exhibition. I was encouraged by many to advocate for its preservation, dismantling and archiving the wall. I adamantly rejected this as a possibility. In many ways the gallery was activated by a drawing that exuded its vulnerability, its impermanence. This was a drawing that could never be reproduced the same way twice, nor should it be.






## INVOICE



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**PROJECT #** 1501 **INVOICE #** 1

**BILL TO** **DATE**


Name  03/25/2015  
 Address   
 City   
 Phone   
 Email 

Parts	Quantity	Unit Price	Amount
Sharpie® Fine Point Permanent Markers, Black, 12/pk	1	\$ 7.34	\$ 7.34
Sharpie® Permanent Markers, Chisel Tip, Black, 4/pk	1	\$ 6.36	\$ 6.36

Labor	Hours	Rate	Amount
01/16/2015 - 01/23/2013 Pre-Design	20 hrs	\$0/hr	\$ 000.00
02/26/2015 Material Supplies Pick-Up	2 hrs	\$0/hr	\$ 000.00
02/27/2015 Room Preparation	6 hrs	\$0/hr	\$ 000.00
02/28/2015 - 03/09/2015 Installation of Drawing	200 hrs	\$0/hr	\$ 000.00

<p><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p> <p> (b. 1980)          Giuseppe Vasi 'Campo Vaccino' 1747, (8.25 x 11.75 in.)          Sharpie® Permanent Marker White Gypsum Wall          96 x 236 in. (244 x 600 cm.)          Drawn February 28 - March 9, 2015          The work is to be destroyed on May 10, 2015</p> <p>Location of Installation:          Taubman College of Architecture + Urban Planning          2000 Bonisteel Boulevard, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109          Second Floor Taubman College Gallery</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>SUBTOTAL</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$13.70</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>TAX</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$00.82</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>OTHER</b></td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>AMOUNT DUE</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$ 14.52</td> </tr> </table>	<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	\$13.70	<b>TAX</b>	\$00.82	<b>OTHER</b>		<b>AMOUNT DUE</b>	\$ 14.52
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Figure 5: Invoice

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