

A+E

MOVIES THEATER ART LISTINGS

Site lines

Josette Urso's drawings outline a view of her perceptual world in *Taking Place*.

By Megan Voeller

It takes just one look out the windows that border Josette Urso's Brooklyn studio to see why the city itself has been a subject of her draw-

ings. From the heart of Bushwick, N.Y.'s youngest, hippest frontier of galleries and artists' studios, Urso's place offers a view of Manhattan as it was meant to be seen — a geometric panorama of skyscrapers and building tops,

a maze of overlapping rectangles and squares, punctuated by water towers, bridges and birds.

Inside Urso's studio, the view gets more interesting still: All around are her paintings and drawings of places. A grid of small watercolors remains as evidence from her last visit to St. Pete Beach; pen drawings document her stay at Yaddo, the artists' residency, and oil paintings of abstracted landscapes offer subtle

signs of New England, New York and Ireland through swatches of color.

Through Sept. 27, HCC-Dale Mabry's Gallery 221 hosts an exhibit of the Tampa native's drawings called *Taking Place: Drawings by Josette Urso*. Small-scale windows onto external places where she's been, the 18 drawings also offer access to the internal space of

Urso's perceptual world. A video, her first ever, meditates on walking the city as an act of drawing with the body, and 20 miniature watercolors installed outside the gallery in glass cases provide a look at her color-infused painting. Next week, she'll give a talk about her work and dialogue with Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art curator Lynn Whitelaw at separate events celebrating the exhibition.

VISUAL ARTS

Taking Place: Drawings by Josette Urso

Runs through Sept. 27; artist's talk is Wed., Sept. 5, 3-4 p.m.; reception is Thurs., Sept. 6, 5-7 p.m., featuring a discussion with Urso and Leepa-Rattner Museum of Art curator Lynn Whitelaw at 6 p.m.; HCC-Dale Mabry, 4001 W. Tampa Bay Blvd., Tampa; 813-253-7386, hccfl.edu/gallery221. josetteurso.com.



CITYSCAPED: Josette Urso enlarged one of her urban panoramas to cover an entire gallery wall at the HCC-Dale Mabry.



SEA CHANGE: Josette Urso's "Cadaques Blue Cap" (12x16, 2010).

Urso may have roamed far from it, but HCC-Dale Mabry is where she got her start professionally. After graduating in 1984 from USF's MFA program, where she studied with the influential generation of painter-art professors that included Mernet Larsen, Bruce Marsh, Jeffrey Kronsoble and Theo Wujcik, Urso picked up a teaching gig at the community college. During her year and a half at HCC, she got to know Whitelaw, who then supervised HCC Dale Mabry's art gallery; he had organized an exhibition of her work there in 1982.

Then Urso moved to New York City, where she'd spent a couple of semesters studying at the Art Student's League through a program organized by USF's art department (since discontinued). Teaching at the famed art school Cooper Union and elsewhere, she launched her career as an artist, splitting time between painting and collage.

A 2002 trip to Ireland for an artist's residency jumpstarted her drawing practice. (Other residencies — Urso's resume boasts a wealth of them — have taken her to Taiwan, Cambodia, Spain, Germany and France.) Picking up a black pen and blank paper, she gave herself a break from the color-filled paintings she was making — lush garden landscapes abstracted to varying degrees. Instead of patches of oil paint in myriad greens, she put down leaf upon leaf and branch upon branch in black ink, building up a dense garden from strokes of her pen.

It felt good, picking up a pen and making lines. The Ireland drawings led to city drawings — meticulous renderings of rooftops in Brooklyn and Manhattan — and drawings of a forest in Connecticut and drawings drawn from inside the early 20th century mansion that houses Yaddo, the renowned artists' residency in Saratoga Springs, New York and Urso's own studio in Bushwick.

Coolly logical compositions in perfect linear perspective they are not. Instead, Urso's

drawings give a sense of the mind (or mind-eye-hand) that churns them out, a whirring, playful entity constantly at work noticing things from slightly different angles — the number of window panes in an industrial building, the curve of a flower stem emerging from a vase, cables spilling out of the back of a television set. Urso records them onto paper in nearly compulsive detail, covering empty space with thick networks of lines.

"I keep moving around the drawing to keep it completely fresh," she says.

The result is a series of not-particularly-romantic places transformed into subtly animated, captivating space.

It's difficult to imagine a more prosaic view than the one of a parking garage near New York's Port Authority that Urso takes on; her pen gives character — personality, even — to each automobile parked on the garage's concrete roof and a pair of birds in flight overhead. (At the time she drew it, Urso was working in a borrowed studio overlooking the lot.) Yaddo's common rooms full of antique furniture, books and chandeliers make for quirky interiors where Urso's pen travels just as intrepidly as it does outdoors, tracing overstuffed chairs, artworks and an electrical fan with equal devotion.

Just for the exhibit: One of her cityscapes has been enlarged and printed in vinyl to cover an entire gallery wall — an invitation to enter a closer-to-life-size version of her drawn world.

Urso's six-minute color video, also titled "Taking Place," pushes the point further. In it, she holds a camera that tapes her shoes and the sidewalks underneath as she walks through New York City. The simple, even boring-sounding premise yields a gratifying surprise — how much her wandering over grooved, striped, graffiti and chewing gum-stained surfaces (all "drawn" upon by people) resembles coaxing space into existence by tracing a line. **B+**