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Marianne Vitale

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In one of the two large-scale installations that make up Marianne Vitale's striking exhibition, nine cast-steel railway joints used in train switches stand vertically in an outdoor riverside meadow, like a clan of marooned, rusty beings. Titled *Common Crossings*, 2013, the grouping exudes a vitality that belies the material's industrial past and lineage of Minimalist, monumental, and masculine sculpture. The feat suggests that the young Vitale (born in East Rockaway, New York, in 1973) is a formidable match for such physical and conceptual heft. Each thousand-pound form is welded to a base from which it rises seven to thirteen feet in the air, shifted ninety degrees from the ground where it would normally lie. The alteration brings the metal alive, transforming formerly functional elements—bolts, joints—into anthropomorphic features such as faces and limbs. Though these creatures are not going anywhere, their humanness might make you think otherwise.

If *Common Crossings* conjures life, Vitale's other exhibited sculpture, *Burned Bridge Junction (Congress)*, 2013, summons death. For this work, the entire second floor of the museum's downtown space is taken up by two intersecting bridges of charred wood. Here Vitale revisits a material and form—wood and nineteenth-century covered bridges—that she has worked with before in both sculpture and video. In this case, each bridge stands more than seven feet tall and spans more than twenty-eight feet, and though smaller than life-size, the bridges have enough presence to invoke the real thing, or rather their demise. The blackened beams, singed in places to such a degree that only flakes remain, muster the troubling Civil War-era that coincided with the heyday of such civic structures, and the many bodies that were branded, burned, and tarred as they were being built. Vitale skillfully manipulates material and form to link past with present, this world with another—a triumph that has a powerful effect on the body as well as on the mind.

This exhibition is also on view at the Contemporary Austin Jones Center, 700 Congress Avenue, until January 5, 2014.

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