

BACK TO SCHOOL

This series of drawings is about my memories of grade school. Like most children, I loved and hated school, couldn't wait to go on Monday and couldn't wait to leave on Friday. This push and pull of feelings is my central memory of childhood.

One tends to think of children's emotional lives as relatively simple, even "elementary" as the saying goes. In hindsight, our inner lives were as complex and layered as children as they are today. We just use bigger words now.

"Back to School" evokes memories we all have: The teacher's pet, the class clown, math anxiety, school lunch. The most popular girl who was never me. A wild mixture of feelings at once petty and profound. Best friends, worst enemies. The beginning of class, the end of the world.

The drawings are thickly layered, with subtle color and texture mirroring the emotions they convey. The work is laid down drawing upon drawing upon drawing. A thin white or gray wash is applied over the surface, covering the images, but allowing hints of what lies underneath to sneak through.

I work on each drawing for several months. Some past the test and skip a grade quickly. Others are kept back. It takes a lot of time to get them to look simple.

Melissa Stern

November 2002, in conjunction with Back to School exhibition at the Children's Museum of the Arts January – March 2003.