

Reframing Nature

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Nature's beauty and complexity continually serves as a source of inspiration and I attempt to represent that feeling of awe that I feel when examining nature's patterns. Through this more recent progression of work more direct source material has been used through the use of discarded plants. My goal is not to make these plants into something that can be marketed or used as a sustainable product, but to celebrate and reorganize these natural objects through an artistic lens. I am exploring how change of context, means of attachment, accumulation, process, and my manipulation of these plant materials can transform the perception of these decaying plants into something precious.

We take plants' immense power for granted, deeming some worthy of our attention and labeling others as weeds, invasive species, and nuisances to our carefully honed gardens and pristine lawns. How you see a plant when it is preserved upon a herbarium sheet vastly differs from what it is seen as in nature. When one sees a plant specimen within a natural history museum, it gains a historical value. When that same plant is seen outside in the wild, it can be seen as a part of something larger, fresher, and of less immediate value. We step upon plants constantly when they inhabit the wild, taking little notice of the life or the structure we have destroyed due to our expectation that it will bounce back. In a garden however, plants are idolized and walled off from the wandering human foot.

In some ways I am seeking to inspire a question of values upon my audience. Why was this plant chosen as a material? Why was this much repetitive, time consuming labor taken to organize these seemingly useless pieces of plant litter? In what environments are these objects usually found? And lastly, I want more notice to be paid to these objects through my own creative process and system. I am asking the viewer to interpret these natural materials in a new way, and so perhaps changing perception of plant litter that may be considered useless, to something of greater value.

Value is the amount of importance or preciousness placed upon a process, object,

person, or system. The value given to these plant materials does not refer to their monetary worth, but of their held esteem and importance within awe-inspiring natural systems. People place value dependent on how they were raised in combination with what situation they have found themselves in. I have grown up in a natural world that has been idolized in my mind and destroyed in front of me. This context has contributed to my appreciation and involvement in the natural world. My experiences and exploration of nature have created a sense of home. This home has developed into more of a sanctuary of all natural systems, not dependent on but stemming from my education and habitat. I seek to share this value by displacing nature's disposed elements.

My appreciation of nature stems partially from the fear of losing it. With the way the world is progressing this not an outrageous fear. We are not only losing species and icebergs, but also our connections to the earth. These days it is more likely to find a child exploring a screen than you are to find them exploring the patterns in a leaf or paths in a forest. This fear of loss is not only for the loss of natural systems but for the lack and declining levels of care for the world as a natural system.

The natural world is a complicated thing to define. Technically the world in its entirety could be considered natural. Why should 'man made' be considered unnatural? Nature for me is a place that has created by the idea of wilderness. It has almost been separated from the rest of the world as a wilderness readily inspiring awe. This collection of places that make up 'the natural world' has become a means of escape and incredible inspiration. It is the place where I feel both physically and emotionally free to wander. Simultaneously however, I feel the need to organize this space, not by gardening, cultivating, or developing upon this land, but by creatively representing and communicating the patterns and repetition I see evolving within these environments.

Either through photography, sculpture, writing, dance, music, and any other creative

pursuit, people have sought to represent the world, which they find most inspiring. Throughout history there has been appreciation shown and praises sung in the name of the earth. We rely on its resources and systems for our existence and so that connection has always been present. Culture develops as a reaction to our co existence with place and what it produces.

This project stems from many different sources including other artists who are inspired and working with nature as a medium, context, and as a system that can be re-framed. The artists who I have been looking to for inspiration all view their relationship to nature and express that connection differently. Some explore how they can manipulate nature within its original context, others bring it into interiors, some use science as a means of manipulation, some celebrate the materials they use as a representation of nature, while others attempt to use natural materials to create more sustainable materials.

Andy Goldsworthy has become one of the most widely known artists exploring the idea of reframing nature through an artistic lens (Goldsworthy, 1990). His work introduced me to this way of seeing, and so created a shift in the relationship seen between the natural world and the art world. Goldsworthy finds materials within nature and primarily manipulates them within the environment where he discovers them. This practice of manipulating the land temporarily, photographing that manipulation, and bringing it into a new context serves as inspiration for my work with natural materials. Goldsworthy's documentation lives in books upon countless coffee tables, and reaches hundreds by means of film and photography. This way of reframing nature allows the audience to see a recording of Goldsworthy's tactile processes. The thing that is most interesting to me about Goldsworthy's work is the tactile nature of the sculptures he creates. I want to re-contextualize that natural tactility by manipulating the plant materials within the gallery space. Goldsworthy's works are subject to environmentally caused change or decay. This becomes not a failure, but a beautiful process to witness or record (Goldsworthy, 1990).



Figure 1
Hillary Fayle
Leaf Embroideries
(Fayle, 2011)

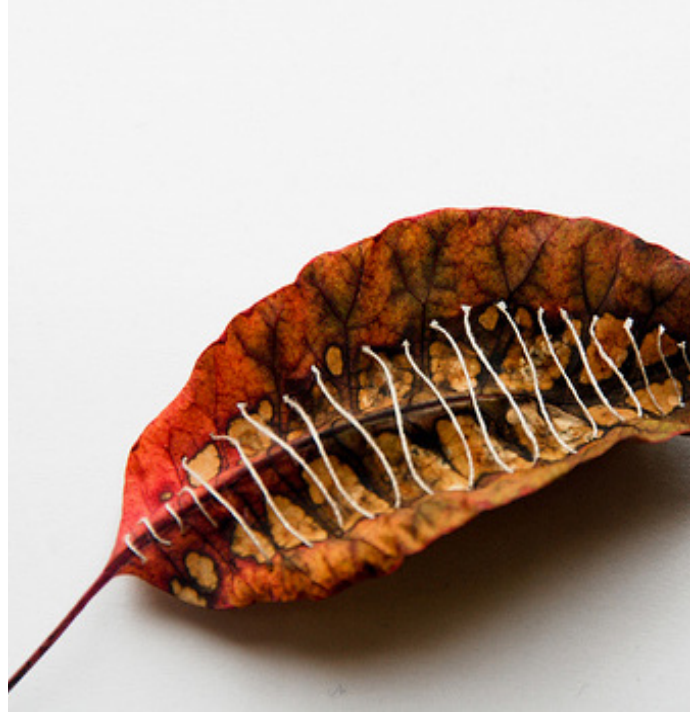


Figure 2
Anika Mari
Leaf Studies
(Mari, 2008)

Hillary Fayle (Figure 1) and Anika Mari (Figure 2) both embellish plants and their intricate patterns through embroidery. Their work is not permanent and is only present as an intact structure until the plant material in question decays. This decaying process also becomes beautiful and adds something to the progression of the work, but the fresh intact leaves are preserved through photography. This brings us to the preservation technique of photographs. Many artists have used photography as direct means of communication with the audience as to how they feel and view the natural environment. Hamish Fulton's work is described as letting the landscape impose itself upon him rather than imposing himself on it (Auping, 2012). However, in my work, that process has no tactile nature. Through a photograph one view of an object is presented. The labor of making and installation is more prominently showcased. When the materials are brought into the space the series of objects can be seen as a part of the natural world being presented, rather than a photograph providing a window into that world.

Ragine Ramsier is an artist who has brought plant materials inside. Specifically, she



Figure 3
Ragine Ramseier
2,000 suspended dandelions
ArTroll Summer Lab 2011 (Jobson, 2011)

brought dandelions gone to seed into a gallery installation (Figure 3). This piece and process that went into it was very inspirational for my work. The environment that is created is one of stillness and careful examination of these objects that would normally be run over with lawn mowers (Jobson, 2011). That change in perception of these plant materials from useless to precious, is one of the things I am attempting to inspire in an audience. I am drawing on all of these artists for inspiration, but I want to communicate the unique connection that I share with nature.

By organizing and presenting patterns that I discover within nature, I am able to further understand and recognize my place among them. I hope to create awe through my painstaking work to refashion natural materials in detailed patterns. I want an audience to ask why someone would spend so much time and effort preserving and processing these natural materials in such labor-intensive manner. I cannot ask people to change or direct them to change their attitudes towards nature and its awesome presence, but I can present the way I feel about and view this world.

This strong interest in pattern and repetitious processes originates and inspires my work in fiber arts and surface design. This practice has strongly fed into my constructions for this installation. This project is taking my design of fabrics and surfaces, which are normally inspired by the natural world, and creating an outcome where the materials themselves are directly sourced from the natural world. Instead of using fabrics and creating designs based on the natural

world, I am making these surfaces out of the plant material. This is not to say that I want them to become a usable domestic product. I want to celebrate these objects and the world that they come from, rather than domesticate them into a product for consumption.

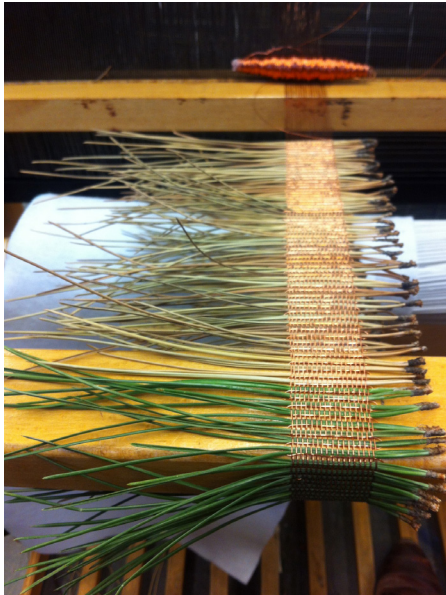


Figure 4
Lindsey Fox
Pine Needles Experiments
2013



Figure 5
Lindsey Fox
Pine Needles Experiments
2013

The materials used in the many experiments made during this process include: fallen ginkgo leaves, honey locust leaves, acorn caps, and pine needles. During the development of this series of work, these materials were used to create several different surfaces and structures. The main installation for the exhibition is made of pine needles woven together with copper wire. They are organized in a linear fashion shown in figure 4. They are then showcased in a vertically oriented hanging formation as shown in figure 5. Copper became part of the process due to its malleable properties, ability to hold its shape, color, and potential for reclamation.

The materials I have collected are objects in nature that are stepped upon, on the verge of decay, and in high abundance around the Ann Arbor area. Due to these factors these objects have accumulated on the well-tread ground and have lost their natural value due to their loss of

life. Their value lies in the life that these plants once held; but now, they are trodden on without a second glance. Their visible value at this stage is lost to us. It is not to say that they do not contribute to soil composition, but their beauty and ability to visually communicate that beauty is lost through their decay. However, I find that decay beautiful. Throughout this project I am collaborating with nature by using these materials and breathing life back into these objects. Through repetitive labor I am re-contextualizing the organic material to present it in a light closer to its former state, and in doing so recreating the reason why we stand in awe when looking at and contemplating the natural world. These natural materials are displaced from their habitat into a gallery installation that makes the audience stop and acknowledge these decayed, seemingly useless plants. I am trying to get the audience to view a newly designed system that is full of life, labor, and awe.

These plant materials inhabit an unfamiliar context when installed in a gallery space. This setting attracts an audience that does not necessarily cherish the plant materials or natural world in which they are originally found. For the installation of this body of work, walls were built, plants are displayed, and spaces are created. The constructed space creates an installation



Figure 6
Lindsey Fox
Work. Detroit
2013

that surrounds and envelops the audience in a laboriously organized world of unappreciated plant litter. Shown in figures 6, the overall show was laid out in a way that allowed the woven pine needle installation to become a separate world from the rest of the show. Based on comments from people who interacted with the space, the space begins to envelop the audience in a space of



Figure 7
Lindsey Fox
Pine Needle Installation
2013

wonder (see Figure 7). By raising the plant material above the audience's head, I am changing the audience's conventional view of these plant materials. What was once under foot, becoming part of the soil, is meticulously accumulated and showcased for all to see and acknowledge. Shadows also played an immense role in this iteration of the installation, activating over half of the white walled space. The plants that are used, to me, are beautiful in and of themselves, but the way that they interact with the space helps determine what objects people begin to value.

By changing the context, orientation, and organization of the plant materials I have chosen, I am altering the audience's perspective of these objects. As I intricately arrange these plants into unfamiliar arrangements, I hope to inspire wonder, not towards my process but towards the natural system that is represented by the decomposing plants I am raising up to the audience.

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