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Integrative Project Thesis
Section 004: Graf, Pachikara
2015

Terra Incognita: Small Vistas Unfolding

Wooden fragments are unearthed from the forest floor and translated through drawing, collage, painting, and sculptural installation. The displacement of these subterranean objects exposes the way that landscape can be perceived as an entity separate from human culture, and attempts to reconstruct the symbiotic nature of our connection to the world around us.



What does the bark say to bark?
What does the bark say to the tree?
What does the bark say to the forest?
What does the bark say to me?



Treestory (detail)

I. The Habit

Without roots I can feel myself beginning to float away. There's nothing for my toes to grab onto here in the world of plastic and screens and I can't tell whether this body is nature or something else. I return to the forest in search of my name and form and the origins of these things that once were solid bricks of earth but now dissipate into the air as dust. I walk in circles looking at the ground, asking this fallen branch how it got those spindles and were they knots when it used to be a full finger on some trunk arm around here? I line up the ones who answer me in a row on the grass and they look asleep lying in the sun. Some don't want to leave their bed of earth and inside I feel guilty for uprooting lives like this in the name of art, like I'm upsetting the balance of a sacred dusty shrine or robbing the ground of these golden Subterraneans that it needs. I am an obstruction to the forest, a loud and clumsy pocket of un-forest, arbiter of tree displacement and I can't help it.



Paper Vista I, 3' x 6', multimedia on butcher paper, 2015

II. The Map

I am a painter of landscapes: another hiccup in the tradition of framing nature to express some grand ideal of Beauty and Truth. I follow in the footsteps of Hokusai, Jacob van Ruisdael, Thomas Cole, Paul Cezanne and Claude Monet. These ghostly makers of images determined the point of view from which we look at nature, and their works propose a specific relationship between humans and the environment. By the selective inclusion and alteration of details, the landscape becomes a malleable spine to the anatomy of a painter's composition. Sometimes I think we are the ones responsible for the division between a pair of eyes and the scene before them, now an apt metaphor for the separation of humans and the nature we are embedded within.

My process is a compulsive response to this disconnect. I hold a subject up close to my face and draw without looking at the paper, methodically creating a blind contour of the wooden fragment in my hand. This intense observation is a way of exploring the terrain of an object in an immersive and physical manner, of losing myself in its miniature topography. The textures of erosion become their own kind of landscape, the scale of which is altered by their translation onto a large stretch of paper or canvas. As the composition grows I trace over lines like footpaths carved into fields of grass, creating a map of my journey over small vistas. Like my ancestors, I propose a new relationship to the content and invite others to wander the Subterraneans with me. The result is a simultaneously internal and external landscape, the original forms having been filtered through the lens of my own perception.

I begin my paintings with photographs of the fragments I've collected. By collaging these images onto the canvas, I build a panorama from the details, a narrative out of moments in time. The layering of contour lines over collage is a method of translation, a gestural record of my own hand. This line drawing in pen and marker documents my small journeys in a secret language. The continued

layering of color pools and contour lines recalls the formation and erosion of the geological time scale, the painting becoming its own vista as I work, the canvas laid flat as an open frontier stretching before me.

By mixing enough solvent into my pigments, the paint becomes viscous. I spill and pour the liquid color over collage and drawing, thereby exposing the early stages of my image to the effects of wind and gravity. I tilt the canvas and rivers flow in vertical drips. I blow on small lakes, throwing spindles of color outward from the center. I play god on the illusionistic space of my canvas and let the forces of nature shape the landscape as they see fit.



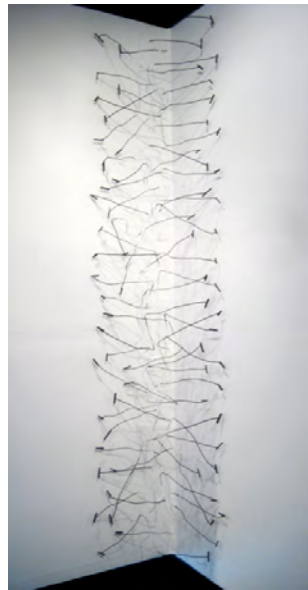
Big Vista, 4' x 8', oil and marker over collage on canvas, 2015



Big Vista (details)

III. Footsteps

There are tracks in the sand I follow and cross: I read them like the Subterraneans and see what they have to say to me. Larry Cressman's tracks are subtle and delicate as if he treads with light feet across a field. The twigs and sticks he passes are intact, unbroken. I see him wandering; head down like me, choosing which ones to take back to the studio. He keeps them in boxes on shelves, categorized by species and size. The levitating grids of lines held in place by pins tell me about the power of subtlety, how these small light things carry a visual weight hanging there inches from the wall, tossing shadows behind like they want to break the order imposed on them there, as if they'll push off and explode into space.



Installation Drawing, Larry Cressman, 2012

Seon Ghi-Bahk knows all about this selectivity of material. Her columns of charcoal seem to hum as they hang there, still and silent. Swaying in this liminal state of being I can't tell whether they're growing or breaking down. Floating inches above the ground they could be rising or falling or both.



An Aggregation (Series), Seon Ghi Bahk, 2014

Global Tree Project is a series of installations by Shinji Turner-Yamamoto that explores the significance of found objects and the stories they contain. His *Hanging Garden* involves one dead and one living birch tree, the lush green leaves supported by the decay of the other. I derive my collection of objects as he does with displacement in mind, knowing that to change the spatial context of a thing changes the thing's meaning. He refers to the cabinet of curiosity as a microcosm of the known universe, bringing together an abundance of ideas to constitute one whole. I think of this mantra as I collect my own pieces from various forests and hope that all these voices harmonize to tell the stories I want to tell. I walk on, acknowledging my footsteps as contour lines on the canvas of the Earth, tracing and retracing in order to remind myself that I am not alone.



Hanging Garden, Shinji Turner-Yamamoto, 2010

IV. The Climb

I've been hanging these pieces of wood from the frame because I have this compulsion to see them floating there, not like outside always attached to more wood or on the ground, just fragments that don't touch each other but maybe want to. When I'm up on the ladder tying the steely wire to my square frame it reminds me somehow of those golden days of woodland adventure in my early years – slowly my cubicle studio melts away and I am in the open air leaning off of stepped trunks with rungs for branches. The Subterraneans spin and dip, twitching under my fingers and when I have to drill the hole to hang them from it hurts, and under my breath I whisper apologetic mantras. Maybe I'm just repeating the backwards rituals of tycoons imposing a system onto these silent seers, a way of relating to them as if they were here to bend to my will. I quicken the forces of time and see the effect of my hands on their wooden skin as pieces snap and break falling to the

ground in splinters onto cold cement. I sweep daily and save the multibrown dust in a box on a shelf. I tell myself it's only a means to an end over and over until it's true.

I am forever tempted to alter the wood by painting it fluorescent or dipping it in plaster or wrapping in tinfoil or at the very least drilling these small holes to thread the wire through – again I feel the guilt. It must be human nature to want to leave traces of ourselves all over the place because it makes us feel some kind of ownership or control and there are demons afoot.

Stepping back I see the Treestory unfold as a pillar descending, the fragments held up and wanting to fall but stuck there reaching down. My eyes fill in the blanks and the woodbricks are moments of time, words in a vast infinite poem that's always been written and never will be finished. The story is about Creation but also at the same time about Erosion and how their distinction is just a matter of perspective – how everything is in a constant state of flux, all of us becoming something else, always and slowly. I want to construct the fragments of my landscape into one new vista legend, like a cut-up poem where you rearrange another writer's words to mean something else, only the writer in this case is Nature and the new story is my own life.



Subterranean Garden (details), wood and plaster, 2015



Treestory, wood, steel; 2015

V. The Vista

It's all about scale. It's about making space, to stop and think about the smallness of humans in the bigness of nature. It's about the difference between smallness and weakness. It's about recognizing our potential, the responsibility of potential, of being the primary natural force shaping the Earth.

It's about displacement: the effect of taking a thing from where it belongs. It's about seeing these Subterranean fragments out of their element, away from the dirt and green leaves nodding in the wind. It's about what they say in a blank space, white space. It's about how white homogenizes form. How we homogenize nature, try to own it, put it in a pot or inside a glass case. It's about how "wood" is different than "the woods". It's about looking at each moment of the story unfolding all around, each crumbling fragment as its own kind of vista, the only frontiers left unexplored and unknown. It's about letting our imaginations unfold.

Treestory is about putting the pieces back together. It is an attempt to reconstruct the fragmentary elements of our reality into one cohesive whole. It's about the tension of our relationship with the environment. It's about the grand narrative in layers of earth beneath our feet. The story is about a tree, my tree, but also our tree. The human tree. Anthropocene tree. We are part of the Story, roots of our own stories, each of us a tree in the vast infinite broken forest of this culture. We are implicated in the formation of the next chapter. What will we write?



Big Vista, oil and marker over collage on canvas; *Subterranean Gardgen*, wood, plaster;





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