



terrabilia

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Introduction

As we experienced an apocalyptic-like summer, unusually packed with hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, and exponential signs of glacial melting, I have been forced to consider how the effects of climate change will affect our Earth and myself on a personal level. Henry Fountain's article in The New York Times entitled "Apocalyptic Thoughts Amid Nature's Chaos? You Could Be Forgiven," discusses how people look for explanations when natural disasters happen, especially in the volume that we have been seeing. Fountain's words led me to consider how we can switch the conversation from defaulting to talk of otherworldly phenomenon to consider it more scientifically and to normalize these events. But things like weather catastrophes are often disparate events that do not affect everyone, causing a common misconception that climate change will not affect you personally.¹

Something that does affect everyone, however, is the issue of invasive species, which cause issues that are detrimental to native species in any given area. The education of invasive species in your own area will give you a greater appreciation for the ecosystem you live in, and how you can help maintain it. However, something I have found in my journey in becoming more environmentally informed is that it is easy to disregard or forget when you are disconnected to the nature around you, which is not difficult when you live in a city or suburb. This led me to ponder how I could create something that functions to remind myself constantly of our changing ecosystems.

Through pattern making, Terraphilia investigates invasive species and the topic of natural human ecology, how humans relate to nature. In a time where developed societies are distanced further from nature, the way people interact with nature is strange and disconnected. Terraphilia intends to question peoples' relationships with nature by taking var-

1 Nadja Popovich, John Schwartz, and Tatiana Schlossberg. "How Americans Think About Climate Change, in Six Maps." The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/21/climate/how-americans-think-about-climate-change-in-six-maps.html>

ious flora and fauna species that are commonly known and creating patterns that can exist on upholstery, clothing, and other everyday objects that will bring its owner face-to-face to the issue of invasive species daily.

Conservation and Sustainability

In an essay entitled “The Land Ethic,” written in 1949 by Aldo Leopold, an early conservationist, Leopold discusses the idea that humans have lost sight of how to treat nature because we have decided to conquer it, which, in turn, causes a lack of respect of the land, resulting in abuse of resources, extinction of animals, and irreversible affects that have led to what we now call Climate Change. He discusses that because our relationship with nature is so evolved, we have lost sight of how we should interact with it ethically. Our “role [as] Homo sapiens,” has become “conqueror of the land” (260),² instead of a “plain member and citizen of it” (Ibid, 240). Because of this, we have lost respect for it, selfishly abusing the resources nature has provided, causing extinction, and creating mass ripple effects relating to climate change. Conservation, he says, is the answer to this problem of ethics. Conservation “...a state of harmony between man and land” (Ibid, 189), can mend the relationship that we have destroyed. Leopold states, “we can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in” (Ibid, 251). This loving relationship then turns into a sense of accountability “for the health of the land” (Ibid, 258). When reading Leopold, I felt as though he was speaking right to me and how I feel about my current relationship with nature. Terraphilia is meant to convey the way we are detached and seeks to remind us of the nature we have disrespected and left behind.

Similarly, environmental historian, William Cronon's 1995 text “The Trouble with

2 Aldo Leopold. *A Sand County Almanac: With Other Essays on Conservation from Round River* (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1953), 260.

Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” discusses about how we have romanticized this idea of the wilderness so much, calling it an escape or refuge from the civilizations we have created, that we treat it as an opposite from our homes. By doing this, we have rationalized that since we know the wilderness is the purest, it’s okay that our homes are not this way, which has left us with little hope of finding harmony that Leopold suggests. Again, our love for the environment would more so allow us to hold ourselves accountable and consider the things we have destroyed and have allowed to happen, instead of kidding ourselves that we can save something that we have already had such a large impact on.

Our Décor and How We Live

At the heart of décor is perhaps how the decoration in your home affects how you live within it. Piet Mondrian took this idea to heart; curating his studios “into a reflection of his current practice” (Meier).³ In 1927 Mondrian writes passionately about the relationship between home and the human;

The interior of the home must no longer be an accumulation of rooms formed by four walls with nothing but holes instead of doors and windows, but a construction of colored and colourless planes, combined with furniture and equipment, which must be nothing in themselves but constituent elements of the whole. And the human being? In a similar fashion, the human being must be nothing in himself, but rather a part of the whole. Then, no longer conscious of his individuality, he will be happy in this earthly paradise that he himself has created (Jong, 6).⁴

3 Allison Meier. “The Geometric Aesthetics of Piet Mondrian’s Studios.” Hyperallergic. <https://hyperallergic.com/256202/the-geometric-aesthetics-of-piet-mondrians-studios/>

4 Cees de Jong, et al. Piet Mondrian: the Studios, Amsterdam, Laren, Paris, London, New York. London: Thames & Hudson, 2015, 6.

Mondrian's relationship between space and individual was such that he enforced the criteria that a successful design means being becoming one with your home. To do this, the décor must be such that the individual relates so passionately to each individual object in the home. Everything has purpose, everything is intentional. This intentionality requires such deep critical thinking and design to ensure everything is functioning purposefully.

The most exciting aspect about what Mondrian talks about is that the décor within one's home can showcase the manifestation of one's thoughts. Mondrian's studio can be seen to quite clearly relate to his works like his famous *Tableau 2*, with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red and Grey that employs a grid system and color blocking.

This manifestation of his work through interior decoration, he saw, to be important to living peacefully in a home that you have made entirely yours. Considering the similarities of his paintings and the home in which he inhabits and designed himself, I have asked myself, how can my work influence someone's thoughts about our larger environment?

Why Patterns and Invasive Species?

The idea that invasive species could be depicted quite harmoniously through pattern



Piet Mondrian's Studio, Source: Paul Delbo

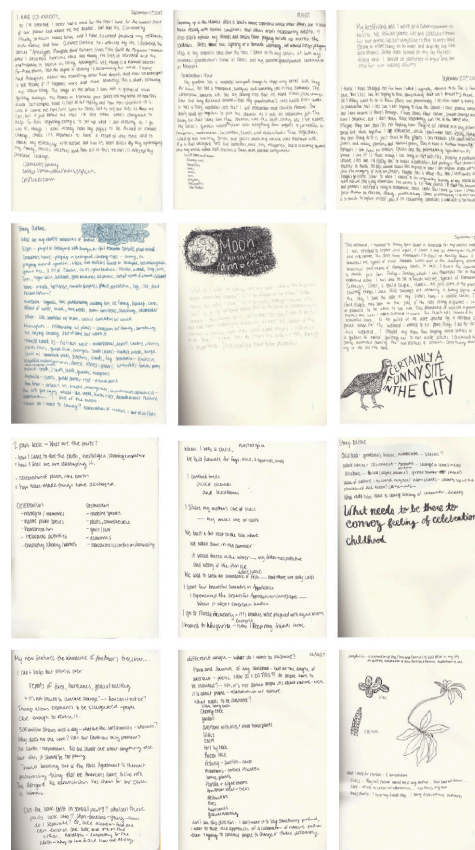


Mondrian's *Tableau 2, with Yellow, Black, Blue, Red and Grey*, which inspired his work space. Source: Piet Mondrian.

came accidentally. Like invasive species, repeated patterns can move and grow to overwhelm a space and lend themselves well to make statements in clothing and décor. Following the same thought process as Mondrian had, I thought that surrounding yourself with terms of invasive species could overwhelm you enough to not only consider the problem of invasive species, but to also to think our environment in general. In displaying the patterns on everyday objects, we can constantly be reminded of how we affect our environment in ways we do not cannot see or relate to.

Methodology

From the start, I wanted Terraphilia to be a manifestation of my own relationship with nature, to understand how I have become disconnected with our natural world. I wanted to depict my struggle with wanting humans to have more accountability for our Earth, but how I find it extremely difficult. This struggle resulted in various personal narratives and diary-like entries surrounding themes of my own relationship with nature and how I currently felt about the environment. This then turned into writing about how I have interacted with nature throughout my quite short life, especially noting certain recurring events that I find prominent. Their prominence, along with most of my writings, constantly reverted back to climate change. Part of my struggle with depicting my relationship with the environment was the feeling that I didn't have the right or education to inform or teach anything about climate change. This feeling led me to the thinking that



Personal journal entries with illustrations.
Source: Shannon Maiers

I had to strictly talk about my own experiences to make the discussion valid. So, I began to think of *Terraphilia* as an illustrated memoir that would depict simple imagery and brief, poetic text that gave insight to my problematic relationship with nature. I thought I would be able to convey a sense of urgency for my feelings about the environment through my own experiences, but I continuously felt that it fell flat or that it was insincere. I then decided that I would make patterns as more of a celebration of nature, or just more for aesthetic value because I did not want to risk making claims about a topic I thought I knew very little about.



Nature illustrations relative to my relationship and stories involving nature. Source: Shannon Maiers

However, when I discussed my project further with Hannah Smotrach and Kelly Murdoch-Kitt, they encouraged me to free myself from this self-doubt as it is a topic I am educated on, even if self-educated.

After my consultation, my project developed quite fluidly. Even though I felt more confident about discussing issues of the environment, I was still unsure what exactly I would say. Because I wanted to stop thinking about what I would say, I just decided to start making. I started by drawing peonies, my favorite flower. I decided I would include insects as well, to create more visual interest. Upon researching what insects peonies host, I came across the relationship of the invasive Japanese Beetle and the Spring Tiphia Wasp who naturally eliminates the invasive Japanese Beetle. With this idea in mind, I became curious

of how other invasive species affect ecosystems and decided my patterns would revolve around three of these stories. Once I researched and decided the species I would focus on, I began to draw each flora or fauna several times in various angles. I then drew compositions that integrated them together.

Since these ecosystems already have stories tied to them, deciding how I would depict the stories came natural. Because the flora and fauna affect each other so greatly, they are depicted as they would be seen naturally, unlike patterns that depict objects ungrounded in space.



Pencil drawing of peony pattern.
Source: Shannon Maiers



Inked and scanned image of peony pattern.
Source: Shannon Maiers

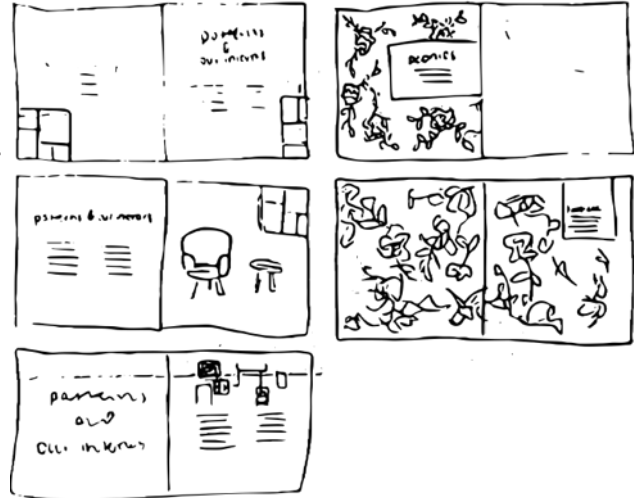
Overall, I would say my project developed when I would just create without much thought. I learn from doing, so before settling on a final design to watercolor and repeat, I created multiple compositions.

Each time I created a “final” watercolor version, I would scan them and edit in Photoshop. The editing is brief, largely to ensure that the patterns repeat and that colors are true and vibrant.

Similarly, with the design of the book I began by creating thumbnail sketches, several for each design spread. I would then transfer it digitally and, again, change it multiple times until I was satisfied with it.

Creative Work

The product of Terraphilia is a mock interior decorative exhibition including wall-paper, a re-upholstered chair and a pattern sample book that features the patterns I have created. This decision came about as I pondered how I wanted people to interact with the work. Terraphilia is meant to be grotesquely beautiful, a reminder that though some of these species are beautiful, they can prove to be detrimental to our ecosystems. These patterns are meant to be a shocking reminder of this and are meant to engulf their viewers. The patterns repeat and expand just as invasive species breed and spread, especially when they do not have any natural predators. The idea that they could be decorated on everyday objects and that they could act as talking pieces for people that are unaware



Thumbnail sketches for book. Source: Shannon Maiers



Introductory pages of final book. Source: Shannon Maiers



Detail of peony pattern, showing damage of peony leaves by the Japanese Beetle, and the Spring Tiphia wasp that is parasitic to the Japanese Beetle larvae.

Source: Shannon Maiers

of the negative affects they have on ecosystems that are in fact close to home helps resolve the issue of how I could make people more interested in their environments in a way that is beautiful and natural.



Series of images of Terraphilia installation at Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design. Source: Shannon Maiers

Conclusion

My goals for Terraphilia were to not only make others aware of our changing climates, but to be able to position myself and my relationship with our natural world. I do not think I fully understand this relationship, however, I know that I feel more comfortable and less anxious about climate change. Since we are in fact at a point of no return, it is now our job to maintain and to conserve what remains. I would like to expand Terraphilia to include more patterns and objects that the patterns exist on. This will allow to expand the conversation, to inform and remind others of the world we have lost respect for. If we aren't aware of what is occurring in our environments, how could we be expected to know how to act? Surrounding ourselves in the world we must conserve daily seems like a good idea, lest we not forget. The only way we will be able to move forward to make change is to not only care, but to obsess over our environments.

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