

Neo-Pastoral

By

John Daniel Walters

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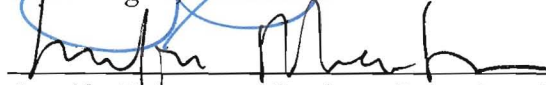
Approved by:



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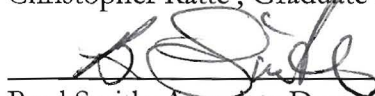
Bryan Rogers, Graduate Committee Member



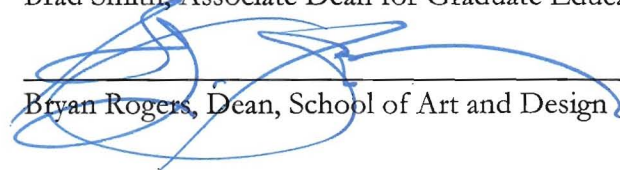
Jennifer Robertson, Graduate Committee Member



Christopher Ratte, Graduate Committee Member



Brad Smith, Associate Dean for Graduate Education



Bryan Rogers, Dean, School of Art and Design

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-Abstract-

This thesis examines the concepts that inform *Neo-Pastoral* (Figure 1), a body of work by John Daniel Walters. The primary work is a triptych of optically altered sculptures that serve as a biography for the neo-pastoral culture of the American Midwest. As a nation deeply embedded in technological infrastructure and practice, the notion of an escape to a bucolic ideal has been surpassed by our access and manipulation of the earth's landscape. The objects in the body of work illustrate a form of technological determinism that is defining the middle landscape of the 21st century. Construction of the work supports the underlying concepts by using a wide range of materials and process, each of which represents a key component in present-day land management.



Figure 1: *Neo-Pastoral*, Steel, Bronze, Terracotta, Aluminum, Mixed-Media, Installation
Approx. 1000 sq. ft., 2010.

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-Introduction-

As a native of the American Midwest I question the significance that the need to idealize a simple, rural-type agrarian lifestyle has upon the lives of the men and women of present-day America - a society so apparently organized, urban, and technologically advanced. *Neo-Pastoral* visually addresses this question and serves as a continuation of a pastoral dissimilarity outlined by Leo Marx, “the distinction between two kinds of pastoralism – one that is popular and sentimental, the other imaginative and complex.”²

My creative research explores the notion that pastoralism remains a significant conceptual approach to a non-utopian ideal. I have seen Marx’s sentimental pastoralism exemplified through urban sprawl, which consumes vast quantities of arable land in our search for a more natural living environment. American culture often promotes a sentiment that popularizes the possible retreat into an undeveloped or rural setting as one that will satisfy our desire for a far simpler, more peaceful style of living. As an object maker from the Heartland, I often question these desires as I develop my practice.

Neo-Pastoral explores a more complex type of pastoral role described by Marx. It uses human, machine, agriculture, and landscape to illicit an imaginative response to the sophisticated order of human existence and the spontaneity of nature: a serene partnership whose basis is the integration of technology upon the rural environment. I have informed this work through national and international field research, which continues to engage my work using an over-arching approach of investigating the apparent tension between people and their environment.

² Leo Marx, *The Machine and the Garden* (London, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 5.

-Contextual Information-

The partnership between humans and nature addresses the engagement we have with our landscape in work and leisure. We often use industrious measures to define the earth's landscape, conceptually as a means of support, and physically as a tactile mass beneath our feet. Education, vocational training, and personal interest generally define what we do. In an industrialized nation, the way that we perform our work is often subjugated by automation through machine technology. The result of this subjugation releases us from mundane tasks while increasing our opportunity for leisure. This has changed the way we approach work. I argue that automation and machine technology is viewed by the American public as a system built by our own ingenuity that provides workers with a release from actions that are often repetitive or time consuming.

Quantified systems of production influence all facets of our society and culture. It is now commonplace to buy and use products of consumer culture as a means of escape or relaxation from our daily work. The antiquated pastoral ideal is a proponent for the complete removal from a "metropolitan" way of life, into one tied to the landscape as pastor and observer. This pastoral ideal, examined by Leo Marx, takes technology into consideration within its definition, but automation – a product of the technological advancements within industry – does not hold a defining role. Therefore, speaking contemporarily, how does a society escape from technology when technology is what we now use to escape?

Labor, as a key component of industry and a virile portion of human existence, can begin to answer this question. As a pastor of the landscape, a person is seen as working closely with the soil, plants, and animals, which serve as supportive elements of one's livelihood. This idea has seen significant decline in the 21st Century, where people often now relegate themselves to actions that are wholly removed from any pastoral notions. The shift to new modes of labor from the apprenticeship and guild traditions can serve as an example. Frederick Winslow Taylor writes in his book *Principles of Scientific Management*,

“The managers assume . . . the burden of gathering together all the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae.”³

This reduction of skill to a series of set rules decreases the connection that people have with their environment. Therefore, even the most thoughtful of individuals still may assume that their actions are correct since they have been successful in previous practice by another thoughtful person. The decline of skill within the workforce is subject to a similar scenario - the division of labor. Speaking about western societies in the mid 1950’s, as described by Matthew B. Crawford,

“The “machine” in question was the social body, made up of increasingly standardized parts. In the Soviet bloc, this machine was subject to central control by the state; in the West, by corporations.”⁴

Here we see the word *machine* used to describe the labor of humans, whose standardized parts are their willingness to accept the predetermined methods of their governing body at face value, often with few questions arising as long as the assembly line appears to be working.

Henry Ford first introduced the mechanical assembly line in 1913. This invention, established to lower the purchase price of an automobile and therefore make it more accessible to the American public, is now considered a fundamental economic principle of manufacture. Within this fundamental lies the belief that certain systems must exist in order to stay competitive. The introduction of assembly line work was initially seen as insulting by workers and higher pay was used to reward employees who would work at the pace of the line.

³ Frederick Winslow Taylor, *Principles of Scientific Management* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1912), 98-99.

⁴ Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soul Craft* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 38.

Harry Braverman writes, “ this opened up new possibilities for the intensification of labor within the plants, where workers were anxious to keep their jobs.”⁵ This provided Ford with a driven workforce that, as described by Crawford, “eventually became habituated to the abstraction of the assembly line.”⁶

Over the past century, the assembly line has become the separating element between raw material and consumer. One could view this influx of automation as a buffer of hardship; allowing relief from mundane action. *Neo-Pastoral* is a visual biography of a landscape that houses this manufactured way of living, a landscape that will be hard pressed to find refuge from the technological infrastructure that has grown from the fruit of human intellect.

Artistic movements of the early 20th Century - specifically Modernism and Social Realism - contain comparative examples of industry and use imagery that has informed and inspired the objects and images found within my work. Charles Sheeler’s *American Landscape* (Figure 2), is a Modernist example of a landscape that evokes an image of a new industrial age that seems to leave the behind the chaos of the crisis-torn Depression era. Charles Corwin, a writer for the *New York Daily Worker* on February 4, 1949 described Sheeler’s work in the following way,

“Sheeler approaches the industrial landscape, whether it be farm building, textile mills or oil refineries with the same sort of piety Fra Angelico used towards angels. His architecture remains pure and uncontaminated by any trace of humans or human activities, an industrialist’s heaven where factories work themselves. In revealing the beauty of factory architecture, Sheeler has become the Raphael of the Fords. Who is it that will be the Giotto of the UAW?”

⁵ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974),150.

⁶ Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soul Craft* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 42.



Figure 2: Charles Sheeler, American Landscape, 1930

Sheeler's painting depicts an image of Ford's River Rouge plant in Detroit, Michigan, which at the time of his painting was one of the premier industrial metropolitan centers of Middle America. Sheeler's imagery served a function for the bourgeoisie as described by Terry Smith,

“We have seen Sheeler's picturing at the River Rouge as a somewhat more resonant encounter than a direct matching up of avant-garde modernist art with the most modernizing industry. We have also placed this meeting as one among a variety of ways in which Ford Company was obliged to organize the broader imaging of its own modernity, in which companies like it were forced to seek some control over the imaging of American industry.”⁷

⁷ Terry Smith, *Making the Modern. Industry, Art, and Design in America*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 202.



Figure 3: Diego Rivera, Detroit Industry North, 1932

In contrast, the *Detroit Industry* mural (Figure 3) of Diego Rivera, a Social Realist and muralist active during the Mexican Revolution of 1910, portrayed his own interpretation of the River Rouge plant in one of his largest works. It occupies the Garden Court in the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum. Smith argues the following reasons for Rivera working in Detroit,

“...he (Rivera) recognized the emergence in the 1920’s , of a globalizing imagery of modernity, that he saw it was taking its strongest form in the United States, that it was essentially tied to the imaging of modern industrial production, in that it was the expression of a dynamic yet alienating economic, social, and political order...he set out both to absorb the irresistible inventive energy of this emergent imagery of industrial modernity and to add to it two other contrary kinds of energy. These were, first, an insistence on organic ancientness of industry itself, and, second, a related emphasis on the primacy and the persistence of physical work as still central to industrial production.”⁸

⁸ Terry Smith, *Making the Modern. Industry, Art, and Design in America*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 204.

The *Neo-Pastoral* series includes the interpretations of industry put forth by Sheeler and Rivera in its construction. The components of industry, labor, and product are explored through motor, human, and agricultural forms. These forms rely on traditional processes and materials in their construction, analogous to the centuries old industrial infrastructure that served as the economic backbone of North America in past and present. Also included is a glimpse of future notions of land occupation and hybrid agricultural production that are still supported by a seemingly antiquated industrial infrastructure driven by fossil fuel consumption. Traditional material processes collide with technologically advanced methods of fabrication and presentation in support of this visual biography of the contemporary American Midwest.

-Motor Production-

Detroit is a city that has seen both the success and demise of North America's industry. Within *Neo-Pastoral*, the replacement of labor power via mechanized means is interpreted most directly in the central sculptural component of my work entitled *Motor Production* (Figures 4-5). Within the exhibition, this motor form is intended to serve as a metaphor of industrial infrastructure. The motor is a 15 Liter Cummins Turbo Diesel that has been formalized using what I term as the Detroit Art Deco aesthetic. It sits in a field of identical motors waiting dutifully to be put to work. The sculpture is built from nine-gauge steel plate assembled using a dry fit system of outer fins and inner architecture. It sits void of any accessory components; a substantial yet transparent form that is hollow, yet heavy.



Figure 4: *Motor Production*, Steel, 72 x 48 x 120 in., 2010



Figure 5: *Motor Production*, Steel, 72 x 48 x 120 in., 2010

An analogy can be drawn between *Motor Production* and the large vacant Art Deco structures in the Detroit cityscape. Most notably Michigan Central Station (Figure 6), the Book Tower, Broderick Tower, and the United Artist Theatre Building stand as iconic examples of the previous Detroit metropolitan legacy that was supported by its strategic location along the Great Lakes waterway and the development of Ford Motor Company. Detroit has one of the largest collections of late 19th and early 20th century architecture due to the progressive state of its economy at that time. Much of this architecture is now in various states of decay.



Figure 6: Senor Miller, Michigan Central Station, 2008, digital photograph

Motor Production adopts visual cues from this architectural style and combines them in a motor form. One might ask, “ Why superimpose early Twentieth Century architectural motifs on a contemporary motor form that is used in heavy industry and the transportation of goods? Why not superimpose these motifs on a Ford Model A engine block of the same era?” I chose the former approach for *Motor Production’s* aesthetic because it is precisely these types of engines that carry - for thousands of miles - the outsourced goods that we, as an economy, rely on heavily today. It is this dependence on outsourcing that has partially contributed to the reduction of North American industrial capital, whose effect is notably apparent in the abandoned commercial buildings of Detroit.

However, the finned architecture of *Motor Production* does borrow its vertical proportions from the front grill spacing of a 1938 Ford half-ton pickup; a post-Depression product of Detroit industry. The viewer’s eyes encounter an interfaced Moiré pattern (Figure 7), which is caused by the visual overlaying of the adjacent finned structure that defines the outer formal boundaries of the motor. An illustration of the Moiré effect is shown in Figure 8.



Figure 7: Moiré pattern in *Motor Production*

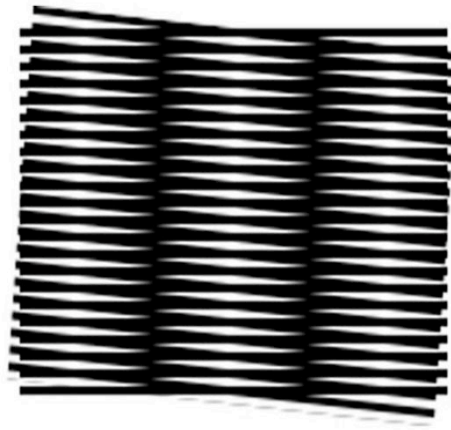


Figure 8: Illustration of Moiré effect⁹

In *Motor Production*, the motors sit in an assembly line landscape. One tends to wonder if they've been sitting too long to ever be started. Observers of the work are asked to confront this landscape filled with motors in conjunction with two other corresponding optical monoliths in a room no larger than 1000 square feet. In this environment, I often found them questioning the motors' function and construction. This response is similar to the reactions I have received from people during my previous profession as a mechanic. In this profession, I would often find myself speaking to a customer about how a motor works by pointing out components, while providing an explanation of its construction.

Within American industry, the Cummins Turbo Diesel and many similar diesel models, typically serve as power plants for on-and-off road medium-to-heavy industry, marine, and agricultural applications. Diesel motors are used for their high torque, durability, and rebuild ability, but they often become transparent components of a system that is highly dependent on their function, while being relegated to sitting buried under colorful paint and chrome. We all expect motors to operate without question, but only a small percentage of us fully understand their functional components. The combustion engine has been a facilitator of commerce and leisure for over a century, yet it has remained relatively unchanged in principle design since its introduction. It is this antiquated facilitation that I aimed to emulate visually in *Motor Production* using a unique method of finned metal construction, which simultaneously gives the work a feel of substance and transparency.

⁹ The Ketelsen's. *Morie Patterns Around Us*, JPG, <http://theketelsens.blogspot.com/2009/11/moire-patterns-around-us.html>

-Apportioned Crowd-

Apportioned Crowd (Figures 9-10) is one of two complimentary sculptural components to *Motor Production* within *Neo-Pastoral*. Whereas *Motor Production* symbolizes the modernist industrial era, *Apportioned Crowd* provides a visual metaphor for the postmodernist end of a work-centered society. Ralf Dahrendorf, in his article *The Disappearance of the Work-Society* describes one's occupation as being, "at the center of the social identity of an individual"¹⁰, but in contemporary society Dahrendorf observed that the development of technology has increasingly dissolved this source of identity, displacing work from its core where "work society has now begun to transcend work".¹¹



Figure 9: *Apportioned Crowd*, Terracotta, 48 x 48 x 120 in., 2010

¹⁰ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Im Entschwinden der Arbeitsgesellschaft: Wandlungen in der sozialen Konstruktion des menschlichen Lebens*, Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken 34, no. 8 (August, 1980): 751.

¹¹ Ibid.



Figure 10: *Apportioned Crowd*, Terracotta, 48 x 48 x 120 in., 2010

The human forms in *Apportioned Crowd* support this observation of the postmodern labor movement shift from one that is human-centered, to one that is reliant on technological innovation and automation. The central human form is portrayed as a standing figure in frontal pose with a planar anterior portion. The multiplicative element of the surrounding two-way mirror optical enclosure turns this single figure into a population of individuals who are paired in silent conversation with one another. Without jaw to move or lung to fill with air, these humans defining characteristics are as flat as the ground that they occupy. Only memories and the texture of their posterior are reminiscent of the land they once tilled with their now absent hands. Like a line of postmodern earthen sentinels they stand waiting for their next order. Daniel Bell provides supporting commentary in his book entitled *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*,

“...having abandoned work as a source of self-fulfillment, the modern individual is vexed with a Faustian restlessness of spirit that offers little consolation. Culture, and certainly not mass culture, has proven no substitute for the gratifications of work. As we witness the transformations from an industrial society in which “energy and machines transform the nature of work” to one in which “social participation” replaces production, traditional social bonds no longer take hold.”¹²

This observation may be neither entirely true nor overtly dependent on a belief in Productivism, but Bell’s argument does support the opinion of Claus Offe, a German historian, on the decline of work ethic as a fault of work itself: “In so far as they are modeled on the pattern of ‘Taylorization,’ processes of technical and organizational rationalization result in the elimination of the ‘human factor’ and its moral capacities from industrial production.”¹³ To some degree, this means that meaning has disappeared from work.

Offe’s observation of meaning and work relies on the perception that work is defined by productive force. However, this perception has been superseded by the realization that communicative force can also be considered a form of work. A French Marxist sociologist named Pierre Naville best defines this when he wrote, “What is new is the element of mechanical “supervision” over complex operations and over longer periods of time.”¹⁴

The notion of displacement of traditional human labor power by means of industrial automation is supported within *Neo-Pastoral* through visual metaphor by displacing the earth’s texture onto the posterior of the humans in *Apportioned Crowd* (Figure 11). The figures physically occupy the landscape, but it does not define them. In comparison, the actual occupied landscape bears a manufactured quality, segmented in perfect divide as a product of its possessors (Figure 12); a product whose planar texture is also superimposed on the anterior portion of each human to such a degree that they become void of character.

¹² Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York, 1976). 147-48.

¹³ Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, ed. John Keane (Cambridge, 1985). 141.

¹⁴ Pierre Naville and Pierre Rolle, “L’evolution technique et ses incidences sur la vie sociale,” *Traité de sociologie du travail*, ed. Georges Freidmann and Peirre Naville (Paris, 1961). 366.

Although human hands have manipulated the earth's landscape since the dawn of civilization, it is with the advent of work – as a postmodern productive force of technology and automation - that the Leo Marx's complex pastoral ideal is superseded. Marx saw technological power as an ever-encroaching element of the metropolitan on the rural countryside. In response to contemporary issues of overpopulation and lack of available resources, Marx's interpretation is gradually being replaced by the corporal and technical domination of nature using systems that no longer view work as coinciding with the occupation of the earth's landscape, but rather as engineered products of science and industry.



Figure 11: Earthen Texture on Posterior of *Apportioned Crowd*



Figure 12: Manufactured landscape of *Apportioned Crowd*

-Hybrid Field-

Hybrid Field (Figures 13-14) is the final of three sculptural components within *Neo-Pastoral*. As a component of this triptych, *Hybrid Field* uses traditional bronze casting processes in the construction of a typically-sized corn stalk that boasts gargantuan cobs. This piece signifies the engineered response of North American agribusiness to increase crop yield using genetically modified methods of manufacture on the American landscape.



Figure 13: *Hybrid Field*, Bronze, 48 x 48 x 120 in., 2010



Figure 14: *Hybrid Field*, Bronze, 48 x 48 x 120 in., 2010

Hybrid Field is a symbol of science supported by mechanized process and a change in the manner in which we now work the land. For centuries the kernels on corn have provided a way to transmit the genetic code of a plant from one crop to another. The recent development of being able to read and alter the physical properties of a plant has led to the patenting of seeds and their genetic makeup. Juan Enriquez, Director of the Life Sciences Project at Harvard describes the industry in the following way,

“Take a look at the most basic industry on the planet...
Agriculture....agribusiness.
Most of the adults living on the planet today still live off growing,
transforming, distributing, or selling food, fiber, and drink.
The ability to genetically alter bacteria, plants, and animals creates
extraordinary opportunities.
Instead of growing grain for flower...
Farmers are starting to grow...
Medicines...
Plastics...
Fuel...
But only those farmers with ...
Knowledge...
And access...
To new technologies...
Can hope to prosper.”¹⁵

Enriquez of course speaks with a mind towards economics. His work also examines facets of North America’s burgeoning knowledge-based economy as a product of industry outsourcing.

As a biography of the American Midwest, *Neo-Pastoral* looks to include an element of the region’s future land use. I chose corn because it is a prominent crop in my native state of Nebraska. Bio-fuels are widely produced in the region and utilize corn as a primary component in its manufacture, as outlined by Enriquez. This new fuel type is now a prominent fuel source for a number of heavy industry motors like the Cummins Turbo Diesel found in *Motor Production*. Aside from the debate over the actual energy ratios and the overall energy balance of bio-fuels as a sustainable product of agriculture¹⁶, the relationship that has developed between corn and engine, as facilitator and product, highlights the

¹⁵ Juan Enriquez, *As the Future Catches You* (New York: Crown Business, 2001), 165.

¹⁶ Dev S. Shrestha and Jon Van Gerpen, “The Biodiesel Energy Balance,” *Biodiesel Magazine*, October, 2007, http://www.biodieselmagazine.com/article.jsp?article_id=1868&q=&page=all

dependencies that can arise in a system that, once prolific enough, can begin to redefine the idea of “crop as food.”

However, this removal from the traditional pastoral notions of farmer, plant, and soil begins to question the boundaries of what we consider natural. Nature can be considered a product of culture because each culture has its own version of nature. Richard White describes our cultures perception of nature in the following way,

Although nature is only an idea, it is unlike most other ideas in that we claim to see, feel, and touch it. For in everyday speech we use the word not only to describe a unity of all things we have not made but also to name a common quality - the natural - possessed by seemingly disparate things; for example, sockeye salmon, Douglas Fir, and cockroaches. When we see rocks, animals, or rivers in certain settings, we say we are seeing nature.”¹⁷

Pastoralism contains the ideal that work provides knowledge of, and connection to, nature. Its relevance to contemporary discussion is limited because it only considers labor done without modern machines. With non-mechanized labor, supposedly people once had a truer, more favorable connection with the natural world, one that now has been severed due to the advent of technology. Philip Shabecoff describes this as a “time before the new machines degraded the landscape.”¹⁸ This is not to say that non-mechanized labor has not left indelible marks on the natural world, it only implies that the working of the land by industry for economic profit is not natural. This line is not so cut and dry. If it were, then where on the line does the rural farmer fall when he or she sits atop the tractor that helps them produce sufficient yield to keep their farm afloat?

Hybrid Field looks to place the viewer in a surreal setting of field and yield. A setting that is both comforting and eerie simultaneously. The warm tone of bronze emulates a feeling of

¹⁷ Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 183 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).

¹⁸ Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 29.

prosperity and permanence, yet the sizable cobs that inhabit the stalk seem out of place and “unnatural”. The stalk bends under the weight of these cobs but gathers itself in perfect vertical form at the base of the tassel, unwilling to let any sunlight escape its upward grasp. The viewer is witness to an expanding field of identical stalks made possible by the transparent, yet reflective qualities of the two-way mirror enclosure.

Technology, as an artifact of our work, masks the apparent connections we have with the natural world. Insight from McBill Kibben in his book *The End of Nature* poses the possibility that pure nature, nature that is separate from human work, may no longer exist. He sites global warming as the basis for his argument, “We have changed the atmosphere and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial.”¹⁹ Industry, technology, automation, and humans are the cause of this conundrum. Much of the technology we now condemn once held hope for tying us closer to nature by virtue of utopia. Hydroelectric dams and the combustion engine were initially seen as a means of escape from the dirty air produced by the burning of coal and the rancid smell of horse manure. These inventions are now seen as killing our natural environment by contributing to the decline of native fish populations and increasing the percentage of carbon dioxide particulates in the air.

In 1934 Lewis Mumford saw humans as, “formed by nature and [were] inescapably...part of the system of nature” where he envisioned a new technical world of “organic machines” and “ecological balance.”²⁰ It is the intent of *Hybrid Field* to portray the confusion imbedded within present-day notions similar to Mumford’s, and cast them permanently in a plant form that is indigenous to the Americas and descriptive of the contemporary Midwest.

¹⁹ Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 58.

²⁰ Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), 256-57.

-Transparency, Multiplication, and Reflection-

The two-way glassless mirror enclosures that surrounded each of the sculptures in *Neo-Pastoral* are of my own design and contribute significantly to the conceptual nature of each individual piece. Large vertical sheets of .005-millimeter thick 50/50 pass polyester film stretched over aluminum framework encapsulate each sculpture and define the proximity of view. Due to the unique properties of the film, fifty percent of the diffused light that is cast upon the sculptures from overhead is reflected back inward, whereas fifty percent is allowed to pass through the film to the outside as illustrated in Figure 15.

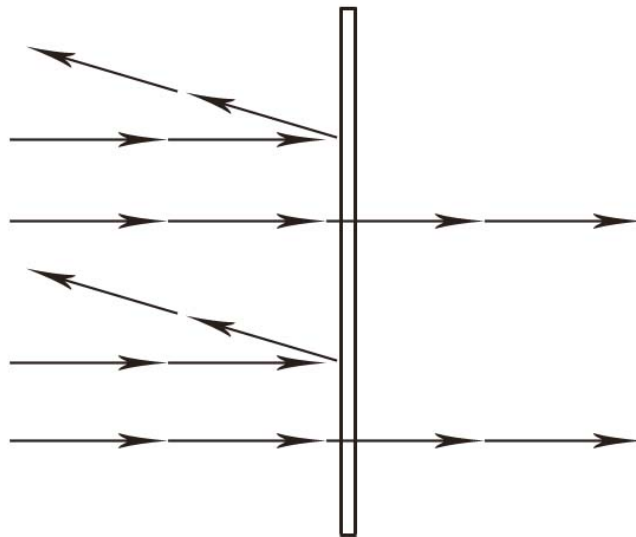


Figure 15: Reflective properties of 50/50 pass polyester film

Using this material principle to my advantage, I am able to turn one sculpture into a field of sculptures. In reference to *Motor Production*, a single motor form is turned into an assembly line. In *Androgynous Crowd*, a stark human figure becomes a crowd, and in *Hybrid Field* a stalk of corn is transformed into a field. My intention in using this technique to display the work is three fold. First, it achieves a unique spatial effect inside an enclosed gallery that is emulative of landscape. Landscape defines the American Midwest; it is what we occupy. The ability to draw direct correlation with our surroundings in a three-dimensional display adds strength to the content and meaning of my work. A viewer is able to walk entirely around each enclosure to view it from all angles. The depth of the landscape is only limited by the

clarity of the film and the degree of ambient light in the room. Each image is compounded upon itself until one of these limitations sequesters the enclosure's reflective capabilities, which is portrayed visually as a gradual darkening of the form far off in the distance.

My second intention, a counterpart of landscape, is the concept of multiple images. Very rarely do we find ourselves alone and even more rare are the notions of a singular object, either animate or alive, being found within our surroundings. The reason for this may have developed from either economic means or natural selection, but it is not often that an object, constructed by human or nature, is made without its equivalent following suit. It seems that most systems have found that production of multiples is beneficial to their larger structures. A piece of chinaware can be offered at a lower price and serve more people if it is produced in multiples. A field of prairie grass is less susceptible to the elements of nature, be it erosion or an encroaching wooded area, if the field is densely packed full of millions of specimens. Passing water would simply uproot a single blade or in the case of an encroaching forest, the blade would simply die due to the lack of sun under a canopy of dense leaves.

The third, and most variable visual property of the optical box enclosure is the outer reflective feature. Contingent on the intensity of the ambient light in the gallery space, viewers are able to see a reflection of themselves, superimposed on either of the three landscapes facing them, as seen in Figure 16. Included in this aspect is an overlapping reflection of the gallery environment comprised of the surrounding wall structure and accompanying sculptural forms in triptych as represented in figure 17. This exclusive aspect of the enclosures allow for a complex viewing experience that is dependent on a social aesthetic. Viewers find that they are immersed in a formalized landscape of the American Midwest. This personal approach to exhibiting my sculptures increases the value and meaning found within the landscapes by asking the viewers to consider themselves as direct counterpart of the themes embodied within my work.



Figure 16: Reflection of audience on optical box enclosures



Figure 17: Overlapping of reflection of *Motor Production* on *Apportioned Crowd*

-Conclusion-

This thesis has examined the concepts that inform *Neo-Pastoral*, a triptych of optically altered sculptures that serve as a biography of the American Midwest. I would argue that machines, technology, and automation have broken the once idyllic connection between pastor and landscape. This connection with land through work does provide the pastor with a tacit knowledge of the landscape, but this does not mean that the landscape is protected. Richard White provides insight in the following manner,

“ There is a modern romanticism of place that says that those who live and depend on a place will not harm it ... both destructive work and constructive work bring a knowledge of nature, and sometimes work is destructive and restorative at the same time ...”²¹

White’s view supports the hypothesis that to condemn modern work for its destructive properties while approving of more traditional, non-mechanized forms of work upon nature does not adequately address our nation’s current situation. There is no need to condemn a machine for the ease it brings to our existence. In the case of rural electrification, as stated by Senator George Norris of Nebraska, the project ended “the unending punishing tasks” of rural life.”²² However, some technologies, like telecommunications, have separated us from our natural surroundings, and through heavy use, more and more of us now depend on their ease of use due to the robust nature of their infrastructure. So I ask again, how does a society escape from technology when technology is what we now use to escape?

Since the advent of Ford’s assembly line, technology and automation has been seen as a beacon of hope as well as the bane of our existence. As society continues to reject technology and its counterparts as an independent source of harm, it also accepts portions of technology as a means of rescuing us from the necessity of laboring in our natural surroundings. . To address this conundrum, the acknowledgment that one’s perception of technology is a product of their understanding of its components, is key. With a greater

²¹ Richard White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living? : Work and Nature” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 181 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995)

²² George Norris, quoted in Craig Wollner, *Electifying Eden: Portland General Electric, 1889-1965* (Portland, Ore. : Historical Society Press, 1990), 162.

understanding of the infrastructure that supports technology, individuals can begin to more accurately monitor their impact on natural systems.

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