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# How Can We Grow if We Destroy our Roots? An Analysis of Roots as Metaphor for Growth and Urban Change

Alexis Vaughn  
*Scripps College*

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How Can We Grow if We Destroy our Roots? An Analysis of Roots  
as Metaphor for Growth and Urban Change

by  
Alexis Vaughn

Submitted to Scripps College in partial fulfillment of the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts

Professor Rankaitis  
Professor Gonzales-Day

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[Chapter 1: Introduction, establishment and exploration]

Roots: They take hold; they grow, expand and change, creating networks and sub-networks as they start to break above the earth's surface and stretch up higher towards the sky day by day. Roots can be taken out (the stock, stem or trunk removed), but both the memory and the evidence of the roots' existence will continue to remain for a while to come. The idea of "roots" applies to so much: from artists taking inspiration from previous artists, even at times to mirror the change in the world which one artist had previously documented; from the places we establish our families and create our memories, to a good deal more. We're always advised to "remember our roots" and to "plant the seeds of change" in our own lives. In order to do so, we record in order to learn from mistakes and successes past experienced, constantly observing and letting roots take hold and things to eventually come full-circle. From the natural world to the personal and the memory within; to the physical world we've created, destroyed, and rebuilt, to the political sphere that governs these changes and our lives; to the policies that enable the transformation from natural to rural, suburban, and urban centers of human habitation, the concept of roots infiltrates the way in which we as humans tend to—as if naturally—function. Sometimes we utilize wood, the very material from the being we seem to model our own lives around, for construction of other entities like our homes. Oftentimes we end up creating endless concrete landscapes; those of us in urban or suburban areas are surrounded by urban growth and change our whole lives and know this image well. With this idea comes another, in which the change that we witness occurs just as often as change in our hearts and our minds, as our own changing environments remain a part of our memory, especially when recorded via the vehicles of art and technology. Even the realm of politics at large mirrors a tree-like structure—core centers accompanied by branches and complex networks reliant on both each other and nourishment from outside forces. And thus, the concept of roots finds its way into more and more aspects of thought and theory...

With this set of statements, I wish to initiate a dialogue between art and politics; between man and nature, between the concept of roots and the concepts of political theory, between the personal and the political, between myself and all of the above, adding my story and research to an existing conversation between artists throughout time and today. By analyzing urban political history (especially the region of my own personal

experience and expertise, Los Angeles) through an artistic lens, and by analyzing art through a political lens, I will help to meld the intellectual bridge between the two disciplines. Especially pertinent political works for analysis include Michael Dear and Steven Flusty's *Postmodern Urbanism*, an example of the Los Angeles school of urban development, Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* and Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*. My goal is to enhance a metaphor connecting the existence, construction, destruction and persistence of nature and "the root" with the same actions of politics and urban development, both within my art piece and within my accompanying paper.

I have always been fascinated with urban growth and change and the politics behind it, a fascination developed from my early childhood fixation upon photographs of my mother as a child both here in Claremont where I could visually compare changes to the terrain from the past to that present as well as the magical lands of back east where my grandparents grew up. More generally, I developed an infatuation with old, historical photographs at a young age as both a glimpse into the lives of family or strangers in another era and a documentation of environment as it existed then. I've also discovered in myself over the years a slightly morbid obsession with the dilapidated, old, rickety and unsafe buildings and structures as well as the rather absurd nature of the human to record said spaces. I've always found myself thinking of ways to preserve the aforementioned old and rickety, either in the public realm like with the Claremont Village Expansion Project reestablishing the old Packing House in an entirely new context, or in the private realm—discovering secret treasures, playgrounds and miscellaneous objects not belonging to an area in my explorations. And yet I find myself falling into the role of "recorder" quite often—I will go out of my way to photograph or document these treasures in defense of the event that they are discovered, destroyed or disappear forever. I suppose you could say I have an obsession with history; *my* history, and the endless stories put into said history. Perhaps I hold onto my history dearly, as many surely do, as a means to "remember my roots" and to provide myself with the opportunity for self-growth in an environment of ever-pressing urban change, acknowledgements of which I place lovingly into my art.

## [Chapter 2: My Project]

The final idea for my project came to me from many sources. Many inspirations served me, from politics, urban development and public policy; to the past, nostalgia, memories, and change; to childhood and hidden treasures; to trees and organic structures on a predominantly macro level. I have been influenced by many artists over the years, mainly photographers and printmakers (but to include them all here would take up an entire page's worth of names). All of these inspirations and influences led me to a concept for my own piece; the overlying thought of the root and everything that comes from it as a metaphor for growth and urban change. For my project, I continued in my preferred medium, photography; attempting to explore a bit by employing alternative processes, ultimately creating combined media photographic work. By using the photographic medium, I perpetuate the idea of a photograph as a servant of memory, or a document of a certain place at a precise moment. My project serves as an expansion upon what I already know about my own "roots" here in Claremont; an exploration of my hometown through a different artistic lens. I place the idea of change in both a childhood home within Claremont as well as the history of the change experienced by the city since its incorporation in 1907 into my work in different ways. Historically, Claremont used to be a location densely populated by endless citrus groves; an historical reference that is incorporated into my project. After a certain point in time, I came to realize that I am indeed stuck in what many call "the Claremont bubble." While living here in this "bubble," I've inadvertently created a catalog of Claremont history in my own countless explorations and class assignments, a catalog that perhaps, down the road I can revisit and re-photograph a la the likes of Christopher Rauschenberg in re-visitation of Eugène Atget's Paris or Mark Klett's *Third View* project.

My project ultimately takes the form of an installation, including straight medium-to large-sized, aesthetically-rich digital photographic images to accompany a photo-construction piece, a small orange tree, preserved orange peels, fresh hand-squeezed orange juice (using my family's old juice press from the 1930s), and that sickly-sweet smell of rotting citrus skin; each piece in my installation thus enabling me to extend exploration of this project. The wood paneling backing the photo-construction piece is reminiscent of

wood taken from the deconstruction and remodeling of my grandparents' home—my mother's childhood home as well as one of mine. Only recently have I witnessed change in the home that has looked the same all of my twenty-one years, an image almost exactly the same as in old pictures of my family as they established themselves and grew here. The wood and old wallpaper scraps hold sentimental value in my personal memory, history and roots. The main image within is of my grandmother's orange tree which resides in her backyard. I picked this tree to both serve to my own personal memory as well as to the history of the city of Claremont as a citrus industry. I chose to engage in the process of photo-construction, or the piece of which is mounted on wood, to highlight the complex dichotomies between construction and deconstruction as well as creations of nature versus those of the hands of man. The oranges on the project were an exploration in preservation—that at the expense of my own hand versus stepping back to let nature take its own course on the peels. I wanted to include an aspect of interactivity in my work and so I chose to hand squeeze orange juice using the juicer that has been in my family for over half a century. For examples of images of my installation, please see the Appendix, Section one.

What ultimately led me to the making of this project was a compilation of my love for photography, exploration, printmaking and working with multiple mediums. My interest in politics, especially urban politics and urban planning and development, as well as my childhood memories, helped to bolster my photographic endeavors with more insight and meaning. The main concept of "roots" came to me over the summer; the whole of my concept growing from that point on. By participating in this project, I nurture a drive to contribute to the existing dialogue of established artists exploring such topics before me, especially so (but not limited to) the subjects of urban politics and development versus the preservation of history and nature.

## [Chapter 3: Theory]

### [Section 1: Art & Art History theory]

Historically, art about politics has tended to follow suit with utilitarian functions found in art theory. James Monaco outlined various systems of criticism in his chapter “Ways of Looking at Art,” including the following determinants: Sociopolitical, with a utilitarian function; Psychological, which functions as expression; Technical, with an “art for art’s sake” function; and Economic, with a capitalistic, sellable function. Though political art pieces could be placed into any one of these categories, they more often than not meet Monaco’s vision of sociopolitical art, which maintains a utilitarian function and holds an ethical and political system of criticism. Pieces in this vein often explore the theories surrounding time in both present and historical contexts, as well as place. They may also touch upon the identity of the individual as he or she interacts with such spaces or the memories thereof. The theories of time and space may thus converge into a place, translating into work about said space. By adopting a utilitarian function, the experiences of space, time and place become fertile ground for an artist’s work to emerge.

Urban political, architectural, restorative, protectionist and other similar movements have also been catalogued within the context of art theory. In her piece *Architecture of the Evicted*, Rosalyn Deutsche analyzes these movements and events in New York, phenomena of which can be found other places, especially Southern California. “...Terms such as “tradition,” “preservation,” indeed “history” itself, have become the catchwords of the cultural practices manufacturing our built environment... Architects, planners, designers, and public artists materialize history in such recent urban programs as landmark preservation, contextual zoning, historic district simulations, neighborhood “revivals” and civic art restorations. Rarely, however, do [such] projects... actually return their sites to an earlier [or] “original” state. Instead, they refurbish antique details while extensively reconfiguring space...” (Deutsche 150). An issue can be plucked out of such political ventures, especially those surrounding restoration and preservation. The juxtaposition of the reversal of nature-induced destruction of architecture with that of restoring historical buildings and spaces, when it was the architecture that was the deterioration of nature in the first place, sets a dialogue for the failures of true preservation and restoration. These



failures, in turn, set the scene for the invocation of the “past only existing in the realm of the imaginary,” for example, whimsical public project names like “The Village” or “The Grove”, “eliciting from readers and views nostalgia, bound up with objects, for a flawless environment. An external “guarantee” of an equally flawless self, their image of the city is, of course, a fantasy from the start” (Deutsche 151). Furthermore, “projects undertaken in the name of preservation represent advances in a struggle to restore—against disruptive forces—a model city from the more remote past, one that is harmonious in its entirety. Such a unitary urban condition... is said to have distinguished our heritage of earlier cities... a historicist narrative of urbanism, [and] a story of urban planning as an attempt to produce an ideal human environment” (Deutsche 151).

Though Deutsche’s argument focuses primarily on the destruction of habitat and displacement of the individual vis-à-vis the acts of gentrification, real estate speculation and development, her arguments are not entirely alien to the destruction and displacement of the citrus groves and natural landscapes which once dominated Southern California. The dominating force of this displacement is capital advancement. “...Far from conserving the physical city, [development and] redevelopment threatens to change the scenery altogether” (Deutsche 152). The scenery hasn’t stopped changing. Even with change, however, it is important to note that many Southern Californian cities whose early histories were dominated by the citrus industry haven’t forgotten such histories. The image of citrus has become iconic in local towns like Claremont, Upland and Pomona; the image of citrus fruits can be found on everything from city seals to public artworks and statues, to city signage and publications. The only thing lacking, as many artists concerned with local affairs seem to show in their pieces, is the actual physical presence of this important citrus industry.

Art dealing with the recording of place before change is instilled simultaneously engages with theories of time. Re-photographic or other similar projects thus provide a continuum of chronological progression from the original recordings. “One of the main reasons that artists throughout history have engaged time in their works is the desire to record and recount events. These might be ones within the artist’s lifetime, but more often the events came from mythology, religion, legend, and literature. In some cases, the visual record of an event acknowledges the event without depicting it directly, as in a monument

with dates and inscriptions” (Robertson, McDaniel 36). Within many of these works exists a key subject often recognizable as a fragment of the instant in time of which the piece was created around; a monument. “The monument itself is usually a figurative or abstract sculpture that interprets an event in an allegorical way” (Robertson, McDaniel 36). If the monument is not a key subject in a piece, “in other cases, artists depict an event in a *narrative* form; that is, they visualize a story by representing a key moment or moments in an event as it is unfolding,” utilizing everything from moving forms like film or video to more static mediums like painting or photographs in multi-episodic or linear formats (Robertson, McDaniel 36-37). Photography itself became a very important part of time-based artworks. The technology, “an invention of the Industrial Revolution, has a special capability for using motion and speed to represent time. By recording the exposure of a light-sensitive surface to the pattern of light at a specific moment, the photograph records the actual appearance of the subject, from the viewpoint of the camera’s lens at the time the shutter was open... A photograph can represent the accelerated pace of modern life... suiting and supporting [sic] the modern era’s preoccupation with time” (Robertson, McDaniel 38). Finally, many artworks dealing with time tend to take from postmodernist values and strategies. Appropriations and collections, similar to re-photographic works, as well as other methods of art making, are terms which are “part of the vocabulary and conceptual apparatus of modern, and now postmodern, art” (Robertson, McDaniel 39). This postmodern touch connects well with the political postmodern theory which can be connected to many pieces commenting on or recording change in environment, especially due to urban development and sprawl; connections of which I will touch upon later in my paper.

Undoubtedly, artworks dealing with specific places engage with the theme and theory of place. Not only do the places in which one has lived affect the “appearance and meaning of his or her art,” but contributes to a “conscious awareness of place” which “informs the work of a wide range of contemporary artists” (Robertson, McDaniel 69). A dominating motivation for creating art regarding place are “responding to specific scenes in front of them or are trying to capture the appearance or feeling of places they remember... grappling with ideas of place in a conceptual way... [trying] to convey the cultural and emotional qualities of a certain kind of place, such as

wilderness, [or] a city square," thus responding to "broader trends and developments that are changing where and how people live" (Robertson, McDaniel 69). Most potent to the workings of my own project, Robertson and McDaniel acknowledge a "level of everyday experience, the increasing encroachment of humans on the natural environment and artificiality of the places in which we live and work," which means that "many of us have to make a conscious effort to experience wild places firsthand" (Robertson, McDaniel 69). The fact that the authors of this art theory passage state "no wonder artists are making works that express changing ideas about place" only furthers the pertinence and persistence of the issue at hand (Robertson, McDaniel 69). Place thus exists as an "enduring theme in art, with continuing, powerful relevance for artists today," including a recurrent theme and pressing relevance within my own work (Robertson, McDaniel 69).

#### [Section 2: LA Politics theories]

The history of Claremont, though it is argued by many to be a spectacular place to live and a shining example of a thriving city, is shaded by another story; a story of which could almost be deemed one of Noir. Noir, which has its roots in dark-toned literary and cinematic works, has frequently been used to unmask "a 'bright, guilty place' (Welles) called Los Angeles" (Davis, 18). Ideas of Noir are the shadows, the nightmares creeping into the sunny Southern California dream. To compare what Davis says about Noir and Boosterism (the early twentieth-century glorification of the area) of LA to that of my own slightly removed example of Claremont, Boosterism would proudly show off gorgeous crate images showing a bounty of beautiful citrus, whereas Noir would highlight the concrete jungle of development slaying such an image. What worries writers reacting to Noir (like Davis) about development in particular is that cities are headed to such an entirely hostile environment that everyday living will be compromised. Images of *Bladerunner* and other Noir films like *Chinatown* serve as examples of the hostility-drenched path of both development and scandal-laden politics which Los Angeles is seemingly headed towards. The thoughts that, "from our vantage point at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can see that the Los Angeles "city of the future" has no future," and "The dream of limitless mobility has been swallowed up in endless sprawl and nonstop congestion... To be sure, new

developments at the edge of the region still push out into the desert in a naïve search for open spaces and uncrowded freeways” are as considerable a contributor to Los Angeles’ Noir image as the fact that LA “in the 1920s promised to become a new type of urban region... the built-up area of the city soon gave way to a landscape of fields and orchards dotted with still separate towns,” Claremont included, which were unfortunately “foretokened [by] an advanced industrial economy that was integrated into a still verdant landscape,” a landscape which has been slowly but surely failing to be “the garden metropolis” it so promised to become (Fishman 251-254).

“Southern California, with its aggressive Present-mindedness, was a land purified by an exemplary design terror. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of the Four Ecologies* (1971) found virtue in almost everything disdained by traditional critics, including... something called “Los Angeles Architecture...” Banham claimed that Los Angeles’s polymorphous landscapes...” as well as “the dream of the urban homestead...” were “a ‘sympathetic ecology for architecture’ (Davis 73). Regarding urban development, the Los Angeles School of thought, which grew in tandem with ideas of Postmodernism, draws a portrait of the manner in which Los Angeles—and Claremont as a faction of it—was built. Postmodern policy has thus been a key in explaining the governance and development of a land which was once laden with endless citrus groves; the issues of existence, construction, destruction and a war with nature, all as parts of the narrative. Both my work and research serve to address these narratives-- in my artwork and subsequent research I analyze my quiet little town, Claremont, through a personal lens, bringing a fresh perspective to these postmodern narratives.

Imagine rows and rows of citrus groves, the pride and glory of the Claremont area since approximately the time of its incorporation in 1907; a time when “citrus ranches spread out across all the foothill communities... [continuing] to flourish in the area until after the Second World War,” when “the pressure for residential development caused many growers to sell their land for housing tracts” (City of Claremont). Improvements in transportation, including the installment of the San Bernardino Freeway in 1954, brought in populations unassociated with the citrus industry or Claremont’s other major attraction—The Claremont Colleges—to find dwellings in this cozy nook of Los Angeles County. The chapter of urban sprawl and suburban development doesn’t end with the orange groves’

disappearance— Claremont has also faced the loss of elegant oak groves and other wildlife habitat at the hands of the 210 Freeway and both perpetual commercial and residential development. The fact that people must rise together to combat the destruction of precious, irreplaceable open space and priceless opportunities for education (not to mention wildlife habitat many southern Californian cities wish they could boast of) for parking lots and shopping centers points out the value of such resources to residents and visitors alike. News pops up left and right about protests to “Save, Not Pave” places like the invaluable Bernard Field Station, a 75-acre educational academic resource, and Johnson’s Pasture, 183 acres of privately-owned, undeveloped land open to the public to enjoy, as well as other open spaces of land in Claremont. Outcries from public forums aim to protect these nature-spaces from the developers with dollar signs in their eyes and the politicians looking for means of citywide revenue dollars. And yet, every last inch of open space seems to get gobbled up or mapped out for development as the throes of urban sprawl extends.

All of the points within a key discourse on Los Angeles’ Postmodern Urbanism, many of which can be found in the area, are written in a major encompassing piece appropriately titled *Postmodern Urbanism*. Subsequently, a good handful of the images laid out by the work can be seen eastbound as the sprawl of Los Angeles extended, and continues to extend, out into Claremont. In the introduction to their piece, Michael Dear and Steven Flusty lay out the grounds for the Los Angeles model: it “consists of several fundamental characteristics, including a global-local connection, a ubiquitous social polarization, and a reterritorialization of the urban process in which hinterland organizes the center (in direct contradiction to the Chicago model). The resultant urbanism is distinguished by a centerless urban form termed “keno capitalism,” which we advance as the basis for a research agenda in comparative urban analysis” (Dear, Flusty 50). By quirkily finding ways to further explain the unique nature of urban development in Los Angeles, they go so far as to create jargon along the way (written in such a sense as to arguably call their theory-rich article a work of art itself). The manner in which the Los Angeles School of urbanism differs so vastly from that of the older Chicago School is that of the very foundations of development. Whereas older means of development, which one finds much more frequently on the East Coast, involve a “zonal or concentric ring” pattern which visually relates well to the rings within the trunk of a tree, Los Angeles is set up closer to a pattern of central “nodal points” with a

diverse network of transportation pathways-as-arteries, much as how roots themselves function (Dear, Flusty 51-52). Southern California has thus emerged as a “suggestive prototype” of the way in which the option of the division of space can occur, according to scholars like Dear, Flusty, and their contemporaries, on the topic.

Considering the trends in Los Angeles landscaping, it is difficult to pinpoint one pivotal image of it-- freeways, implanted palm trees, sprawl and smog are all important images which seem quite depressing albeit ripe for the artists’ picking as subject matter. (An immense worry for many was, and still is, the loss of purely natural, open green space, and I’m not talking about the size of our pristinely groomed front and backyards in places like Claremont.) A valuable addition to the imagery of Southern California is Rayner Banham’s “powerful, evocative and instantly recognizable” map of the four basic ecologies of LA: *Surfurbia* (the beach cities), *the foothills* (where “the privileged enclaves of Beverly Hills, Bel Air,” and arguably, some of the homes in Claremont, have “financial and topographical contours [that] correspond almost exactly”), *the plains of Id* (endless sprawl and track-communities both fostered by scratches of freeways and hindered or destroyed by them), and *autopia* (the creation of freeway-as-place and “complete way of life... of arteries”) (Dear, Flusty 53). Banham, Dear and Flusty describe all sorts of images, especially the ones put forth from this initial point in the postmodern analysis of Los Angeles, some of which have been realized here in Claremont. Other important points in the work that explain a space like Claremont’s place in the discourse on Los Angeles, aside from socio-political incidents like white flight and the established attractions of the city itself, are explained by some of the terms in Dear and Flusty’s “Taxonomy of Southern California Urbanisms,” including the terms “Edge Cities,” “Privatopia,” general ideas of “Cultures of Heteropolis” and “Historical Geographies of Restructuring,” and, most pertinent to my project, “Politics of Nature” (Dear, Flusty 54).

To delve further into this *taxonomy*, I wish to analyze the specific examples in relation to Claremont and its surrounding areas to further an understanding of its urban structure, the structure of which and the politics behind what my own work explores. Edge Cities, an establishment of theory by Joel Garreau, are the spaces which must be reached by an “urban beltway” of highways and freeways which propel the necessity for the automobile in the region and spur on the development of parking spaces. Claremont may

be seen as one of these spaces, especially in one of the three more specific definitions of an edge city: it has been an *uptown*, one of a handful of “peripheral pre-automobile settlements that have subsequently been absorbed by urban sprawl,” though recent establishment of another freeway through the city, which the city has undoubtedly taken advantage of in its public relations publications, has also made Claremont a *boomer* edge city, or one of “the classic edge cities, located at freeway intersections” (Dear, Flusty 55). The definition of *Privatopia* serves as “the quintessential edge-city residential form... a private housing development based in common-interest developments...” often “promoted by an ideology of “hostile privatism” and the ideals of success and ownership of private property, in congruence with the secession of the enclaves of the rich. The ideas of *Cultures of Heteropolis* and *Historical Geographies of Restructuring* that comment upon Claremont most are essentially the region’s Native American and Mexican settlers’ roots, as well as those of being a citrus industry and college town, all coming together into the culture of the area, seen most frequently in street names and architecture.

Finally, if not most important to my cause, are the *Politics of Nature* seen throughout the history of Claremont and its surrounding area. “The natural environment of Southern California has been under constant assault since the first colonial settlements. Human habitation on a metropolitan scale has only been possible through a widespread manipulation of nature... on one hand, Southern Californians tend to hold a grudging respect for nature... On the other hand, its inhabitants have been energetically, ceaselessly, and sometimes carelessly unrolling the carpet of urbanization over the natural landscape for more than a century” (Dear, Flusty 59). What does this mean to the environment of Claremont and the surrounding areas? Specifically, it means endless occupation which will engage its inhabitants with endless environmental problems, from noise to physical pollution, as well as loss of habitat and dangerous encounters between humans and wild animals (Dear, Flusty 59). Furthermore, residents of Southern California, Claremont as no exception, like to wrestle with nature, often building homes and other architecture in areas prone to wildfire, landslides, earthquakes, flood, and pests. Claremont in particular has a chronic ant problem due to the loss of the ants’ established homes: the citrus groves that used to occupy much of the land here. There is also as a coyote issue, continuously fueled by our conquest of their territory (and our habits of leaving food outside for our outdoor

pets, tasty morsels for coyotes themselves). Thus the politics of environmental regulation have become a major installment in the lives of Southern Californians, ushering a “political view of nature... focusing both on its emasculation through human intervention (Davis 1996) and on its potential for political mobilization by grass-roots movements (Pulido 1996)” (Dear, Flusty 59). It is this last point where art similar to mine, art concerned with urban change, development and environmental preservation, have become particularly important in the grass-roots movements engendered by the discourse on Southern Californian urban politics.

My art is influenced by the aforementioned political theories, both directly and indirectly. I have initiated projects in the past surrounding the theme of the work of Dear and Flusty and their contemporaries as they provide a discourse on the relatively new subject of Los Angeles as a center of urban growth and a theory of urban/suburban development, and will continue to explore their work through an artistic lens in the future. I frequently look at both my and other artists’ work through these lenses, while at the same time, as I read works like this, I go out and research artworks that speak to the political theories. My work asks for preservation of what historical and natural goods we have here, whether in Claremont or the greater Los Angeles county; work which may later give rise to the creation or accumulation of more aggressive activist art should I pursue such a career. The more I research the theories and histories of both artists before me and politics, the stronger I can make my art, and the louder I can make it speak to others.

[Chapter 4: History and Background]

[Section 1: Artists+Artworks]

Many works of art over the years have dealt with, commented on, and/or worked in tandem with politics and urban development. As humans spread their developments further and further into nature’s territory, paving over green space and bulldozing countless trees, plants and other natural formations, the call for alarm for the deteriorating state of nature, for more environmentally-friendly architecture and against the destruction of the natural



earth, grows more and more. The art world is no exception. From earthworks to photographic and re-photographic pieces documenting sociopolitical and urban change, sculptures, installations both inside and outside of the gallery space, more environmentally-friendly artistic practices and more, the politics of urban development and gentrification have become a staple theme of the arts.

A very interesting artistic practice of urban change commentary is that of re-photographic work. One specific artist dealing with the subject of urban change over time is Christopher Rauschenberg, who made a work titled *Paris Changing: Revisiting Eugène Atget's Paris*. His series of photographs, as seen in tandem with Atget's in *Paris Changing* document the change to the territory and Atget's subjects that has come with urban and technological advancements as well as the detriments of both urban degradation via semi-natural instances—like acid rain—and social instances like graffiti over the course of approximately a century (for examples, please see Appendix, section two). Interestingly, Rauschenberg's original motivation for this work was to "match the poetic meaning of the image [of Atget's] more than... to show that the magnificent tree [in one of his first re-photographic pieces] was gone," resolving to "return and explore with [his] camera whether the haunting and beautiful city of his vision still existed... most of the places that Atget photographed are still there, and still posing. You can see the effects of weathering and acid rain on them... the disrespectful marks of graffiti... [and] that the magical streets of the city are choked with traffic and parked cars. However, among all the other Parises that coexist so thickly in one amazing metropolis, Atget's Paris is still definitely and hauntingly there" (Rauschenberg 9). Atget himself got his start following the "well-trodden footsteps of a number of other French photographers whom he had perhaps never heard of," and alongside Charles Marville who produced "a suite of photographs of Paris in connection with Baron Haussmann's "renovation" of the city in the 1860s, which radically changed its physical look" (Rauschenberg 11). Rauschenberg's ultimate opinion of Atget and his work is that he became a preservationist of "everything in Paris that was evanescent and vanishing from the *ancien régime*... a kind of grand, agitated botanist dividing an entire city into phylum and sub-phylum where each species is categorized, named and described... even [taking] pictures of the root structures of trees and the foliage of Paris at different seasons. Nothing escaped his eye" (Rauschenberg 11-12). Ultimately,

the nostalgia for the lost landscape of Atget's Paris is echoed in the contemporary mourning for the lost charms of Southern Californian history (but arguably still present, ghost-like, much like the subjects of Atget's time). It is this final insight that connects my own artistic interests most to this great pair of photographers.

Another realm of art heavily involved with the earth, at times in protest of the destruction of nature, at times to bring the artist him-or-herself closer to nature, is that of earthworks and sculpture or installations involving or commenting upon nature. A superior example of politically-gearred earth art is Bruce Nauman's skywriting piece, a piece forty years in the finalizing. A simple piece with a chilling statement—he sent a skywriting pilot to write out one statement in little puffs of smoke several times: "LEAVE THE LAND ALONE"—a piece which itself even leaves the land alone (Appendix, Section two). His word choice was educated and inspired by the era in which he was visioning the piece, as "the aerial exhortation also recalls emerging environmentalist issues, kicked into contemporary public consciousness by the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson's "The Silent Spring,"" a controversial but extremely important work of writing of the modern era which extensively outlined man's endangerment of nature, especially with pesticides (Knight).

On a different note, Jessica Rath's piece "Tree Peel" uses nature as a medium, dealing with earth in a physical way. Her piece, which was created by casting a latex rubbing of a dying tree in her backyard, turning it inside out and reforming the tree itself by suspending it from the ceiling, seems to speak to the fragility of nature, especially trees, that is often overlooked (See Appendix, Section two). "A cousin to trees created or re-created by Roxy Paine and Zoe Leonard, Rath's stands as a gorgeous lament... [oscillating] profoundly between the noble and the grotesque" (Ollman). Another handful of works that utilize natural objects and physical space are Yoko Ono's "Exit" (1997) and "Wish Tree" exhibits. Exit, which features citrus trees growing out of coffins of various sizes (large, medium and small) both laments the fragility of nature yet celebrates the resiliency of it, harkening to death in general—death of humans and death of nature—but showing nature as a triumphant being always on the ready to produce more for the consumption of the living, especially via her choice of citrus trees (See Appendix, Section two). Her "Wish Tree" exhibit, perhaps the more positive of the two tree works, takes place on beautiful crepe myrtle trees... Trees which may not produce fruit like citrus trees but still "bear fruits" of

peoples' desires and wishes as viewers and participants in her piece attach a tag with a written wish to one of the tree's branches. Each of these works thus adds to the dialogue of environmental issues caused by humans in their own ways, whether through blatant, written statements or other means.

Artworks whose dialogue my art lends to or takes from include a multitude of projects and artists. A pair of artists who have informed my own work is Mike and Doug Starn. Their general modes of working and the pieces they make mesh well with my own curiosities and aesthetics. They have done many composite and/or alternative-processed pieces with striking images of tree branches, snowflakes, leaves, insects, Buddhist statues and more. They play with many alternative processes from carbon printing to toned printing on various types of paper; one mode pertinent to my project is their use of encaustic wax which they place over their images. This symbolizes the preservation of nature, paralleling the fact that we use wax to preserve natural goods like fruit. The Starns' overall aesthetic is very similar to my own, and I see my work becoming even more of a contemporary of theirs in the future. I am also interested in Isidrio Blasco's work that involves photographs mounted on pieces of wood or board, constructed in a sense to make the 2D image slightly more three-dimensional. Taking pictures of landscapes, he chooses certain elements to literally bring forward; a similar visual idea is the majority of childhood pop-up books. This literal "deconstruction" of photographs into a "construction" of images is not only related to my personal aesthetic but related to the theme of urban change and deconstruction/reconstruction. Similar to these artists and many more, I also make beautiful photographic images out of "the ugly" or "the ordinary." An aesthetic that a large handful of photographers also employ, beautification of "the ugly" can also be translated into a motivation of urban political creations of nature spaces, an idea of which is discussed throughout my thesis. (For examples of these artists' work, please see Appendix, Section two.)

My work is also in dialogue with public art works, specifically pieces which contribute back to the community, reclaim nature or use nature spaces in a different way than the generic recreational definition, for the good of the public. The "Fallen Fruit Project" and the "Not A Cornfield" projects are great examples. The former reclaims and re-establishes fruit and vegetable plants for public use, providing maps of certain areas to access and find the

plants. By encouraging participants in the project to share with others, to only take what one needs, and to give back to the project if they can, the project fosters both an awareness of the niceties of fresh, healthy foods as well as the necessity for more local patches of said nature spaces. This sensibility of nature as precious, and subsequent actions of preservation and cherishment thereof, is one of the backbones to my political interests of nature conservation and duplication. In the latter example, a temporary project titled "Not A Cornfield", a cornfield was planted and harvested in a 32-acre industrial brownfield just north of Chinatown. The choice of corn serves as a metaphor for residents of the unique Los Angeles terrain, pulling from a history similar to that of my own project:

"Not A Cornfield is a living sculpture in the form of a field of corn. The corn itself, a powerful icon for millennia over large parts of Central America and beyond... an event that aims at giving focus for reflection and action in a city unclear about where its energetic and historical center is... redeem[ing] a lost fertile ground, transforming what was left from the industrial era into a renewed space for the public. The California Department of Parks and Recreation is currently designing the historical park this site will become... By bringing attention to this site... we will also bring forth many questions about the nature of urban public space, about historical parks in a city so young and yet so diverse... It is about redemption and hope... [and] the fallibility of words to create productive change. Artists need to create on the same scale that society has the capacity to destroy" (Bon).

There are contemporary artists producing work specifically with citrus and citrus themes. Among them are Alexis Smith and Ben Sakoguchi. Smith's work "Same Old Paradise," which depicts a scenic, citrus groves-by-hills-and-highway large scale image a la the citrus crate images popular in the early twentieth century, comes with a little implied venom—the peaceful highway gives way to a snake's twisting body sinisterly eying, or perhaps protecting, the groves and an image of its juicy produce. To the right of the snake's outstretched tongue are eight smaller panels—blown up segments of advertisements—installed on top of the image, quoting passages from Kerouac's "On the Road," such as, "I was rushing through the world without a chance to see it." To me, these advertisement segments speak keenly to the corporate takeover of both nature and

America, displacing scenic routes of endless foliage to make way for unsightly billboards. Ben Sakoguchi's work functions well to carry on the potential air of pessimism regarding the rise and power of corporations and/or the loss of nature. His series of orange crate images register beautiful and historic at first glance—a closer look and viewers notice his politically-fueled play on the historic images. From his "Atomic Brand" oranges ("deformed but delicious!"), to bold titles like "Art Sucks Brand" and "Eat the Rich Brand," to controversial images of communism and even the KKK, Sakoguchi's crate creations are anything but the positive, peaceful, scenic images seen on citrus crates from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which he referenced for his work.

Other artists dealing with citrus in their pieces are Marjorie Strider and Tim Hawkinson. Strider's "Peel Three," involves a beautiful painted bronze sculpture of an orange peel that leaves viewers hungry for a fresh orange of their own. Her construction of something inedible (the orange peel) out of inedible materials (bronze and paint) harkens to our own Southern California history—a lingering fantasy of delicious citrus paired with its very real (and inedible) absence due to construction of roads and buildings obviously unfit for human consumption. Hawkinson's work "E'EI" also plays with this idea of absent edibility—for "E'EI," he put a multitude of rotting oranges on display on a delicately twisting wire vine whose metallic roots start from the ceiling. Hawkinson, too, engages in a dialogue of desire for the simply natural. Essentially, whether working with citrus, the environment, or with political inspiration, all of these artists, as well as myself, together engage in one or more of the dialogues touched upon within my thesis. (For examples of these artists' work, please see Appendix Section two.)

[Section 2: Political reference]

The physical history as well as the publicized image portrayal of Southern California, which I thus loosely define as a region extending from approximately the Santa Barbara area down to the Mexican border, has very much changed over the past century, a theme of which—change—has trickled into a multitude of artworks. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art's exhibition titled "Made in California: Art, Image and Identity, 1900-2000"

provides a vast survey of this change. Each section of the exhibition thus takes on an era in Californian statehood from the twentieth century. The exhibition “goes beyond a standard presentation of California art to offer a revisionist view of the state and its cultural legacy... [considering] both “booster” images of California and other coexisting and at times competing images, reflecting the wide range of interests and experiences of the state’s diverse constituencies... also included in the exhibition... [are] cultural documents such as tourist brochures, rock posters, labor pamphlets, and documentary photographs from important public and private collections from across the nation, that convey California’s fascinating history and changing popular image” (Made In California). The early 1900s boasted an image of Southern California sun-soaked and richly fertile with rows of poppies forming golden roads to opportunity. Although many images showed a lush antidote to the dusty cities Easterners and Midwesterners were used to, urbanization and industrialization had actually commenced in many areas, especially along the paths of the railways. Orange crate labels began to surface, showing off the juicy riches of Southern California terrain. Lurking in the shadows, however, were many darker aspects of California history, from racism to abuse of labor. The 1920s-1940s brought more urban conceptions of California, a classic image of which is Millard Sheets’ 1931 piece *Angel’s Flight* which shows a romanticized version of a working-class, urban neighborhood. This period witnessed a rise in the glamorous movie industry, and scenic grove landscape images continued to flourish, despite the dark cloud of the Depression years. Picturesque roads and destinations of travel became another good to be marketed in Southern California, alongside film and citrus. These sunny images, however, also had masked many dark stories, especially as the Dust Bowl expelled farmers to California in search of work.

The second half of the century showcases just as much change and development. Post-World War II development brought an image of the suburban California lifestyle. Though tensions between whites and minorities as well as minorities themselves mounted, there was a propulsion of the image of a Californian, laid-back, indoor-outdoor suburban lifestyle. Romantic housing developments, urban landscaping and rolling surf became the new image of Southern California. Artists similarly romanticized traffic scenes and laces of freeways, and heights of palms prevailed; however the noir repercussions of development, like the razing of nature and displacement of native residents, again went unpublicized as

part of the quintessential Southern California image. The 1960s and 1970s showcased California's car obsession, as carousing of the natural Californian landscape slowly diminished (though romanticization of the land and its change continued). The domestic suburban landscape started to replace the endless agriculture of prior eras. Most recently, the rise of multiculturalism and pessimism has caught up with Southern California imagery, inserting complexity into perceptions of the area. Now seen as a land of natural disaster—quake, flood, and fire to name a few—and social disaster—riots and various degrees and means of pollution—artists have adopted the most dystopian and ironic approaches to Southern California imagery yet. The most pessimistic imagery of the state of Southern California has appeared in the last couple of decades, and yet a romanticism and certain nostalgia still play heavy roles in said imagery, especially with the recent artist grassroots returns to agricultural roots through positive public works pieces. A part of Southern California, Claremont and its citrus-industrial sisters are not strangers to any of these movements. Similar to the stories of other small towns and localized communities, "the postwar period brought a new vision of city life, a new approach to progress: urban planning. The can-do, publicly minded spirit of the times led to grand public works projects... "Urban renewal"" included, which eventually displaced the most of citrus industry entirely (Princen 1).

(For historical images of Claremont's citrus industry, please see the appendix, Section three.)

### [Section 3: Personal Experience]

Most art comes from some the experience of the individual artist. The experience that I bring to the art practice stems from the realm of politics, specifically urban politics, policy, planning and development; all of which thus translate into my art. Much of the urban change of Southern California—namely Claremont and its surrounding areas—that I am concerned about took place long before I was born. How, then, did I become so involved with the ideas for my project? A simple answer lies in my realization that urban change *continues* daily; thus continuing to fuel my passions and interests. My own

awareness of nature, history and historical sites (and the disappearance versus preservation thereof) led me to this project. From my own conservationist approach and perspective on urban change, I am able to analyze the facets of continual urban growth and spread; frequently including the dialogue on man-versus-nature-versus-man in my analyses.

My active participation in the processes of urban development and change around me has since become a vital part of who I am. Through my six years of volunteer work as an ambassador between the youth and the city's governing powers-that-be on the Claremont Teen Committee (a subcommittee of Claremont's Human Services department connected with Claremont's City Council), I have had many opportunities to voice my concerns regarding the health, use and existence of both natural spaces and historic buildings, including the destruction thereof. A specific example, one pertaining to the history of my hometown in which I am so enthused with, is my participation in activism against the demolition of (and consequently for the preservation and reuse of) the historical Claremont Packing House, which was then an abandoned building on a vacant lot. Distinctively, this land was sitting as an open patch of land being inefficiently used, and thus eyed by many hungry developers to create what now exists as the Claremont Village West Expansion. I argued vehemently to the roll of guests attending our committee meetings, council members and developers alike, for the safety of this specific building, as well as countless other plots of land subject to ever more, arguably useless, developing and marketing projects and strategies. Fortunately, many others in Claremont have similar values as I do, further perpetuating the positive outcome of the Packing House—as time went on and plans became solidified, the dialogue on the preservation of the building shifted to that of what should be included in the plan projections for the building and the surrounding space. Now, the Packing House is home to shops, artisans, artists and studios, all of which enrich the history of the building and its home city. It is even home to art galleries, including the Claremont Museum of Art—a gallery which, in its few years of establishment in the Packing House, has hosted the work of many local artists. Though my voice was not the only voice on the subject, and though I didn't singlehandedly save the building myself, I do not discredit the time I spent arguing for the safeguarding of it; and I infuse such experiences into my own art today. Thus, my fall art project nestles in with many works executed before mine in the various parts to my installation; especially works



dealing with the dichotomy of the destruction/preservation of nature and history which serve to inform my work just as much as my personal experiences have.

There are many questions I continue to address while creating my work, especially when and how I intend it to address an issue, thus participating in a public discourse on said issue. What do I want my work to say, and what are my questions? Who am I addressing, and how am I speaking to them or making my signs meet the needs of their “language?” How can I properly exhibit my take on the issue, in this case urban change and development, into my work? Overall, my fall project addressed some of these questions in a more passive way; future projects will more actively and aggressively engage in initiating public discourse on man and his urban development in conflict with nature.

#### [Chapter 5: In Conclusion]

A dialogue between politics and art: there are recurrent and very strong connections between the two disciplines, especially in response to the connections I forge between urban politics, policy and development of my photographic art. Those roots have taken hold, and will continue to inform my work. Perhaps someday my politics and art backgrounds will enable me to create public art works of my own, promoting this dialogue even more. Part of being an artist is finding the confidence in yourself to produce work, and with that to find confidence in the work you produce. I am doing just this, and I am finding my voice. As I grow and develop as an artist, I preserve history, and I learn from artists before me. I retell history in my art through what I’ve learned from my politics research. We cannot very well continue to grow without our roots; nostalgia cannot persist without the preservation of cherished memories, and knowledge will not be accumulated if we forget past lessons in the process.

[Addendum: After the Second Gold Rush]

My spring project arrived out of a long month of brainstorming the final product of my spring semester art piece, to be exhibited at the Williamson Gallery at Scripps come April 30<sup>th</sup> 2010. While I loved my fall photo-construction work, I felt that I needed to vastly expand in complexity: both technically and conceptually. The fall piece was a memoir of a safe space—the orange tree in my grandmother’s backyard where I grew up; the spring piece takes from this and moves out into the real world. As I embarked on the initial sketches and construction for this piece, I discovered my own disillusionment with what I previously saw as a beautiful heritage: the citrus industry stands as one of the major reasons for urban and suburban development in Southern California. This participation in the causality of that which is personally very depressing—the abolishment of open, natural landscape and organic spaces for construction and industrial development—cast a deep mental shadow over the otherwise golden glimmer of light and hope (a romantic image which served its purpose to many in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). I cast this aura of personal depression in the images I chose to use for my spring project (affectionately and officially titled *California’s Second Gold Rush*)—the dirty, grimy hue of the layer of smog (which obscured my otherwise breathtaking views of Southern Californian suburban development) is essentially digitally untouched and just as hazardous as my eyes and camera found it. The work itself poses an analysis on the land as it appears to have existed prior to human interaction in juxtaposition with the smog and endless development we have today, wrapped together into one part of the piece. The other part, a smaller photo-construction work, highlights the beauty, optimism and hope for which citrus stood; exemplifying the dominance it still has over the physical landscaping and mental image of Southern California; albeit slightly removed yet very romanticized.

The piece is constructed with printed digital images mounted on sheets of cut Plexiglas, arranged on the wall in layers to serve as a (approximately) 5’ x 19’ photomural. Directions I plan to take my research and work in the future include large digital prints and an artist book; including digital work involving different types of urban, suburban, rural and abstract landscaping infused with alien orange trees and citrus groves. The subsequent projects will take my social and political commentary ever further.

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[Appendix]

[Section One- Images of my installation work]

Whole piece—After the Second Gold Rush, 2010



Detail: After the Second Gold Rush, 2010



California's Second Gold Rush, 2010



Photo-construction piece, photographic pieces, 2009







[Section Two- Images of artists mentioned]

Christopher Rauschenberg's re-photographic project of Eugène Atget's Paris (ca. 1994-2000)



Christopher Rauschenberg

# PARIS CHANGING

Revisiting Eugène Atget's Paris





PHOT des abbés de Reims, 4 rue du Jaur, 1907



PHOT des abbés de Reims, 4 rue du Jaur, 1907



Rue Dupetit-Thouvenin, 1911



Rue Dupetit-Thouvenin, 1906

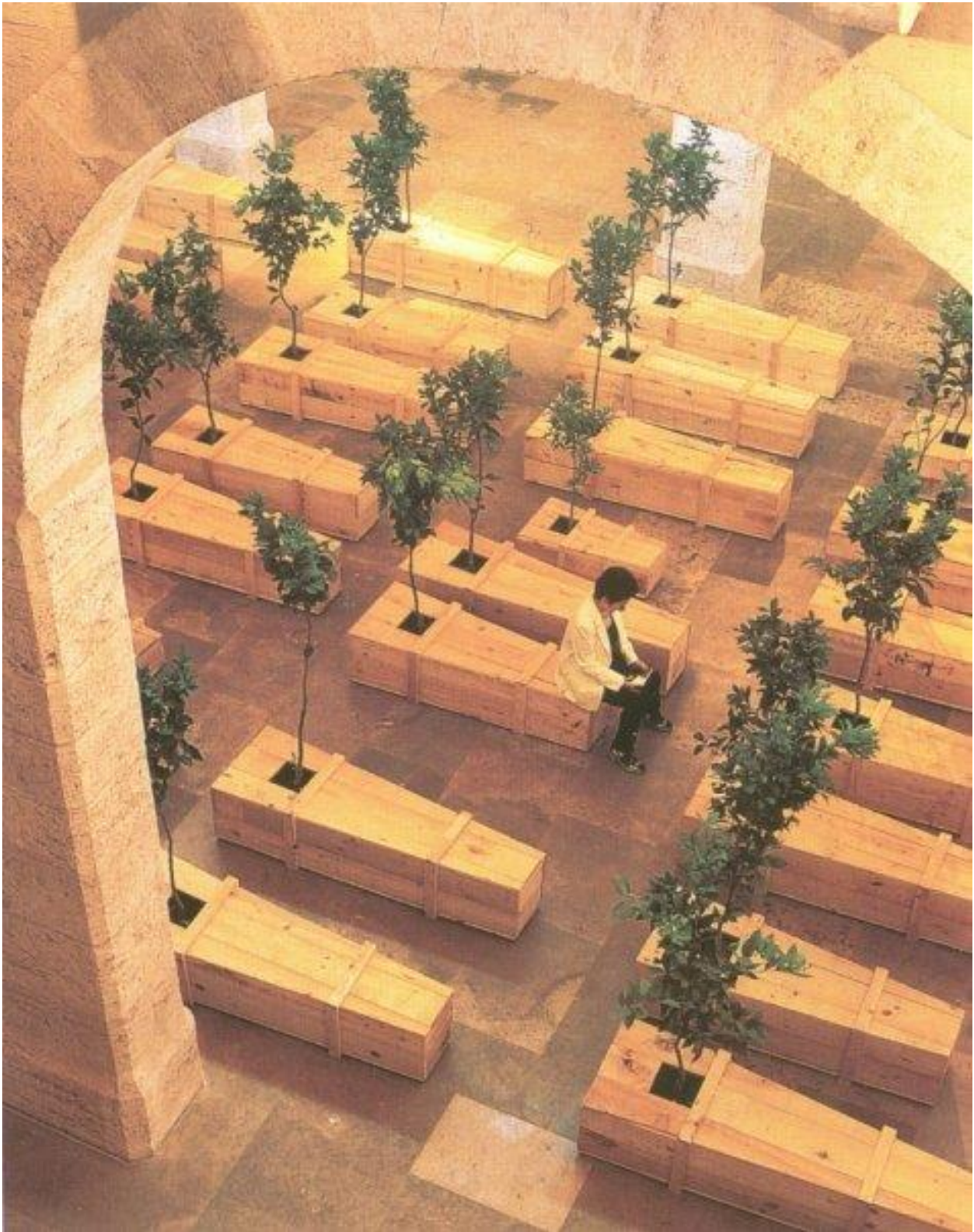
Bruce Nauman- *Untitled (Leave the Land Alone)* (1969/2009)



Jessica Rath- *Tree Peel*



Yoko Ono- *Exit* (1997)



Mike and Doug Starn-



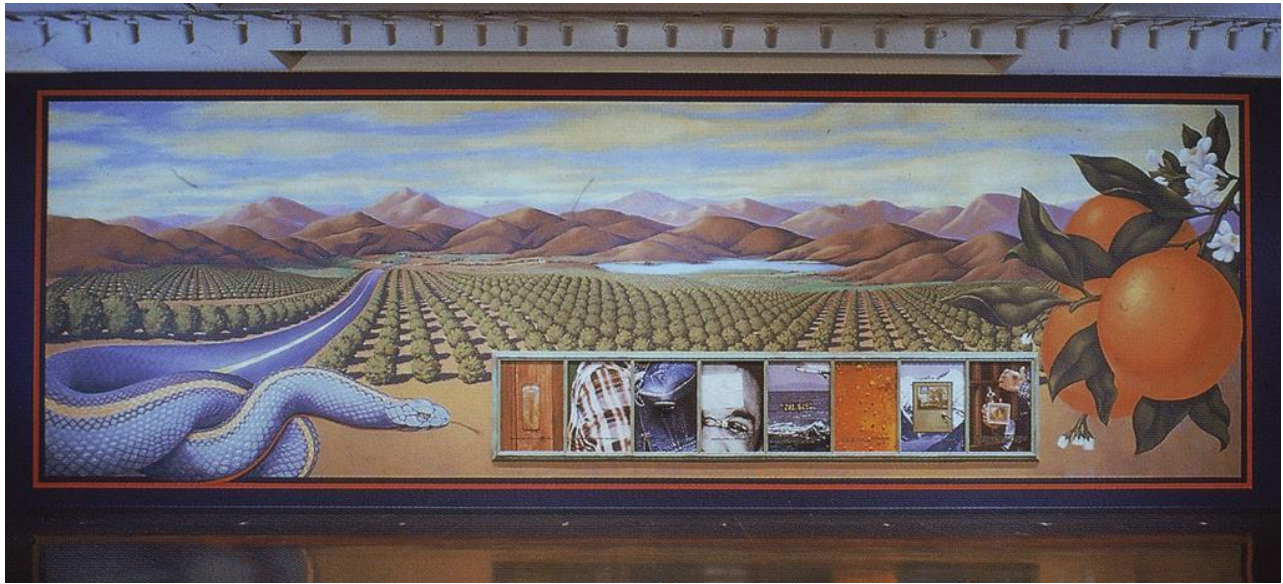
David Hockney-



Isidrio Blasco-



Alexis Smith- *Same Old Paradise* (1987/88)



Ben Sakoguchi- *Orange Crate Series* (1982)

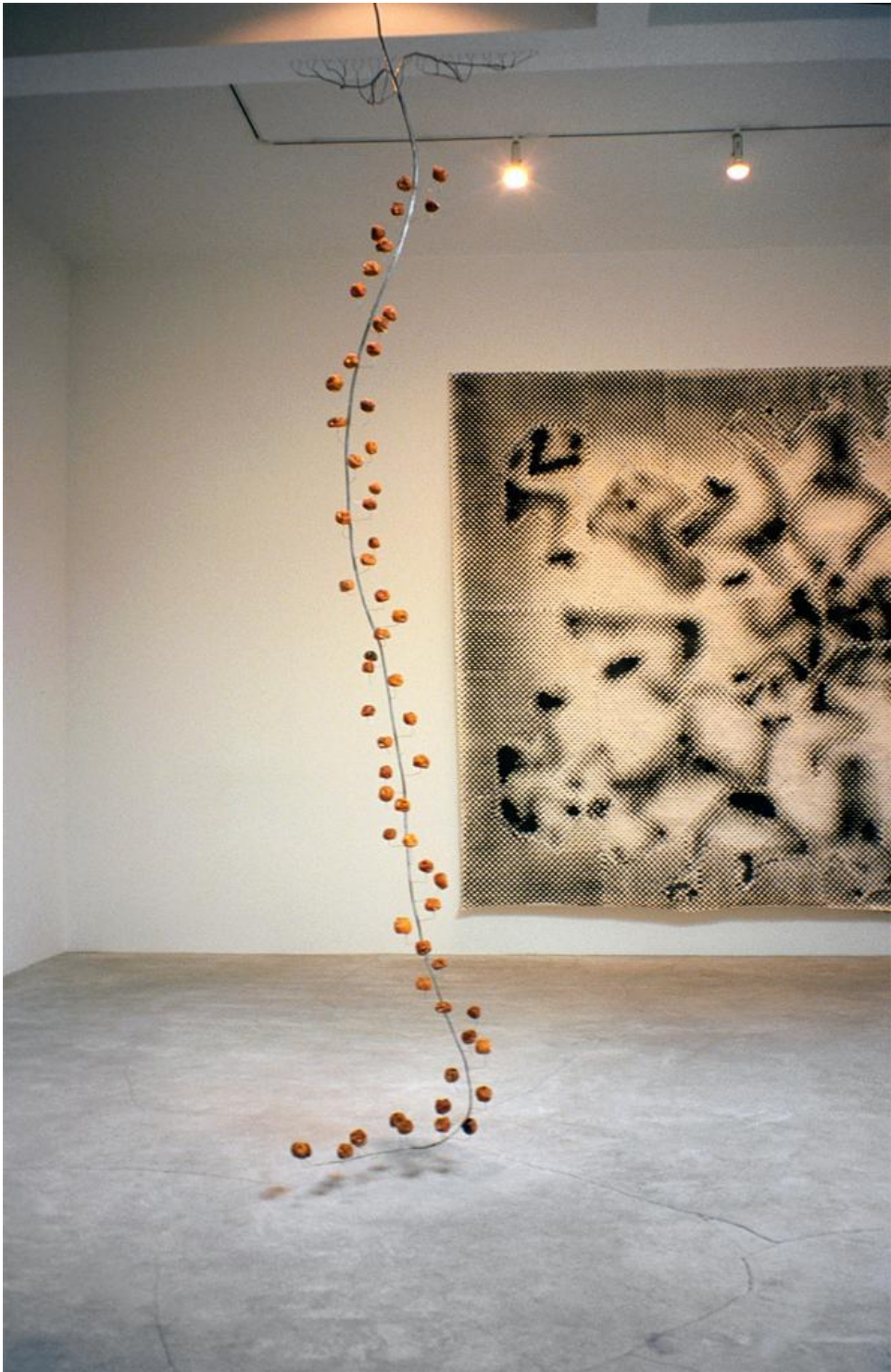


Marjorie Strider- *Peel Three* (1977)





Tim Hawkinson- *E'E'* (1997)



Millard Sheets- *Angels Flight* (1931)

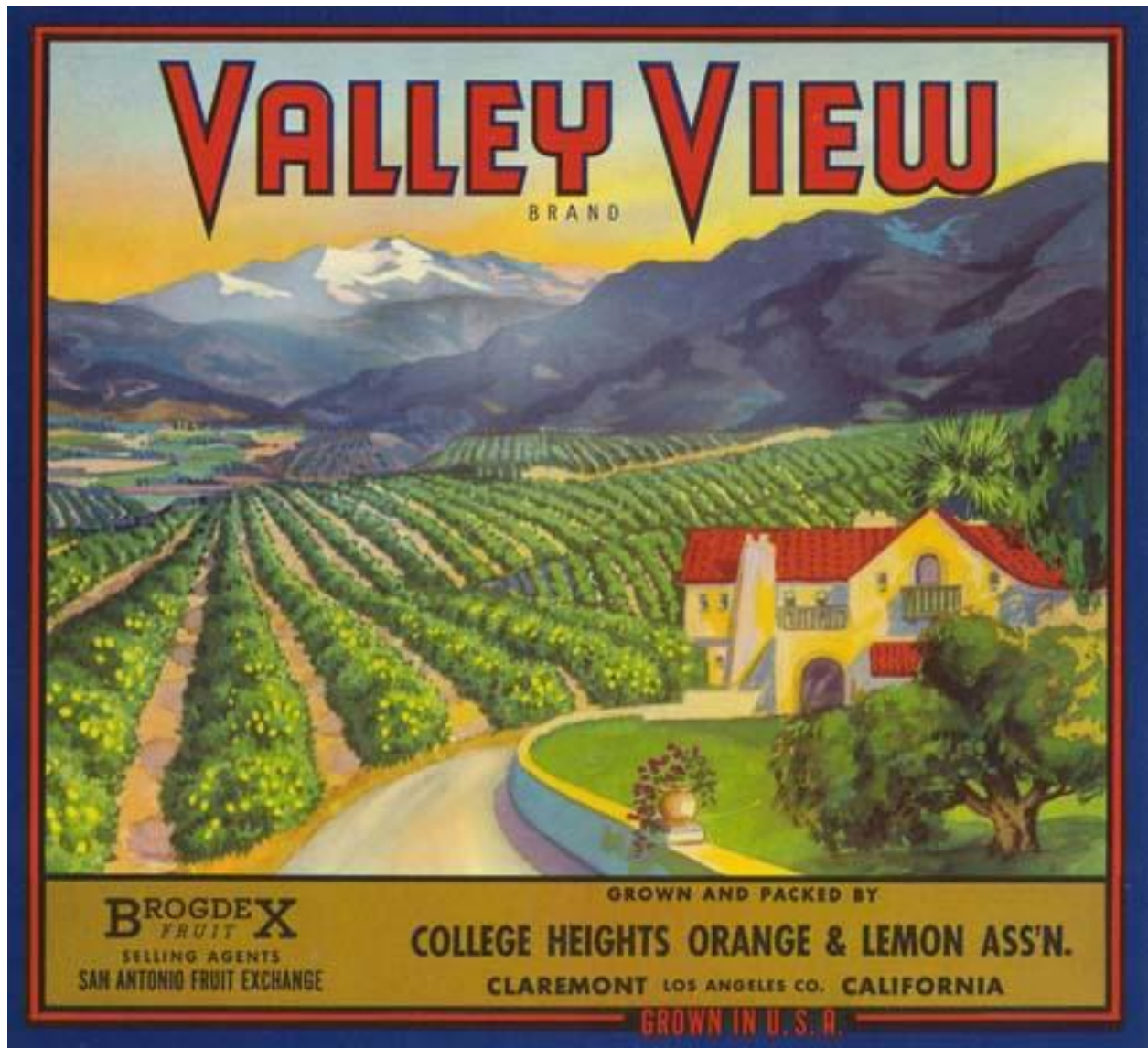


[Section Three: Historical Images]

The following are courtesy of the Claremont Heritage Historical Society

(<http://www.colapublib.org/history/claremont/images.html>)

Citrus crate label for the Valley View Brand of the College Heights Orange and Lemon Association of Claremont, c. 1930



Packing House and Precooling Plant, College Heights Orange and Lemon Association, Claremont Calif. College Heights Orange and Lemon Association packing house, c. 1920



The following image is from the Claremont Colleges' Digital Library, where many other historical images may be found. It is an example of the vast groves that once covered a large portion of the City of Claremont and its neighboring cities.

*Citrus Grove*, Hugo Schwichtenberg, ca 1910- 1920

