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Deep End

Emily Smith

Claremont Graduate University

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ARTIST STATEMENT

In my work I examine how and where nature and culture collide, merge, overlap or become one. Ultimately my goal is to draw attention to the ways we perceive and remember nature as well as how we experience the natural landscape in opposition to built environments. I am also interested in how our relation to these spaces changes over time and how we might envision these environments in the not-so-distant future.

I define nature as undeveloped land, sky, open space, water that is still clean enough to swim in, quiet places where you hear nothing but rain-drops, or plant-life that is green even without the presence of a sprinkler. Culture is what is built, urban space, the structures we live in, and how we operate as a society that often disregards the need for its natural spaces. I am interested in this separation, but also in exploring more closely a landscape where nature and culture meet or co-exist: areas where pavement meets a patch of grass, stockyards and horse corrals sit alongside garbage dumps and railways, and cable car lines cut the sky into thousands of pieces.

A large part of my childhood was spent exploring landscapes with my father and collecting shells and coral with my grandmother. I began collecting again when I lived in Ireland, and continued when I returned to Minnesota. My current body of work traces back many years to when I was only using these collected fragments of nature for visual reference. The objects that I chose were often the smallest elements in nature: bits of driftwood, seeds, bones, shells, pieces of insects or reptiles, and twisted plant forms. Much like Andrew Goldsworthy, I also understand that by collecting these materials I am not just touching single fragments of the landscape but that I am affecting the space around them as well.

Recently I moved to Southern California. I was intrigued by the new imagery and colors that Los Angeles provides: the abundance of power lines, freeways, trains, billboards, overpasses, concrete causeways, synthetic grass, and trees. Such imagery has worked its way into my consciousness and into my art. Since I cannot collect a freeway in the same way I can collect a branch, I take photographs and bring them into my studio for visual reference. I have now begun to graft this imagery to my organic forms to create a new space or experience floating somewhere between nature and culture. I enjoy the juxtaposition of texture and line that comes with abstracting and layering a fluid organic shape created from the shadow of a branch over a rendering of a cold stark freeway overpass.

All of these objects and images are more than just visual reference — they are talismans for memories. How will I remember this place? This experience? Is this how I represent myself and my past? Can drawing these pieces of the landscape help me to remember it better? Studying the collected objects and drawing from them is a way for me to create a record of a time and place, and to elicit the resonance of memory outside of it. I hope that my viewers recognize their own environment in my work and as a result encounter or remember their surroundings in a new way.

I find that the landscape of our time is one that is in a constant state of flux, one we are changing and disrupting in the pursuit of progress and ultimately transforming the picture of our future landscape into something profoundly different. Edward Burtynsky's photographs also focus on this landscape. Our work relates in that we are both trying to "bring an appreciation for nature and what it represents — that we come from nature," while also trying to look "at the industrial landscape as a way of defining who we are in our relationship to the planet."

In a city like Los Angeles, what is nature? Is it cell phone towers designed to look like trees? What is society's idea of "green?" Is it about digging up hillsides and lining them with wind turbines as far as the eye can see in order to generate power for our cities? Or perhaps it's about parks that are designed and built with turf instead of grass in order to conserve water. How does this effect our idea of what nature is? In reality, the world's dependence on nature to provide materials for consumption and our concern for the health of our planet is a disturbing contradiction. My work addresses these contradictions, and proposes a fantasy where they can sit in opposition to each other and at the same time live in visual harmony.

My materials also support this contradiction. I am trying to find a balance among pre-fabricated, natural and artificial, harmful, recycled, and biodegradable materials. It is important for me to stay conscious of what effect my life and my art practice will have on this future landscape and ecosystem while also embracing the idea that there is not much that I alone can do to prevent the destruction. Currently I am creating layered mixed-media works on panel using traditional drawing materials and pre-fabricated model-building supplies. These materials include paint, ink, graphite, charcoal, miniature plastic houses, turf, cable, balsa wood, plastic, fake foliage, and brightly colored adhesive vinyl. I play with two- and three-dimensional use of space as well as scale and texture on naked wood panels.

The space I construct through installation is similar to that of my mixed-media pieces: perspectives shift, scale is inconsistent, and pattern connects pictorial elements. I use recycled styrofoam, sod, tarps, wire mesh, paper, branches, traffic cones, and turf. The shapes, colors, and media are arranged in such a way to bring nature and culture together like a neatly interlocking puzzle. I am engineering a confrontation through design and organization and therefore bringing cohesion and quiet beauty to opposing forces. There is however, still a strong element of drama in bringing these elements together, altering their state of being.

My focus on the future condition of our landscape comes out of my interest in science fiction, specifically literature centered on the dystopic future city and the fantasy of how we might progress or obliterate the natural landscape. I am influenced by the short stories of J.G. Ballard because of the limitless possibilities they present. What fascinates me about his fictitious landscape/city spaces is that they are calling attention to things that have not yet happened while simultaneously speaking about

the present. Ballard's future landscapes are places where we are free to imagine various combinations of social structures, human relationships, lifestyles, planet conditions, technologies, nature (or its absence), architecture, landscape and so on. The goal with my work is to invoke these limitless imagined possibilities of spaces or realities.

Generally, my work is much more optimistic than Ballard's writing. I find that in order to feel less anxiety about the future, I must twist my work into a more utopian view even though sometimes I may believe whole-heartedly in what Ballard is depicting and describing.

I find that Lebbeus Woods puts a similar twist on his work — specifically in his *DMZ* series of drawings. They are drawings of his vision of utopia — a place where the

“ideal state of conditions for humans, is not based on a harmonious melding of conflicting conditions, but rather on the free ‘dialogue,’ or open interaction between them... Conflict, achieving a dynamic balance of opposing ideas, actions, forces, through continuous struggle...”

My utopia is a place where this conflict and struggle is embraced, amplified, and organized. I use this conflict to speak about nature and culture, and how we experience them in opposition to each other as well as how we perceive the areas where they overlap. I am interested in how these landscapes change over time, and how they might look in the future. Ultimately I am making a utopian space that I believe to be unattainable in the real world. Perhaps they are only attainable in my work.