



# SOCIAL ECOLOGIES

RAIL CURATORIAL PROJECTS

*Curated by*  
Greg Lindquist

# Social Ecologies 2.0 by Greg Lindquist



We are more aware with every day that passes that we inhabit a single planet, a fragile, threatened body, infinitely small in an infinitely large universe; this planetary awareness is an ecological awareness, and an anxious one, that we all share a restricted space that we treat badly. At the same time, we also are aware of the gap, growing day by day between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor; this planetary awareness is a social awareness, and an unhappy one.[...]

How can this trend be reversed? Certainly not with a magic wand or pious sentiments. If we want to prevent knowledge and science from being concentrated exclusively at the same poles as power and wealth, at the points where different networks of global system intersect, then today education is the ultimate utopia.

— Marc Augé, *Non-places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*

How, for example, would patterns of consumption change if we faced not litter, rubbish, trash, or “the recycling,” but an accumulating pile of lively and potentially dangerous matter? What difference would it make to public health if eating was understood as an encounter between various and variegated bodies, some of them mine, most of them not, and none of which always gets the upper hand? [...] What difference would it make to the course of energy policy were electricity to be figured not simply as a resource, commodity, or instrumentality but also and more radically as an “actant”?

— Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*

A true ecological approach must always become a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

— Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*

Phoebe: I like the dirt.

Martha Rosler: And the dirt likes you. We are all dirt.

— Overheard: Martha Rosler and her granddaughter  
at Social Ecologies

When asked by *Brooklyn Rail* publisher, artist, curator and friend Phong Bui to edit the Critics Page in late 2014, I was also aware that the Rail office's future move in Brooklyn from Greenpoint to Sunset Park would offer an exhibition space for the Rail Curatorial Projects. So I proposed a Critics Page on art and ecology whose discourse would extend into a show at the new gallery space at Industry

City. The idea, dreamed in that moment, excited Phong immensely. He accepted it with his characteristic high five. I spent the following six months soliciting, gathering and editing thirty-two responses to my Critics Page prompt and selecting twenty-one artists to join the exhibition soon to be titled *Social Ecologies*.

As the title suggests, this essay might evoke a sense of déjà vu for those who have read the Critics Page, particularly in its revisit of questions about the function that art should serve for current ecological and social concerns. This exhibition addresses these concerns as thought forms embodied by objects and actions, rather than discursive polemics and written reflections. I also see the project as an extension of my own work as an artist, specifically a recent painting installation addressing the environmental and social impact of coal ash pollution at the North Carolina Museum of Art in my home state where gender identity discrimination under the McCrory administration rages—distracting from environmental issues such as coal ash. In these cycles of digesting theory, experience and discourse, the larger lifelong project has come full circle and will continue to evolve.

I discovered Marc Augé’s *Non-places* at Martha Schwenener’s recommendation. Thinking about the relationship of the social and ecological began in collaboration with environmental activists in my *Smoke and Water* painting project in 2014, studying the environmental justice movement through the writings of Robert Bullard. In this exhibition, I am defining the term “social” in the context of environmental justice as the fair treatment and equal involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or gender identity. Reading Augé’s introduction to *Non-places* led to divergent internet searches, stumbling upon the radical philosopher Murray Bookchin and his concept of social ecology. Bookchin’s stark argument that ecological problems are caused by social problems was striking, especially since his discourse predates Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962).<sup>1</sup>

These interlinked concerns of the social and ecological are also evident in Pope Francis’s *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality*, based largely on Michael Zimmerman’s notion of integral ecology. It’s also important to note here the conscious choice of the term ecology, which as scholar John Clark describes, is more critical, open and transformative, placing humanity within a larger system and allowing for a reconsideration of an environmentalism that evokes an instrumentalist perception of nature, reducing the natural world to “stock resources used for the benefit of humanity.”



The conceptual and contextual scaffolding of the exhibition was carefully designed. Creating a discursive network<sup>2</sup> foregrounded in a contemporary conversation about ecology and art with a flexibility to extend and expand beyond the Critics Page was a central concern. In addition, the potential to increase the scale (from the nearly 2,000 square foot space of the Gallery at Industry City) as well as the number of participating artists and collaborating curators for future reincarnations of the show was also a chief consideration. My interest was to bring together artists of various generations—historic, mid-career and emerging—and, inspired by Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here* (1989), to intermingle artists primarily making objects within gallery systems with artists inhabiting the realms of performative actions and social practice with public institutions.

In bridging the social and the ecological in the landscape, I also strove to push against the traditionally romantic and ideologically neutral conventions of landscape. *Social Ecologies* prioritizes imagination and phenomenological immersion over information dumps, aiming to inspire viewers instead of oversaturating them with data. The embodied experience of installation comes in the form of a damp, pungent odor of soil wafting from the gallery. A faint Naples yellow hue enveloping the walls offers a retinal immersion in color. This hue, focused with gallery lighting, bathes the inner gallery in an atmospheric glow. The exact identity of this light is ambiguous: as if an impressionistically blurred dawn or dusk, a moment of

meditation with the outer world or a subtle suggestion of an impending toxicity.

The tinted walls also unify the interior space as does a beige baseboard, that together anchor the inner elliptical space to its outer ring. This exterior perimeter, defined by walls painted with beige and an over 9,000 pound soil floor, brings a tactile, olfactory and retinal sensation of outdoor elements that absorbs Ellie Irons' garden of invasive plants, *Sanctuary for Weedy Species* (2015). Forming an interior and exterior space within the exhibition space, the soil draws a mutable boundary between nature and urbanity. The soil is swept back daily in a sisyphean task by the gallery attendant as it continually migrates into the main space of the gallery.

The visceral tactility of the exhibit space, the phenomenological connection of seeing to feeling with the body in a real space (as described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and perhaps less known by Vilém Flusser in *Natural:Mind*<sup>3</sup>), is an irreproducible experience offered only by visiting the exhibition. In an era of social media, image sharing, and disembodied seeing, exhibits that insist on embodied viewing are imperative. The majority of video here is also projected to maintain an immersive, bodily relationship with the moving image. Given the importance of these social and ecological concerns, it's essential that visitors are compelled, emotionally and intellectually by their immersive experiences.



Upon entering, one is confronted with the inner and outer ring of the gallery. Stepping onto the soil, the viewer encounters the work of Tattfoo Tan and Trevor Paglen. Two burlap-lined shopping carts, *S.O.S. Mobile Garden* (2016), are beached on the soil and overfilled with common house plants, providing a domestic counterpoint to Iron's weed garden. Outside the gallery in the corridor are two banners, each eight by ten feet, one instructing how to make one's own mobile garden and the other, strategically placed above garbage receptacles, offering a "sustainable organic stewardship" (S.O.S.) pledge. Projected onto a partitioned wall to the right is Trevor Paglen's *Drone Vision* (2010), footage of surveillance aircrafts intercepted from an open channel by an amateur satellite hacker. Segments of low resolution views of unknown terrain are stamped with coordinates and technical data. Interwoven are scenes of a clock with a Batman logo. While no one seems to know where they are from or why they appear, one of my students, a military veteran of Afghanistan drone strikes, identified the clock as a symbolic insignia of a secret society of drone operators.

Turning the corner into a long, narrow corridor with windows on the outer wall, a curious play between image and object emerges. The sheer surface area and volume of soil contrasts with Charles Simonds' *Birth* (1970/2015), a forty-two by six and a half foot wall vinyl print whose frames serially document the earth-covered artist emerging from a New Jersey claypit where he obtained the materials for his dwellings. The cinematic here is made bodily by scale and bipedal motion through the passage.

Underneath Simonds' work, one encounters Marc Handelman's *The Triple Bottom Line* (2011-15), a thirty-eight and a half foot long shelf containing eighteen binders of redacted text from corporate sustainability reports. Collated by visual motif from nature to culture (including images of romantic landscapes, vanishing points, sky, foliage, water droplets, flowers, animals, the white heteronormative family, environmental racism), the pages appear at once eerily surrealist and kitschy, showing leaflets morph into oil droplets, dollar signs into shrubbery. In the inner gallery, Handelman's shimmering painting *The Art of Adding Value* (2013) evokes a glacial surface as well as stone veneer of a corporate lobby.

Punctuating the wall is Matthew C. Wilson's *Public Relations (How to Alter Perception of the Corpus)* (2014), a video that creates an interior monologue of relational networks between art, psychedelics and banking: water lilies (as used in ancient Egyptian funeral rites as well as appearing in Claude Monet's Giverny gardens), a wealth management company called Giverny Capital, David Rockefeller's acquisition of Monet's water lily canvases and JP Morgan founding the Metropolitan Museum's Egyptian collection. Across the partitioned wall is Wilson's *An Arcane Alembic for Abstraction* (2014), constructed of a mason jar holding a mixture of water from MoMA and Metropolitan Museum water fountains and blue water lilies, all balanced atop an antique bankers lamp. As the lamp of finance heats the psychoactive brew of water and water lily, vapors waft subtly into the gallery.



Behind the partitioned wall is Ellie Irons' *Sanctuary for Weedy Species* (2015) in which she imported invasive species near her Bushwick studio into the gallery. With grow lights and biweekly watering, Irons exerts an absurdist level of control to contain the wildness of nature. To the right, an alcove contains two video projections by Laura Grace Chipley. In *Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol: Coal River Valley/Kanawha Forest* (2015) Chipley sends a surveillance drone into coal mines and slurry impounds of West Virginia, monitoring illegal mountaintop removal mining in state forests. The opening shots show Marsh County Elementary School which was shut down because of the local population's chronic respiratory problems, likely resulting from excessive mining. The panoramic views of the scarred landscape are both majestic and devastating, capturing a disturbing beauty caused by destruction. *Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol: Biodiversity/Contamination* (2015) depicts the Jarrell family cemetery, which was surrounded by mining sites and requires mining security to escort visiting family members. Mine blasts have cracked the headstones and killed trees in the graveyard. Chipley's videos combine an uncomfortable mixture of the beauty of nature and the ugliness of human impact on the land, while working with communities in efforts toward environmental justice.

Hung in the entrance to Chipley's work is Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Sanitation Manifesto* (1984) in which she argues that garbage collection is a cultural system to which we are all bound, demonstrating with the gesture of shaking every sanitation worker's bare hand. On the face of the partitioned wall is a grid of eight legal paper-sized paintings depicting a nocturnal view through tree branches. Arranged as if panes of a window, her paintings provide a solemn meditation on and mediation through the medium. On the same wall to the left is Kevin Zucker's painting *Untitled (Clastra)* (2015). A series of translations, Zucker creates a digital 3D model in Rhino of a screenblock wall, from which a CNC milled low relief is fabricated, atop which Zucker creates a rubbing with canvas and crayon. Zucker is driven by questions of virtuality, such as what does it mean to make a rubbing of something with digital origins as much as colonized rep-

resentations of nature melding with geometry. The screen block, or decorative pierced block, common to separate public and private exterior space, is created from a heavily abstracted flower, literally hybridizing the amorphous shape of nature and geometry of human architecture.

Just as paintings by Zucker evoke the slippage between image and object, paintings of headstones by Josephine Halvorson and cement sculptures by Allyson Vieira all circle around the actual mineral matter of stone versus its representation. Anchoring opposite ends of the gallery are Viera's complementing cement, rebar and steel sculptures *Worker A* and *Worker B* (both 2015). Made as studies for site specific works in São Paulo, Brazil in the same year, these sculptures evoke the simple means of construction methods used to create Brazil's modernist architecture by Oscar Niemeyer and others. In their upright posture and allusive titles, these sculptures at once evoke construction sites, ruins and human presence.

On the main wall, near Zucker's painting are a pair of Rackstraw Downes paintings, *Sand Hills with Cell Tower, Presidio, TX, A.M.* and *Sand Hills with Cell Tower, Presidio, TX, P.M.* (both 2010) in which one observes the minute and dramatic shifts of light and shadow in a desert landscape, as well as the looming intervention of a cell phone tower signifying the otherwise invisible interconnectedness in a typically vacant locale. For Downes, site specificity means painting only from observation and allowing the painting to grow and take shape organically, which often means stitching on additional squares of canvas as he did here. On the opposite side of the gallery is *Study for Two Dumps in the Meadowlands, April, Lowtide, A Grassfire*, 1986, a panorama depicting, on the far left, a grassfire and, on the far right, three front end loaders pushing around garbage—a New Jersey reminiscent of Smithson's seminal essay "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967). Downes' primary essay is a rare text in which he acknowledges ecological concerns in five paintings that are seldom made explicit in his work.

Hanging to the left of Downes' pair of paintings is Robert Smithson's *Lake Crescents* (1973) proposal for an earthworks thirty-five miles outside of Chicago. Still working on this at the time of his premature death, Smithson had begun to conceive of earthworks as radical public park pieces.<sup>4</sup> Fascinatingly, *Lake Crescents* also represents a break with the particular form of the work created from specifics of a site as this work was largely an expanded version of *Broken Circle* (1971) in Emmen, Holland.

This exhibition aims to align Smithson with younger artists with ecological conscience, even though Smithson himself may not have identified with that agenda. David Brooks' *Myopic Wall Composition* (2014) elaborates upon and recontextualizes Smithson's notion of non-site, re-locating logs worn by weather and human intervention retrieved from the historic Walden Pond. Embedding them

as knots in MDF plywood and humorously holding them by metal scaffolding, Brooks poetically collapses the natural and humanmade while creating an meta-space within the gallery.

Martha Rosler's series of six photographs from *Greenpoint Project* (2011) encompass a rich, ideological and personal portrait of the inhabitants of Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Expanding on a project from 1992 that addressed pollution in the neighborhood when it was seldom discussed, Rosler provides a kaleidoscopic view of the forces of gentrification and corporate neglect in the area she has lived for decades. It also happens to be the location of the original *Brooklyn Rail* headquarters and has been where I have lived for over a decade. Rosler's essay "About Greenpoint" expands on the social, political and economic histories of Greenpoint.

Roxy Paine's vitrine of epoxy resin psychedelic mushrooms, *A vs. B* (2004), rests on a sloped section of cement, tilting the glass case subtly downward. In an attempt to understand these mushrooms as language, Paine did not cast specimen but rather attempted to inhabit their consciousness to locate form. The title alludes to the conflict of fungus feeding on each other, a quiet battle occurring in the soil.

Mary Miss's *Crossings: Bright Lines & Water Systems* (2014) is a drawing from her public art project *STREAM/LINES* in Indianapolis, in which a series of interactive sculptures engaged the community in issues of local waterways. Gio Sumbadze's *Soviet period bath building Ts-kaltubo* (2015) is a photograph documenting the decaying architecture from the Soviet occupation of the Republic of Georgia. The footprint of building itself is a geometrization of the daisy flower, and its circular form is echoed in the arrangement of the exhibition.

Across the gallery is *Glacial, Icecap and Permafrost Melting XXXVI* (2008) by The Canary Project, a collective comprised of Edward Morris and Susannah Sayler. Depicting the remote location of a research base on King George Island in Antarctica, a Russian Orthodox church built by importing the building piece by piece populates the frigid horizon line alongside a communications tower.

Adjacent are Josephine Halvorson's paintings *Wilmett 1* and *Wilmett 5* (both 2012) painted, like Downes', from observation on site, in this case, outside Saint Peter and Saint Paul Church in Shoreham, Kent, England. Rather than focus on optical verisimilitude, Halvorson aims to accurately transcribe an empathy with objects through the animated touch of painting, calling to mind Jane Bennett's notions of vibrant materialism. Indeed her paintings intersect with ecological concerns, as a local historian told Halvorson that in the last forty years many of the stones' crisp inscriptions have been erased by acid rain and changing ecological conditions.



Last, but certainly not least, Alexis Rockman's painting *Loam* (2008) depicts rich, fertile soil ideal for farming, alluding also to a color field painting by Morris Louis of the same name. Atop the flat shape is the life cycle of a soybean and sparring red and black ants. Rockman's use of taxonomic symbols, while also combining allegory with abstraction, allows viewers straightforward access to its ecological content and balances some of the more indirect and allusive works. Rather than generalizing, romanticizing or poeticizing, *Social Ecologies* evokes and widens the dialogue on the urgency of ecology. The work not only visualizes the invisible land, water and air pollution, but also its often ignored social and economic impact. Meditating on complex links between human impact on the environment, the relations among people, and the natural world's response, the artists here strive to evoke empathy and interconnectedness to turn our collective ecological anxiety into collective action.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Curiously, this seminal text was published the same year as George Kubler's *The Shape of Time*, whose treatise on the formal evolution of objects over time proved influential to a number of 1970s artists including Robert Smithson, who was given a copy by Ad Reinhardt.

<sup>2</sup> David Joselit has referred to this concept as "art in a networked context" in his recent book *After Art*. For a discussion on the circulations of images in art and Bruno LaTour's influential actor-network theory, see my interview with him in the June 2013 issue of the *Brooklyn Rail*.

<sup>3</sup> Flusser states, "In order to see the moon, I must look at it. I do not need to listen to the wind in order to hear it. I may but I don't need to. In order to see, I need to gesticulate with my eyes and my head, 'to lift my eyes to the sky'... In this sense, sight is similar to touch: it is drawn toward the phenomenon that is to be provoked. The 'objective' explanation that eyesight is the reception of electromagnetic wave emissions (just as hearing is the reception of sound waves) conceals the fact that eyes are closer to arms than ears."

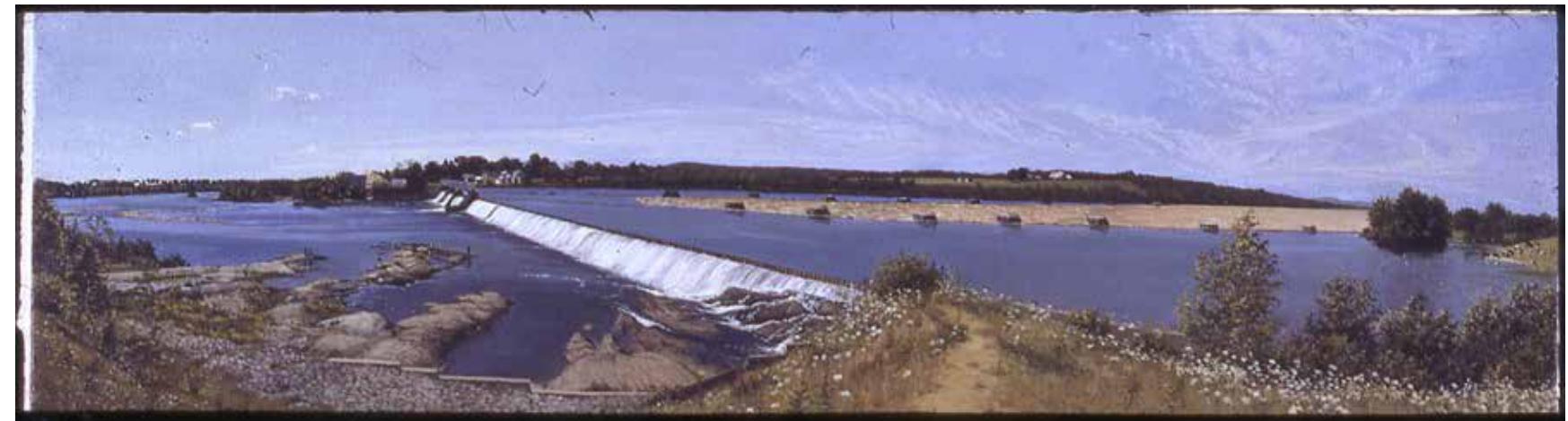
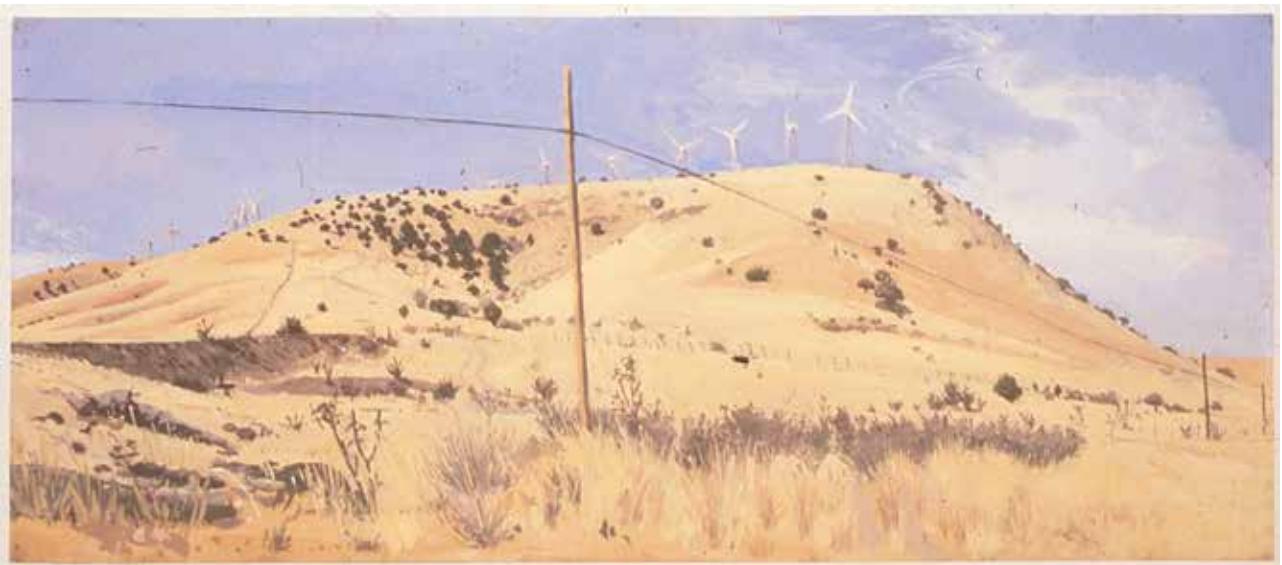
<sup>4</sup> This concept is echoed in Robert Smithson's 1973 letter of support for Charles Simonds' public art project, in which Smithson highlighted the need for a "community consciousness" and "neighborhood connectedness." This letter is reproduced in the documents section.

# Notes from Panel on Eco-poetics

School of Visual Arts, September 16, 2010 by Rackstraw Downes

*True Progress*, 1997

In forty-five years of painting in the landscape, I only made one work that advocated anything. This is it. It shows a long line of wind turbines generating electricity; it's between Valentine and Fort Davis in far west Texas. I called it *True Progress*, because I felt it was.



*The Dam at Fairfield*, 1974

Far more typical of my practice, and the circumstances that occur around it, is this painting from 1974 of the Kennebec River in Maine, at Fairfield. A road runs parallel to the river to its east. Driving along this road one day, I saw that, beginning a little upstream from where I then was, the whole river surface from bank to bank and for miles upstream was an orange-tan color. I stopped my car, took a footpath in toward the river to investigate. I found a *locus amoenus* where, below the dam, people were swimming and fishing, and above it cows were drinking. The strange color turned out to be a carpet of four-foot logs, which had been cut up north and were floating down to Waterville to be turned into toilet paper. Just above the dam, the logs were being held in a long V-shaped area; this

was made of a log chain—long logs joined by chains—kept in place by log cribs, structures resembling tall log cabins. The cribs were constructed during the winter on the ice of the frozen river and filled with rocks. When the ice melted, they sank to the bottom, but were still tall enough to stick up above the water level. At the point of the V, a narrow log-chain corridor leads to the spillway where, when released from the V-shaped holding area, the logs go over the dam.

I started work at this pleasing site, only to find out that a huge controversy regarding these logs was playing out in the courts and the state legislature. Environmentalists wanted the logs out of the river because, as the bark soaked off them, it sank and released tannin, which harms the fish. And the logs prevented recreational use of

the river. Their suit was joined by another lumber company which did not have access to the river and had to truck their logs down from up north at great expense.

The environmentalists eventually won their case, but I was troubled: Did the environment actually benefit from this? Recreational use was resumed, but now all those logs had to be trucked instead. Bridges had to be strengthened or rebuilt to carry the heavy trucks, and with them came increased diesel emissions and a whole service industry of batteries, tires, etc. It did not seem to be a good deal.

At about this time, I was reading Chekhov's letters.\* He articulated superbly the way I felt about these things; he seemed to me to be a most profound aesthetician of realism. He wrote, "It would be gratifying to couple art

with sermonizing, but, personally, I find this exceedingly difficult and all but impossible. Why, in order to depict horse thieves in 700 lines I must constantly speak and think as they do and feel in keeping with their spirit. Otherwise, if I add a pinch of subjectivity, the image will become diffuse and the story will not be as compact as it behoves all short stories to be." And again: "You are confusing two concepts: the solution of a problem and the correct posing of a question ... The court [i.e. the author] is obliged to pose the questions correctly, but it's up to the jurors [i.e. the readers] to answer them, each juror according to his own taste." I myself believed, and I think I still do, that to be truly observant it is necessary to be agnostic.

\* Letters of Anton Chekhov, Selected and edited by Avraham Yarmolinsky, New York, 1973, Viking.



*P.H. Robinson Generating Station, Dickinson, TX: Eight Ibis Feeding with an Egret*, 1991

I've been asked, "How do you want people to respond to your paintings?" Well, this painting, done in 1991, represents a generating station in Dickinson, TX, between Houston and

Galveston; it sits all alone in the middle of the prairie, and the electrical wires and pylons seem to go on forever (William Least Heat-Moon called the prairie "a paradigm of infinity").

The Houston MFA wanted to acquire this painting, so they asked the company that owned the plant to buy the painting and donate it to the museum. In due course, some company suits arrived to look at the painting. The curator prepped them on who I was and said,

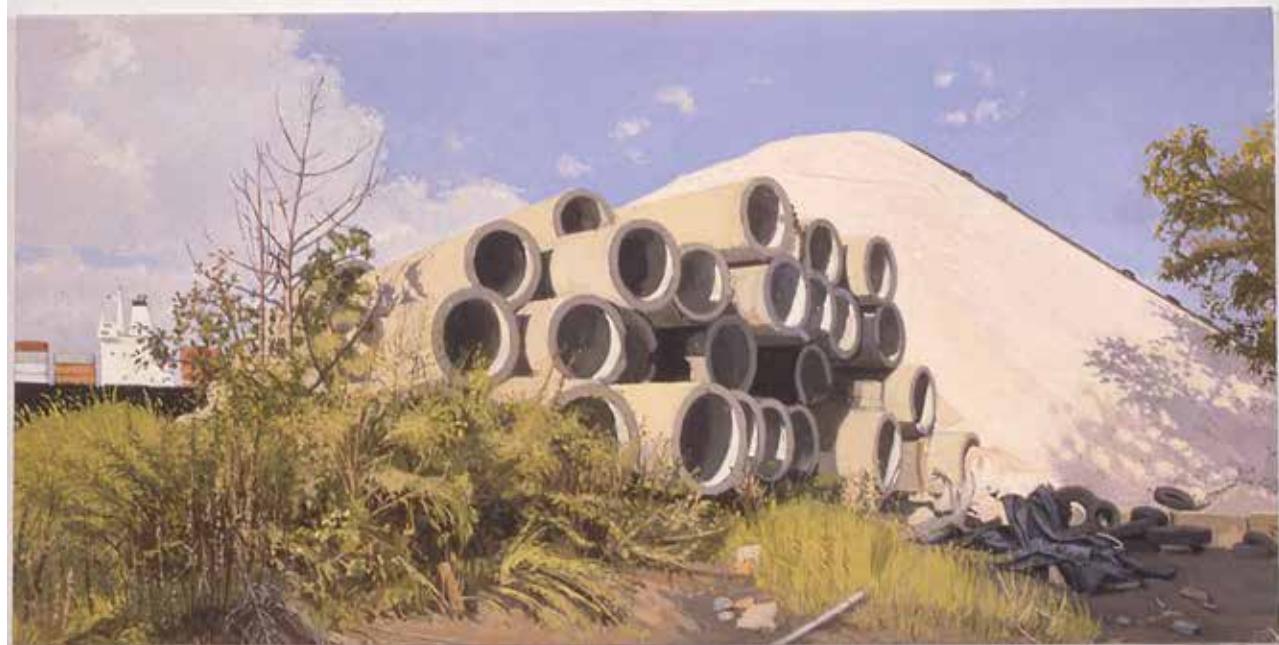
"Check out the painting, and I'll be over here to answer any questions." The suits huddled round the painting, whispering. Then one of them said to the curator, "We have a question." "Yes?" "Is he trying to say that generating electricity is a bad thing?"



*A Fence at the Periphery of a Jersey City Scrap Metal Plant*, 1993

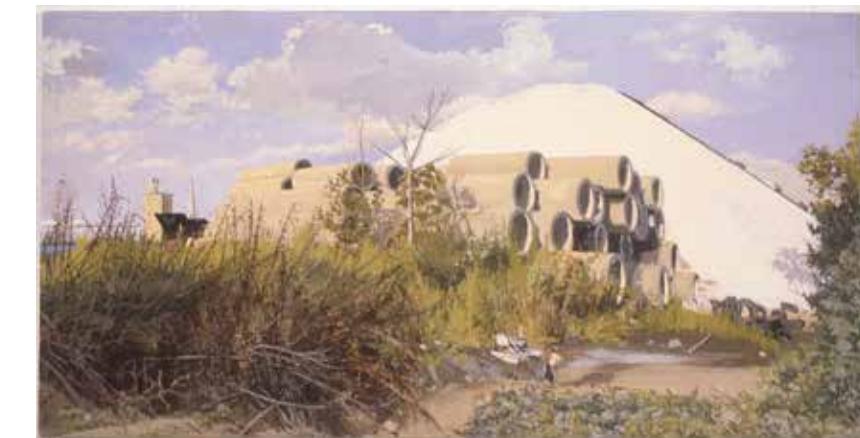
Peter Schjeldahl once called me "the bard of weeds." There often are weeds in the foreground of my paintings. To set up my easel, I look for neglected spots where I will not be in people's way and will avoid unwelcome interruptions. Wherever neglect is, weeds move in. They

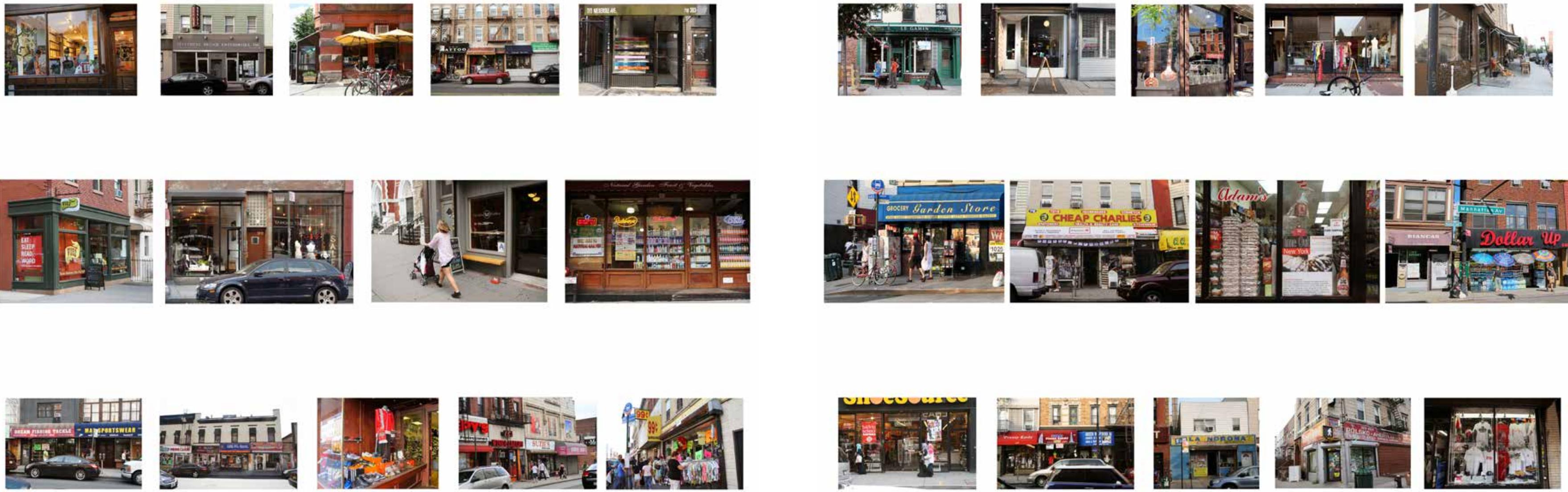
are the avant-garde of nature's campaign to revitalize this increasingly moribund planet. There were no weeds in the foreground of this painting when I started it in the spring, but by mid-summer there were many.



*Salt Pile with Culverts by the Kill Van Kull*, 1997

In 1997, I chose to paint this spot as an antidote to the very long canvases that had become habitual in my work. The tall salt pile and the flanking bushes prompted a less-elongated canvas. This is one of a pair that show the same salt pile—for use on the roads in winter—plus a stack of culverts, near the Kill Van Kull, the narrow strip of water between Staten Island and New Jersey. The ship to the left is on that water. The two views are intended to be seen as a pair. I was interested in the difference made by altering my vantage point just a little bit, and in how, after rain, the salt pile turned from brilliant white to pinkish. Noticing and making such distinctions is crucial in my work.





## About Greenpoint by Martha Rosler

Greenpoint, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Brooklyn, is situated at the westernmost tip of Long Island, where Newtown Creek meets the East River. Greenpoint was an important early site of industrial manufacture, from shipbuilding—the U.S. Civil War ironclad warship *The Monitor* was built and launched here in 1861—to the so-called “black arts”: glass and pottery making, printing, cast-iron production and refining. Home to one of the first petroleum refineries, Charles Pratt’s Astral Oil Works, Greenpoint’s waterfront has long hosted a range of toxic facilities, from electroplating and chemical manufacturing to petroleum and natural-gas storage to a huge municipal incinerator and one of New York City’s main sewage-treatment plants—many of which heedlessly polluted the neighborhood for years.

Many different European immigrant communities have made Greenpoint their home. In the 19th century, new arrivals came primarily from Ireland and Germany. Italian, Polish and Russian immigrants arrived in the 1880s, and Puerto Ricans near the middle of the 20th century. Toward the 20th century’s end, political unrest in Poland resulted in a new wave of immigration. Other new residents have come from Central and South America, Mexico, North Africa (especially Yemen and Egypt) and South Asia—primarily India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The latest wave of young people to the neighborhood are mostly upper-middle-class, arriving from elsewhere in the U.S. and other developed countries.

From the mid-1960s, Greenpoint, like other urban neighborhoods, suffered from so-called “white flight.” This exodus occurred even as new immigrants were arriving—many obtaining working-class

jobs, including those in construction and housekeeping, and casual unskilled labor—while the long-term unemployed and underemployed remained. Greenpoint’s “urban village” insularity was abetted by its poor public transportation. Postwar road building segmented Greenpoint, with multilane overhead roads and through-streets for heavy trucking carving up the local areas. In subsequent decades, many small factories closed, but polluting facilities, as well as a major underground petroleum spill, remained. In the 1990s local residents banded together and got the state to undertake clean-up campaigns, but the neighborhood seemed stalled, and business in Greenpoint remained stagnant. Small shops sold clothing, shoes, sundries, electronics and plant material, and there were a plethora of Polish and Latino delis, family restaurants and overseas shippers—and, more recently chain drugstores and fast-food restaurants. The few entertainment facilities primarily served the Polish community.

Great changes have come to Greenpoint over the last decade. As young, upwardly mobile professionals from elite backgrounds began to move into the central cities in the U.S. over the past few decades, the value of land shot upward. Patrician New York was intent on redeveloping Manhattan for banking, real estate and tourism interests, forcing people seeking cheap rents to move out of the borough. Artists had been moving to Brooklyn since the mid-1970s, but only recently to Greenpoint, as housing pressures in trendier Williamsburg pushed people northward. The migratory trend into Brooklyn was seen by city fathers as very much worth promoting and accelerating, especially once it became clear that artists produced lively neighborhoods attractive to docile, well-heeled residents. One result of

the onrush of development, however, is that many artists who had recently been priced out of Williamsburg have now also been priced out of Greenpoint. Even in the midst of the protracted financial crisis of recent years, development continued in both neighborhoods. Abetted by zoning-law changes, the formerly industrial waterfront has seen the rapid-fire creation of luxury high-rise housing for people with better financial prospects. As the waterfront is becoming a solid block of these towers, loft-style apartments are built on other sites, next to much smaller 19th-century walk-ups and rowhouses.

By now, the rapid transformation of the local business ecology is visible in the changing face of its storefronts. Small neighborhood stores designed in older styles are supplanted by a new model, a new International Style, different from the one centered on notable buildings and grand urban-redevelopment plans that transformed cities in the 20th century.

Immigrants moving to cities, both from the countryside and from outside national borders, have typically opened small businesses, often as a multi-generational family enterprise, with members willing to devote long hours and days to keeping the business afloat. Such families often harbor hopes that their children can gain an education and achieve middle-class, preferably professional, status. The new development process, sanctioned by local and national governments, relies on the idea of “creative class”-led reclamation of low-rent or decaying neighborhoods for business and social elites. Now no longer primarily driven by the arrival of relatively poor immigrants from abroad, migration and development in the present moment bring about a net decline in the diversity of neighborhoods such as these. This phenomenon is apparent in the new stores on local shopping

streets, a trend that has been observed in cities from New York to Shanghai, from Tokyo to Toronto, from Amsterdam to Berlin.

The series of photographs included in *Social Ecologies* depict the storefront businesses that exemplify these different moments of neighborhood change. Unlike previous waves of newcomers who rebuilt or transformed the neighborhood with their own hands and in their own image, today’s well-off young Americans, often moving from suburbs around the country, have little distinctive culture to bring. Commonly they situate new businesses in the shell of what went before, gesturing toward a fetishized urban past, with its vaunted “grittiness” that retreats as they advance. These stores draw upon a small repertoire of design elements: self-effacing façades and slapdash coverups of previous signage—or old signs simply left in place—matte black paint on the exteriors, modest lettering, twee names, a standing chalkboard sign out front. Inside, the spare décor may be taken to reflect the world picture of those for whom social relations are enacted or cemented by virtual means, for whom material possessions have receded in importance as signs of status.

As corner groceries, pizza places, family restaurants, variety stores selling sundries, local pharmacies, stores selling hardware or auto parts, jewelry or stockings, are replaced by bars and coffee shops likely to generate more revenue and support greatly increased rents, the opportunities for newcomers to try to ascend the social and economic ladder by operating small neighborhood businesses are greatly diminished, and diversity is dramatically decreased. The rise of ubiquitous global chains selling luxury goods and mid-level brands is mirrored on the local level by a different sort of homogeneity.



Installation View: Laura Grace Chipley, *The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol*, 2015. "Biodiversity / Contamination" and "Coal River Valley/ Kanawha Forest." Courtesy the artist and The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol.

## Artworks

# David Brooks



Installation views: *Myopic Wall Composition* (w/ chainsaw-cut wood found at Walden Pond), 2014. Chainsaw-cut wood found in historic Walden Woods, MDF, paint, metal scaffold foot print. Dimensions variable; height 9 feet. Courtesy the artist.



# The Canary Project



*Glacial, Icecap and Permafrost Melt-ing XXXVI: Bellingshausen Base, King George Island, Antarctica, 2008. Archival Pigment Print. 40 x 50 inches. Courtesy the artist.*

## Laura Grace Chipley



*The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol*, 2015. Coal River Valley/Kanawha Forest. 13 min, Digital Video. Courtesy the artist and The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol.



*The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol*, 2015. Biodiversity / Contamination. 13 min, Digital Video. Courtesy the artist and The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol.

# Cynthia Daignault



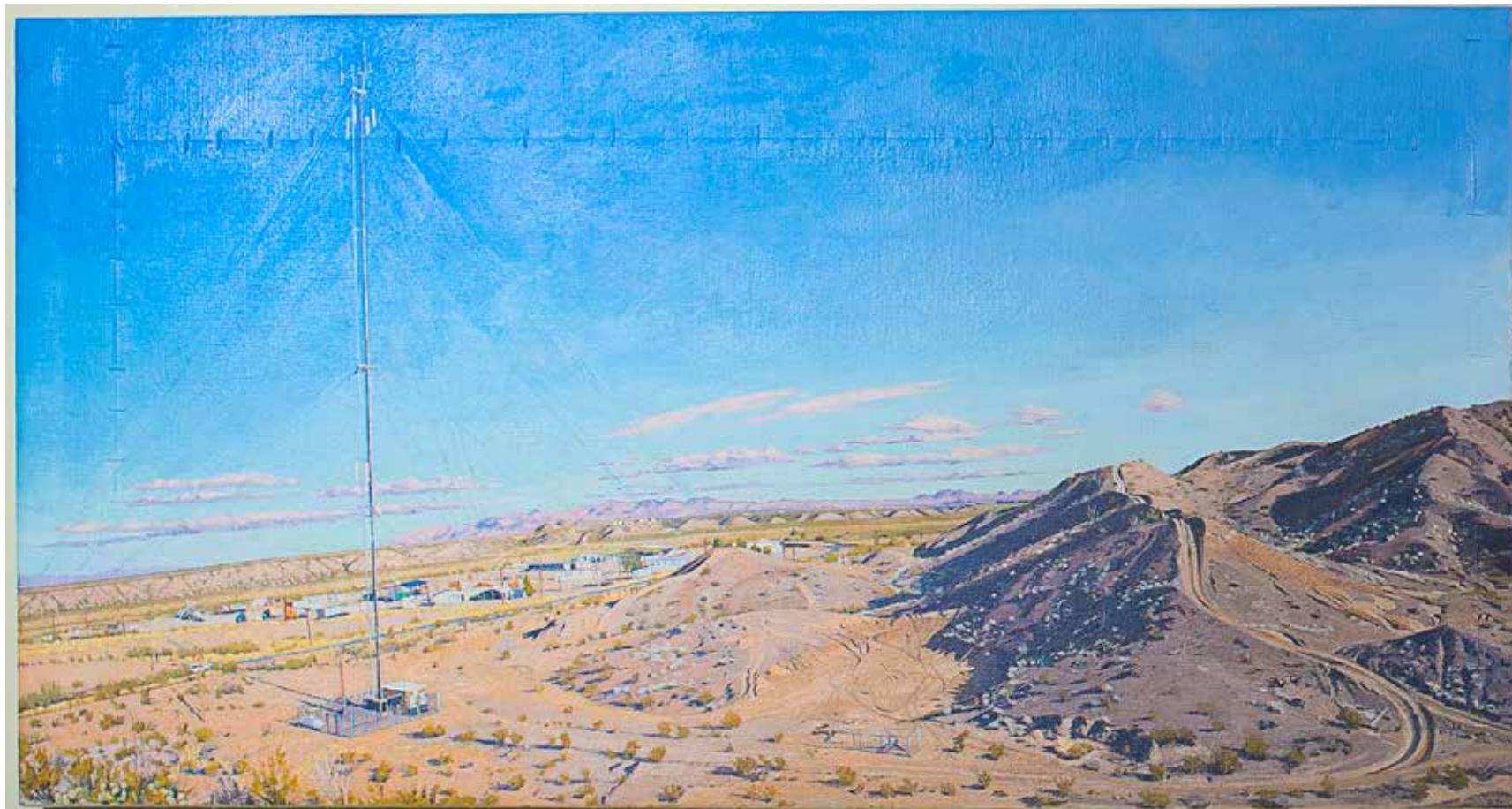
*Window, Ash*, 2015. Oil on linen. Overall dimensions variable. In 8 parts: 12 x 9 inches each. Courtesy the artist and Lisa Cooley, New York.



# Rackstraw Downes



*Study for Two Dumps in the Meadowlands, April, Lowtide, A Grassfire, 1986.* Oil on canvas.  
7 x 41.75 inches. Courtesy the artist.



*Sand Hills with Cell Tower, Presidio, TX, P.M., 2010.* 20 5/8 x 35 7/8 inches. Oil on Canvas.  
Courtesy the artist and Betty Cunningham Gallery.



*Sand Hills with Cell Tower, Presidio, TX, A.M., 2010.* 20 1/2 x 39 7/8 inches. Oil on Canvas.  
Courtesy the artist and Betty Cunningham Gallery.

# Josephine Halvorson

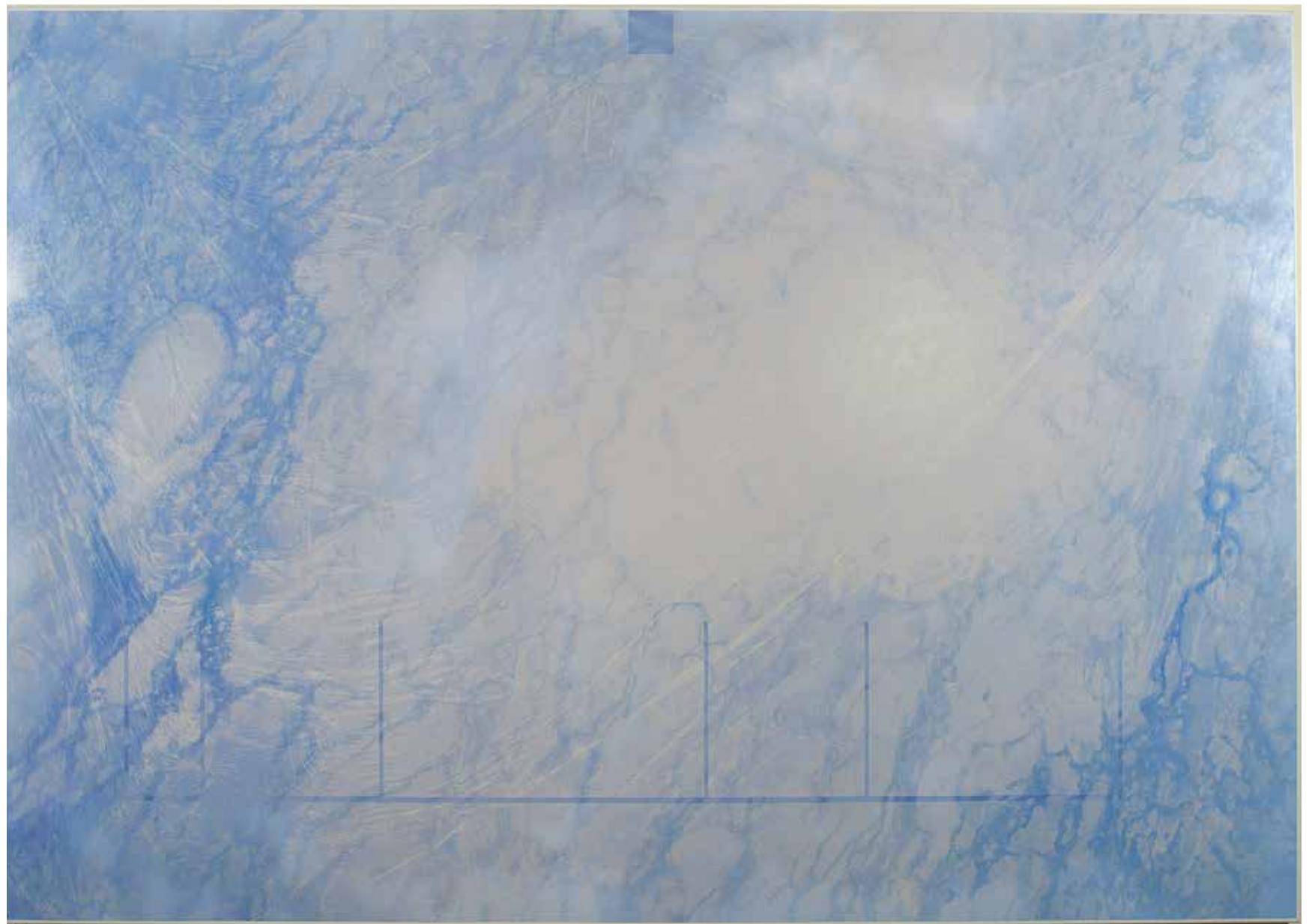


*Wilmott 1*, 2012. Oil on linen, 30 × 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., and Peter Freeman Paris.

*Wilmott 5*, 2012. Oil on linen, 30 × 24 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., and Peter Freeman Paris.



# Marc Handelman



*The Art of Adding Value*, 2013. Oil and Projection Screen Glass on Canvas. 61 3/4 × 87 1/2 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



*The Triple Bottom Line*, 2011-15. 18 aluminum binders. 462 3/8 × 32 1/2 × 11 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



# Ellie Irons

*Sanctuary for Weedy Species (A Winter Respite for Urban-dwelling Plants and Humans)*, 2015. Soil, plants collected in or sprouted from Bushwick's urban soil, didactic material. Courtesy the artist.



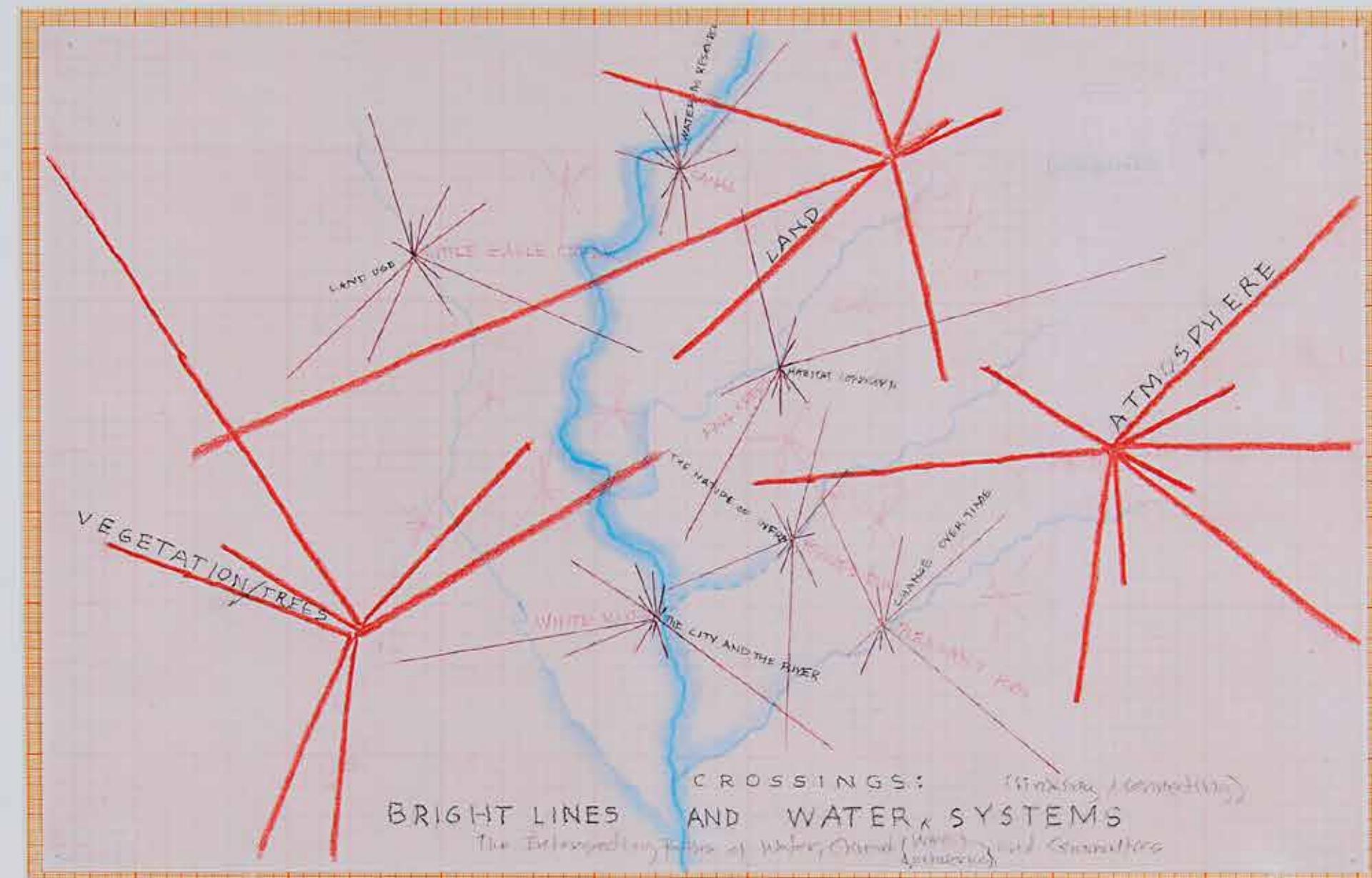
# Mary Miss

## STREAM/LINES by Mary Miss

In five modest neighborhoods in Indianapolis a cluster of mirrors and red beams radiating from a central point have been installed next to streams and waterways. At the center a visitor can step up onto a pedestal and see themselves in a four foot diameter mirror that places them in the middle of the reflected landscape. Single words and texts are reflected in the multiple mirrors; some of the texts are poems while others are prompts that encourage exploration. All are intended to provoke the visitor's curiosity about the nearby waterways. This collaborative project includes an artist, musicians, poets, dancers and scientists.

Whether following a red beam out to observe habitat at a stream's edge or listening to music composed for the site, the goal is to engage citizens with these waterways that support every aspect of their lives. The installations are like anchors that will be activated over the next year by walks with scientists and artists, performances and readings. The goal is to allow the people of Indianapolis to begin to imagine what they would like to see their streams, lakes and rivers become in the future.

This CALL (City as Living Laboratory) project was made possible by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

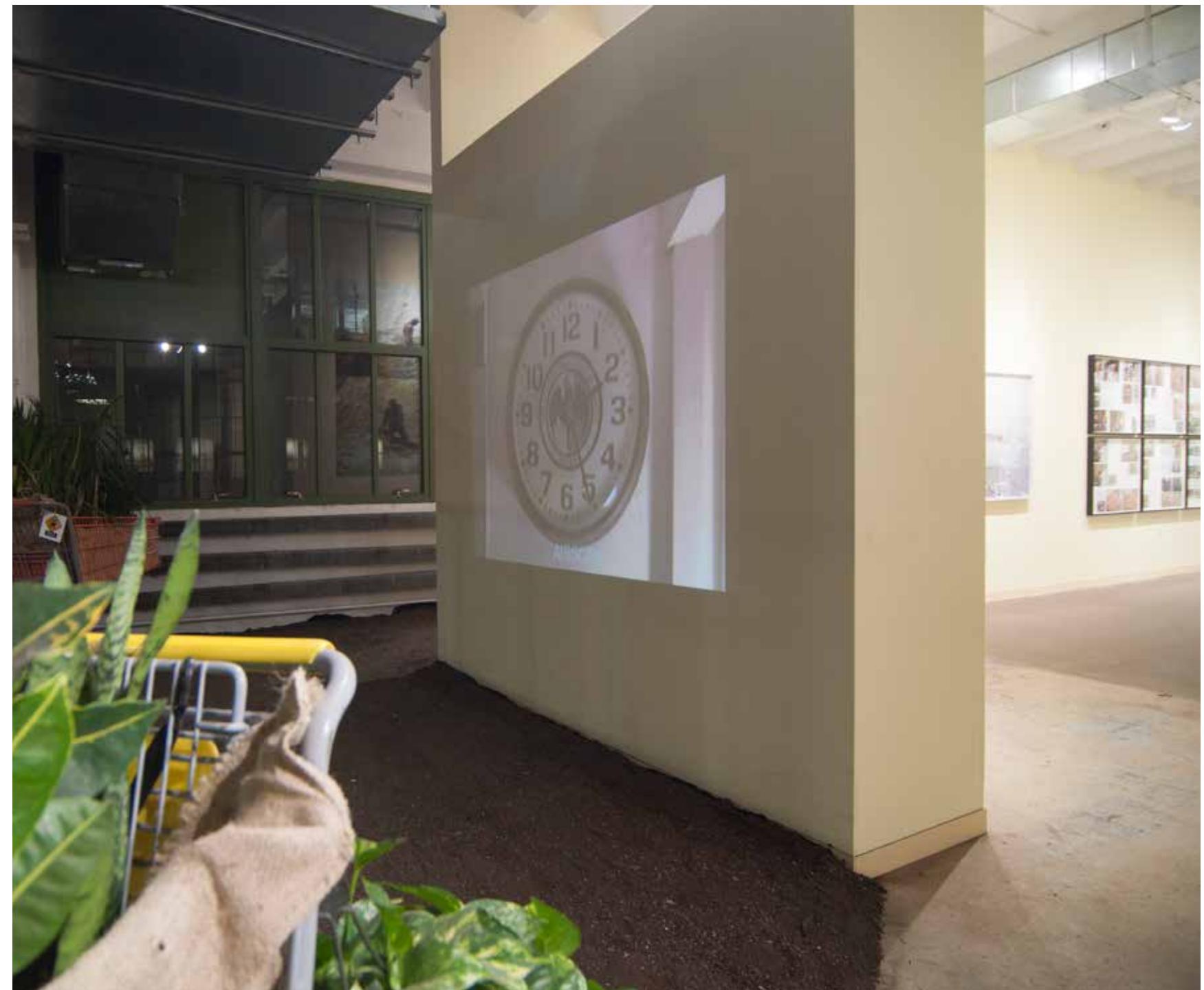


Crossings: Bright Lines & Water Systems,  
2014. Color pencil on paper, 15 x 21 3/4  
inches. Courtesy the artist.

# Roxy Paine

*A vs. B*, 2004. Epoxy, thermoset polymer, oil, lacquer, wood, glass, steel. 75 × 45 × 75 inches. Courtesy the artist and Kavi Gupta.





## Trevor Paglen

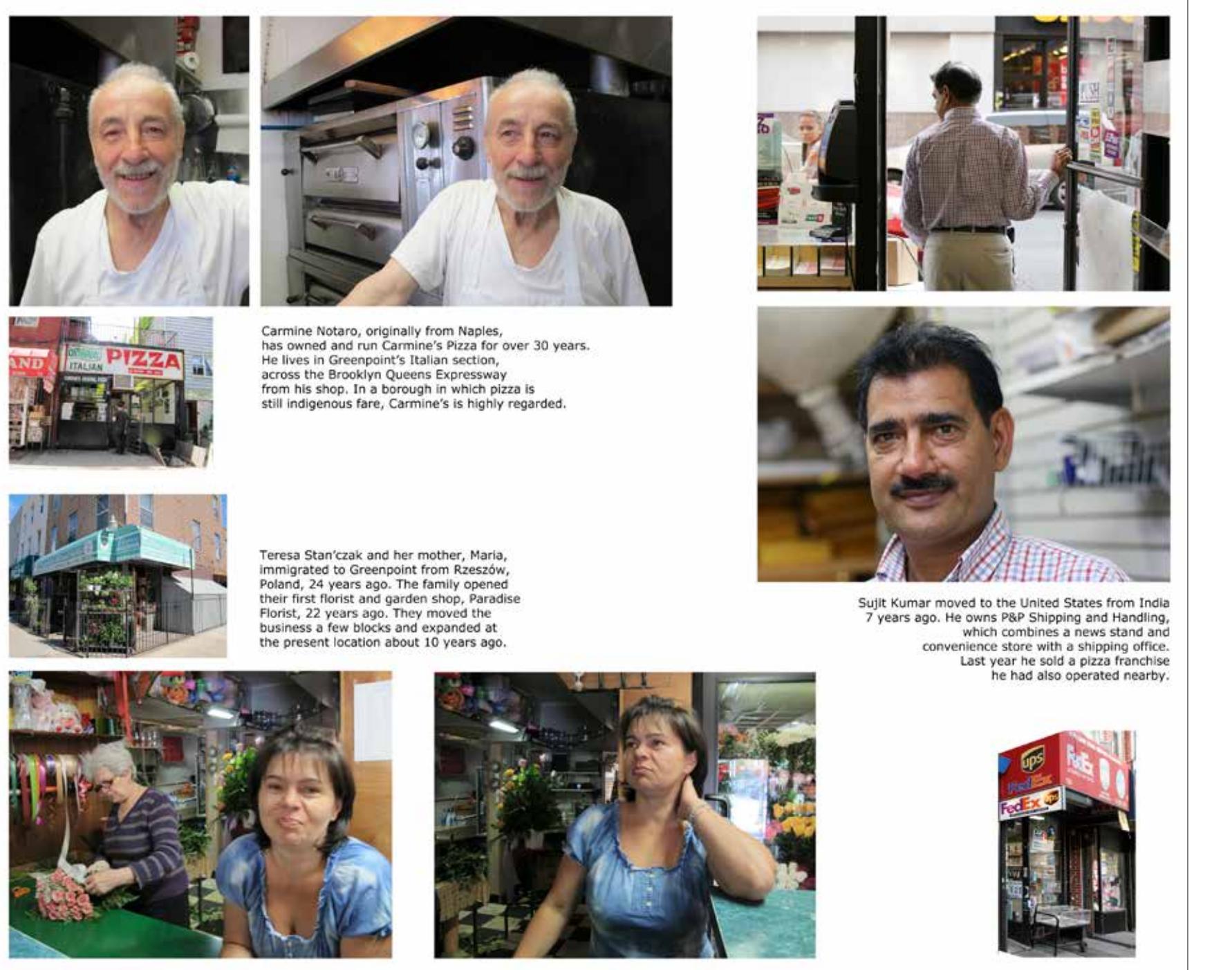
*Drone Vision*, 2010. Video intercepted from a communications satellite (edited), 5 minutes. Courtesy the artist and Metro Pictures, New York.

Above: installation view.



**Alexis  
Rockman**

*Loam*, 2008. Oil and acrylic on wood.  
44 × 56 inches. Courtesy the artist and  
Sperone Westwater.



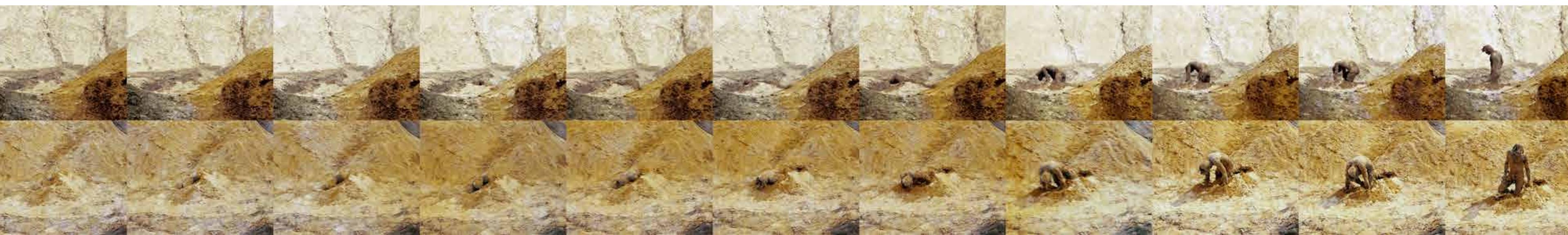
## Martha Rosler

*Carmine, Sujit, Teresa*, 2011. Inkjet print. 27 x 33 inches. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.

*Daniel's Iyad, G&S*, 2011. Inkjet print. 27 x 33 inches. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.

*Pit Stop, Kang, Super Sound*, 2011. Inkjet print. 27 x 33 inches. Courtesy the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, NY.





**Charles Simonds**

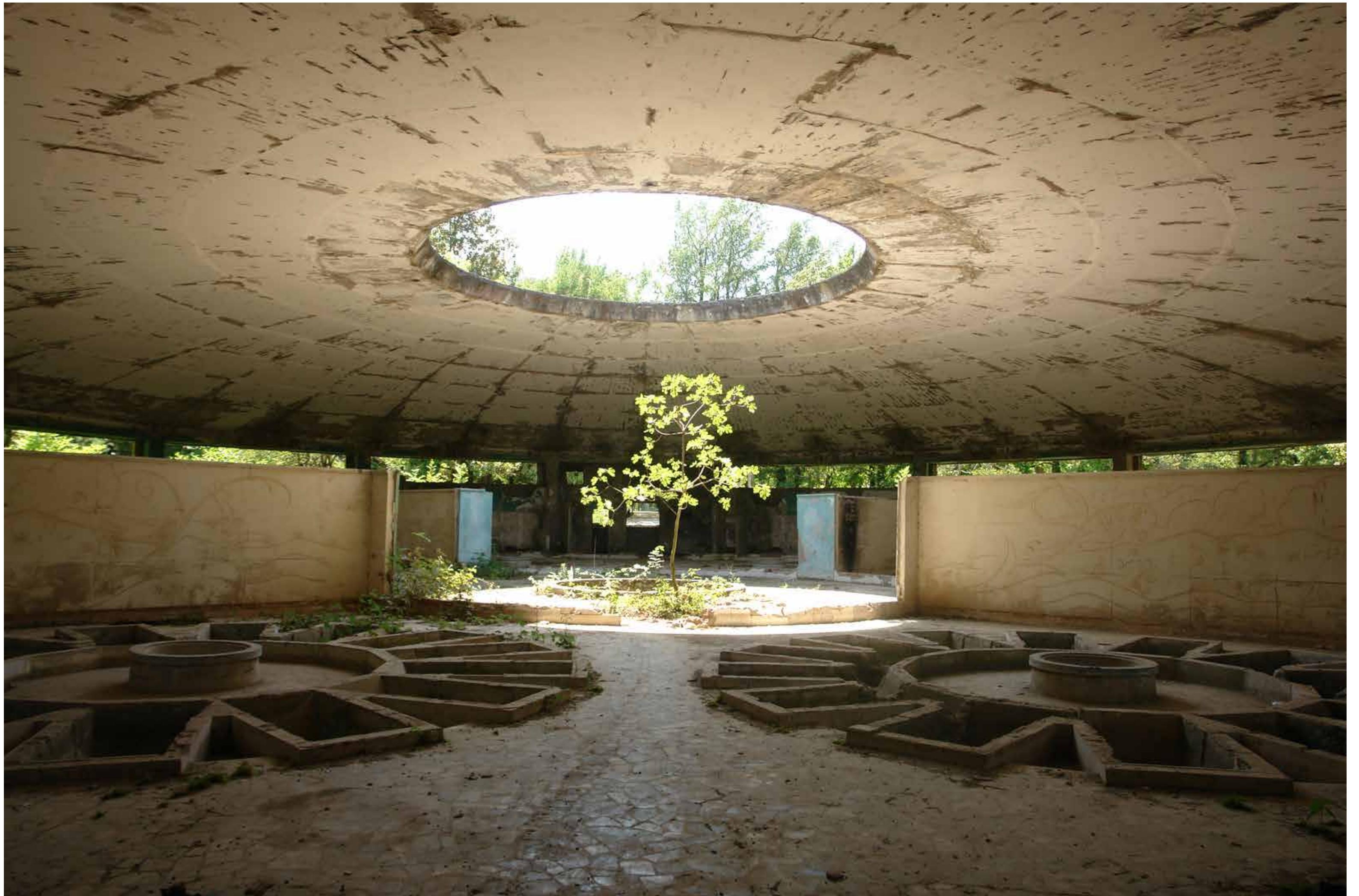
*Birth*, 1970/2015, Photo-Tex.  
6 1/2 x 42 feet. Courtesy the artist.



**Robert  
Smithson**

*Lake Crescents*, 1973. Photostat with plastic overlay, 18 3/4 x 23 3/4 inches (in frame). Copyright the Holt-Smithson Foundation, Licensed by VAGA, New York. Courtesy James Cohan, New York.

**Gio  
Sumbadze**



*Soviet period bath building, Tskaltubo,  
2015. Photo-Tex. 36 × 48 inches.  
Courtesy the artist.*

# Tattfoo Tan

S.O.S. Mobile Garden, on going. Dimensions variable. Social Sculpture. Courtesy Tattfoo Studio.

(Below) S.O.S. Mobile Garden + S.O.S. Pledge Banners, 2014. Inkjet on Vinyl. 8 x 10 feet. Courtesy Tattfoo Studio.



## How to make your own Mobile Garden.

- 1 - Log on to craigslist.org and search the free items postings, or dumpster dive.
- 2 - Look out for items that can be easily rolled around like an office chair, luggage, stroller, skateboard etc.
- 3 - Contact donor and pick up items.
- 4 - Fix any broken parts and upcycle the item into a planter.
- 5 - Be creative and design your Mobile Garden.
- 6 - Remember to put some hole at the bottom for drainage.
- 7 - Place edible plants into your Mobile Garden.
- 8 - Now you have a living sculpture and are ready for a parade.



Mobile Garden is a discarded shopping cart upcycled into a mobile edible garden that can be locked to a signpost or be paraded to engage the public.

Discarded shopping carts can be found everywhere, especially in low-income neighborhoods and housing projects that are spread across the city. Pushed by individuals who survive through economies of recycling, these wire-framed vehicles stand for consumption in excess, and like the objects they contain, seem to be subject to the same fate of disposability. They are a sign of homelessness, of desperate measure, urban decay and neglect.

The location where one can find this urban artifact also points us to a piece of land that is unused or a corner in our urban sprawl that is out of sight. This land can and should be better used. Why are they just there and deserted? Who owns the land? Who has the rights to use the land? Without land, should we resort to a Mobile Garden to grow food?

A discarded shopping cart is the sign of our times. The collapse of financial institutions and big corporations. The recession is caused by our excessive and irresponsible buying habits. Foreclosures of real estate cause the working poor to be homeless and suburbanization causes the abandonment of our inner city neighborhoods.

Mobile Garden is raising further questions rather than resolving them. This action has come to generate further actions and lead to an increasingly open structure, where it is important to continually invite and allow the input of others, to keep tense the core elements as a narrative of multiple voices and directions.

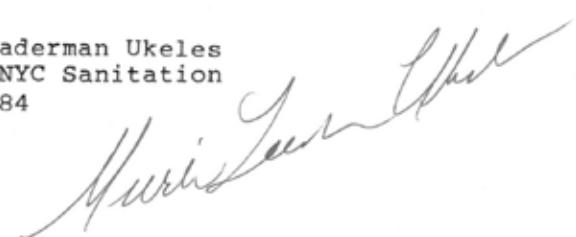
I invite you to start your own Mobile Garden parade.



"WHY SANITATION CAN BE USED AS A MODEL FOR PUBLIC ART"

Statement by Mierle Laderman Ukeles  
Artist in Residence, NYC Sanitation  
May 8, 1984

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Sanitation is the working out of the human design to accept, confront, manage, control, even use DECAY in urban life.

Sanitation, face it, is the perfect model of the inherent restrictiveness imposed by living inside our corporeal bodies, via material "necessity," in urban civilization (and its discontents), in finite planetary "reality."

We are, all of us whether we desire it or not, in relation to Sanitation, implicated, dependent--if we want the City, and ourselves, to last more than a few days. I am--along with every other citizen who lives, works, visits or passes through this space--a co-producer of Sanitation's work-product, as well as a customer of Sanitation's work. In addition, because this is a thoroughly public system, I--we--are all co-owners--we have a right to a say in all this. We are, each and all, bound to Sanitation, to restrictiveness.

Now, if that is true, how does that inextricable bond impinge on my commitment to Art in democracy as the primary system articulating the forms of (individual) freedom? What happens to the inherently 'free' artist in a most mundane inherently restrictive public work system? O�versely, what happens to the notion of freedom and limitless value of a 'public service' sanitation worker in this 'free' society? How do these extremes relate? The contextual edges, boundaries and limits of each conflicting field-structure--free-art and social-necessity--shape, frame and ultimately define each other, in tension.

Sanitation is the principal symbol of Time's passage and the mutable value of materiality in organized urban life.

Sanitation, as an environmental energy system, is trapped in a miasma of essentially pre-democratic perceptions. The public generally doesn't 'see' beyond the tip of its nose--or see where we put our waste, or see what we do or should do with it, or see what choices we have about managing our waste. Waste is our immediate unwanted past. Do we "conserve" its energy through transformation, or do we drown in it? We are facing an

environmental crisis, because we are running out of space to put it "away." To begin to accept as "ours" the difficult social task of dealing with "our" waste at the highest, not the most mediocre, level of intelligence and creativity in reality, in all its effulgent scale here, people need to understand how they connect one to the other across our society, in all its scale. We need holistic inter-connected perceptual models of how we connect and how we add up.

As a first step, we certainly need to peel away and separate ourselves from the ancient, transcultural alienating notion and aura of the caste-stigma of waste-worker, of "garbageman," which has always translated, trickily, into "their" waste, not "ours;" they're "dirty," we're "clean."

Sanitation is the City's first cultural system, not its displaced-housekeeper caste-system. To do Sanitation is to husband the City as home. I think it can serve as a model for democratic imagination, as follows:

Sanitation serves everyone; it starts from that premise: it accepts that everyone must be served in a democracy, and the City must be maintained in working order or we'll drown in yesterday's waste. Sanitation works everywhere, no matter what socio-economic 'culture.' Sanitation works all the time, through all seasons, no matter what the weather conditions. Sanitation is totally inter-dependent with its public: locked in--the server and the served. Sanitation, in democracy, implies the possibility of a public-social-contract operating laterally, not upstairs-downstairs, but equally between the servers and the served. This is accomplished at totality of scale; yet it deals on an incremental basis (house to house, bag to bag), and it cuts across all differences. Out of these most humble circumstances, we can begin to erect a democratic symbol of commonality.

I believe we do share a common symbol system: we are all free citizens of this City. We all [should] have equal rights. We all share responsibility for keeping the City alive. We are inherently INTER-DEPENDENT: that is the essence of living IN a City. That is simply a basic commonality; it does not deny each citizen's individuality, nor diminish the inestimable value of each living being. Rather it sets each of us in a CONTEXT of inter-dependence. We're in this together. Just as by law, we can't ship our garbage OUT, but have to deal with it IN our common 'home,' manage it so it doesn't destroy us, we, too, all together, have to work our individual freedom out without destroying each other.

Now, here is the intersection between Sanitation as the symbol of inter-dependent reality with free art:

WORKING FREEDOM--THAT'S AN ARTIST'S JOB.

## Mierle Laderman Ukeles

*Sanitation Manifesto*, 1984. Two text pages mounted on Museum Board. 16 x 24 inches.  
Courtesy the artist and Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York.



**Allyson Vieira**

*Worker A*, 2015. Concrete, cardboard, steel.  $77 \times 14 \times 15$  inches. Courtesy the artist.

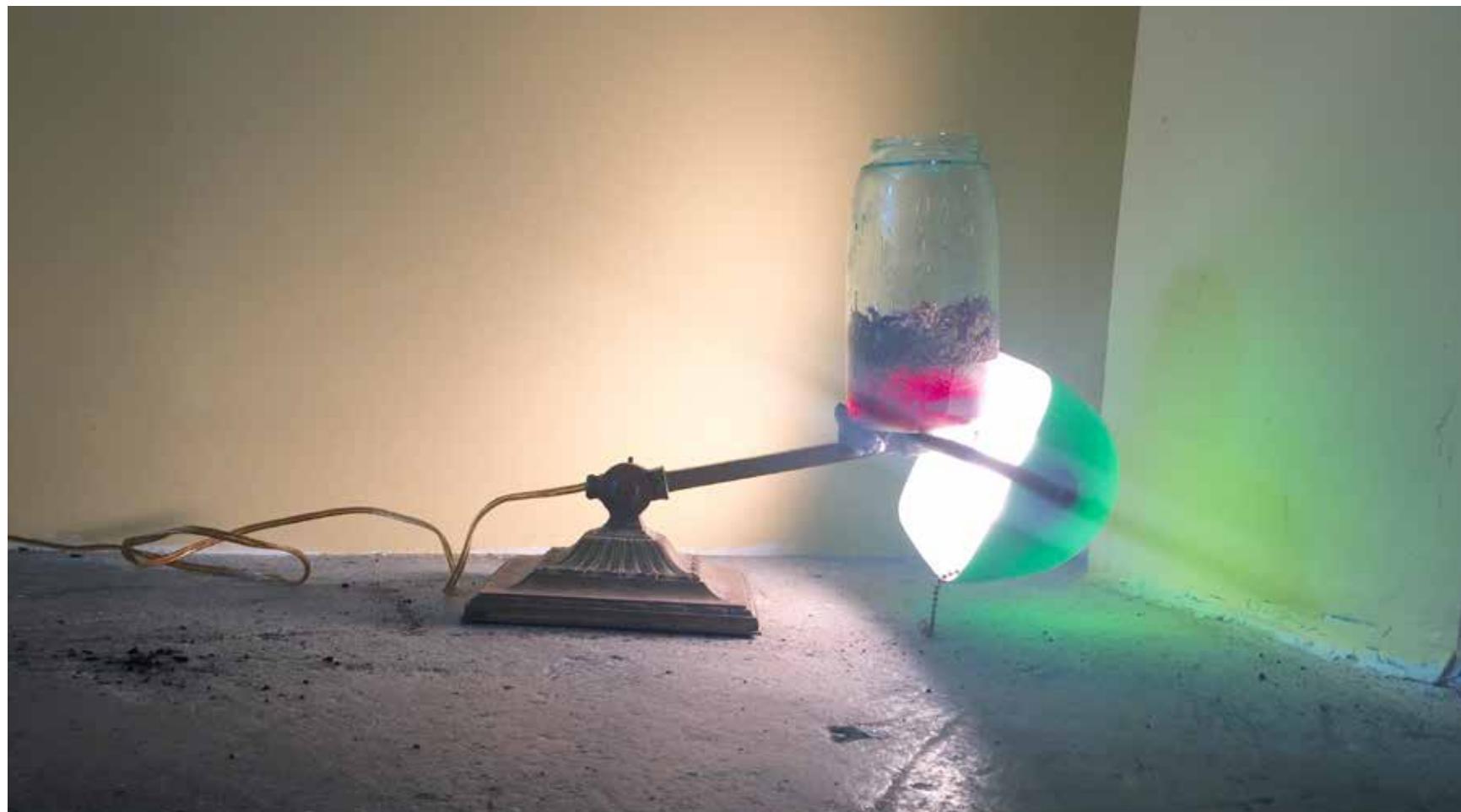


*Worker B*, 2015. Concrete, steel.  $72 \frac{1}{4} \times 14 \times 15$  inches. Courtesy the artist.

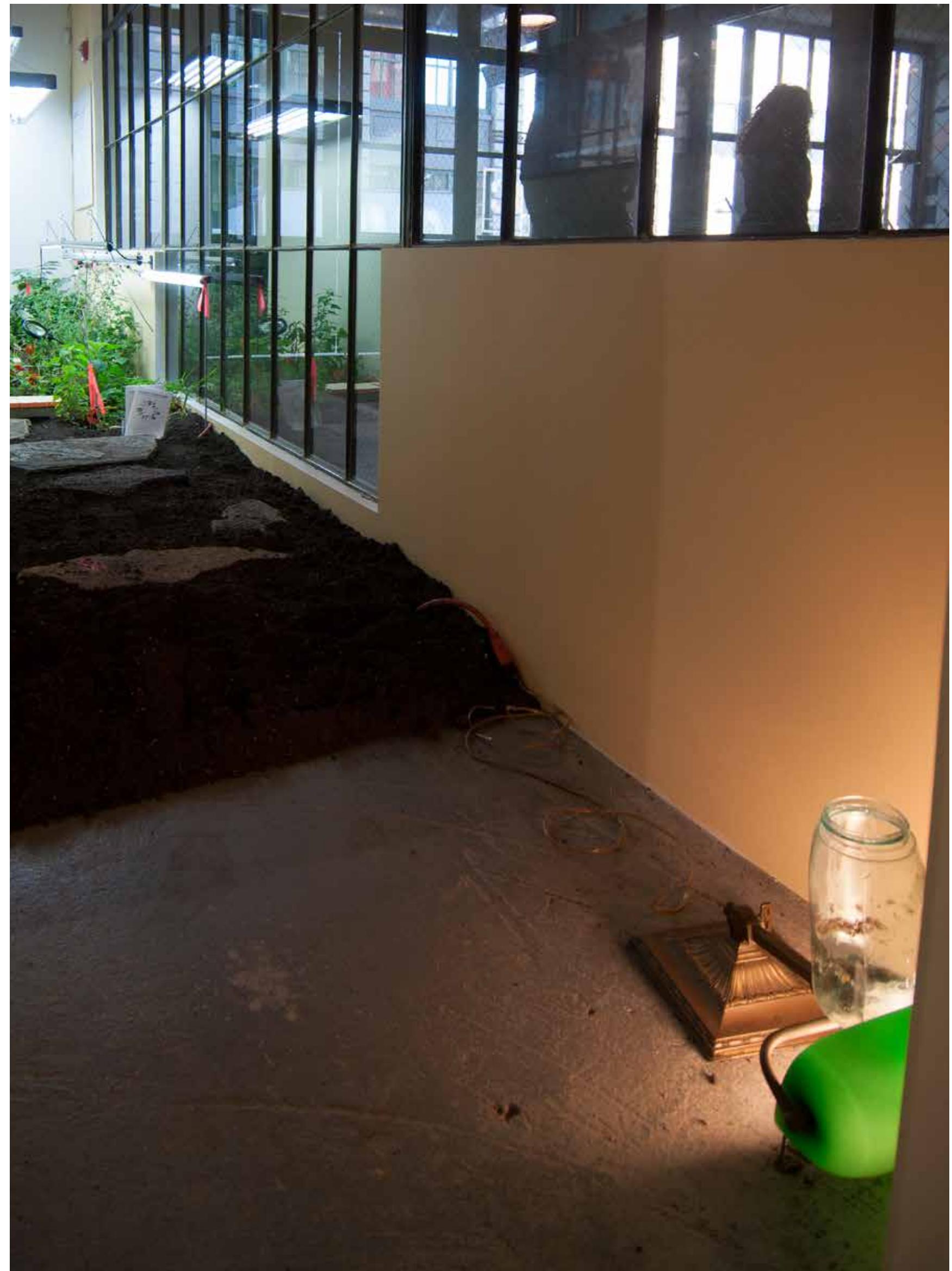
# Matthew C Wilson



"Public Relations (How to Alter Perception of the Corpus)" from *Excerpt of Heirs of the Royal Art*, 2014. 10:31 loop, HD Video. Courtesy the artist.

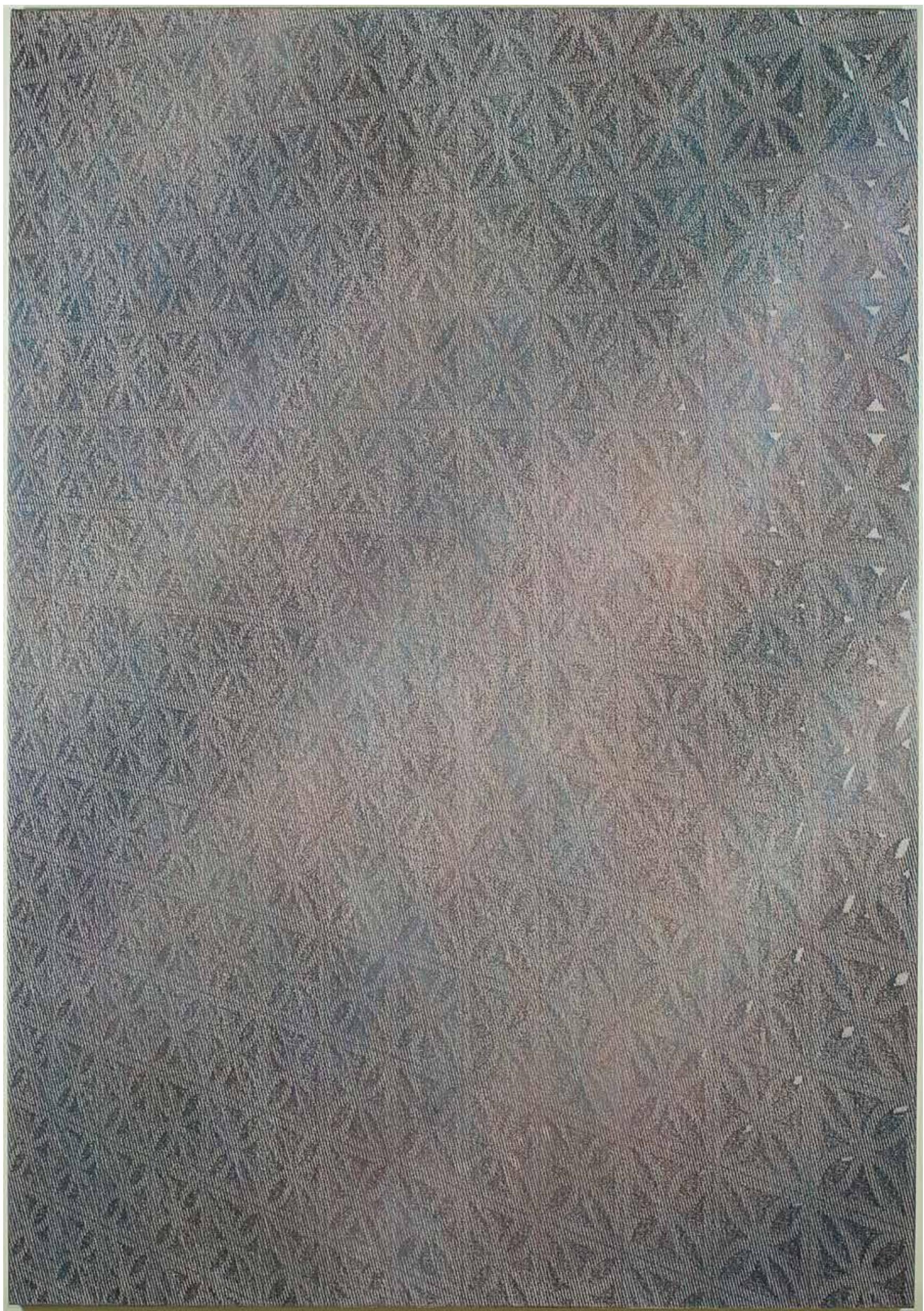


"An Arcane Alembic for Abstraction" from *Excerpt of Heirs of the Royal Art*, 2014. 11 x 14 x 9 inches. Antique hermetically sealing blue mason jar, water from MoMA and the Metropolitan Museum, dehydrated blue water lily flowers, antique banker's lamp. Courtesy the artist.



# Kevin Zucker

*Untitled (Clastra)*, 2015. Crayon rubbing on canvas. 51 x 73 inches.  
Courtesy the artist and Eleven Rivington, New York.



Ellie Irons during Social Practice + Ecology event, February 13.

Events

# Opening Reception

December 12, 2015, 4-8pm



## Architecture + Ecology

February 7th, 2016, 4pm

Josephine Halvorson, Gio Sumbadze, Allyson Vieira, Kevin Zucker,  
moderated by Greg Lindquist

Please join artists Josephine Halvorson, Gio Sumbadze, Allyson Vieira and Kevin Zucker for a lively discussion of the relationship between history, architecture, and landscape in their artistic practices, moderated by Rail Curatorial Projects curator Greg Lindquist. Whether drawn to vernacular fragments or regional variants of modernism, the panelists will discuss their diverse range of processes, and how these reflect their aesthetic, conceptual, and temporal concerns. Sumbadze is a Georgian artist engaging with the influence of the Soviet Union on his home country's architecture and its relationship to his photographic documentation projects. He is joined by Vieira, a New York-based sculptor whose materials often include ones of building construction, Halvorson, a painter whose empathetic paintings from observation often depict fragments of architecture evoking their histories, and Zucker, a painter whose work explores the ways in which the external world is visually archived and stored.



## Social Practice + Ecology

February 13, 2016, 4-6 pm

*Social Ecologies* artist Ellie Irons will present a workshop focusing on making watercolor paints from invasive and weedy plants. Featuring a short tour of the gallery garden and the opportunity for participants to take home their own pigment.

*Social Ecologies* artist Tattfoo Tan will offer a lecture and demonstration focused on creating and maintaining a backyard chicken coop in New York City.

The Canary Project, Ellie Irons and Tattfoo Tan in conversation, moderated by Jess Wilcox, in relation to ecology and social practice.

Jess Wilcox is the director of exhibitions at Socrates Sculpture Park.



## Community + Ecology

February 13, 2016, 7pm

Charles Simonds, Laura Grace Chipley, moderated by Lauren van Haaften-Schick

Screenings of video works by Charles Simonds and Laura Grace Chipley with The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol, followed by a discussion moderated by Lauren van Haaften-Schick. The gallery will be open following the discussion for a reception.

Lauren van Haaften-Schick is an artist and curator working towards a Ph.D. in the History of Art at Cornell University, and is Associate Director of the Art & Law Program in New York.



Infusions of basil and coffee vodka for closing dinner cocktails, courtesy Greg Lindquist.

## Food + Ecology

Closing Dinner

Saturday February 20, 2016

Menu Ingredients Sourced from Williamsburg Farmers Market on Sat, Feb 20, 2016

Menu included

### Landscape-Body-Root Vegetable Soup

Golden and red potatoes, parsnip and rutabaga (Highland, NY); celery root (Goshen, NY); unsalted butter (Ancramdale, NY); garnished with chick greens (greenhouse grown, chemical free in Riverhead, NY)

### The Rosler

Once uncharted Greenpoint Cafe Grumpy's Heartbreaker espresso infused in vodka served with a splash of maple syrup and seltzer, chilled with iced. Hints of blood orange, marzipan, caramel and dark chocolate are noted by hipster tasters; coffee sourced from Columbia and Ethiopia.

### The Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol by Laura Grace Chipley

The ATV's motor struggles against the steep incline of the mining road. Junior Walk, the outreach coordinator for the West Virginia anti-mountaintop removal organization Coal River Mountain Watch, steers us around a hairpin turn. As we climb, the view of the mountains through the trees abruptly surrenders to a monochromatic valley of rubble.

The ATV carries a payload of camera gear: a quadcopter drone strapped to the front and a GoPro camera affixed to the back. While digging more video cameras from the trunk, I notice an old photo memory-card case. "That might have been from the Vice people, or maybe one of the other journalists who visited," Junior, who is twenty-five years old, tells me. He jokes that if his job at Coal River Mountain Watch falls through, maybe he'll start a business taking journalists up the mountain to photograph the devastation.

The Coal River Valley is perpetually flush with journalists and filmmakers intent on capturing a story as urgent as the environmental and public health crises unleashed by mountaintop removal in West Virginia. The toxic dust that settles on hollows after blasting erases ecosystems and irrevocably contaminates drinking water, yielding unprecedented rates of cancer, birth defects, and miscarriage. Still, the environmental regulations are not enforced. Everyday citizens carry the burden of fighting the mining companies.

Junior is one of seven local environmental activists with whom I am working on an art project, the Appalachian Mountaintop Patrol (AMP), which trains activists to use video and aerial photography to document the effects of mountaintop removal. AMP is producing a series of videos—some chronicle the lack

of safe drinking water, while others capture the vast panoramas of destruction hidden in areas inaccessible to the public. Other videos document the biodiversity and natural beauty of the mountains slated for new mining permits and accompanying slow erasure of Appalachian culture, jobs, towns, and people. The story is both complex and very simple: a before and after.

We lie on our bellies and peer over a cliff into an undulating gray ocean of toxic wastewater. This is the Brushy Fork Slurry Impoundment: 7 billion gallons of coal processing byproducts contained behind a 900-foot earthen dam. It's the largest in the Western Hemisphere, and it's located directly above Junior's home.

The drone sounds like a swarm of angry bees, resonating from the bald cliff's surrounding impoundment. Junior deftly maneuvers the craft down the embankment. We know the images will be breathtaking and that releasing the drone video on the web will inspire denunciations of mountaintop removal from both allies and unwitting viewers across the country. But rather than "extracting the story, just like the coal is extracted from the mountains," as Junior puts it, AMP videos will also be screened for local people at community meetings. Through these screenings we hope to rally opposition against new permits, encouraging conversations about the future of Appalachian communities and helping people visualize how mountaintop removal alters landscapes and lives.

Originally appeared in Social Ecologies Critics Page of the *Brooklyn Rail*, November 2015



### Josephine Halvorson

Left to Right:

Photo of cemetery at Shoreham's Church, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, Shoreham, Kent, England, Courtesy the artist.

Painting *Wilmett 3*, August 27, 2012 at 6:52pm BST, Courtesy the artist.

Painting *Wilmett 2*, August 28, 2012 at 5:31pm BST, Courtesy the artist.



### Notes on A History of the Future by Canary Project

"It makes you schizophrenic. The two time-scales—the one human and emotional; the other geologic—are so disparate. But a sense of geologic time is the most important thing to get across to the non-geologist. A million years is a small number on the geologic scale, while human experience is totally fleeting—all human experience, from its beginning, not just one lifetime. Only occasionally do the two time scales coincide."

—Eldridge Moores, as quoted by John McPhee in *Annals of the Former World*, p. 458

This image is part of a much larger series of photographs, titled *A History of the Future*, which consists entirely of landscapes in places around the world where scientists are observing the impacts of climate change. In launching this project, we wanted to find out what could be seen of climate change in still landscape images, but more importantly we wanted to find out what could be conveyed through these images that might bridge the gap between scientific data and public understanding of the issue.

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We are drawn both to the stillness and the potential of violence in these landscapes. It is important to note that this violence is not necessarily in the landscapes themselves. The meaning of these images depends on their context within a larger discourse about climate change – a discourse with many registers: scientific, journalistic, activist and artistic. In the aggregate, the photographs form an archive and can be positioned as evidence. Viewed individually, the images form a blank stare. How we meet that stare depends on our changing perceptions of Nature. Is the Nature in these landscapes fragile or violent? Indifferent or damaged? By what hand?

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The photograph, whatever its limitations, has one distinct advantage as a medium to encourage mediation on the deep past: Its momentary nature (the thinnest veneer of time available: the instant) sets in stark relief the time-based phenome-

non we hope to elucidate. Always a memory, but in this case, a memory that extends beyond the realm of human experience.

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The photographs are from 14 locations that include Peru, Antarctica, Niger, New Orleans and The Netherlands, etc. The very names of the places connote a particular history, a part in the human story. Obviously, we cannot capture that history or explore it any detail in such an essay, but we can encourage the imagination of it. Because photographs have reminiscence as their ineluctable modality, they stimulate the imagination (*What there? What then?*).

But more than this: because photographs trigger a memory reflex, the scene they depict inevitably takes on a personal significance that is like a shadow and cannot be fixed precisely. This is an unconscious mechanism, silently nagging the viewer (*Where does this fit in my life? Was I there?*).

The places are also, of course, points on the earth, coordinates in what we call our environment, that which envelopes us. In this sense they are part of a different history, but one that is much harder to comprehend – the story of a planet that has existed for more than 4 billion years before humans. This too is part of our collective unconscious.

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Most of us barely know how to read the land. But once you start to learn, even a little, you are confronted everywhere with absence. You are drawn back into the past, and this seems, at first, the only direction you can go. You see glaciers in the striations on the stone, the flatness of the valley at the foot of the mountain, the melt water, the rocks left in a field thousands of years ago by the withdrawal of a nearly unimaginable force. Yet, feeling the past in this way is like taking a few, hard steps up a hill, gaining elevation from which you ultimately hope to see in all directions, even the future...

Synthesized from various texts about the series for the *Social Ecologies* catalogue



## Myopic Wall Composition (w/ saw-cut wood found at Walden Pond) by David Brooks

David Brooks's Myopic Wall Composition (w/ chain-saw-cut wood found at Walden Pond) contains wood collected from historic Walden Pond, imagining that Thoreau himself may have tread on or even made notations about these objects. Upon closer inspection, evidence appears that these various pieces have at one point in time been cut by a saw—some of them perhaps decades to a century ago, others just last season. Thus, what appears to be a "natural" object is in fact an object formed by culture. Much like the 'wilds' of Thoreau, the wilderness is not a place void of culture, but is rather a place intimately intertwined with it.

Wall text reconfigured for the *Social Ecologies* exhibition and co-written with Dina Deitsch



Northwest corner of Walden Pond with various pieces of wood floating at pond's edge, including chainsaw cut samples later collected, 2014. Courtesy David Brooks.

## Explanation of plant species included in the installation by Ellie Irons

From September-November 2015, I collected 200+ small plants from vacant street tree pits, sidewalk construction sites, and other neglected public land near my studio in Bushwick, Brooklyn. All the plants collected were "spontaneous plants", meaning that they were not part of an intentionally cultivated garden, park or planting. Such plants are often referred to as weeds. I took the collected plants back to my studio and transplanted them into planters filled with potting soil. In early December I installed them in the gallery at Industry City for the *Social Ecologies* exhibition. All of the included plants are common in urban settings in the northeast. I've used Peter

Del Tredici's *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast: A Field Guide* to identify many of them. Others I'm still working to identify. The included images show the process of harvesting plants from an empty street tree pit on Himrod Street near Myrtle Avenue. For further information about the project please visit [ellieirons.com/projects/sanctuary](http://ellieirons.com/projects/sanctuary) or refer to the project guidebook, which is available for download on the project website and as a print out in the gallery.

Notes written for explanation to plant identification inquiries for *Social Ecologies* exhibition

## Nature Morte by Marc Handelman

A few years ago, I started collecting corporate environmental reports, also known as sustainability reports or corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports, and published them as a book. Titled *The Triple Bottom Line* (2011-15), the book-object's eighteen aluminum binders were displayed on a thirty-seven-foot long table that suggested an assembly platform. The vast majority of the informational and narrative copy within the book had been deleted, emphasizing the remaining visual rhetoric of logos, slogans, photographic imagery, and graphic coloration.

The binders are organized in thematic sets, each exploring different social, economic, racial, spatial, and formal ideologies, expressed in an array of tropes denoting the natural. From the marketing of sustainability as a white, upper-class lifestyle; to the gross re-narrativizations of environmental racism; to the pastorally naturalized, heterosexual nuclear family, nature is encoded beyond the objects or locales commonly expressed under its sign. Taken sequentially and in overwhelming repetition, they illuminate an array of powerful ideas about nature.

The work problematizes ideological and social entanglements, moving beyond these reports' perverse greenwashing and more conventional environmentalist thinking. Also at stake are ideas about nature itself—ones that frequently accelerate capitalism, consumption, and the degradation of human and non-human life. Many of the aesthetics in these ideas ironically put in peril the very nature they are seeking to preserve.

Consequently, an effective social and political ecology can't be structured on the historical and ever-convenient bifurcation of nature and culture. Events and activities that take place "elsewhere" reinscribe their effects locally, thus eradicating this illusory divide. An altogether different nature—one that is profoundly stranger—binds all life, violently and urgently, in "intra-action" and increasing interdependence. If art has an imperfect role, it might provide a new task of mourning attendant forms of radical anti-naturalism and non-self identity, much

as with other subjects of stifling essentialization, such as the categories of gender and race. To critically disentangle the ideological legacies that continue to drive a discourse about landscape is imperative for a rhetoric whose indirect violence is affectively marked by collective notions of beauty, sublimity, and predestination, as well as moral and racial superiority.

The *Triple Bottom Line* was made alongside a series of paintings. Some of these mime an Orientalist gaze, creating a thread of appropriations from a Toyota sustainability report depicting a woman's face anthropomorphized from exotic flora and fauna. Other luminous, abstract paintings based on dimension-stone stock images suggest material and phenomena that destabilize their subject matter. These apparitional pictures assume a strange, transitive identity: obdurate matter appears aqueous; interior and exterior are blurred; opacity and translucency coexist. Their shifting light and opticality from veils of projection-screen glass negate a stable image and viewing experience, while the notion of projection itself recalls the ways in which we recode nature. We imagine and transfigure its forms in the construction and animation of desire.

The paintings and book-object evoke a reflective, parallel, and analogous relationship. Masquerading as a binary between representation and abstraction, each mode of work unsettles those surface distinctions. Painting itself is historically bound to the legitimizing forces of naturalistic ideologies that continue to fuel problems for social and political ecology. If the genre of "landscape" as an art-historical and political discourse seems long decomposed, its apparatus is fully intact and thriving with uncanny semblance in mass culture within new forms and narratives. Remediating these forms through painting strives to visually and critically reconnect the invisible links from these potent ideologies to a networked culture of images.

Originally appeared in Social Ecologies Critics Page of the *Brooklyn Rail*, November 2015



# PROPOSAL (1972)

by Robert Smithson

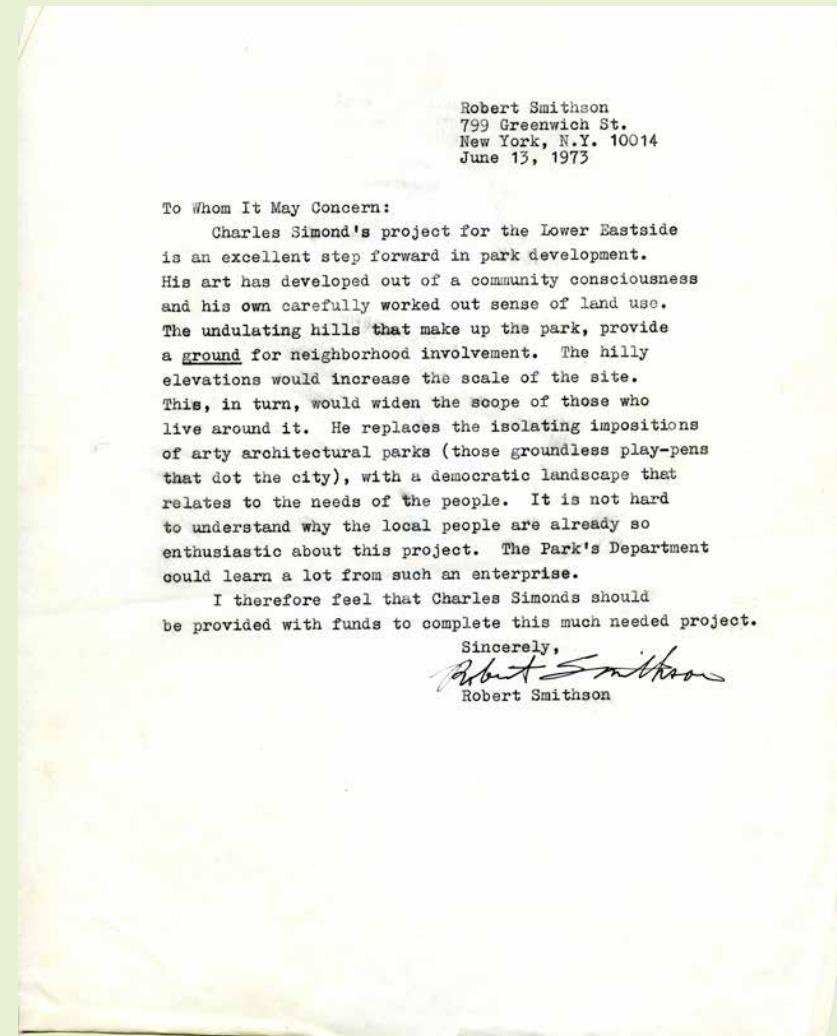
Proposal for the reclamation of a strip mine site in terms of Earth Art and its relation to the Ohio State University Conference on Art Education.

A 1000 acre tract in the Egypt Valley in southeastern Ohio in the strip mining region has been slated for a recreation area by the Hanna Coal Company. The area as it exists today is in the beginning stages of reclamation-grading and planting. I have made a direct proposal in writing to the President of Hanna Coal, Mr. Ralph Hatch, advocating the commission of an "earth sculpture" as part of the reclamation program. Such a work would exist as a concrete example of how art can enter the social and educational process at the same time. Ohio State University is planning an international conference on new approaches to art education on April 2-8, 1973. Our ecological awareness indicates that industrial production can no longer remain blind to the visual landscape. The artist, ecologist, and industrialist must develop in *relation* to each other, rather than continue to work and to produce in isolation. The visual values of the landscape have been traditionally the domain of those concerned with the arts. Yet, art, ecology, and industry as they exist today are for the most part abstracted from the physical realities of specific landscapes or sites. How we view the world has been in the past conditioned by painting and writing. Today, movies, photography, and television condition our perceptions and social behavior. The ecologist tends to see the landscape in terms of the past, while most industrialists don't see anything at all. The artist must come out of the isolation of galleries and museums and provide a concrete consciousness for the present as it really exists, and not simply present abstractions or utopias.

The artist must accept and enter into all of the real problems that confront the ecologist and industrialist. It is my hope that the Egypt Valley project will be realized before the international conference on art education, so that students and critics can learn from a concrete situation. Art should not be considered as merely a luxury, but should work within the processes of actual production and reclamation. We should begin to develop an art education based on relationships to specific sites. How we see things and places is not a secondary concern, but primary.

I have already demonstrated that it is possible to combine reclamation and art in two completed projects—the *Broken Circle* in a sand quarry in Holland which was slated for reclamation, and the *Spiral Jetty* in the Great Salt Lake, Utah near an old oil mining region. Art on this scale should be supported directly by industry, not only private art sponsorship. Art would then become a necessary resource, and not an isolated luxury. The artist must overcome the inequities that come in the wake of blind progress. Such things will be brought to consciousness during the educational conference. Those in economic power should not thwart such necessary enterprises. I am therefore requesting that you endorse my proposal. Artists should not be cheated out of doing their work, or forced to exist in the isolation of "art worlds." There should be artist-consultants in every major industry in America.

Excerpted from Robert Smithson: *The Collected Writings*, Jack Flam, ed. (University of California Press, 1996)



Simonds' letter of support by Robert Smithson for La Placita Community Park, 1973.  
Courtesy Charles Simonds archive.

# Birth, Sayreville, New Jersey, 1970 by Charles Simonds

I arrived in the morning. The dead end of a suburban street, the slam of a car door, a push through some bushes, then silence. Walking noiselessly, barefoot, in soft sand. Only my breathing and now and then the clink of carried shovels. A large abandoned clay pit lay before me, flooded at its bottom. Swallows echoing in an early breeze, seeking breakfast bugs, a few silent bats as well, swooping over an immense primeval amphitheater. Nearby, the top of a sunken steam shovel protruding through quicksand. In the distance, a tall industrial chimney, a lone sentinel, the only remains of the nineteenth-century brick factory that once labored here, producing bricks for Lower East Side immigrant tenements. The birthplace for my Little People. Around the edges, slowly encroaching tract housing. Little houses with neatly trimmed, generously watered, complacent green lawns. "Little houses, little houses, little houses made of ticky-tacky, little houses, little houses, all in a row." Sherwood Oaks, Forest Glen, Hidden Valley-developments with alluring, cartoonish names like that. Little houses built on land once owned by IHOP, where these suburban dwellers were surely going for breakfast that day. I would not be joining them.

Softly I found my place there on the warm sand. Heavy clumps of wetclay slowly pushed me down as I was buried.

Finally interred, I immediately found my warm, silent sanctuary to be a suffocating, frightening prison. Blackness brought claustrophobic panic. Only gravity gave me any direction for breath and light. A longed-for, imagined womb, suddenly a tomb. A knife-edge moment between embracing death's peaceful welcome and an exhausting struggle to push off the earth, squeeze myself out, stand upright and be reborn. Eros and dark, stubborn Thanatos fought hard over me at my rebirth, competitive witnesses, leaving a scar on my being. Birth and death were forever conjoined. Ever since, I build ruins, I give birth, create places of absence, abandonment, and death.

## Body < --- > Earth

A couple of years later I returned to give back the memory of my body to this birthplace. I cavorted with soft, warm, slippery earth. I lolled, I slithered, I stroked, squeezed, and pounded. Caressed its body with mine. Willingly, desirously, it welcomed me, at times clinging like a mud-sticky lover, refusing to let go, not knowing when to leave, to release me, and admit it was over. Did it want to reclaim me, to try to suffocate me anew?

Just a breath, a whisper, a single word, is heard and remembered by wet clay. Every tender touch is felt, and is also felt and remembered by the giver, the enlivener. My signature is a thumbprint of clay or of my blood. Each records the landscape of my skin. At Sevres, where I often work, there is an ancient French saying, roughly translated: "Porcelain is like an old lover who will remind you during firing of everything you ever said that caused even the slightest offense, even those unnoted remarks, those never spoken of or acknowledged, which will reemerge, and create a destructive fissure in what you have created. They will destroy your newly loved object, accusing you, innocent though you may be, of past betrayals." Some of these fissures are absolutely invisible to the naked eye as they enter the oven.

## Landscape < --- > Body < --- > Dwelling

Finding a place alone. Nestling into the sand. Reshaping my body with clay into hills and valleys, crevices and precipices. Making fissures, wombs, and breasts where none had been before. An androgynous bodyscape. An earth-flesh, straining and convulsing, rising and falling with each breath. Touching the earth I feel I am touching myself as a new land. A living earth, then, bearing a settlement, slowly, laboriously, becoming a dwelling. My body, my house, my land, my place, and my home, one and the same.

Excerpted from *DWELLING* Charles Simonds (Walther König, Köln, 2015)



Detail: Charles Simonds, *Birth*, 1970/2015. Photo-Tex. 6 1/2 x 42 feet. Courtesy the artist.

# Objects, Loss, and Gallery Tending

by Kara Lynn Cox

The maintenance of gallery space is often concealed, as it underlies the gallery's stability as an environment. It is a labor enacted by the gallery attendant who both monitors the exhibition space and ensures its continuity. Maintenance is attentiveness, a continual act of engagement, and, for me, an expected process of endearment.

This maintenance forges a symbiotic relationship between the gallery and its attendant as nurturer. The garden of common urban weeds *Sanctuary for Weedy Species* is a living, and thus ever growing, part of this ecosystem; maintenance is imperative for its sustainability. Within the gallery space, this invasive plant garden generates continuous tasks required for mere stasis. Sweeping, cleaning, inspecting and documenting ensure visitors an uninterrupted experience through an immersive space.

As the gallery attendant for the *Social Ecologies* since mid-December I have, in some cases, spent more time with the work in this setting than many of the artists spent producing it. My relationship to the works has evolved through my protracted interactions and through various unexpected changes in my life. I've developed a strong emotional connection with them, feeling I've watched them grow and change over the course of the exhibition.

Although most of the artworks only require a protective eye for their well being, all of the objects have seemingly changed. Obviously these changes are changes in my subjective experiences with the works, but the changes often feel real, external. I catch myself getting increasingly frustrated with visitors that do not spend time with them. It is by no means a fair expectation, and yet I can't help but feel conflicted. I feel that the nonchalance of a brisk walk through the gallery is an insult to the deserving and complex objects in the space. It was difficult to witness an easy dismissal of the objects, as I observed Marc Handelman's painting *The Art of Adding Value* every day that I watched the gallery. Spending many hours with this painting, I would discover something that last escaped my attention or my understanding of it has changed with the passing of time. For the objects in the space, I find myself silently pleading their case of importance and engagement, yet realize the objects themselves do that.

When I learned that my father passed away, I was working at the gallery. The objects felt present to comfort me. They were the tangible objects of a reality that was grounding. I spent the remainder of the shift with the artworks. For two hours I flipped through every page of Marc Handelman's *Triple Bottom Line*. I sat in the garden of plants, carefully removing insects from every leaf. I swept the dirt back into place. I was comforted by physically engaging with the objects in the gallery. The objects waited for me to reciprocate their empathy. Although I had not created them, the artwork still allowed an expansion of my own

expectations and emotions—vehicles for navigating my new reality where everything was coated in a thick layer of despondency. As a painter, I consider this navigation the foundation of making.

With the loss of my father, I receded into every crevasse of my depression, reflected through every physical crevasse that mediates the surface of my canvas. I was stumbling through every brushstroke in search of my own painting's empathy. Painting also offers resistance, stanching death's mutability. Objects and paintings are mirrors that reflect emotion, rather than containers. As I consider each mark and simultaneously disregard it, I feel both nurturing and destructive in the shadow of death. Painting allows me to reside in the elusive space between human and object. I feel this agency in the objects I have nurtured even while I'm aware they are not sentient.

In the weeks after I returned from my father's funeral, the artworks seemed to have changed again especially in the garden of plants. It is now February, past the plant's typical life span. They feel tired like I am. They are collapsing under their own weight and burned by their arc towards grow lights. They are not designed to weather these conditions. I'm stubbornly forcing them to resist their inevitable degradation.

As I watch the plants approach an entropic state, I see them as physical manifestations of my father's death. I feel an overwhelming guilt from the care I give them, as my relationship no longer feels symbiotic but rather toxically over nurturing. I have been torturing them by extending their natural lifespan, forcing their survival by administering plant food and water.

At times, this gallery maintenance echoes the care I gave my father during his various illnesses like when I brought him water to aid his severe withdrawal. In the way the plants collapse under their own weight, I am reminded of his body supported by his brittle, leukemia-infected frame. In these experiences, I was quickly bound without choice into a nurturing contract.

These thoughts weigh heavily in anticipation of the quickly approaching exhibition closing. I wonder where these objects will go and into what relationships. Will these objects continue to uphold viewers, or is that quality my own projection? I know there are no steadfast rules forcing them to behave in any particular way, but I'm now keenly aware of their cathartic potential. Through observance over time, I am acutely aware of cracks in the floors, the decisions in the paintings, and the plants' imminent demise.

I cannot ask any more of these objects, but simply wish to thank them for their stabilizing effect during a fluid moment in my life.

Written for *Social Ecologies* Catalogue



Kara Lynn Cox, sweeping the gallery, January 9, 2016, Courtesy Greg Lindquist.

## Maintenance procedures are as follows:

- 1) Turn on any electrical devices, including track lighting, projectors, monitors, or art works.
- 2) Observe plants and watering schedule and document their state. Proceed accordingly; determine if they require more water, or spray to keep away bugs.
- 3) Sweep dirt from the encompassing garden when it has drifted into the main gallery space. Repeat this task as necessary.
- 4) Observe the water level of *An Arcane Alembic for Abstraction*. Determine if more water, or cleaning, is required.
- 5) Dust or clean any glass surfaces, including Roxy Paine's *A vs. B* and Marc Handelman's *Triple Bottom Line*.
- 6) Inspect walls for any abrasions or inconsistencies.
- 7) Greet, count and document visitors.
- 8) When leaving the gallery, turn off any electrical devices including track lighting, projectors, monitors, or art works.

— Kara Lynn Cox

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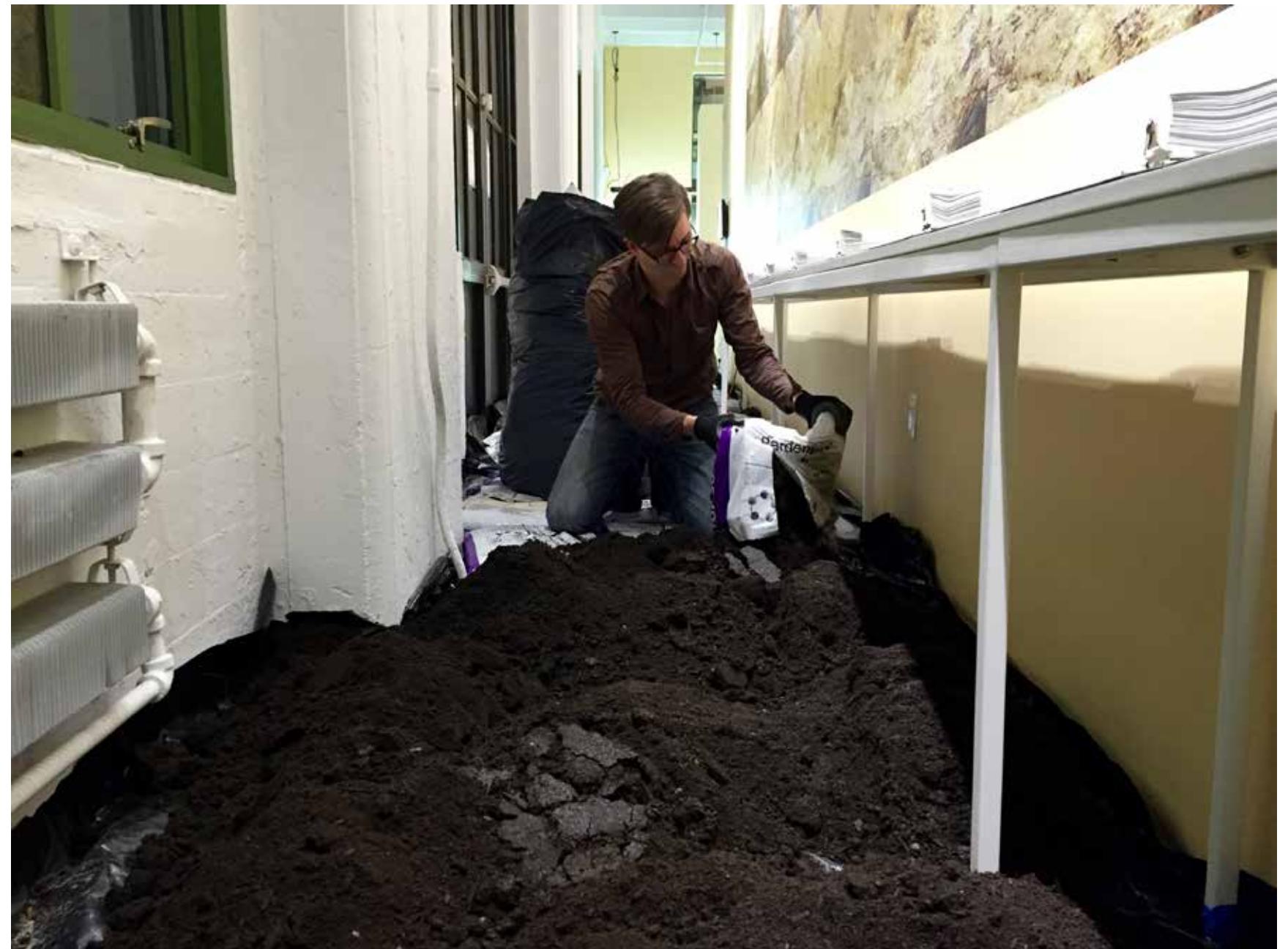
Spencer Erickson, Luke Poliseo, Sophia Panayotou, and Kara Cox all were additional helpers in the week of the grueling installation. I'm also particularly grateful to David Brooks for logistical and auxiliary assistance in moving large objects, and Marc Handelman and Ellie Irons for assisting in laying the soil, and Matthew C. Wilson for helping with technical video concerns. At Industry City, a partner and supporting organization of the show, I am thankful for the help of Cristal Rivas, Nina McCandless, Christian DiCroce, Zev Horowitz, Andrew Kimball and Adrienne Campo.

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— Greg Lindquist, May 6, 2016  
Brooklyn, NY



Greg Lindquist spreading soil during *Social Ecologies* install, December 10, 2015. Courtesy Dyan Sabin.

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*Essays by*

Greg Lindquist  
Rackstraw Downes  
Martha Rosler

*Artworks*

David Brooks  
The Canary Project  
Laura Grace Chipley  
Cynthia Daignault  
Rackstraw Downes  
Josephine Halvorson  
Marc Handelman  
Ellie Irons  
Mary Miss  
Roxy Paine  
Trevor Paglen  
Alexis Rockman  
Martha Rosler  
Charles Simonds  
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Gio Sumbadze  
Tattfoo Tan  
Mierle Laderman Ukeles  
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