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RECORD/PLAY 000

Kyle Knobel (*Editor*)

Conversations With Visual Artists:

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Digital copies of REC/PLAY 000
are available at www.kyleknobel.com/art/books

2010 Update

This project that has thankfully continued to have relevance, due mostly to the ongoing activities and careers of the artists interviewed. I printed two small runs of REC/PLAY 000, maybe 150 in total. In 2009 I sold-out the last few copies and decided to go digital. Hopefully the advantages of digital outweigh the disadvantages of not holding something in your hand. My hope is that more people to experience it. If you reprint parts of the text for any reason, please shoot me an email first.

As a sidenote, in 2005 I made a second in this series, titled REC/PLAY 001. This book is a collection of images culled from a year's worth of my hard drive. Images that were gathering silicon dust, so to speak. Cheers, KK

2003 Intro

My computer is playing the song *Hippy Johnny* by Johnathan Richman. My good friend Gary Bishop put it on his Christmas 2004 mix-CD (we often exchange pirated musical gifts). This song hit me just at the right moment. I walked around a corner and THERE IT WAS. We have all experienced this. Later, as I spoke to my friends about my new song I was dismayed to find they were long hip to it. Was I not paying attention?

Leafing through the zine selection at San Francisco's Needles and Pens, I read about some kids in Indiana living young punk rock lives in shared, trashed houses. I read a few issues. The author is a young girl. She writes of car trips spent listening to music with her friends, driving to all the music shows within a 100 mile radius of her small mid-western town. She makes notes about boys she likes and dislikes. Fears too. But its not what is on the page. Rather, as I experience a slice of her life I cannot help but use it to throw my own life in to clear relief.

Again, I am hit by something that was all the time right in front of my face. These zines I am reading hit unexpectedly, in way that makes it hard to breathe. I am struck by this brilliant strategy for getting by, day-to-day. It makes me think of video diaries, long-duration performance rituals, and blogs. Life-as-performance, regardless of who is watching. There are mostly boring moments, but also little nice moments, and occasionally incredibly inspired moments.

There is a precursor to REC/PLAY 000, called the Appointment Project. I wrote a brief announcement late in 2001 to kick off 60 days of meetings with fellow artists, musicians and interesting folks:

For the remainder of 2001 I will be accepting appointments from 9:30 to 11:00 am, Monday through Friday. I consider these my office hours. These morning meetings will be documented via still photography and a short questionnaire.

The Appointment Project begat a book that documented each meeting with an accompanying questionnaire & web search, as well as one photograph and one exquisite corpse drawing. Meetings were held at galleries and museums, cafes and public squares. Directly and indirectly, exhibits and friendships and misunderstandings all grew from this experience.

RECORD/PLAY 000 extends these conversations to include a focused sphere of people. The book travels to THE BAY AREA SHOW opening in April 2003 in Detroit, and then to New Image

Arts in Los Angeles. Both shows are the master-mind of artist/curator Sacha Eckes, assisted by Brad K. Alder and Rhonda Winter.

What is RECORD/PLAY? A strategy, a way of working. The thread that runs through a series of linked projects. A brand.

RECORD/PLAY 000 focuses on conversations with Bay Area artists who are creating and interacting with space. Read on..



Many many many thanks...

ELEANOR HARWOOD for her continued support in my endeavors, as well as steering the Adobe Books gallery that forms the hub of our community, as well as, as well as...

MICHAEL DAMM for the color printing help, and sage and patient advice.

REGINALD SPARKS for the folding and stapling and the style and the listening.

MISA IANOKA for hopefully not hating my guts when you get back from the Vermont Studio Program because my tape recorder didn't pick up your voice and that is why you are not in this REC/PLAY even though your work really inspired me to think about space in a radical way. Lets try again?

CALIXTO at Mission Cultural Centers screenprinting studios for all the help and patience with the front cover.

SACHA ECKES for a deadline.

This book is dedicated to Allison Knowles' *Identical Lunch* (1969), Linda Montano's *Odd Jobs* (1975), and Tom Marioni's ongoing *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends Is The Highest Form of Art* (1970 to present).

Michael Damm is an artist working with digital sound and video in installation as well as single-channel contexts. This interview takes place at his home and studio, a storefront building in the Fruitvale District of East Oakland. I visited him there on the 12th of February, 2004. Later, sitting at my desk, the audiocassette plays back the first part of our meeting, which is my trip under the BAY via the Bay Area Rapid Transit. A monotone voice announces each stop between 16th Street Mission in San Francisco and Fruitvale station in Oakland.

KK I wanted to start talking around the formation of a specific piece that you showed at 21 GRAND gallery in downtown Oakland. What made you decide to go out and start recording your own neighborhood in Oakland?

MD That was something I had been working on for awhile. Partly it was a response to moving here from San Francisco and coming into a new place, being kind of an outsider there, and initially relating mostly to it's exterior and the way it looks, it's visuality and wanting to document that. As I got farther into it, that started to change. I was still interested in recording particular urban spaces, but also in trying to describe an experience shaped by those spaces, and also in trying to reveal the artifice and subjectivity of my description. So the piece you're talking about was a culmination of that. It's a description that's very different from what most people would see in this neighborhood. It's very emptied out - you only see a few people here and there, always walking by themselves, when in reality it's very full of people. And behind them it's just this endless row of facades, storefronts going past, with occasional openings between them. I thought of it as representing a kind of enclosure, of looking at outside from outside.

KK Do you identify with a feeling or experience of cultural dislocation?

MD Yeah definitely. At the time I was shooting the first series of photographs, I was still figuring out what the work was about. In some ways I was talking about Oakland, but in retrospect it's not really about Oakland at all. It's more about an experience I was having here, which could in some ways have been anywhere. A few months ago I saw a film from Chicago, in which artists were talking about the nowhere spaces in cities, that I felt an immediate affinity with. It's places where the infrastructure is just barely humanized; places that you might pass through but never spend time in, or even really look at. Marginal spaces where entropy is more evident precisely because things are overlooked. I guess there's also a certain metaphoric resonance for me of looking at something as an outsider, looking from the exterior margins.

KK In your recent video work you occasionally appear in the frame. Someone will come up to you on the street and ask you what you're doing, and maybe you'll respond off camera. I consider this an honest acknowledgement of your presence. You are saying that your camera is not some random eye wandering the streets.

MD Yeah, I'm definitely present. But that's something I embraced in the editing process, where you look at something that could be considered a mistake or a problem, and wonder how it changes the piece. Sometimes it makes sense to just leave it in.

Lately I've been working with a fixed frame, where I set up a shot and just let things move through the frame. A lot of it is just recording whatever happens in that sliver of space over a certain period of time. You create a kind of theater just by pointing a camera. Theaters of light in Nathaniel Dorsky's phrase.

KK Do you see any connection to cinema verite?

MD I see myself jumping back and forth between these different languages of image making. Sometimes there is an indexical relationship, meaning the image is about the thing that's being photographed. Other times I try to disrupt that and make it be about an expanse of time, where the confluence of sound and image is just a way to structure an experience, and it's not necessarily about the thing you are looking at in any documentary sense.

KK Do you want to show me some new work? (*We watch some videos*)

So in this new video you have gone down to Mission Street in San Francisco to watch some construction sites?



Micheal Damm images (2003)

MD Actually it was the site of this huge demolition a couple of blocks from where I used to live. They were tearing down a large part of like two city blocks. I was interested in it partly because it was a place that had been so familiar to me, but also because I'm just sort of inter-ested in entropic processes in general. I didn't really have an idea other than to just record some wrecking ball footage. It turned out to be an example of starting with an idea that's kind of a cliché, and then working your way into something more interesting. Anyway, I went over there with a hardhat and a safety vest on. The full deal! (*laughs*) I was going to try and walk onto the site. But when I got there they had check points on both of the alleys leading into the site, and I knew I wasn't going to be able to get in. I walked up to corner trying to figure out what to do, because I really wanted to get some footage, and I noticed a parking garage across the street. I went up to the roof and that turned out to be a really good vantage point. That perspective really shaped the outcome of the piece. I went back a few times and ended up shooting about seven hours of footage until I finally got kicked out. Kicked out of a parking structure! That was a new low. (*laughs*)

KK In this new video, I get the feeling that it is a still photograph or image, that is somehow animated. And that even though it is one moment, there is an imperceptible amount of movement. It's hard for me to know what I am looking at, and to respond to it. Do you see yourself as making an imaginary place?

MD (*laughs*) Yeah, pretty much. In thinking about why I am interested in this footage, I started to think about this book I had when I was a little kid. We were living in Germany at the time, and the text was German, which no one in my family spoke. So I never really knew what any of the words were. I just looked at the pictures, which represented a town, and the people were drawn as animals. (*laughs*) They were all dressed in some kind of occupational attire or uniform or something. And the way that space was represented was that there was no spatial depth. Everything was flattened out vertically.

So it created this weird omniscient overview, which has a connotation of surveillance; but also, from a childhood point of view gave a really idyllic sense of what this town was about. There was this implication of a completely egalitarian set of social relationships. At this point I sort of view it propagandistically, a skewed idealization of the 9-6 workday. But as a kid there was something about that representation of an egalitarian social space that really stayed with me.

MD Part of how this was communicated was its graphic representation, it's use of non-perspectival space. Going back to the construction site piece, because of the angle it was shot from, and the distance, and the fact that the lens is zoomed in all the way, the space ends up being really flattened out. There is a creepy surveillance aspect to it, but also a kind of idealized overview. My friend Julia described it as looking like a set of toys! I shot these really long takes in which a certain set of characters and interactions passes through the frame; and partly because the site is so loud, a lot of the communication going on is gestural. You can see from a distance a lot of what people are saying to each other. There are all these things about status and hierarchy that start to come out of it, and also a lot of things about masculinity. Some shots are just played as real-time, but other parts are more like extended time. The footage is slowed down or looped in ways that are not always perceptible. So that's where your observation that it's a made-up place comes from. I've tried to pull these small narratives out of it in a way that relates to how narrative sometimes functions in children's books, where really complex social dynamics can be compacted and simplified, but are still recognizable.

KK Well it's a fascinating idea that from this picture book everyone is seeing the fore, middle and back ground simultaneously. That's not really how life is. If you are working a forty hour week, or are struggling and have to work even more, there is a tendency to get this fore-shortened view. You see your apartment, and then going out to your car or on to a bus. And then you have the view from a cropped frame of a vehicle, and then a short walk in to a building? You're getting all these partial views. It's different from having time to sit outside a coffee shop during the day and view a horizon.

MD Yeah, the book showed a very idealized relationship also in terms of time. There is a perpetual moment that everyone shares, because you see everything in overview. You are not seeing a snippet from one person's perspective, and then you go over to someone else. People are shown in the workday together, and then everybody is in school together, and then at dinner with their family together, and on like that.

KK Back to your video and how you said you can tell what the construction workers are doing by their body language and their hand signals. It reaffirms the potential and the viability of the visual language. To look at a drawing of a figure in space, with out any sort of text, there is still a language there.

MD Visuality is really important to me, which is different from how video is sometimes thought of, especially early on when it was often an extension of conceptual and performance based art practices. I try to think more like a painter. But I don't really dichotomize those practices. There's this idea of a separation between art that's about ideas, and art that's only about how it looks. But when has art ever been only about how it looks? People have been trying to use visual language to talk about their ideas . . . always.

KK This hierarchal structure is set up where you have to preference one or the other, to wield a pure language. So, do you feel like your presence effects people?

MD You mean while I am shooting?

KK Yeah.

MD Ummm, it depends on the situation. Sometimes there are no people involved, and I am shooting this very static situation. And then people will come through and sometimes I have these interactions happen off camera. You hear it, and I sometimes leave it in. I don't think much is changing because I am there. There will be an acknowledgment of my presence, but I don't think people alter their path much.

KK It's sort of cliché but as so much of the lived experience includes the mediated experience, and it is easy I think to lose track of what the difference is anymore exactly...but I do think the presence of the camera, as a tool that records the moment, does in fact affect the moment.

What is the place of nostalgia or preservation in your work?

MD That's a good question. I just saw this documentary a couple days ago on KQED (public television) about the Fillmore district. There was all this great archival footage, leading up to the point where most of the neighborhood got torn down by the Redevelopment Agency in the 70's. A lot of it was very similar to some of what I've shot in Oakland, which made me aware of the archival nature of some of my footage. The thing that starts to come into it for me is the whole experience of gentrification in San Francisco. I have seen so many neighborhoods change in that process, and got displaced myself. So there's this sense of the loss of the familiar, which is also the loss of a certain cultural situation; effectively the loss of a place. So I do have an impulse to record the physicality of a place before its gone. But that's not really what the work ends up being about.

KK Is there any research you do for work that you'd like to talk about?

MD I try to work as an urbanist, which is a word I got from Walter Hood (a landscape architect from UC Berkeley making work in Oakland). I try to study the city. For me that process is experiential as well as academic, and means city as the larger phenomena of cities in general as well as the specifics of the city in which I actually live. So I'm just constantly exploring, looking for different vantage points. As I said, I'm really interested in the overlooked and the marginal.

I'm also interested in the work of collaborative teams like *Harvard Project on the City* and *Multiplicity* which is about doing these multi-disciplinary, conceptually-driven surveys of particular urban situations in a way that frames larger arcs within culture and public space.

Beyond that, I see a lot of film and video. A lot of documentaries, but also commercial films. I look at a lot of photography. I see a lot of art in general. I'm pretty immersed in images.

I'm very process oriented. My work is really about trying to use sound and image to structure an experience. I shoot a lot of footage, sometimes very haphazardly in a 50's-existential-street-photographer kind of way. And then it's just about a lot of time spent looking at footage trying to find a direction to take it. With the sound, I try to take field recordings, which are sometimes just a lot of incidental noise, and draw certain things out of them that become more musical. So there ends up being this oscillation between a very straight cinema-verite type of sound environment and a highly manipulated concrete-music kind of thing, which encapsulates my approach to video in general. I try to create a situation that's compelling enough to keep somebody there and engaged, and beyond that my model of authorship is really that.. I'm not the exclusive author of my work. I can shape the work, and try to point out things within it, and try to put as many ideas in as possible. But ultimately there's that old Duchampian idea that the viewer makes half the work, which is something I really believe. Recently I've been coming across a lot of writing that extends that idea. Irit Rogoff talks about reading images into the narrative she is constantly telling to herself, out of her own experience, in which art constantly intersects with other kinds of visual experience and is reshaped by it. De Certeau has looked at consumer use patterns - trying to debunk the idea that people are entirely controlled by the products or media they consume. He looked at the ways people are constantly adapting things for their own purposes- in a sense, re-authoring them. I know from my own experience as a viewer that often in the process of reading a work, I reinscribe it, or read things into it that the artist might not have intended. In a sense, we all always re-authoring each other's work, which I think is really interesting. So the way that I think about my work is that I'm really happy if anything I've done, any image or sound or sequence of images, gets folded into the story that somebody tells to them self, in relation to all the other stuff they are taking in.



Micheal Damm images (2004)

(top) Digital video stills from Mission Street San Francisco construction site
(middle) Digital video stills from *Elsewhere*, a two channel installation video
(bottom) Digital video stills from the *All Nascent* series.

Sarah Cain



KK

I bought this tape recorder we're using at a thrift store in Pacifica for \$5. It works perfectly.

SC

I had one like that.

KK

What did you do with it?

SC Some field recordings. I have to say I wrote some songs. *(laughs)*

KK Did you? Did you play along with a guitar?

SC I had some backup guitar. And keyboards. I taped a lot of the sounds of my bathtub.

KK It has a great sound quality, but there is something about the audio cassette... people don't want to listen to that audio hiss.

SC I used to tape my dreams. Those recordings are incredible. You hear the sheets and me drooling. You'll understand one word and then the rest are garbled.

KK I had this dream the other night about my grandfather's death. I was really upset and I jumped up to write it down on my computer. The next morning, looking at what I wrote, there were all these double letters and misspelling and words missing. I caught the frenetic quality of my emotions. It's a great document just as it is.

So we are at the apartment that is your most recent installation. Tell me a little about how you got this space.

SC Basically I needed to find a new space to work for myself. I was feeling that I was in my studio too much, and I wanted to work outside. This corresponded with getting a SECA visit that I knew would mean a visit from 60 people. Not that I made it for them, but I did need a space large enough. I actually wanted the top floor of that parking garage across the way *(motions out the bay windows of the room we are presently sitting in. There are large banks of windows that run the length of a commercial building. The space, approximately 2000-3000 square feet, is totally open with tall ceilings)* but there was no way they were going to rent me a parking garage. So I searched the China Town and North Beach neighborhoods pretty extensively. I eventually rang the doorbell of the landowner of this apartment, which I already knew was vacant. The owner has many buildings that are being fixed up right now. I presented to him what I wanted to do with the space and told him how many people would be coming through. That was it. He said ok, come by tomorrow and get the keys.

KK Does he have an art background?

SC I'm not sure. I know that he worked for the IRS. He has art all over his apartment. And he has financially supported different artists and musicians in the past. I'd say he has a patron background. When this piece was finished he came through, but we didn't have a conversation about it.

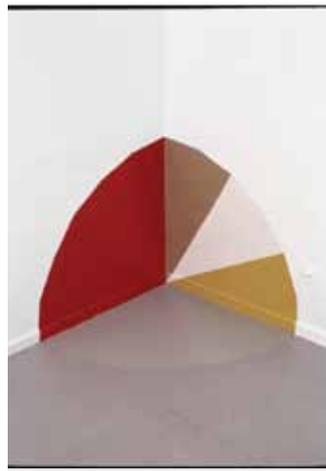
KK So once you were in the space, how long did you have to work in it?

SC About a month. It took a week to clean it out because there had been some people living here that weren't supposed to be living here. I had to throw out furniture and garbage, and then the space was still creepy. I talked to people about the apartment, and some people said it was haunted.

SC I went through this process, and I don't even know if I fully believed in it, but I felt that I had to go through the actions of listening to what people were telling me and respond. So I put up mirrors, and placed teacups of saltwater around. Of course I burned sage. And finally just sitting in the space. The longer I sat in the space the more I opened up to the space and I realized the more the space opened up to me. I think my work is a halfway point between myself, everything I carry, and all that already exists in a space.

KK Did you think of leaving the teacups as part of the installation?

SC Well I left the mirrors, but I don't see them as part of the piece. Honestly I was afraid to take them all out. It wasn't a choice per se, they are just part of it.



Sarah Cain (2001-4)
(clockwise, starting at the top)

Grant Street apartment installation. Mixed media on the wall and door. San Francisco, CA

Corner painting. Acrylic. Duesseldorf Germany.

Pink Swoosh for B.B. Mixed media on floor. Chatham, NY

Detail from Grant Street apartment installation. Blouse, gold thread, acrylic paint. San Francisco, CA

KK Who are the people who have inspired you along the way, that you have seen as the historical stepping stones that lead to this work.

SC One of the first artists that I remember ever responding to, a long time ago, was Gordon Matta-Clark and his house splitting. Yeah, I totally responded to him. He collaborated with Caroline Godden and other artists in the project Food. Food was an artist run restaurant in New York City, that later became the alternative space White Columns. The menu was created by artists. I relate to this idea of getting involved and having different roles within the art community. Besides just being a studio artist.

But of people who are still alive I really like the work of Katharina Grosse, Isa Genzken, Jessica Stockholder. And then there is the late Fred Sandback, or Richard Tuttle and Agnes Martin. The list could go on for a while. But Both Grosse and Stockholder are coming from, and there is be a better word for this... an over-the-top place. I am coming from something that is more minimal. I really love both of their work: Jessica Stockholder even more so because she is doing work that crosses the boundaries of painting and sculpture, while Katharina Grosse is playing with space but I basically see her as a painter. I am interested in the room between sculpture and painting. And also the in between of different definitions of space: mental, emotional, physical, the space between the elements.

Then to think about, right now we're sitting in this space and it's just the two of us. The artwork is around us and we're interacting with it. And then think about this space inhabited by 60 people. It's something that I try and keep in mind.

KK Did you feel that this apartment became a performance space for 60 people?

SC Well its had different lives. Only a few friends saw it, you saw it, before the SECA visit. And then the visit happened and that was definitely a unique moment and very awkward and fast. After that I have had as many people come in, but one on one. In some ways this space has become... I felt a little self-conscious at one point because I was thinking of Tracey Emin making her own museum. At some point it felt as if, oh my god, I cannot do any more visits. I cannot talk about myself anymore! At some point towards the end I started using the space, some collectors had come through, as an opportunity to tell them about other artists that I really like. In an attempt to turn it over. I don't know about the performative aspect. It's definitely become this emotional tomb. People kept using used the word cathedral.

KK Are you going to be glad when it's remodeled?

SC I don't know how I feel. I don't think I would ever enter the space again once it's been remodeled. Right now I like to walk by on the street at night when someone has the lights on and see it. The last person who came to see it was a North Beach lawyer who wanted me to let the Historical Society have a benefit here and have me at the benefit to do self promotion. (*laughs*) Its not what I am about. Even when the building owner came through...when you start getting people who are not from the art community, the language changes and the dialogue changes. When you are only working in art spaces the language can get so specific and narrow, which does have its positives like creating a context of investigation and a place to break new ground. However, there's something about dealing with people who have no idea what makes artists artists, which I guess can be a needed check of reality.

I did a piece in Upstate NY in an old hotel I loved that nobody occupied. One day there was a garage sale in it. Little old men with no teeth selling their old 45's and stuff, in this huge gutted brick building. I found out who owns it and went next store to talk with him. It turns out that he is a chef who runs a restaurant, owns a hotdog stand, and sells used cars behind the restaurant! (*laughs*) I gave him this whole rundown on what I wanted to do in his building, but I had to give it in a way that he would listen to. In the end it turned out that his daughter is an artist and he wanted to be friendly and helpful. Every time I wanted to get the keys I had to walk all the way through this long kitchen and listen to the chefs ask me why I was putting stripes on the floor. The owner would throw me the keys and say go have fun playing in my building, honey. So that part is good for me, I am pretty introverted. It's good for me to swallow my intense seriousness with art. (*laughs*)

KK What is the relationship you have to narrative?

SC I think the narrative is presented abstractly. So the narrative is always hidden. This is never something I want to share with people. It's something that is broken down to a level of feelings. When someone walks in they are going to get it if they are going to get it. I feel that if you have to read a statement in order to understand the work... then why make visual work? Why not be a writer?

KK Let me walk around a little bit. (*I walk around the space for about 5 minutes*). Tell me about the role photography plays in your work.

SC The work only survives in photography. So it is really important. The wall drawing that I did at the Lab [gallery in San Francisco] in 2001 was a turning point in my practice. I realized this piece was ephemeral in every sense because it couldn't be photographed. After The LAB show I got an email from Bill Berkson, while I was on my way to do a piece in Germany. He wrote me a really nice little critique saying something to the effect of, if you make your pink swoosh in a fuck it manner then people will read it in a fuck it manner. Of course now he denies that he ever wrote that.

SC But IT WAS NOT PINK! It was two oranges and a fluorescent yellow made with the tips of crayons snapped off all in a line. It took a lot of patience and most people missed it. Right after Germany I went to Upstate NY and did the hotel piece. I painted three large stripes, hunter orange, safety red, and sashay red, running from a window to a brick wall, about 50 feet long. I called it Pink Swoosh for B.B. When I was in Germany I realized I had to become more aware of the ability to document my work. In a lot of ways it is similar to making art and not thinking about where you are going to be showing it. It would be fine if I didn't care about the life of my work, but I started making ephemeral work for other reasons. I never make a piece for its ability to be documented, but I do keep it in mind. For example in this apartment there are five pieces, four of which can be photographed. And that's fine.

KK Tell me something about the piece that won't survive.

SC It's a strange piece. It's actually the one that I feel is leading most in the direction of where I want my work to go. To describe it: it is a pink silk blouse with its arms extended. Starting at a point about one foot directly above the neck is a piece of gold string that runs down to both sleeves, forming a sort of inverted triangle. There are painted white geometric forms that start on the wall and run over a portion of the shirt. The white is only two or three degrees in difference from the wall itself. The walls have a lot of grime and scrapes on them already. I love the walls.

It's been really interesting to interact with people about this piece. Everyone had something to say about it, but something really different. Overall though I think people got the feeling of it. And that's the one that people said made them feel that I had made a cathedral. Or someone said that it had a real ascending feeling, which I think is true. I know that a lot of my own personal relationship to this building is in that piece. It really responds specifically to this room, as directly as it possibly could. The rest of the rooms in the apartment have windows and lots of references to the outside. This room is all closed with sliding doors, and it's the one room where I was completely absorbed in the environment of the apartment. I think that all the ghost talk got into that piece. It's creepy.

KK You had a solo show in 2003 at Lucky Tackle in Oakland.

SC Yep. That show was called *Epigram on Being Alone: A Golden Willow Hits You In The Head*.

KK You painted a gold geometric shape in a corner near the floor. Looking at that piece, I couldn't help feeling some sort of likeness to an alchemic process. Did you ever do any research on alchemy?

SC That's funny because the next show that I'm working on is called *The Alchemy of Closeness* (taken from the words of the musician/poet Joanna Newsom). I haven't done any research yet, but it's a word that I am stuck on these days.

KK Tell me some more about the Lucky Tackle show.

SC I made a bunch of drawings on paper, one was gold, one red and one was green. Those were studies for corners I made while living in my studio town in Upstate NY. Those were drawings for sculptures. I had been playing around with the idea of building them outward, of sheetrock, or of doing them directly on the wall. They were about solitude. The gold one was actualized. I titled the gold corner and the show that after the words of the poet Bernadette Mayer who also lives in my studio town. She wrote the epigram, *Epigram on Being Alone: A Golden Willow Hits You In the Head*. It was the first solo show I ever did, that epigram really stuck to me. Bernadette was pretty prevalent in my thoughts those days. In the corner opposite that was the piece titled *To Belong To (for Alicia)*. That was for [the painter] Alicia McCarthy who I was living next to at the time. That show was my first time having a space all to myself. But also it was a chance to give credit and speak to the people who were in my life at the time who were inspirational. So the dripping rainbow piece was about allowing myself to paint in a way that is not holding back. It came easily for me, but then I feel that if something is that easy that maybe it's not pushing enough. To be able to look at the dripping rainbow and then turn around and see the geometric gold piece.. it was about the relationship between the two modes of working.

KK Often in your work you include portions of text, poetry. Tell me the relationship of the written word to your process.

SC Poetry really inspires me. I think painting and poetry, not to negate music because a lot of the writing I use comes from song lyrics, but I understand poetry and painting on the same level. I think the little moments of the everyday that I find poetic, is what my work is about.

KK On the front door to this apartment is a pane of glass. Written on that glass is "Sarah Cain." I didn't notice that on the door when I was here before. But it frames the experience. It is not that you just walk up into the apartment and there are paintings on the wall or sculptures laid around on the floor. I think you are talking about transformation.

SC Oh yeah, it is a transformation. Not a manipulation because that implies something negative to me. I guess the word that I always use is activation. I think of it as an activation of space. But transformation is valid too, because that door (*points to a door that has been painted with a band of varied colors and textures that overlap and run against each other*) is no longer a door. A painting is no longer a painting when it is a door that opens and shuts. I enjoy having people enter the space and deciding where to go. Some people are not even sure how to walk through it. They get stuck in certain spots and wait. They want some encouragement, for me to say, its OK. People question: did she do that, or was it here before? It is my greatest hope that when people leave here that they'll walk outside and notice that beautiful building across the way, instead of walking quickly past it.

KK You are creating a space that could be lived in. You live in your studio space.

SC Everything I do is done that way.

In 2002 **Nathan Burazer** went to live and work in Paris. Up until this time he had been making graphite drawings on paper, with layers of overlapping, seemingly frenetic marks and lines. They possess an immediate intensity, both loose and rich. I caught up with him at his apartment on South Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco the night of the 14th of February, 2004. In his darkened bedroom he set a video projector on a dresser. Suspended from the ceiling at head height was a single sheet of 11 x 17 inch white paper. This served as the projection screen. Glowing colorful shapes morphed one into the other, accompanied by a still-in-progress ambient soundtrack.



KK Do you have any questions about what we're doing here?

NB Ahh, yeah.

KK In my own work I have been thinking about and creating these different spaces, environments and imaginary places. And that is a vague description, but I'll leave there. So I thought I am going to go out and talk with artists who inspire me and who are also working with creating their own spaces. So this is part of a series of conversations.

NB Sounds cool. Let me start out by saying that I understand what you're talking about, but I don't really know what I have to offer. I enjoy talking with you though.

KK Great. That's a nice way to start out. *(laughing)* The first time that I saw your digitally based work was when Michael Damm and I put together the *What We Saw When We Got There* exhibit at The LAB gallery. You showed us some figurative work.

NB That was from Paris. In Paris there are all these fashion magazines everywhere. I was picking them up because they were free. Advertising or something. Being a foreigner, I was picking up random stuff and looking at it. I brought it back to my room and was making drawings from them in my sketch book. Afterwards I would put them in to a computer, because there was one around.

KK So you were living in Paris, and you were making them on what, a laptop?

NB Yep, on Naomie Kremer's laptop. I worked for her for 5 months while in Paris. I just figured out recently that a lot of the reason I started making animations was because I didn't have the space for painting or drawing. I could draw, I mean you can draw anywhere. But painting specifically requires a lot of space. Also I was broke so I couldn't afford paint. But there was a computer. It was free.



Nathan Burazer (2003). *Night Swimming*³

KK Nice. So I saw your work just back from Paris, and by the time we saw it again a couple months later, it had definitely changed. There was something still something similar in their movements... but what do you consider these?

NB I think of them as biological, but not really relating to a specific life form. There are certain things that look like plants, some like animals, and others like humans. I see them as organic forms.

KK So they are an abstracted biology? They have the traits of what you imagine biology is? Is there specific research that you do? Or is it more based on intuition?

NB I took some classes in art and genetics classes at the San Francisco Art Institute with Meredith Tromble, sorta at the same time I had already begun this work. So ideas about how micro-organisms interact were running through my head. Really though, they are imaginary organisms.

KK Is there an object and an environment, separate from each other?

NB Well, there is always an environment, right? When you are working on a dimensional space there is always an environment, whether it's depicted or not. So in this one for example (*pushing some keys and switching to a different projection*) here is an ecosystem and these are the organisms in it that are living and adapting to each other. Each one is introduced in to the ecosystem separately, and slowly they influence each other. The one that is adapting the best to the others survives and the others decompose. They are influencing each other by color and by movement. (*We watch forms change for a few moments.*)

KK What are some of the ideas you have about the space they inhabit? Is it simply a color field? Or maybe it's not so important?

NB It is different for each one. I am not sure how much I want to represent something that is well rendered. You kinda get a sense of the ground, and their orientation. I think it is more powerful, and stays in the head more, when it is less specific. They exist in space, somewhere. You can imagine it infinity small or large, rather than an environment giving a specific context.

KK Tell me about your decision to project them onto this size paper. Say, as opposed to showing them on a monitor.

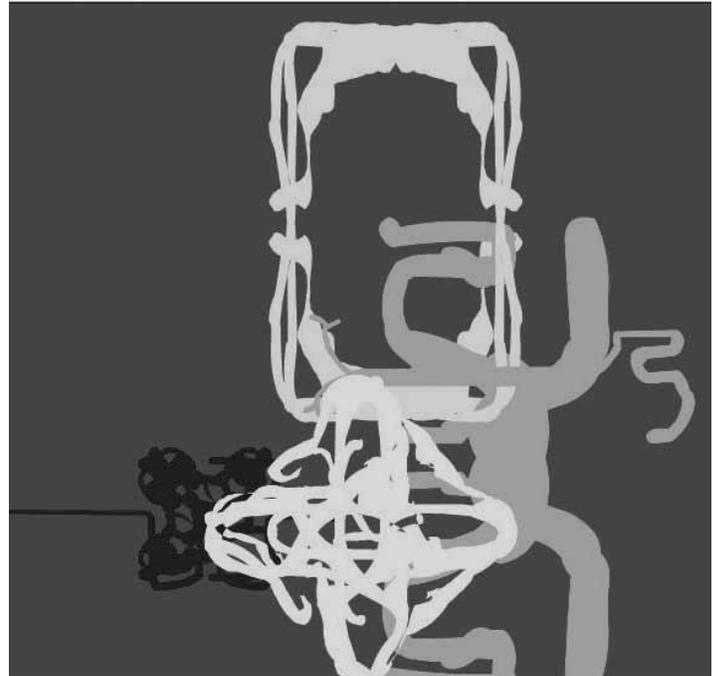
NB I like for it to exist off the wall, or outside of a specific object such as a TV. Just in space. And I like it small because then you can relate to it in a more intimate way. When it is shown large I think it's intimidating, to me at least. By rear projecting on to vellum, you can approach it from the front and get very close. There is no interference from the projector. I have seen a lot of digital work that looks like digital work. It says, *this is made using technology*. I think that can get in the way of actually experiencing the images. This feels more accessible. A piece of paper is also easier to relate to then say, a plasma screen.

KK Because they are shown at head level, it seems you are pushing the idea that they are in fact abstractions of human behavior. Is there a social narrative?

NB Yeah, it's attraction and repulsion, living and dieing. Not that these concepts and processes are necessarily confined to human interactions. Also just the overall process of living and dieing.

KK Although there are moments the patterns become asymmetrical, the patterns maintain a symmetrical understructure.

NB The asymmetrical parts feel much more organic in their movements. In the symmetrical moments I think I am trying to find more.. order in the chaos. Harmony I suppose.



Nathan Burazer (2003). *Monsters2*

KK Are there any politics in the space you create?

NB No, not in the space. I feel personally that it's a political thing just to even create... well, maybe not. But to be an artist is somehow political.

KK Do you preset rules at all, for how things are going to interact?

NB I think I will start out with an idea and then see where it leads me. In the beginning I don't have an idea that I will end up where I do in the end. I think that it is not entirely easy, in working with a technology, to keep the process organic. It's very easy to become technologically adept and find a trick and get really good at it and then not be able to discover something new or really have fun anymore.

KK Tell me how time figures in to these spaces.

NB It's warped, because it's a loop. It's fantasy time, while still existing in time. What is your question?

KK I don't really know what my question is. Does it matter where you enter the cycle? Is there a beginning and an end.

NB It's not important. The narrative is really not so important. But it is interesting that my move in to time based work pretty much coincided with me getting in to making music. I think that the formation of my band TUSSELE really fed in to the visual processes I was exploring.

KK So you have been a musician for some time?

NB Yeah, I have. But not very seriously before this. Not in any collaborative way, it was just more something personal and by myself. When I started composing seriously I got more in to these processes of building up and breaking down.

KK Working with rhythms and movement.

NB It is probably a shared part of my brain being woken up.

KK Do you have any connection to Surrealist landscape painting?

NB Probably in some way. When I was a teenager living in Florida, I visited the Salvador Dali museum in St. Petersburg. I was blown away by these huge paintings... so tripped out. In a funny way he was the first artist I strongly responded to. I guess it was because of the drugs that I was doing at the time. I went with my uncle. We both seemed to get something from the show.

KK When you go to a show or a club and behind the band or DJ there are images projected on a screen or displayed on a monitor, how do you relate to it? I think there are doubts and questions about the purpose or validity of.. well eye candy.

NB Because it's not in a gallery?

KK No, that's not it. I think it's the lack of content, or maybe narrative.

NB Like a screen saver? (*laughing*)

KK Although I have seen amazing screen savers!

NB I used to trip out on screen savers as a kid. I have seen some large scale gallery based work that is mathematically generated, creating very complex forms. There is a certain point though that it could just be a screen saver. Where is the line between artwork and screen saver? Does the fact that it is a screen saver cheapen the experience? When you are sitting at a club is it cheapened because a video is playing behind a band? In some ways yes.

KK Like many things, its depends on intention to a certain degree. As well as presentation.

NB It's the same as seeing a Salvador Dali painting on the front of someone's shirt. It is presented on something that is incredibly accessible. So does that mean it is no longer precious?

KK Lots of artists work on t-shirts. But taking a painting and turning that in to a t-shirt is different than directly designing a cool t-shirt. To what extent do you try and control how your work is disseminated? There are artists who make only 5 copies of a video, and then those are sold to a museum or are screened at the gallery that represents the artist.

KK Most people do not possess the object, but they can have the experience. Where do people see your work?

NB It is interesting because I just had a meeting this afternoon with an art dealer from Chicago. She said to me, if you want to market these you have to limit these somehow. I don't know where I stand. I am just stoked to be making them and have other people like them. And to be making something that I haven't seen before. I feel right now that I am just along for the ride. At one point she said, you know, Nathan, you might want to get your process copy written. Because someone could come along and see these and take the whole thing out from underneath you. And you have done all this work.

Someone has said this to me before. But this process is completely easy and anyone could do this and I am not the proprietor of this at all. What, I should get an attorney all of a sudden? The dealer's background is in painting and sculpture. So for her the issue is, how can this work be marketed?

KK How does your environment effect the environments you are creating?

NB Well, while in Paris I was using one set of colors that are quite garish and bold. And now living here in San Francisco the color choices are very different. They are more thought out I think, while in Paris I was more reacting to new surroundings and they have possibly more immediacy for me. With a laptop I could be anywhere and make this work. I like that idea.

KK Who are the artists you would point to that have led you to this moment and this style of work?

NB William Kentridge, for his animated drawings. I like how Terry Winters' forms relate to the body, but figuratively how they relate is not clear. Also Harry Smith.

Jordan Belson, who was a Bay Area artist working in the 1960s with light projectors. He had a more spiritual or meditative approach, they weren't necessarily blatantly psychedelic. He made shimmering spherical forms that would change over time, but of course without computers. They were all film based. Belson and his mates did projection shows in the planetarium in GG park with live music. I read once about how they left the projectors on overnight, in the room adjacent to the aquarium. The temperature in the room rose enough to raise the temperature in the aquariums to the point that all the fish died. So that apparently was the demise of the planetarium shows. Fucking hippies. Tripping out. Killing fish.

www.tussel.org/burazer.html



Nathan Burazer (2003)
Digital stills
Outburst Two-Four

I met **Sean McFarland** on the 21st of February over at the California College of Arts in San Francisco, where he is finishing up his graduate studies in Photography. His small studio at midday radiated with light. A large collection of tiny hand painted landscape photographs covered one wall. On another wall hung a single print from his series on San Francisco neighborhoods. I was late, and he graciously let me get a bagel and some coffee. Relaxed and leaning on a wall, he enjoyed the sun.

SM Do you have prepared questions for me?

KK I have a few, to fall back on if needed. *(laughs)* Describe to me the physical process of making your most recent series, as much as you want to reveal. Do you tell people how these photographs are made, or don't you think it is important?

SM I do, I do. I am conscious of technique taking over and being more important than the conceptual or I guess, experiential qualities. I feel if I get technique out of the way, then people care less about how it is made and think more about what it does.

I stumbled on the technique by accident. I was out one day with my father in San Francisco, up on Twin Peaks. He just got a new camera that he was really proud of. He let me borrow it. I took a bunch of shots, looking down on to the city. The camera has a really long lens.

Later, I had the prints from this shoot at Twin Peaks. One day, kinda bored in my studio, I rephotographed them, just playing around. I was intrigued, right away. And then after a little bit they became more complicated. I started cutting them apart and photographing them over and over.

KK So you started to combine different places that didn't exist naturally together.

SM No they exist. But I am taking images with different lighting sources, say a sky that wouldn't really be behind a group of buildings. And then those buildings that would not be in front of some other buildings. So that you lose concept of... maybe temperature, and place I guess. I think that we're used to seeing landscape photographs rooted in a real time and place. When the light source is changed even slightly, even if mostly unrecognized, it is still noticed. But every thing I am using is rooted in one geographical location. But that could change.

KK Tell me more about your associations with light and mood.

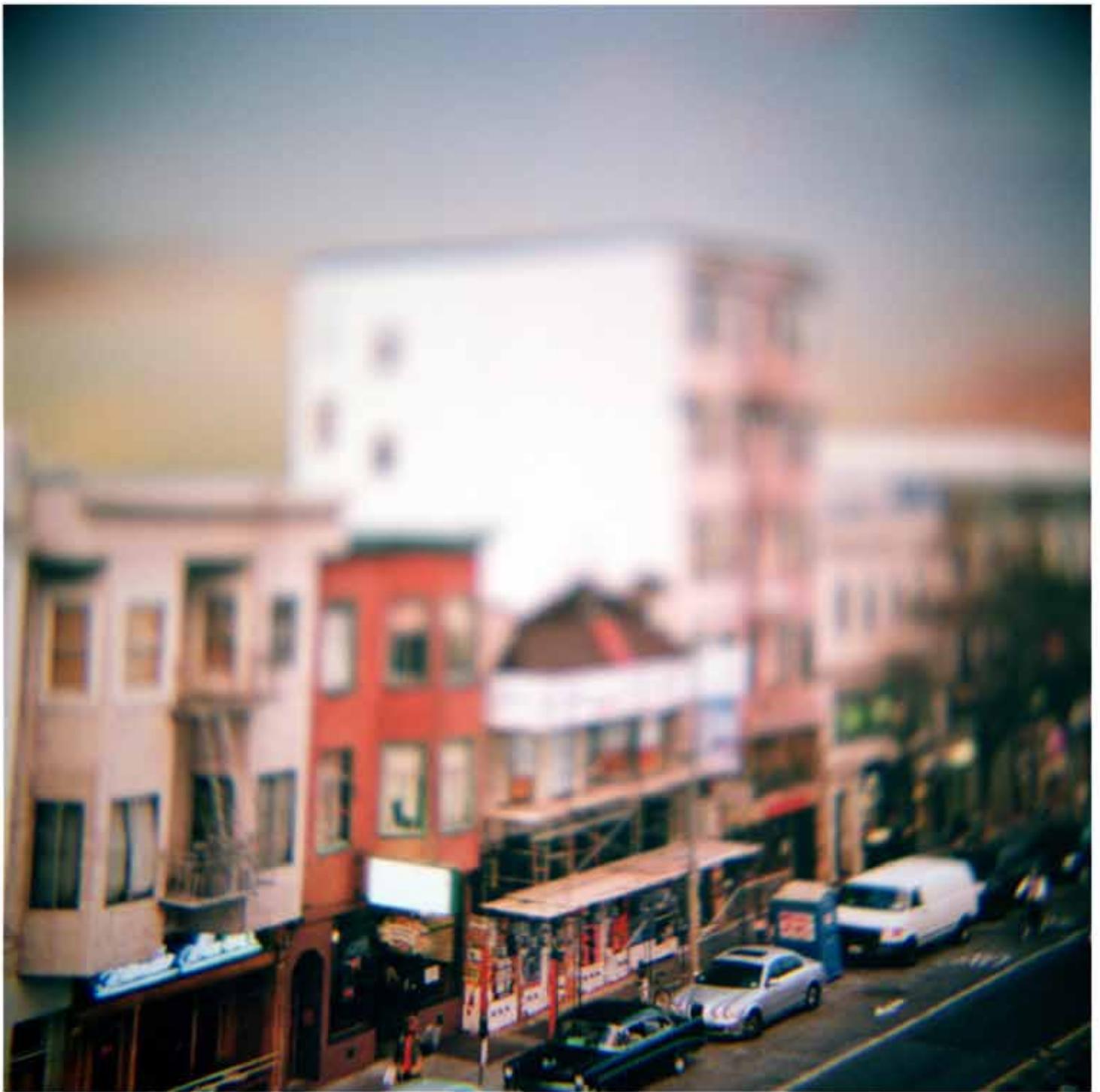
SM By slightly varying the light you can create impending doom, or Mr. Roger's neighborhood. I am really interested in that fine balance between stuff being innocent and frightening at the same time, they are total opposites. For me they seem to work.

KK How do you want someone to feel when they are a looking at a photograph you have altered?

SM I want people to feel that there is something impossible going on. When you look at the scale and lighting and the total environment... they all become questions. Photographs have been used forever as a tool of scientific fact. In court rooms for example. But they are also used in theater and film and fine arts and advertising. We're inundated, our psychological make-up is so interwoven with the visual, especially through photography. What we see is real, and what we see is fake.



Sean McFarland (2004). *Heart-Lug*



Sean McFarland (2004). *Valencia*

KK Do you relate to this series as documentation? Look at this one piece here (pointing to an open book of Polaroid proofs). Do you see this as a document of the street you shot the photograph on?

SM They are altered documents, they have been reconfigured. They do have some representation of what was actually there but for the most part remain photographically and architecturally impossible.

KK Someone that lives in this neighborhood will look at your photographs and it will change their idea of how they see the neighborhood. What is your relationship to nostalgia?

SM The small photos behind you on the wall, that is an earlier series and they are steeped heavily in nostalgia. I wonder though, people of my generation, do we have nostalgia for the 1970's and 80's because it was our childhood? Or is the nostalgia I have actually for my parents' childhood, the 1940's and 50's imagery? Matthew Higgs was speaking to my photo seminar one day about this issue. I found it really fascinating. This city, San Francisco, is nostalgic for me because I visited it as a child. I am a fourth generation Californian, yet the only one not to grow up in San Francisco. So it's been a strange thing. I am in a way looking at this city with these photographs, in a way that I never have prior. Nor could I see it this way in reality. The photos are like toys. So I guess I'm not adverse to being called nostalgic. I know it's there and I have to recognize it.

KK Maybe if you were making this work in the Mission District four years ago people might read them differently. You might be dealing with issues of gentrification. But I don't read any particularly overt political agendas here.

SM There is an aspect of the omniscient eye in these photographs. When I take these, basically I can see in people's bedrooms. But that's not the focus of the work. I do think there is a bit of the doomsday aesthetic, which is frightening. Movies from the 70's such as Earthquake show the city right before it falls apart, reproduced in a miniature scale model. And I think living in a fear culture contributes to this feeling. In my opinion America is a culture of fear. But the photographs themselves are not a post-September 11th thing. I don't want to do work around that. I think the element of temporality and fragility that the images have maybe could be a political statement. But I have never intended to make one.

KK There aren't many people in your photographs.

SM No, I haven't figured out how to incorporate them or if they are even important. To me they already exist inside the buildings. When I put a person in it... I don't want them to be just voyeuristic. I am just not interested.

KK From what vantage point do you shoot your photographs?

SM From overlooks, roofs and buildings, sometimes from the street.

KK How are you getting access to the buildings? Do you approach home owners?

SM No. (*laughs*) San Francisco has plenty of overlooks. And I always have a camera on me. Also I spend a lot of time on public transportation, which is a viewpoint that is higher than you might think.

KK So... often when I am talking with a photographer I am wishing that I knew more photographic history and theory. Do you feel that studying photo theory has informed your practice, or are you more intuitive in your approach? Those two are not exclusive (*laughs*) obviously.

SM Studying theory has changed the way I work. I don't know if it has enhanced it or detracted from it.

SM My only background is the time I have had here, at California College of the Arts. And I haven't really read half of what I was supposed to! As far as the artists I have been exposed to, it has been a window in to Contemporary Photography. I've learned a lot about how it is talked about critically, and produced.

KK Tell me more about the ways you feel your work differs from traditional landscape photography.

SM Edward Muybridge did all these motion studies in the 1800's. And he also did panoramic shots from San Francisco rooftops. In some ways they resemble some of my images, or rather mine resemble his. It's hard because landscape photography is so loaded, there is definitely the romantic, perfect landscape. Then you get in to the New Topographics, someone like Robert Adams. And now people like Jeff Wall who makes landscapes that you have no way of knowing if they are real or fantasy. The whole genre of the docudrama photography: Gregory Crewdson, Phillip Lorca DiCorica... they have really changed the way people look at landscape photography. It makes people question, what are real photographs? Does it even matter?

KK To a certain extent it is a matter of scale. A broader stroke verses the finer details.

SM It is more fun to focus on the mundane for me. I know that's really been done in the 60's and 70's by the New Topographics. In a way I am being derivative.

KK Do you think of yourself as a story teller?

SM No, more a set designer than a story teller.

KK Do your photographs have a relationship to the cinema?

SM I think they do. Visually they are filmic to me. But if you asked me to tell the story of one, I would be making it up. There is not a preconceived story to any of them.

KK When you are shooting, what influences what you shoot? Is it ever a song that you hear, or something that you overhear another person saying?

SM I shoot what I know will make a successful image. I am always thinking, can I take a picture of that and will it work? It's also the whole process of choosing to photograph something, developing the film and then manipulating the image. And then rephotographing those photographs.

KK When you first shoot, what type of camera do you use?

SM An all manual 35mm.

KK Do you ever have the feeling of shooting something with the intention that it is just a snapshot?

SM Definitely. And I think that it's starting to come up now, especially in some of the newest pieces. I feel this comes out in some of the work I am now identifying as more successful.

KK Tell me something about how you select a building to fit with a fore, middle and back ground?

SM It mostly comes down to formal decisions. There are times it really fails. What works together is fragile.. Sometimes they can become ridiculous. (Sean leafs through his book of Polaroids again) I think that one, there, is ridiculous. (Flips the page) That one too. Ridiculous. It just doesn't work. I look at this and ALL I see is a landscape photograph, which I don't really... even though this is what I call them when I talk to people.

KK I think that there is a tendency to be overdramatic. Which I think is how a lot of cinema has gone, influenced via Hollywood.

SM The romantic is never going to go away.

KK You watch films and the convention is that every street has to be wet.

SM And everything is shot at twilight. The romantic aspect of my work has always been there. It is somewhat problematic in relationship to how people read my work. It's something I consider and attempt to keep in check. Maybe not control. I think about it all the time.

KK What reading do you do?

SM I do a lot of reading on miniatures. Susan Stewart wrote this book called On Longing that deals with the souvenir, the miniature, the collection, the gigantic. I found her book really beneficial, when I could understand it. I reread it several times to understand it. I sit around at home and look at books. That's what I do at night.. Listen to music and look at photo books. Almost exclusively Landscape Photography. I got this Guresky book for my birthday. It is so hard for me to look at those images. There is no possible room for me in his work. It's so weird. I cannot place myself in it, at all. I feel totally detached from it and engrossed at the same time.

KK It's alienating? There is no relationship to the body?

SM There is no space in his photographs that I can understand.

KK He is one of 3 or 4 artists who inspired me to do this project.

SM Really?

KK I read this article in the New Yorker about DIA funding a short list of mega-projects by mega-artists by creating one person museums. These massive scale works consume mass amounts of materials and cash. There is a side of me that felt really ill about this dynamic.

SM It all seems so out of reach.

KK *(pause)* I think as an artist that I would have a hard time reading an international newspaper each day and justifying my consumption of so much stuff. So I started looking at artists who realize large scale visions by fairly modest means. I think that Guresky is one of those artists, in a certain sort of way. Even though I heard a rumor that each print costs in the neighborhood of \$20,000 to produce. Is there anything that you want people to know when they come to see your work?

SM That's probably one of the hardest questions. Basically I want people to look. If you can make somebody want to pay more attention than they did before they saw your work, I think that's a pretty good contribution. There is a certain amount of questioning in this series, as far as how things work. I hope it makes people be a little more attentive. Cause they are just normal stupid places, that end up looking impossible, or that they might fall apart. That's a hard question.

KK It's kind of a bullshit question. Is there any part of you that feels maybe you are trying to fool people. That there is something disingenuous about the illusion of this work?

SM Hmm. I honestly don't think that is a valid critique of the work. What art isn't about coercion? About trying to sell an idea to someone? If anybody says their work is not about that, they are lying. I am not trying to say that this is how the world looks. Maybe I could call the work THE MODEL I BUILT OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO! *(laughs)* They are obviously not real and obviously not fake at the same time. More importantly, it's a critique on photography. Because every single thing that is done is done on film. It's completely photographic. Something that has been counted on as a truth for so long is being drawn into question.

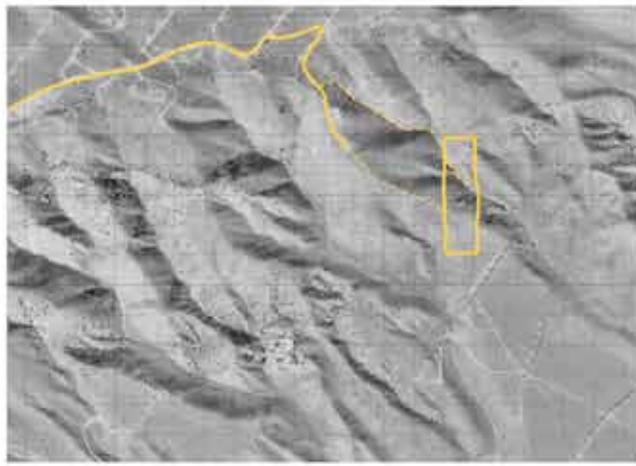
KK If these were done digitally, not only would they feel different, but possibly there would be another implication.

SM Who were the other people who inspired you?

KK One person is Misako Ianoka, an artist I have known for a few years, and who currently has an installation up in the front windows of Artist's Television Access on Valencia street. You should check it out. I did actually interview her for this issue, unfortunately her voice didn't record well. So I am going to have to speak with her for the next RECORD/PLAY. Anyhow, she did this series of small, postcard size, found photographs culled from older National Geographics. She works with aerial photographs and then she draws on top of them with a very fine white marker. And she'll draw something, maybe two circles connected with two lines that form a cylinder. And when I saw them it dawned on me: she has just described a container that is 1000 feet high by 1000 feet wide that would contain... what!? Fuck giant sculptures!

SM Who needs millions from DIA?

www.seanmcfarland.com



AMY BALKIN (starting in the upper left and moving clockwise)

Amy Balkin and friend visiting the land surrounding the PUBLIC DOMAIN land with an employee of Florida Power & Light. The PUBLIC DOMAIN itself is highlighted in yellow.

Satellite map of the PUBLIC DOMAIN. The access roads, as well as the 2.5 acre parcel highlighted in yellow.

The bench monument to be placed on the PUBLIC DOMAIN land.

www.landauction.com.

Site visit to wind farm that land-locks the PUBLIC DOMAIN.

I met **Amy Balkin** on the 16th of February at her apartment on 14th street in the Mission District of San Francisco. Her apartment is floor-to-ceiling with full bookshelves, posters from exhibits and artwork. We sit and have tea in her living room.



KK I have seen quite a bit of your work over the past five years. This spans several series of projects, but there has always been a focus on the environment.

AB I started thinking about making artwork in response to the California exurban environment in 1997, at which time I was interested in dioramas and display, particularly the presentation of nature. I started making dioramas and then moved on to sculptures of fragments of California landscape - the sort of the thing you might see while on Highway 5, barren hills with bits of power grid infrastructure. So while I was doing that, I wanted to move towards something that wasn't necessarily recreating a simulation of the landscape, but something that would be using the landscape itself.

In 1999 I did a collaborative proposal with an architect for the Harvey Milk Memorial at the corner of Market and Castro Streets, where the BART station is, to create a monument and public space in which to place it. Think about the Castro district: it is a place that is so much about display, but there isn't really a center to it. People walk up and down the street, but there isn't a single public place to see and be seen. I was just back from Italy, and thinking about the plaza as a place where people go around in the evening. So the idea was to create a series of steps that people could lounge on, as well as a windbreak as the corner gets a lot of wind coming down over the hill.

More recently, when I was at graduate school, I was again asking myself -what am I concerned with? Do I want to make sculpture or installation? I was questioning, what is the value of making artwork when it is always framed as a commodity in a marketplace that is primarily concerned with generating exclusivity? I thought I would like to make something inclusive and anti-elitist. Something that was anti-institutional. Something that was not about making things but rather about making some sort of different social space.

Around the same time, during the dot-com inflation, the landlord for the 9-unit building that I live in tried to evict everyone from the building illegally using a legal loophole called the Ellis Act. The Ellis Act was created as a way for landlords to remove a building from the rental market permanently, but being widely used at that time to circumvent rent control laws in the city by scaring renters into vacating their apartments, and re-renting them at higher rates after the old renters were gone. The law dictates you can't use the Ellis Act on a building with more than four units, but she tried anyhow. I had been living on 14th street for a while, and I felt it was my home. Because of the rent inflation at that time, if I had lost my apartment I probably would have had to move out of the city. It was frightening how little control I had as a non-landowner, and I began to consider how democratic participation can be manipulated when voters are easily forced out of areas by economic pressure.

At the same time, homeless people were dealing with San Francisco becoming a place that is more and more exclusionary. Whereas before there was a bench to lay on, benches were being designed to prevent people from laying on them. Sort of like an anti-pigeon device, except its an anti-sitting device. In essence, you have to be paying all the time, or keep moving. And then you have George Bush trying to use national public parks, which are presented as the ultimate democratic, shared places for us all to have egalitarian access to, for pseudo-public interests like oil drilling. So I thought it would be good if there was a place that people could go where they would feel protected from the movements of capitalism. That there would be some refuge. That is when I began to develop the project I have been working on for the last few years.

KK Give me the two-sentence definition for this project.

AB The project is called **THIS IS THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**, and is an effort to create a permanent public commons. That public commons will be held in perpetuity, and it will be a shareable place open to use by anyone in the world.

KK So you began looking for a physical space?

AB So I began looking for a place and my first concern was, what kind of a place would it be? And how big of a site? One thing that seemed to me to be important is that it would be an occupiable size. I wanted the place to be physically inhabitable.

My second concern was about how to acquire a site. I first tried to get land donated through a series of postings on Craigslist. After I didn't get any response, I decided to buy the land. I bought a parcel of land in April of 2003, after a series of investigations into the world of cheap land sales. I went to some land auctions and got in touch with groups who are involved with acquiring cheap land, like the San Francisco Archdioceses, who often receive land donations. I eventually ended up buying land at auction via Ebay, and purchased 2.5 acres of land in the Mojave Desert. And that's really just the beginning of the project - the initial acquisition of the land.

KK Where did you go from there?

AB To explore legal strategies for the handover of the land to the public.

KK When I saw your exhibit down in Stanford, I got the idea that it was a huge challenge to even define the land. You wanted it to be public and, but not controlled by the government. And you definitely didn't want it to be private.

AB No I definitely didn't want the land to be private and I didn't want it to be subject to eminent domain. Eminent domain being the right of the government to take any land in the name of the people, for what it deems to be the greater public good. This includes things like the Bush administration clearing away homes to run through an oil or gas pipeline. It's well, questionable. Since any land is subject to this, the question becomes; how do you get around it? It's highly problematic. I am now researching land trusts, which I think could possibly trump eminent domain.

I am investigating different ways the land can be shared, and I have identified five legal areas to be explore. The first is an inversion of intellectual property law. Another is a way of sharing common pool resources that are not divisible and is called a limited common property regime. That's an arcane piece of law that can be used to negotiate shared rights to traditional fishing areas, or condominium parking lots. When you are attempting to frame up an agreement for sharing within the context of the U.S. legal system as it now stands is, the way the legal system is constructed is that there has to be a chain of control and ownership of land that is totally traceable by the government. So someone is held responsible for the land. And not necessarily in the more generous sense of responsible, but responsible in terms of what the government wants: to hold someone accountable for agreeing to their land use rules. The problem with a land trust is that it must have aboard of directors, and what I want to do is give everyone equal access to the land. I don't want it to be mediated by an owner, directors, or by any controlling entity. Basically I want to say, the land is the land, everyone has equal access to it. To say everyone has a right to share this land just as with any other pooled resources. Like air, like water. It's a way to say, lets reframe this in a way that is inclusive.

If you consider the history of American land use, at least for the past 300 years, I'm not really sure about land use issues and sharing when America was less populated, its been all about restrictive control and commodification of the landscape.

KK So you have this land and it's in your name presently.

AB Yes, I own it.

KK Does it matter to you whether people actually do anything there? Or is it more the process of acquiring the land and the series of questions that are asked by the entirety of this process?

AB I feel it succeeds on another level if it's actually made available. And whether or not people use it their decision. Completing this and being able to do the hand over to the public is very important to the project. Because otherwise there is no point in me going through the actual process. It would simply be a conceptual statement about land use. In banging my head against this wall, and hopefully finding some sort of response and some ending that is satisfactory, that will be great as far as inclusion is concerned. We don't have any space for that in the legal system, so I don't know what that ultimately means, or how this project ends. I think I need to consider it as a goal, if the goal is to hand it over.

There is a question as to why to approach this in the context of art making? And isn't this a piece of intervention or activism? And does framing it as art, does that detract from it? It's a question that is contextualized by the real geopolitical struggles that are going on in the world. Look at the borderization that is happening in Israel and Palestine, look at the fact that people are losing their lives every day over land, look at the land wars in South America, and the water wars there.

The actual land that I acquired is in the desert. It has a lot of high wind almost all year round. It's actually located in the middle of a wind farm. So what kind of site is this, and why this response? Is it a meaningful response? It's not in a place where there is any kind of contention.

Another thing is that there are a number of people working with these types of issues. This is just one project among a number that are addressing a shared set of questions.

KK Are there any that specifically come to mind?

AB There are two types of projects. One is a life project not framed by the art making process. This would include groups of people who have tried to create places that weren't owned or had different sort of sharing agreements, or had different sorts of relationships with the government. And those would include places like Morningstar, which was a commune in the 1960's. Lou Gottlieb who owned the land the commune was on tried to deed the land to God. That legal battle was something that went on for years and years.

Another place is Sealand, an abandoned military site off the coast of England that was occupied by some squatters, a family, who wanted to turn it into The Principality of Sealand. I think it's a server farm now, but they are still trying to be recognised as a nation by the European Union. So there are these areas where people have used their personal lives to stake out their terrain. They have gone and occupied this site and said were going to claim it as a different sort of place. Whether or not it came to be a different sort of place is another question.

Then there are those interventions in the art realm. One example is a project called LAND, by N55. They said if you have piece of land you can give it to this project, a network of places, and people can use them for free. Here, the rights to the land are still held by the original land owners. They can say, well were going to do this for a while and then stop. While this is similar to what I am trying to do, I want to do a total handover of all rights in perpetuity. Otherwise it's a gestural statement, and functions in a different way.

KK It's one thing to say, go-ahead and use my land. It's another to somehow finds a niche within the system. It shifts the focus on to the social system itself, and our relationship to the land.

AB I'd like to think that it approaches those problems.

KK Did you have any formal training that encouraged you in this direction? Socialist parents? *(laughs)*

AB No my parents are fairly apolitical. How did I come to this? I don't know. Let me go backwards. It seemed to be the most generous way to think about how we consider things. Let me step backward: it is a political question, geopolitics. However there are so many problems with my project and the idea of use. For example when I was in school and was beginning the project, I had a classmate by the name of Gauri Gill. She is a photojournalist in India. One of the things she's been doing is photographing landless people in India. When I proposed this project she asked well who can use this land? What does it mean to use this land? Does it mean that someone camps out on it and makes art projects? If farmers came they would want to know, how much of this land can we use? Maybe they'd want to farm it and stake a claim on it immediately. Then it would become apparent what the real politics of this space are. Any piece of land, once it is set claim to, begins to have the problem of sharing. Let's say some farmers come and they plant the land, and then some other people come. How are they going to share this land once work has already begun and they have transformed the land, if this was to happen? You have the problem that you have limited area and you ask how do people share it?

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN is limited in size, 2.5 acres, and it has borders. How do you share this small area that obviously cannot support everyone in the world? So this land becomes a microcosm for questions of sharing common pool resources.

To get back to the question of politics, everyone is obliged to ask: how do we share these things we need to survive- land, air, and water? If they become totally degraded it will kill all of us. It's not only a question of the law and geopolitics, but a larger question of survival of humanity. We must share these things in a way that is equitable.

KK Show me on the map where this land is.

AB The sight of the PUBLIC DOMAIN is located at the foot of the San Joaquin Valley in California. It's located near the town of Mojave, at the junction of highways 58 and 14. If you leave Mojave on Oak Creek Road and drive west for a mile and then turn north, that parcel of land is just south of highway 58. In the hills just south of Tehachapi.

One of the reasons the land was so cheap to buy is that it's landlocked. There is no access. I went to go look at the site a few months ago, and had some aerial maps that showed dirt roads leading to it. When I actually tried to drive there all the dirt roads were blocked off by the owners of the wind farm. They built a graded road that goes right near the land but won't let me travel on it because they say it is a safety hazard. So there is an issue: Is the land accessible? No it's not. But by law anyone has access to their land. So there becomes an issue of negotiating that. The wind farm is owned by Florida Power and Light, which is a large energy company based in Florida that also owns nuclear power plants. So the land is surrounded on three sides by this large corporate entity. The other side is made up of land held in a patchwork of smallhold parcels. This area is called the Homesteads. The area is pretty hardscrabble, and the people who live there are sort of the pioneering fringe. They have staked down out there. So the question is about having either a relationship to this corporation, or to these individuals. When you think about a specific actual site, verses conceptualizing a sight, you are dealing with issues of who is there already? And how are they going to interact with us? And of course the Public Domain is their land too.

(The phone rings. Amy answers the phone. "Hello? Yeab? Oh, I know. Actually, everything is good. Actually somebody who is another artist is over and is interviewing me about my project, which is nice. So can I give you a call back later? Everything is all good. Are you good? Cool. I'll call you later today.")

KK I want to read to you a quote from *Pamphlet*, an ongoing conceptual architecture project.

Destroying and constructing are equal in importance. We must have souls for one and the others. These seemingly opposite acts are equal in the sense that they are both ways of altering existing reality. Construction always implies destruction of a prior state of being. Changing and rearranging physical, cultural, and experiential conditions. Both processes reveal and hide.

You are creating a series of questions, as well as an opportunity. Tell me more about how important it is, or isn't, for you as an artist to create something?

AB I don't think it's important to create something. I think it's important to create something when it is appropriate to create something. Now I am thinking of art more as a visualisation tool. I think more in terms of model making and mockups. If a visualization is going to be an useful tool to thinking about things differently, then it's a good idea. Plus, in the process of making you create new forms. Those new forms can be very inspiring. So while I don't have a critique against making, I definitely have a critique of capitalism. I have a critique of any kind of making within that context, but it is not as if I am outside it.

My other thought about making is that it needs to be environmentally conscientious. When you make anything I think you have to consider the entire process, and the real costs of the process beyond the materials. That is an even handed answer I suppose. I don't think it matters what you make, but how you make it.

KK There were moments of artists consuming massive amounts of materials. Personally I think the time for that is over.

AB You can address a grand scale and you can do it really lightly. Thinking about visualizations, I made a project recently called Preface. This was a small book that contained a series of massive scale interventions. It is a series of pictures with text. They are so large scale that they would be impossible to build. But you can still pose the questions.

KK What is the place of nostalgia or preservation in your project?

AB I'd like to say it's anti-nostalgic. That it is for creating a new set of social relations. But at the same time you could look at it as a utopian project if you wanted to. You could say that all utopian projects are nostalgic for an idea of future that has never existed.

KK You mentioned to me an idea of placing a monument on the land. What about physically influencing the space in some way? Are you trying to insert anything specifically personal in your environment?

AB I specifically want to not insert anything personal. The only reason I would be inserting a monument, which is by the way a bench, to be placed on the land for strategic legal reasons. I'd rather have nothing. I was thinking that if I would want to put in some sort of interpretive information on the land, that perhaps a portion of the land should be taken away from the site before a handover. A small sliver. So that maybe this would not be an issue. Although of course it is still an issue. (laughs)

www.thisisthepublicdomain.org

Amanda Eicher lives at the top of three flights of stairs. On the morning of February 23rd I visited her apartment and studio on Valencia Street. As she heated water for tea I peered out her kitchen window. Looking down and out through the leaves of a giant tree a spirited soccer game was in progress.



KK The first time I saw your work was at Adobe Books back room gallery. You used graphite to draw a horizontal line around the perimeter of the main gallery space/book store. This instantly stuck me as brilliant. It is one of those moments when on walking in to a room you see what has been done and you say, yes, of course, that's exactly what this space needed!

AE As an artist I felt that I was undergoing a similar process as a curator: to look at a space and try to unify it in some way. When I opened the Adobe Books back room gallery there was already a strong community of involved artists and writers. I wanted to somehow bring them together. By drawing this common horizon line, I was asking what and where can it lead to?

KK Tell me more about this common landscape.

AE I can be vague. And at times I am looking for all the metaphors present in a particular context. I like to open up a possibility for people, and see what happens when they get inside. With my horizon line there is a reference to time and a physical relationship to the viewer. I hope they might wonder: how long is that line from end to end, and how did it get made?

KK What about the overlap between your studio and curatorial practices.

AE It's funny, I was writing about what I do, for some grant and residency applications. I closed off for a while to exclusively work in my studio. I wondered what effect it would have on the studio practice to eliminate this process of creating space, opportunity and time for others through curating. As it turned out my drawings and installations reflected some of the same ideas and hopes.

KK Give me a timeline of Adobe Books back room gallery.

AE I started the gallery in 2000 with the support of Adobe owner Andrew McKinley, as well as help from the artists Chris Johanson and Christopher Garrett. I programmed the space full time for about two years, and then in 2002 I started sitting down with Eleanor Harwood, Sarah Boswick, and Misako Inaoka. Slowly, over the course of half a year's time, people began to take on different roles.

KK Misa and Sarah were silk screening some amazing posters at that time for shows!

AE Definitely! And Eleanor emerged as the person who really wanted to take on the programming and has done so. Her effect on the program has been incredible. She has a complex curatorial vision.

KK One of the things I appreciate about the backroom gallery is that it is a community space guided by one person's vision. I think there is a lot of freedom for a curator in this position to follow their intuition: to go along a path and develop relationships with artists. This is much more difficult in committee.

AE I think that Adobe is a chaotic place, and one that tends to produce neurosis. In some instances it is easier to just go ahead solo. Committees can work together in a collective manner well, but they tend not to.

KK I remember you telling me about an interesting interaction you had with Swan. Swan is described by the writer Jamie Berger as, "the white-haired and bearded, almost literally resident poet and pigeon keeper."

AE During the installation of my own show at Adobe he said something like, you know what? You are crazy! (*laughing*) I wish that I had his newsletter from the day following my installation. I cannot remember exactly what he wrote, but something to the effect of, Come one, come all! See what She's doing here! Swan's own writings and drawings are so fantastical, and I think something about it that resonated with him. It was kinda fantastical and ideal to think that this single line could speak to people. Swan has defiantly been influential to me. In periods that I am writing everyday, I think of him on his typewriter, clicking away. When I have moments of feeling selfish, for spending all my time writing, I can think of Swan's own funny dedication.

KK Tell me something of the spirit of your residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts, in Marin County California.

AE Well it was on the fly! They had a cancellation in their project space, and so they called me on a Friday and asked if I would start a residency the following Monday. So I really dropped everything that was going on here in San Francisco, my job, etc, and went up there to work. I make little rules for myself, more guidelines, and had decided to make art with what I had at hand. So my friend Corbi drove me up with I think two boxes of supplies and a typewriter in the back of her station wagon, a couple changes of clothes.

The first thing I did was to paint a big square of color on the wall with spray enamel. Of course I didn't know there wasn't supposed to be any painting directly on the walls. There was a lot going on right at that time. For one thing, it was April at the Headlands, just about my favorite place in the world to be, and nature was really in action. Back in the real world, the United States had just declared war on Iraq. I was beside myself over it. So I worked out my ideas about war and colonialism and on how people dominate spaces and other people. I had just been given this big space to more or less dominate, so I decided to check out different tendencies I had in myself.

I found what I suspected -that it is possible to be more inclined to reconcile than to dominate, but that within the constructs that make more conciliatory action possible, you can have a good time, get somewhere intellectually and artistically. Some people say that in any relationship you have to dominate at some point to get along. I do worry sometimes that it's true, but this space was a really good example of somewhere you could play, argue, work, collaborate, rest, experiment.

It's no war zone, but the Project Spaces are still challenging. You are pretty much on display as a resident artist six days a week, and your art is right out there, in its most intimate and awkward developments. I learned a little more about the conditions I have to lie down to ease myself away from some of the pressures of being a human in the art world, and in the real world as well.

Visually, it was a various and strange space, the whole way through. Early on I drew a horizon line, running at chest height around the room to define the borders of the space. This developed into a consideration on inside and outside. As the drawing became more elaborate I began to import some elements of the things I was seeing while running in the mornings over the hills and walking around the valley. I was engaging with sticks and stones, the cast-off bits of landscape which lent themselves to being tools. These became structures, the first really big sculptures I've made. These became places to sleep or set your burdens.

Emma-Louise, one of the HCA staff who became my great friend, would come in to the studio and we'd play soccer with some 'stones' I made out of cast-off newspapers. It was great to be kicking around all this crumpled up information about the world's ridiculous and maddening events.

On the final night of the public program, we had skateboards and balls and sticks and all this, and it got a little rambunctious at points. It developed into this gym-class, dodge-ball mentality. Although it was a pretty gentle foray into really complex ideas about people, I found it an incredible breeding ground not only for actual artworks, but for knowing better my own mindset for art-making.

KK There is a certain element of your work that I intuitively feel is coming out of your observation of people around you.

AE Currently in my drawings the figure is not present, but they are implied. While in residency I was also building stick structures for individual people. They were portraits. They were an exclusive experience, which is funny. If anyone else got inside, they wouldn't fit quite right. I wanted the people who they were built for to see them and question what they were, and then to discover hey that's me!

KK To what extent do you attempt to effect the moment of a space, in relationship to letting a space's history or circumstance affect you?

AE I have always leaned towards wanting the space to affect me. But to a certain extent that is a snow job. I am always going to be exerting myself. I am not waiting for inspiration from someplace outside myself. I am checking things out. We have to take action everyday, place one foot in front of the other.

KK Do you see yourself as having any relationship to more traditional landscape painters?

AE I can look at a traditional landscape in a similar manner that I enjoy seeing a James Turrell sculpture or painting. Having gone to school for Post-Colonial Literature, I was always on the look out for something... that might stop me from enjoying a painting!



Amanda Eicher (2001)

Installation with horizon line at Adobe Books back room gallery.
Graphite, Cobalt blue and russet brown mixed media.

AE In reality, I get a lot out of it. I do think many of our ideas about land and landscape are popularized by artists and writers. When I set out to make a landscape I am very careful about my own intentions. I am also very interested in them. I am trying to not waste too much time thinking about the politics.

KK Let me ask you to compare the work of two artists: Richard Serra and Andreas Guresky. In specific, respond to how they work with materials and public space?

AE I think of Andreas Gurevsky's giant museum photographs as pretty macho, but in a different way.

AE I also think of museum work in general as somewhat limited, when compared to work done in the public arena. Yet it's a cool idea that Gurevsky could plant little conceptual seeds in the minds of a bunch of people that might alter the way they think about space and scale. I love experiencing a Richard Serra, but if you are going to be using tons of steel maybe you have to ask yourself, is it justified?

KK It is simultaneously beautiful and irresponsible.

AE You know the piece that comes to mind for me that I really loved was the cardboard LIVE/WORK loft that Christopher Garrett made for the Bay Area Now show at Yerba Buena Center For the Arts, in San Francisco. He built it in the courtyard that faced both the museum and the street. He really altered that space of the intersection, in a dramatic fashion.

KK His use of modest materials to big effect is exciting. Plus in this case there is a great message behind the piece.

AE Efficiency is nice. I like the implication that there can be both message and visual impact. Christopher's piece touched on so many ideas about the changing South of Market neighborhood around Yerba Buena. Who are all the new LOFTS made for? Where is this target population now that the DOT.COM had slowed? What will be the physical longevity of the spaces themselves based on what they are constructed with? Plus of course, the pre-redevelopment history of that neighborhood is one of Single Residency Hotels and the poor, some who are living in their own cardboard spaces on the streets.

KK Will you talk a little bit about the research you do for your landscapes?

AE You know in my life and artwork I try to have fun while recognizing that the steps necessary to create are important. I would consider the bike ride from San Francisco out to the Headlands area in Marin County as research. I would bike out multiple times each week and do sketches of the surrounding land, which ended up being blown up larger in my studio later on. I try to build my art practice in to my everyday life. In doing site specific work, I go visit and write. I enjoy reading about other artists' practices.

KK I want to read to you a quote from an ongoing conceptual architecture project called *Pamphlet*.

“Destroying and constructing are equal in importance. We must have souls for one and the other... Construction always implies destruction of a prior state of being. Changing and rearranging physical, cultural, and experiential conditions. Both processes reveal and hide.”

AE In a certain way, I want to say that I don't care about that too much. Because we are all involved in these two forces constantly. But I will answer it with a quote from something I read earlier today. It relates I think. (AE pulls down a book from a nearby bookshelf, stuffed with papers, soft cover and over size hard back volumes) This is from a zine made by the artist HEART 101. He writes:

“Quit something if you want to start something. I wrote that a long time ago. Basically the idea goes, you want to stop watching TV? Then stop. You don't have to know what you want to do. Instead stare at the wall. It's hella boring but eventually your body will move towards something [else].”

Yeah, I agree with that. Sometimes you have to clear stuff out, without knowing what will fill its place. Some people I know destroy their old art work. I tend to go back into them and reuse pieces that don't work out, by drawing over them, give 'em a new face. This way I can make things without the pressure to feel like they have to be perfect.

KK I think that's about it.

AE Who is going to interview you Kyle? I think you should consider it.

KK Ok.



Amanda Eicher (2002)
The project space at the Headlands Center for the Arts

I met **Alena (Scooter) Rudolph**, on the 24th of February as she de-installed two paintings from the wall of Adobe Books. We walked across 16th street to Café Macondo, a small café that bustles with students, activists, organizers, and lone laptop users. There was quite a din and we went off in search of a quieter spot for the sake of my tape recorder. We sat at the one table in back.



Alena Rudolph (2002). Roadside photograph, California.

KK

I want to ask you where you grew up?

AR

I moved a lot. I was born in Los Angeles and raised in West Hollywood. I lived there for eleven years. My dad was a working artist and my mom a classical pianist. At some point my parents got sick of living in the city, so we moved to the suburbs. That lasted for about a year. It didn't work, we were total suburban outcasts. Everyone thought we were white trash. My dad had this huge studio with the door up all the time, running saws. Everyone thought we were out of our minds.

So we kinda got ousted from the neighborhood. My parents quickly decided to move to Santa Barbara. Just looking through the paper one day they said, "why don't we move here?" They found a ranch house on several acres for about \$900 a month. I lived there for about 10 years. We had goats and chickens. To go from blunt city to living in a rural area was a total culture shock.. After Santa Barbara I moved out to Los Angeles. About a year later I returned to my parents house with an open-ended drug habit. I recuperated and then moved up here. I have lived here for eight years.



Alena Rudolph (2004). *Cabin #1-2*. Ink and acrylic on wood.

KK

Sometimes in your work I feel that the landscape and the buildings are at odds with each other. That maybe the buildings have been transplanted from someplace else.

AR

Usually I choose semi-industrial landscapes. On road trips I take a lot of film, just hanging the camera out the window and shooting what is going past. Its like, look at that one building, out in the middle of nowhere. That's great. And there is nothing going on there. Maybe some phone poles, that is it. In a weird way you can be out in the middle of nowhere but there are always signs that people have been there.

KK

In Santa Barbara it was rural?

AR

Yeah, all ranch houses. Everyone was about one-half to one-quarter mile away from each other. Some people had horses. We lived above a valley that a river flowed through. In the spring it would flood and turn everything a lush green. The cattle herders would then let their cows out. If you go down in to the valley on their land, they were legally allowed to shoot you. I have gone for hikes down in the valley and hear gunshots. And then it was like, gotta go. But we'd go swimming in the river sometimes.

KK

What role does nostalgia play in your work?

AR

A lot. I was doing research on the settlers of Minnesota, and the people traveling across the United States. There are all these great pictures of the cabins made by the settlers who would stop when they got snowed in. Then they would continue West. I use the cabins and place them in different backgrounds. It is nostalgic for me to paint cityscapes with their wires and intersections and perspective based views. Walking through the streets and looking up at the wires as an adult, reminds me of childhood. Of laying in the backseat while your parents are driving, and looking up and seeing all the trees and cables above. Streaming past you, they almost look like they are waving. That always fascinated me.

KK

What are the politics of the spaces you create?

AR

It's mostly about communication and isolation. It's personal though. People say things like, I remember driving to see my grandmother one summer and driving out past all these farms. I have heard that so many times. Often the paintings recall a memory. It's funny, it's often about their grandma (laughs). I also hear Oregon, I hear the Southwest. Mostly personal stories. For someone to have a connection to one of my paintings and then to tell me the story, it becomes this chain. I like to think that people see it in this way. Like a lapse in their memory that has been suddenly recalled.

KK

What are the elements of time that play into your landscapes?

AR

Landscapes do change, but in subtle ways. Except for when they tear down buildings and then there is this big hole. As far as rural landscapes, they don't change so much. There isn't a lot of upscale development. But the buildings I paint have a timeline that is ageless. At a some moment though something like telephone wires were added to old structures. But now, maybe it's not even in use anymore. When did this happen?

KK

Do you work exclusively on found wood?





Alena Rudolph (2003). *Water-side.* Acrylic and ink on wood.

AR

Mostly. What I do is find old Luan and nail 1x1 inch strips of wood on the back. So I build them. I don't spend money on wood. I figured if it is there, why not paint on it?

KK

Is this for practical reasons or are you interested in the history of the object?

AR

I am interested in the layers. Say an old house is gutted: a Craftsman or an old Victorian. They want to put in the Home Depot crap. They pull out all the panels of wood that have eight layers of paint on them. When I actually start sanding down the paint, or pick it away, there are ten of the most beautiful colors that nobody would choose for their kitchen colors now. Now everyone wants Mauve or Olive. You see the most amazing mint greens and creamy yellows, and sometimes even bright red. I love the craft, and the fact that it now gets a second life in my hands. And maybe someone buys it and it lasts.

KK

So that is the basis for your color palette?

AR

I drive around and go scouting the neighborhood. A lot of houses are being bought up right now and I make sure to look every time I drive past. It is just a matter of time before it's gutted. There are things that I am looking for: not too much bare wood showing, no water damage, things like that.

(We break briefly to put some change in the parking meter)

KK

You don't include people in your paintings, but they are so implicit.

AR

Oh yeah. Especially via the telephone poles. They mean there is something happening, there is communication. There are things going in, and going out. I am trying to take away the feeling of isolation by having someone to communicate to. I don't do people or cars, because I like this idea of a ghost town, or at least a quiet town. Everyone is minding their own business. No one wants to play a cameo appearance in my painting.

KK

Do you see your work through the lens of traditional landscape painting? Is that something you enjoy looking at?

AR

Oh yeah. There is this painter Andrew Wyeth who does these great dilapidated cabins in the snow. He renders them in brushy water colors, so most of the painting is devoid of paint. The paper is white and he'll add subtle touches of grey to give the hint of shadow. I also love architectural scale models. There will be this map of the city that is flat, and then a proposed building is represented in three dimensions. It is this erection coming off the paper. It looks so cool. I work so flat.

KK

This idea of flatness. Do you follow this out of a lineage of graphic design, or California painting, or...?

AR

A big influence, being from Southern California, were the graphics from Ocean Pacific. Remember those old OP shirts?

KK

Oh yeah. Even in upstate NY, Ocean Pacific was hot.

AR

They would have four layers. A gradation of browns, or rich mustard yellows. They inspired me to use a monochromatic palette. I did some proposals for REAL skateboard decks. They were hotel themed boards. The whole presentation was so slick. I like going out and finding wood, and using more subtle colors, but knowing that this range of colors is also available to me is exciting. I like it. Oh, also sunsets! They influence me. That sounds corny (*laughs*). Most of my paintings are based on the light of dusk. The sun is down but the sky is still bright, casting objects into hard relief. The foreground is in shadow, the background is backlit. Looking back into my photographs now I am starting to notice the variations of grays in the silhouetted foreground. This is starting to show up in some paintings. More and more layers.

KK

Is there anything about that part of the day, beyond its visual intensity?

AR

It's the best time of the day! (*laughs*) It's the time when you are driving and you feel sedated because everything is fading. It fades away and opens up in to dark. I love watching the transition. There is nothing you can do about it. All day it has been blue skies, or maybe grey. Then maybe the clouds go away, or it will rain. And then everything is really crisp. It's washed. It's clean. I like sunsets and walks on the beach. I like hot cocoa and bubble baths and reading poetry by the fire. (*laughs*)



Alena Rudolph, 2003. *Untitled*. Acrylic and ink on wood.