Sift

by

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Studio Art

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Sift is a suite of drawings that serves as a personal record of a long hike in Iceland. Through an exploration of sediment as a metaphor, and the use of sedimentation as a drawing process, I am sifting through matter and what it means to be working with landscape, nature-based imagery, and a Romantic disposition in the twenty-first century. My work investigates how sentimental longing and personal recollections of the landscape can present an individual perspective on the world, and how the projection of memory in order to gain an understanding of encounters with one's environment and personal recollections are small but political gestures that express the relationship individuals have with the world around them.

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The sediments are a sort of epic poem of the earth. When we are wise enough, perhaps we can read in them all of past history. For all is written here. In the nature of the materials that compose them and in the arrangement of their successive layers the sediments reflect what has happened in the waters above them and on the surrounding lands. The dramatic and the catastrophic in earth history have left their trace in the sediments—the outpouring of volcanoes, the advance and retreat of the ice, the searing aridity of desert lands, the sweeping destruction of floods.¹ - Rachel Carson

My work stems from a strong interest in nature and landscape. The suite of drawings that constitute my thesis exhibition is titled *Sift* and is influenced by my experiences in nature, most recently a five-day hike along the Lagavegur Trail in Iceland. This hike exposed me to a variety of different terrains and despite walking in the middle of summer, my first day of hiking was through a blustery and wet storm across snow caps and obsidian fields. It was visually confusing as the ground and sky melded with one another; looking down provided the clearest vantage point for me to understand the terrain. Everywhere I looked I was witnessing traces of the wind, the precipitation, along with the erosion that results from these ongoing geological processes.

Sift recalls my hike through this landscape that was occasionally hazy, while at other times was absolutely clear, providing the landscape with an ever-shifting identity. Each drawing represents a process of trying to understand and re-create the way that sediment settles and deposits on snow fields after a season of storms. The drawings are thus grounded in a process of recollection together with a material and process-based exploration.

Sediment highlights the relief qualities of snow banks along the Lagavegur Trail. It shows the surface texture of snow which shifts based on the type of snow that has most recently fallen, the snow's granularity, as well as the surface patterns developed by the wind. In *The Sea Around Us*, conservationist Rachel Carson defines sediment and the sedimentation process:

Volcanic dust, blown perhaps halfway around the earth in the upper atmosphere, comes eventually to rest on the oceans, drifts in the currents, becomes waterlogged, and sinks. Sands

¹ Carson 76

from coastal deserts are carried seaward on offshore winds, fall to the sea, and sink. Gravel, pebbles, small boulders, and shells are carried by icebergs and drift ice, to be released to the water when the ice melts. Fragments of iron, nickel, and other meteoric debris that enter the earth's atmosphere over the sea—these, too, become flakes of the great snowfall...²

No surface is completely free of sediment, and it becomes embedded in layers after each snowfall.

I have titled this body of work *Sift* because the drawings are made through the act of sifting through matter. The results of this action appear to be atmospheric. The process of making the drawings consists of a method of mixing, pouring, evaporation, and allowing material to shift and settle. This method of working with materials can be repeated endlessly since there is not a firm "end point" as I try to get toward the granule of memory of my experience walking through this landscape and watching the landscape shift because of the weather. My motivation in making this work in this way is that the drawings as I make them are continually shifting, just like memory. My interest in large-scale natural, physical events and environmental memory, along with my attempts to recreate these experiences, is my way of negotiating the sublime. I acknowledge this as a Romantic gesture.

² Carson 76



(fig. 1) Sarah Kernohan. Sift 29, 2014

Process

My drawings are spatially ambiguous. They evoke landscape and geological processes. The drawings are made by sifting, pouring, and allowing matter to settle, which mimic the sedimentation process. Carson describes the sedimentation process as a "long snowfall"³:

We may think of the abyssal snowstorm in terms of a bleak and blizzard-ridden arctic tundra. Long days of storm visit this place, when driving snow fills the air; then a lull comes in the blizzard, and the snowfall is light. In the snowfall of the sediments, also, there is an alternation of light and heavy falls. The heavy falls correspond to the periods of mountain building on the continents... In the drifting sediments on the floor of the ocean we see the work of the 'winds,' which may be the deep ocean currents, distributing the sediments according to laws of their own, not as yet grasped by human minds.⁴

Each drawing is made with mixtures of graphite, water and vinegar, which is poured onto the surface of large sheets of mylar. I do not start with an image in mind, rather I respond to the material as they are layered from one pour to the next. Occasionally I start with darker washes, which are swept away by subsequent pours. This process takes time. I work wet, and usually in one session, but occasionally will add another wash on top of a previous day's drawing to see if I can create another shift in how the material has settled. Like sediment that has settled on the landscape after the rush of a flood, graphite becomes embedded into the surface of the paper. Other times the graphite is washed away, like sediment after a heavy rainfall. As a result, the drawings are atmospheric.

This process can be done over and over again, each result being different. Each drawing recalls a previous drawing. The drawings recall features and atmospheric events that I have seen in the landscape. These features can be recalled on a macro and on a micro level: the drawings can both harken back to the snowy landscapes that I walked through in Iceland and allude to patterns on the surfaces of stones or other objects that I have picked up in Iceland and on other trips. My drawings are continuous surfaces—visual fields—which can be observed at full range and at close proximity. The process of making the work together with the projection of memory (mine and that of the viewer) plays key roles in the construction

³ Carson 79

⁴ Carson 79-80

and in the encounter with the work. Individually, we make sense of the world based on our own experiences. This familiarity that allows for these associations to emerge as I make the drawings is developed by physically engaging with my materials as well as the places that I visit. The memories I have of landscapes from different places that I have visited, or have looked at in photographs or in satellite imagery, have a strong influence on the associations that I make when I view something for the first time. By navigating a space on foot and through the act of drawing, I am able to call upon these associations to make sense of what I am encountering in the landscape or on the surface of my paper.



(fig. 2) Sarah Kernohan, In-studio photo of drawing in process, 2015.

Grappling with Romanticism

My disposition as an artist can be characterized as Romantic as it is based in a strong interest and attraction to the natural world, toward the landscape and objects within it. I find myself constantly attracted to the surface qualities of natural objects, exploring and learning what I can about natural phenomena and geological processes. I choose to work with imagery from these sources, and approach the landscape with a sense of wonder, reverence, awe, and mystery. I surround myself with objects that I collect from the landscape during my hikes and other trips. This act of collecting and recalling is a manifestation of my sentimental relation to nature.⁵

In the late eighteenth century, Frederick Schiller noted that sentimental longing can be aroused by both art and nature and that we as humans are estranged as nature. Deniz Tekiner has summarized

Schiller's thoughts:

[Schiller] asserts that the sensual experience of the intrinsic beauty and harmony of nature, to the extent people can still experience it, can provoke people to become self-conscious of being estranged from nature, and in turn, also become self-conscious of being estranged from their own sensuality, their capacities to fully experience beauty. Further, the beauty of nature provokes an emotional longing to overcome these estrangements. Schiller calls this self-consciousness of estrangement and longing a "sentimental" experience of nature, an experience unique to modern people. ... Sentimental longing seeks to overcome the alienation of nature and, in effect, to recover a lost sense of mythical participation in nature's processes. Sentimental longing seeks the fulfilment of the human spirit in the re-enchantment of life.⁶

Tekiner then maintains that the artist is capable of evoking sentimental longing as well as the resolution of sentimental longing: "Aesthetics evoke feelings of wonder, reverence, awe... It thus holds forth the promise of the human atonement with nature and divinity, and the re-enchantment of the world, in the resolution of sentimental longing."⁷

Despite the passing of nearly two hundred years and major technological advances, Romanticism persists as a disposition and attitude towards the world. Timothy Morton, an academic who writes about

object-oriented ontology at Rice University, argues that we are still in the Romantic period because

⁵ As identified by Tekiner 14.

⁶ Tekiner 14

⁷ Tekiner 15, 18

various circumstances that came to light two hundred years ago are still around today, despite major technological advances.⁸ Tekiner's definition of Romanticism resonates:

... a critique of the disenchantment and the rationalization of the modern world, of the alienation of nature, and of the subordination of individuals to an emerging collective mechanical life. [Romantic works of art] also comprise a prescription for ameliorating these conditions by evoking a heightened sense of spiritual realities and of connectedness to nature.⁹

Today we still grapple with how technology has consumed such a large part of our personal and work environments. Additionally, climate change and environmentalist movements continue to draw our attention to the natural world, highlighting its fragility and the permanent changes that have been made to the landscape through resource extraction and habitation. Despite criticism and calls for objectivity, artists and writers have been responding to these conditions since the nineteenth century, by directly addressing the environment and making it the subject of their work, with the goal of re-enchanting the natural world and drawing attention to it.

⁸ Romanticism arose at the same time as the emergence of industrial capitalism, consumerism as an emerging subjective ideological response to capitalism, and environmentalism as an emerging political response to consumerism, capitalism, and industry.

⁹ Tekiner 6

A Mass of Extractions and Captured Impressions

I look to Roni Horn for her sensitive approach to landscape and memory. Horn has been making work in response to her understanding and experiences of the landscape in Iceland since her first visit in the 1970s. Her works are a series of translations of her experience of a place and what that landscape is to her. She has produced a series of artist books titled To Place that document her experience of Iceland's landscape. The project is an 'Icelandic encyclopaedia', referring (with a degree of humour) to a kind of publication whose very job is to provide what Horn has called 'a collection of knowledge'.¹⁰ It functions as an archive, yet each book focuses on different elements of the landscape:

The first volumes of *To Place* gather information and images, and indeed archive some of the most notable elements of the Icelandic landscape, but the suggestion is that each volume of photographs is always partial, always fragmentary, and will never capture the full identity of Iceland. The images in *Lava* are emblematic of the project as a whole: Iceland can only be represented in fragments, through luxurious debris that is debris nonetheless. What accumulates is a mass of extractions, rather than a slowly unfolding vision of any stable totality, a progression towards incompletion. To Place is not only a fragmentary but a fluid encyclopedia, its volumes like new tributaries joining a long river and each new volume changes the identity of the whole by inflecting the memory of those proceeding it.¹¹

The entire collection of books constructs a narrative and draws the viewer into Horn's understanding of these places. Bluff Life, for example, focuses on small drawings of objects that Roni Horn has collected from the landscape such as rocks, shells, and pieces of lava.

My drawings provide a framework for me to describe and share certain experiences and articulate modes of understanding the landscapes that I have encountered. Like Roni Horn's extended study of Iceland, I am working with portions of experiences rather than a packaged experience. This is partially a result of working from memory that includes my experiences of the landscape. I also have a collection of photographs that I took during my hike, which I refer to occasionally as aides-mémoires, rather than as source images. All of this material comes together as elements of a landscape eroded by memory and my own failure to identify it precisely, instead of identifying unique landscape features by name or location.

¹⁰ Godfrey 935 ¹¹ Godfrey 937

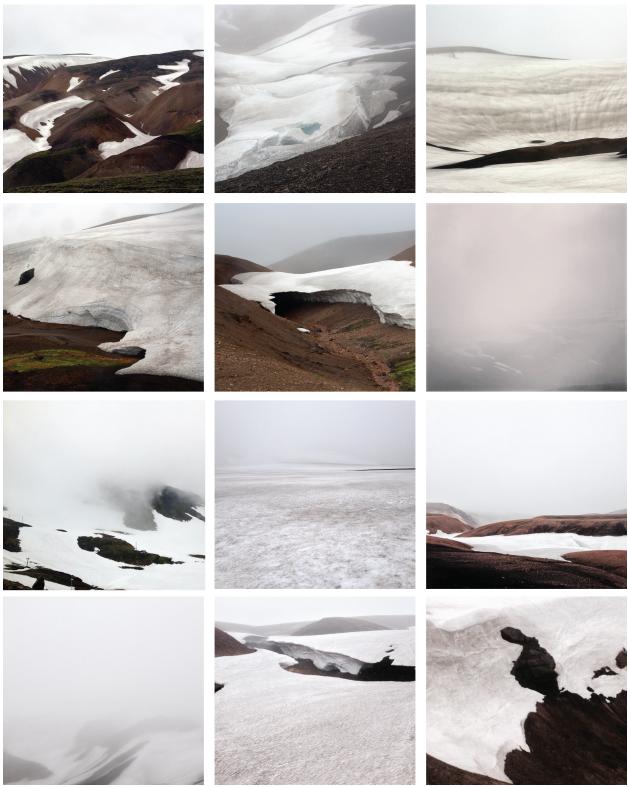
In much of her work, Horn focuses on surfaces: of materials and textures of objects. Horn describes Iceland as a reflecting pool: "My image of Iceland as a reflecting pool is the idea of using nature as mirror and measure. It's an understanding of oneself through a knowledge of what real, not imposed, limitations are."¹² Curator Mark Godfrey describes how this metaphor of Iceland is manifest in the way Horn addresses surfaces:

Horn develops her concept of Iceland as a reflecting pool most powerfully in the presentation of blank surfaces. Faces and rocks act as these surfaces and most recently in *Doubt Box*, water has fulfilled this role. Stilled by the act of photography, the glacial river loses its fluidity and the silvery, infinitely-creased skin of water takes on new identities. Water seems to thicken even as it ripples and crests, and all sense of scale and of our orientation to the image is lost: each photograph becomes a landscape for the imagination to explore. As readers look at these images, and the repeated surfaces in Horn's other books, they begin to project their own thoughts. The books become the desert in which they find 'who they are', mirrors which they look into to discover their own feelings and ideas.¹³



(fig. 3) Roni Horn. Bluff Life. 1982.

¹² Godfrey 949
¹³ Godfrey 949



(fig. 4) Sarah Kernohan, Lagavegur Trail travel documentation photos, 2014.

Roni Horn's book works are spaces for the individual to project their own experiences of landscape, as are my drawings. While making the drawings I use them as spaces for the projection of memory for myself, and I also invite the viewer to do the same. The journal entries I wrote during my hike focus on how elements of the landscape trail off due to erosive or meteorological factors that obscure large features of the landscape:

A lot of our walking vesterday and today has been through the clouds—on top of ice caps... and I've been struck by the patterns at the edges of the snow drifts- and how they simulate rock faces-texturally-mostly because of how they respond to erosion-wind, etc. The snow functions as a visual level as it occasionally poses as the sky—bits of the landscape ripped out, exposing the rocky areas around it. I was thinking of them as scabs on the landscape—fitting scars made by erosive forces (falling/running water)—preventing further damage and then later causing more.¹⁴

My drawing process allows me to imagine that these forms are at work within my drawings and for me to demonstrate that to others. While the drawings are ambiguous in form, my narrative, along with the experience that the viewer can bring to the work, also feed into the comprehension, thus the viewer is able to project their own experiences onto the work.

Impressions and the projection of memory are important in the viewing of my drawings. Roger

Caillois, the French intellectual and poet who wrote about the imagination in the 1970s, described a long-

standing tradition of rock collection and appreciation. He explained how people become entranced with

rocks because of their inherent beauty and the insights that would be gained from the activity of looking

closely at these objects:

...the strange shape or pattern of a gnarled root, a rock, a veined or perforated stone. Such objects may resemble a mountain, a chasm, a cave. They reduce space; they condense time. They are the object of prolonged reverie, meditation, and self-hypnosis, and a path to ecstasy and a means of communication with the Real World.¹⁵

This links Caillois's description of the emotions evoked by the sublime to the experience of wonder. He

writes:

At such moments it seems to me that I see why these images exert such a powerful fascination over the mind; I seem to detect the underlying reasons for the unwearying and irrational zeal that

 ¹⁴ Kernohan, Journal entry July 3 2014
 ¹⁵ Caillois 12

makes man give a meaning to all appearances devoid of it, to look for parallels everywhere, and to create them where they do not already exist. I see the origin of the irresistible attraction of metaphor and analogy, the explanation of our strange and permanent need to find similarities in things. I can scarcely refrain from suspecting some ancient, diffused magnetism; a call from the centre of things; a dim, almost lost memory, or perhaps a presentiment, pointless in so puny a being, or a universal syntax.¹⁶

Caillois points out that stones—if you let them—can be a wellspring for the imagination even if likenesses can be farfetched. I am working from memory in my work, allowing the materials that I am using to recall and conjure what I have seen before.

Memory, Embodiment, and Ambiguity

I am not interested in re-creating what I have seen on my hike. Part of my research process involves collecting materials from the landscape and taking photographs while I travel. This collection is part of what I use to tell the story of my experiences.¹⁷ This collection also has a formal aesthetic that seeps into my production.

One element of this collection is sharply focused on atmospheric events. This includes photographs of the landscape where the division between land and sky is blurred, and the fog is visibly dense. Formally, I look to the later paintings of J.M.W. Turner, which break from representation of the landscape to focus on atmosphere and atmospheric events. Curator and art historian Jeremy Lewison noted that Turner apparently said: "Atmosphere is my style... and indistinctness is my fault,' seeing a positive virtue in the imprecision of his compositions. Though sensitive to atmospheric incidents, which he noted in his sketchbooks, he executed his paintings in the studio from memory."¹⁸

¹⁶ Caillois 103-4

¹⁷ This notion has is informed by Susan Stewart's writings about how the building of personal collections constructs a personal narrative in On Longing.

¹⁸ Lewison 112



(fig.5) J. M. W. Turner. Storm Clouds at Sea, c.1820-30.

Because Turner was continually collecting and processing the landscapes that he encountered

through sketching, he was able to work loosely, and allowed the atmosphere to take precedence. Turner's

late watercolours from the 1840s describe the atmosphere around bodies of water and mountains. These

paintings evoke a landscape rather than depict it:

The relation to experience is fanciful, metaphorical: the handling is brutal and summary... The forms hang magically on the paper as if in space; the colors are held in vibrant tension, incandescent as if with real evening light. But it is the paint, or rather the whole technical repertory and its property of metaphoric evocation (not the beauty-spot supposedly evoked) which are so real to us.¹⁹

By working loosely, and using obscurity and ambiguity as formal elements,²⁰ the atmosphere became the embodiment of landscape in Turner's paintings.

¹⁹ Gowing 32 ²⁰ Lewison 29

A similar disorientation happens when hiking in a landscape without trees, which are usually markers of distance. My drawings recount that spatial ambiguity, disorientation, and the sense of wonder that I felt as I was hiking. They lack a horizon, a sense of concrete depth, and perspective. While navigating a space like this, it is difficult to determine the distance that has been travelled on foot since spatial markers are obscured because of the elements. Over time, and through the act of physically navigating a space, it is possible to develop an understanding and overcome the confusion of that space, eventually bringing about a familiarity. Ambiguity is embraced. Other times, large landscape elements such as mountain peaks or glaciers can feel as though they are following you—they slightly shift, yet stay in your field of vision for days unless the weather obscures them.

I want to create work that engulfs the viewer on a physical level, as well as a sensory level where it is difficult to judge what one is looking at. I first encountered this feeling when viewing Claude Monet's Water Lilies. Lewison describes how the requirements to view work such as this demands embodied vision. Monet's paintings challenge the viewer because they are spatially ambiguous. His paintings take on qualities that are usually associated with the sublime to create a sense of engulfment that lacks the sense of endangerment usually affiliated with that term:

Perception of the painting required embodied vision, a projection of the body to inhabit the depicted space, interrogate and comprehend it in a manner that mirrored contemporary phenomenological thinking... Verticality, horizontality and depth were to be explored by projection.²¹

This embodied vision pulls a viewer into Monet's *Water Lilies*. There is a sense of being surrounded, falling in, that is usually associated with the sublime. Like Turner's paintings of Swiss lakes, the sublime is not present as a fearful sensation. "These renderings of the infinite, boundless, disorientating and absorptive are manifestations of the sublime. As the viewer projects himself into the painting, his sense of self is dissolved and he is enveloped in the watery depths."²² This ambiguity is achieved because *Water Lilies* is painted from multiple points of view, creating visual confusion because "...distance between

²¹ Lewison 53 ²² Lewison 57

clusters is unverifiable, uncertain, and reflection is difficult to differentiate from actual object."²³ What is left is an impression:

An impression is more or less fleeting; it is what is *left behind* because the scene has disappeared or changed. Knowledge can coexist with the known; and impression, by contrast, survives alone. However intensely and empirically observed at the moment, an impression later becomes, like a memory, impossible to verify...²⁴

The qualities of obscurity, the infinite, and disorientation evoke the emotional response of the sublime.

I enhance this disorientation and sense of engulfment by installing my drawings as a panorama. The goal is to multiply disorientation experientially across multiple drawings. Like Monet's paintings, the drawings are spatially ambiguous. Hung in multiples and in a suite, they do not gain clarity. To be comprehended, they require embodied vision.

Direct Impressions

While my drawings are made through a process of sedimentation, other artists have evoked

landscape through direct means by working directly with the landscape while continuing to engage with

the process of drawing. Michelle Stuart has created a series of monumental field drawings that are direct

impressions of the earth. Her art is about places, as well as memory.²⁵ She works site-specifically.

First, Stuart chooses a site that has some archetypal quality that appeals to her. Working outdoors when possible, she collects dirt, sand, rocks from exposed strata and impresses them into long scrolls of muslin-backed rag paper. Then she grinds the larger stones down with a pestle rock, and finally she polishes the whole with the palm and side of her hand until it reaches a skin-like sheen, a warm, dense glow. The result is a very low relief, a microcosmic topography of peaks and valleys which, when confronted on a long scroll, conveys the experience of walking across a huge barren space.²⁶

The resulting drawings are surfaces that fill the entire field of vision of the viewer. They can be looked at

from varying distances and each point of view offers a different point of view: "close up... a porous

²³ Lewison 58

²⁴ Dyer 426

²⁵ Graves and Lippard 16

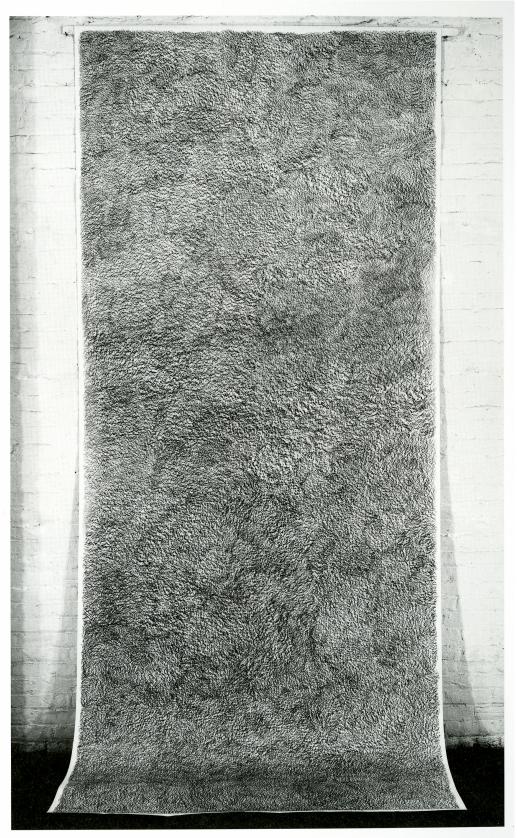
²⁶ Graves and Lippard 16

matrix or, from a distance, as a black cloud."²⁷ Because of the variety of tone that is inherent to each individual pigment, "...each topography has its own specific atmosphere. At the same time they are all generally cosmic fields, where particles hover in several layers, the sky as well as the earth."²⁸ This process and the resulting drawing allow room for an image to be projected onto it. "The frottage technique strategically bypasse[s] mimetic representation and authorial expression, generating marks beyond the artist's immediate control."²⁹ While the drawings in *Sift* attempt to re-create geological events and processes, Stuart's are direct recordings of multiple processes: the time that she has taken directly working with the landscape and the landscape processes that are visible on the surface that Stuart is working on as well as the time that she has spent in this landscape. Stuart's drawings could be described as ground; they take on the colour of the earth that she is using to make the drawing or that of the graphite that she has transported to the site with her.

I have chosen to work with graphite because of its availability, versatility and ability to mimic other sediments, and how well it carries in wet media. I respond to the quality of the marks made with the first pour and work into and around this first deposit. Each pour shifts material around the paper—and ridges in the floor's surface occasionally create folds like ripples of reflected light on water. The topography of the studio floor becomes part of the drawing because of its strong influence on the sedimentation of the drawings. I let the drawings settle and sift into place as I am often unable to see the final result until the drawing has dried.

 ²⁷ Alloway 65
 ²⁸ Graves and Lippard 16

²⁹ Stuart 13



(fig. 6) Michelle Stuart. #5 Moray Hill, NY. 1973.

Captured Impressions

Dove Allouche has a strong interest in photographic history as well as the process of drawing, and has melded the two. He uses materials that eat away the emulsion and do the drawing, allowing the process to dictate the outcome of his drawings. He has collaborated with chemists to develop photographic emulsions that he uses as drawing material. In some works, such as *Les Granulations*, he looked at some of the first images of the solar surface, which were published in the first solar atlas, *Atlas de photographies solaires* (1904),³⁰ by Jules Jannsen. In an interview that describes his working processes, Allouche explains that:

Janssen understood that it was granulation that produced sunlight, and that was what he wanted to photograph. The black spots seen in the images indicate an absence of granulation.³¹ To build these drawings, Dove Allouche collaborated with Jean-Louis Marignier (a scientist at CNRS) on research into physautotypes, starting with the conceit that alcohol and lavender could create a photosensitive emulsion based on records by Niece and Daguerre.³²

It is through the use of materials that mimic the structure of the original photographs that he is able to create an image that successfully gets closer to the essence of his subject matter, without resorting to reproducing the image exactly through drawing. In other works, he has made his own photographic emulsion, and "put[s] spores known for their voracity on a photographic plate. They eat away the emulsion and do the drawing... on the plate itself placed in a Petri dish. Then [Allouche fixes] the plate and draw[s] on it."³³ The resulting works look at landscape elements through a semi-detached system. He describes his drawings as apparitions: "My drawings are like a mode of apparition—the photographic equivalent would be a double exposure. Unlike photographic paper, drawing paper can incorporate images into its fibres by absorbing the materials used. The image appears as a result of this embedding."³⁴ The process is alchemical:

³⁰ Pigaet and Allouche 40

³¹ Pigaet and Allouche 40

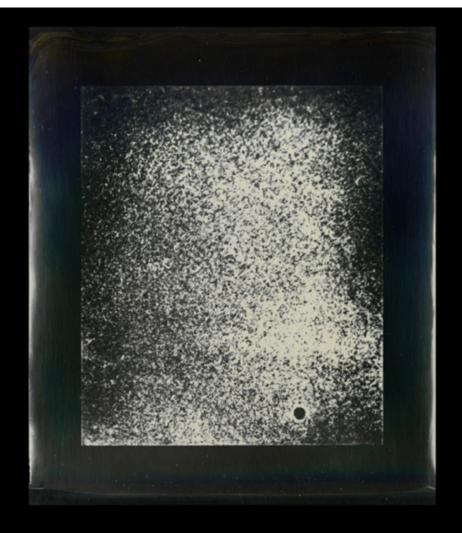
³² Pigaet and Allouche 40

³³ Pigaet and Allouche 40

³⁴ Pigaet and Allouche 41

As I took back drawing, I abandoned ink and graphite pencil for metallic powders, lamp-blacks and ethanol. The question of representation became secondary: the subject substitute[s] itself during the elaboration of an emulsion sensitive to the air, making the drawing evolve through evaporation and oxidation.³⁵

As I started to develop the drawings in *Sift*, I was looking to remove my hand as best I could from my work so that I could lessen my control on the drawing, and have as a result relinquished control on the outcome of my drawings. Like Dove Allouche's drawings, mine are apparitions, the result of a physical and chemical process that evoke a specific process. While Allouche's process is photographic, mine is more closely related to geological processes.



(fig. 7) Dove Allouche. Granulation_6, 2013

³⁵ Dove Allouche.

Activating Awareness

The drawings in *Sift* act as a space for time-travel as well as memory. Poet and critic Susan Stewart describes collections as a place where memories as well as nostalgia are able to sit. These drawings are a collection like the objects I gathered on my hikes and the photographs that I took. The drawings are a way for me to re-connect and remember my experiences in nature, and as such they are a vehicle for sentimental longing. Making the drawings allows me to build a connection to nature and to study it more closely. To work with landscape and memory on this level is a nostalgic as well as a powerfully Romantic exercise. To return to Tekiner, Romantic works of art:

...are not expressions of complacency, but are forms of critical resistance to social forces of spiritual and psychological repression. The aesthetic of the sublime, which is implicated in Abstract Expressionism and earthwork art as well as in Romantic art, is an expression of sentimental longing to apprehend an ideal. It expresses a frustrated yearning to overcome alienation and harmonize the self with nature and spirit. As a representation of a numinous and ineffable order or spiritual infinitude, it always seems to evade complete apprehension. It does not represent realized ideal, but forever reaches for an elusive goal which it cannot fully attain.³⁶

Making drawings based on my experiences of landscape is a political act. The politics of attention draws focus onto the world that is often neglected around us. Instead of running away from the elements, the drawings in *Sift* attempt to draw one's attention to the world and to look for commonalities from personal experience to make sense of what is presented. Curator Chris Fite-Wassilak describes how paying

attention to small details is a revolutionary act:

Built into the curious reworkings of the commonplace... is the question of why we do things the way we do. Each of these attempts is its own quiet revolution, an alteration of the world in miniature. Each suggests—humbly, softly—that it is possible to change the way in which we perceive and interact, by activating our awareness of ourselves and our environment. This quiet revolution is a shift, one that points to the possibility inherent in everyday objects and relationships, one that is not external or endlessly awaited, but that is already around us.³⁷

Sift is a body of work that is based on memory, memory recall of natural imagery, and a direct approach

to the landscape that I approach with a sense of wonder, reverence, awe and mystery. Other artists work

with recollections of the landscape either through recalling it and documentation (Horn), direct

³⁶ Tekiner 105

³⁷ Fite-Wassilak 7

impressions from the earth (Stuart), or by doing their best to replicate it (Allouche). They are also seeking that resolution of sentimental longing. I continue sifting my way forward, and hope that my experiences and these explorations will allow me to understand the natural world on a closer level.



(fig. 8) Sarah Kernohan. Sift, Installation view, 2015



(fig. 9) Sarah Kernohan. Sift, Installation detail, 2015.



(fig. 10) Sarah Kernohan. Sift, Installation detail, 2015.



(fig. 11) Sarah Kernohan. Sift, Installation detail, 2015.

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