

12-2006

Landscape and Slowing

Adrienne Raxter

Clemson University, araxter@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses

 Part of the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Raxter, Adrienne, "Landscape and Slowing" (2006). *All Theses*. 55.

https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/55

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

LANDSCAPE AND SLOWING

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Arts

by
Adrienne Brook Raxter
December 2006

Accepted by:
Heidi Jensen, Committee Chair
David Detrich
Sydney Cross

ABSTRACT

The landscape becomes an avenue to explore and express the process of looking, observing, finding, and gathering. I turn to the landscape to find inspiration and motivation that provokes contemplation and questions of the world around us. My work functions as an extension of my experiences, observations, and as a record of thoughts gathered from fleeting elements. The significance of the images I draw is directly tied to my quest of contemplating, understanding and questioning processes in life and how time and change leaves its mark on objects. I focus on my everyday familiar surroundings, because our daily encounters and repetitious routines provide a constant source of changes that take place. The objects and forms reveal the world around me, my experience with perception, and the process of creating the work. These ideas focus directly on perceiving visual stimulation in our environment, what become a record of that experience, and the impact of time.

The paintings become a landscape and environment in which to place and create forms to be discovered. I use the process of archaeology as a metaphor to describe my creative process and investigation of the work. The role of time is defined in the work by depicting ephemeral experiences, transformative surface and forms, and a sense of the artist's hand. The body of work is about building images that can challenge viewers' relationship with patience, perception, and time. Our experience with flashing visual images, video, television, and computers, is over-stimulating our senses, thus fatiguing our receptivity. My engagement with sensory perception, evidence of change, slowing experience, and careful observation is used to question how today's society is focused on speed and urgency in which information is received and experienced.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my friends and family, for their endless support and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors, Tom Dimond and Heidi Jensen, for all their support and guidance. In addition, I would like to thank the other members on my committee, David Detrich and Sydney Cross, for their patience and direction into helping me clarify and distill my thoughts.

I would like to thank the Visual Arts Faculty for giving me this opportunity to be a part of the Clemson University Art Department.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, sister, and Jason, for their constant love and support, without them I would be a mess.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF IMAGES.....	v
LANDSCAPE AND SLOWING	1
Role of Time	1
Looking into the Landscape	6
Process	9
Conclusion.....	10
BIBLIOGRAPHY	11

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure		Page
1.1	Metamorphose	12
1.2	Detail (Metamorphose).....	12
1.3	Transitory Matter	13
1.4	Detail (Transitory Matter)	13
1.5	It is my place.....	14
1.6	The markers are clear	14
1.7	These are the things.....	15
1.8	Ravening.....	15
1.9	Clearing Begins.....	16

LANDSCAPE AND SLOWING

As artists we are trained to be observers, scanning our surroundings, noticing and interpreting surface, form, color, and relationships. The material landscape becomes an avenue to explore and express the process of looking, observing, finding, and gathering. My work functions as an extension of my experiences and observations. These instances occur upon my recognition of ephemeral moments of change. The moments are remembered and recorded through a collection of objects and observations drawn from the landscape. The significance of the images I draw is directly tied to my quest of contemplating, understanding and questioning processes in life and how time and change leaves its mark on objects. The forms become symbolic elements in representing my fascination and engagement with dropped or displaced parts, like an opened pod or moldered leaf lying on the ground; objects that embody time. My work tries to make still what is fleeting and uncontrolled, namely within the environment. The objects and forms function in dialogue to reveal the world around me, my experience with perception, and the process of creating the work. The ideas focus directly on perceiving visual stimulation in our environment, what become a record of experience, and the impact of time.

Role of Time

The role of time is defined by looking at ephemeral experiences, transformative surface and forms, and establishing a sense of the artist's hand. My interaction with the landscape informs the conscious accumulation of evidence from my experiences. My gravitation is towards objects that show evidence of change. The objects are specific to the

natural world such as red berries, large leaves, and a rotted root, and reflect my search to understand the uncontrolled and constantly changing aspects in life, and particular to those uncontrolled events that occur in the landscape. To express this time continuum, I use found objects that reveal surface transformation, age, weather and decay. I am drawn to their spent nature of life, weathered surface and fragile state of lifeless energy. When closely observing a weathered surface, decayed object, or fossilized material, it can question an awareness of your own place within the context of time and history. It is found that “the representation of time through used and worn materials is an example of a symbol or sign, know specifically as an index.” (Mc Daniel Robertson, 40) It raises questions about the passing of time that occurs each day in our own lives, and possibly our relevance within this continuity; “learning about the various guises of time in history’s broad sweep leads us into a broader perspective of the inevitability of change.” (McDaniel Robertson, 46) It seems that we are constantly searching into the past to understand the present, while in our present we are constantly searching to create the future. I am pulling bits and pieces out of this continuity to better understand and slow down what is fugitive.

It is understood that the visual perception of our surroundings differs from person to person. However, I am giving the viewer the select experience of seeing what I am visually stimulated by in my own landscape and studio practice. I focus on using source material and evidential processes, such as decayed objects and distinct mark making, to locate the role of time as a contemplative experience.

It is in my perception, *becoming aware of through the senses*, which leads to question our understanding of the world around us and to encounter unique phenomena. That is, to begin to understand why things exist, how and why they function, and how things are controlled and not controlled. The contemplative experience offers an avenue to

understanding a passing of time and sense of history. The passing of time is inevitable and unpredictable, and will always conduct change, whether linear, cyclical, or simultaneous.

The process of slowing is evident in my engagement and experience with the work as it transforms time, being built up, covered up, scraped away, and layered. The paintings become a landscape and a physical environment in which to place and create forms to be discovered. A horizontal orientation references a horizon, creating an above and below, those surroundings which are seen by the eye and that which is drawn from memory of the surface below. Through layering information, the viewer is allowed to search and find, as subtle nuances of form are buried and revealed as the image is scanned. I use the process of archaeology as a metaphor to describe this investigation of the work and my creative process. The excavating process informs the viewers experience and observation that takes place in a moment of time. During creation, I am constructing layers and imbedding images that are revealed or covered up; while other times, I am scraping and pulling material away to reveal the surface below. The large scale format enables me to create a new experience for the viewer to walk into. The environment of the painting is characterized by atmospheric ambiguity, a cross-section of layers, or looking down through shallow veils. As I work in one area and move to another, far or close, quickly or slowly, the viewer is also following this experience. The subject and form are allowed to float in and out, one to the next; with differing spatial planes within the whole. The viewer is invited into deep space and brought back to closer surface, jumping near and far. In *Clearing Begins*, flat, abstracted contours of a Purple Shamrock are surrounded by deep purples and browns to accentuate dense space and relate to a heavily wooded area that is compact and complex. As the forms move from left to right, more space is left open around the shapes as lighter value begins to surround them, moving into an openness and void. Here, soft whites and yellows create luminous space,

amplifying the feeling of air and weightless matter. As you move down toward the horizon, the color shifts through atmospheric agitation into a ground of umbers and siennas, as if moving below the surface into dirt and rock. This type of space creates a subtle contrast between flat and deep space that moves the viewer's eye while scanning the work and begins to construct a place or space that directly connects to experiencing the landscape. This role permits contrasting large gestural brushwork and flattened simplification with tight rendering and delicate gradations of line, value, and color. Looking at the work of artist Terrance La Noue has supported my understanding of creating space, surface, and experiences in the paintings. In the book Terrance La Noue, writer Dore Ashton describes a recent work titled *Winterkill: Sunset*:

“This patently Expressionist vision is filled with nongeometric ambiguities and bursts of light that expand both within the depths of the painting and on its surface. There are many small incidents here, drawing the eye from corner to corner and up and down, but the overwhelming volatility of mood is the primary experience. This is landscape, obviously, but with a curious perspective that forces the eye to adjust to a vertical picture plane on the left and to a horizontal plane on the right, bound by coursing serpentine lines that overcome its limits. . . . The viewer is detained, delayed, forced to consider surfaces and textures minutely. An element of time is successfully enacted. From now on, La Noue commands a vocabulary of spatial inversions and extrapolations that definitely establishes his fundamentally stratified, archeological point of view.” (Ashton, 49)

In comparison, my paintings can be experienced from a distance, but through the use of subtle, sensuous, nuanced surface quality, the viewer is drawn near for close and intimate observation. This role of microcosm/macrocosm supports my aesthetic during the creation process, and presents landscape and natural structures from extreme distance to

specific embedding within a finite area. My intention is to provide an experience of lyrical movement, so that the viewer begins to slow down the process of looking and visual attention that. With the increase of information produced in video, I become more aware and appreciative of the hand and labor provided in the pieces made for the viewer to experience. I feel it is important to re-sensitize the viewer to physical experience and interaction that is lost from a flattened surface of a projected image. The viewer is more detached from a mediated device of projection. The areas where mark and subtle layers are prominent is selective and used to support ideas of presence, spontaneity, the subconscious, gesture, and physical, tactile surface texture.

In perceiving contemporary society as quick paced, the work can alter and contrast the norm through direct observation and stillness of form. My engagement with sensory perception, evidence of change, slowing experience, and careful observation is used to question how today's society is focused on speed and urgency in which information is received and experienced. The body of work is about building images that can challenge viewers' relationship with patience, perception, and time. Today in electronic media, the abundance of images and speed in which they are received are created to control the manner in which visual senses are stimulated and shortened. Technological advancements are creating transmissions of flash images and information at a rapid speed in video, computers, and television. This type of stimulation is uncontrolled by the viewer and is expected to be visually and intellectually satisfying. Our experience with flashing visual images is over-stimulating our senses, thus fatiguing our receptivity.

Looking into the Landscape

Everyday, we perceive what surrounds us, from walking to our cars, driving to our destinations, taking walks, or looking out our windows. As we are engaged in daily routines, our surroundings may become unimportant and an unrecognizable blur. I focus on my everyday familiar surroundings, because our daily encounters and repetitious routines provide a constant source of changes that take place.

“That deeper rhythm of change, I can’t see other than in my home. That is why my home place is becoming more and more important to me. . . . What happened last year is going to come this year. I am fascinated by those processes that are happening in nature; all the time connected by the sun, light, the tide, growth.” (Rivers and Tides)

As we constantly scan and interact with our surroundings, there are moments of stimulus that are recognized or overlooked. Perceiving the landscape around me, I am drawn to such stimuli that are *something different, abnormal, peculiar, or not easily classified*. This visual stimulation may be triggered from a strange, unique, displaced object or event that is recognized in a particular moment.

“That is the way of understanding, seeing something you have never seen before that was always there but you were blind to.” (Rivers and Tides)

I am interested in retrieving the points of stimulation and providing the viewer with sensitivity to finding such visual differences. I am interested in selecting something that triggers a peculiarity in contrast to our recognizable and banal situations. Such materials may not be present three weeks, three months, or three years later. I reference the moment of encountering unique objects in the landscape by directly drawing from found berries, decayed leaves, opened pods, and surveying tape. I reference the encounter of changing activities in the environment by conveying a heavy downpour and clearing of land. Through

choosing to bring into close observation, I can begin to understand and engage in aspects of its presence, its beauty, and its peculiarity. It is a world where change is dynamic and constant, uncontrolled, unique and magnificent. It cannot be reproduced, recreated, or replicated by man, but only observed, modeled, or represented. It is an incredible world that exists without our making and thrives without our touch.

Andy Goldsworthy is an important influence to creating work with direct correlation to the natural landscape. Goldsworthy physically manipulates natural material like stone, leaves, mud, and ice to create site specific work in the landscape. His forms interact with natural forces and are temporal pieces affected by the constant change in nature. His approach to the work provides a visual experience with movement, change, transformation, ebb and flow, passing and following, presence and history. The work leaves evidence of his presence and interaction with nature.

“Each time I got to know the stone a bit more. It got higher each time, and it grew in proportion to my understanding of the stone. That is really what my art is trying to do, trying to understand the stone.” (Rivers and Tides)

I pull inspiration and motivation from the landscape; this produces work that seeks to understand natural material, forces, surface, and interactions that are colliding and ultimately provides insight into our relationship with nature.

I approach the paintings as a narrative, describing the perception of visual objects, revealing the time spent during observation and recording emotions inferred from the encounter. The narratives include the observational process of exploring surfaces to render and forms to abstract that create a contemplative experience. The abstracted imagery is used to support the larger concepts of experience, change, transformation, and irregularity. The collected objects are transformed, making the banal object, like a leaf, berry, or shamrock,

move away from familiarity and become unique and peculiar. The observation of natural materials found in the landscape is represented in a combination of naturalism, distortion, and simplification. This transformation provides a greater understanding of *how* we are looking at and locating associations between the forms, rather than *what* we are looking at. I use abstraction to take the viewer through my journey into clarity and representation of what I am observing. In *Metamorphose*, a decaying leaf is pushed into distortion to reference the crustaceous, creature like essence that intrigued me during a walk in the gardens. The abstract qualities achieved from this transformation create peculiar forms that move into associations with linear movement. Placed next to cellular forms, the images allow insight to interactions of change and growth. The extreme horizontal length becomes panoramic or scroll-like to establish linear progression, accentuating rhythmic movement and progression.

The process of transformation is also important to exploring natural abstraction. Using abstraction to create visual ambiguity allows the play of opposites and dichotomies that create a dialogue between imagery. The dialogue exhibits precision and ambiguity, chaos and control, strength and weakness, complexity and stillness, mechanical and free form. In the essay *The Self Similar* by Lisa Phillips, similarities are found in Terry Winters body of work:

“There is a continual play of opposites in Winter’s work: between outer and inner worlds; between clarity and obscurity; and between traditional and painterly expressiveness and postmodern strategies of appropriation and repetition . . . his unflagging respect for craftsmanship and relentless perfection of technique are rare among contemporary artists.”

“His unabashed sensuality and attention to process-to gesture and traces of the hand-give his work an undeniable tactile presence and ‘presentness’. “Though many references abound in his mixture of the found and imaginary, the recontextualized and purely invented, Winters

always returns to one basic impulse: the desire to form – to make paintings, drawings, and prints come into being.” (Phillips, 11)

Process

Evidence of my process is used as a way to exhibit evidence in the studio for the viewer to engage in. The processes of making as a part of the studio practice are unique to gestural mark, material manipulation, analyzing created forms, making intuitive responses to the surface and forms and constructing imagery. The work consists of the immediate abstract expression combined with controlled mark-making and interpretation of shapes. This process is driven by participating in conventions and traditions of drawing and painting. The association with tradition motivates and elevates my involvement with the presence of the artist’s hand and attention to craft. I feel that by elevating the sense of the hand, the work has a physical, tactile presence that is lost in mechanical modes of process.

The materials of my work range from oil paint, encaustic, paper, ink, and drawing media. The investigation of materials provides avenues of transformation. This process helps me build imagery that could not be created by the conscious hand or as an observation of reality. For example, in *It is my place* and *Clearing Begins*, the process of creating the drip mark became an integral focus for developing imagery. In *It is my place*, the drip mark is developed from “stroking an over saturated brush” (McEvelley, 74) onto the paper and letting the ink wash stream down the surface creating a network of drips. The function of this area is to portray the feeling of a heavy, pouring rain. The drip mark that once used in *Transitory Matter* and *Metamorphose* to express and signify the painting process and physical material is now turned into a “pictorial concept” of a natural force and material. Similarly, the drip process in *Clearing Begins* exhibits a horizontal drip mark that is revisited with

charcoal to accentuate the strata-like, slate rock formation that was once discovered in the early stages of development. This aspect of transforming a process and mark that was created “as a purely expressive gesture performed for its own sake” represents the flowing ink wash that “in effect *is*” the illusion that it represents. (McEvelley, 63)

In the book Pat Steir, Thomas McEvelley analyzes Steir’s oeuvre. In the essay Steir states:

“When I began making these paintings that show marks, I started with the idea of making a picture of the desire to make a picture. The mark would be the picture, that’s all, a kind of primitive picture of desire. (McEvelley, 65) I don’t think of these paintings as abstract. . . . These are not only drips of paint. They’re paintings of drips which form waterfall images: pictures. . . (Nor are) they realistic. . . I haven’t sat outdoors with a little brush, trying to create the illusion of a waterfall. The paint itself makes the picture. . . Gravity makes the image.” (McEvelley, 68)

The forms in my work are used to reference rather than depict an actual material. The result in the work exhibits bringing together disparate processes and imagery. Through my investigation of the work, the development reconciles this variation to the forms function and content.

The work attempts to situate our relationship and place relative to the aspects of the natural environment: change, time, matter, growth, decay, and flow. The work also situates my role with creating work relative to contemporary art world and in an increasing image driven culture. The work functions as a record of thoughts gathered from the fleeting elements. I turn to the landscape to gather inspiration and stimulus that provokes contemplation and questions of the world around us; as my studio practice is motivated by the act of producing and creating a pictorial surface to be explored.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ashton, Dore. Terrance La Noue. New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1992; p. 49.
- Kertess, Klaus; Phillips, Lisa. Terry Winters. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991; p. 11.
- Mc Daniel, Craig; Robertson, Jean. Themes of Contemporary Art. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005; p. 40,46.
- Mc Evilly, Thomas. Pat Steir. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1995; pp. 63-74.
- Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy working with time. Filmed by Thomas Ridelheimer. 2000. Videorecording. Burlington, VT : Docurama; New York: New York Video, 2004.



Figure 1.1 *Metamorphose*, Oil paint, encaustic, India ink, and drawing media on paper, 4' 4" x 12' 2006



Figure 1.2 Detail (*Metamorphose*)



Figure 1.3 *Transitory Matter*, Oil paint, gesso, India ink, drawing media, and silkscreen on paper, 3' 6" x 10' 6", 2006



Figure 1.4 Detail (*Transitory Matter*)



Figure 1.5 *It is my place*, Oil paint, encaustic, gesso, India ink, drawing media, and silkscreen on paper, 52" x 84", 2006



Figure 1.6 *The markers are clear*, Oil paint, gesso, drawing media, and silkscreen on paper, 52" x 97", 2006



Figure 1.7 *These are the things*, Oil paint, encaustic, drawing media, and silkscreen on paper, 52" x 35", 2006



Figure 1.8 *Ravens*, Oil paint, India ink, drawing media on paper, 52" x 40", 2006



Figure 1.9 *Clearing Begins*, Oil paint, India ink, drawing media, and silkscreen on paper, 52" x 85", 2006