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The In-Between

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THE IN-BETWEEN

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
Derrick Zane Logan
December 2011

Accepted by:
Anderson Wrangle, Committee Chair
Andrea Feeser
Christina Hung
ABSTRACT

This body of work explores my perception of the landscape. I traverse spaces that exist in the in-between. My work functions on a personal level in that I am seeking a reconnection with my surroundings through a physically intense interaction with the land. It is an attempt to reengage the land, to form knowledge, awareness, and a sense of belonging.

Through performance I explore transcendent potential within the landscape. These performances of slow walks through the landscape are documented through video. Viewing of the documentation grants points of projection for the viewer. The videos both engage and undermine how people tend to view land as a stage for transcendence and as a screen on to which they project desires to master territory.

The picturesque (a picture-like view characterized by variety, asymmetry, and temporality) becomes an access point through which I invite the viewer to consider the photographic image. I construct photographic tableaus that speak of exploration, a search for knowledge through consideration of space, and transcendence in the landscape experience. These images are presented as meditative experience.

When considered together, a dialogue between my videos and photographs creates a third critical space; once viewed, the information from the two methods becomes inseparable. To reach a conclusion the accumulated experiences must be acknowledged. Each offers a different mode of looking and interacting with the landscape, together and in unison they offer viewers the means to reflect on and re-evaluate their knowledge of landscape.
DEDICATION

This body of work and thesis is dedicated to Miranda Sawyer for her endless patience and support.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Art Department faculty at Clemson University for the immense contribution that each have made in my growth and development as an artist. I would like to give a special thanks to my advisor, Anderson Wrangle for his support, patience and contributions. I would also like to thank my committee members, Andrea Feeser and Christina Hung, for their guidance and critical feedback.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This body of work explores my perception of the landscape. I traverse spaces that exist in the in-between; areas that often act as physical or implied boundaries, simultaneously dividing and joining populations and landmarks. They make up the majority of the landscape yet go largely unrecognized until they are altered, repurposed, or destroyed, often leaving little evidence of their previous state. During the negotiation of the space I become a willing recipient to the environment's reciprocal interaction. This interplay allows for examination through means other than the visual and is an attempt to reconcile and expand my visual and cognitive perceptions of the space through physical engagement. After I consider this encounter I construct still photographic images and videos that attempt to illustrate my newfound perceptions and understandings of the space. These experiential performances and constructed tableaus are then offered to the viewer in order to communicate my accumulation of experience, exploration, and the reconciliation of perception and actuality. In the search for knowledge I attempt to forge a clear vision of how these spaces function for me physically and psychologically.
CHAPTER TWO

LAND

The application and designation of the word interstitial is transitive and applies to various segments of the work. However it all begins with the area in which I choose to interact. Through my exploration I seek out areas that exist in the in-between, lying silently in the periphery, subordinate to scenes with more intrinsic appeal or perceived value. These landscapes go largely unrecognized, as they are not typically associated with scenic views and do not conform to the standards of the picturesque. I have chosen to work in areas that are specific to my daily routines. My initial degree of interaction with these spaces is usually limited to fleeting moments, glimpses often taken while in a state of disengagement. They are situated between businesses and housing developments and in varying degrees of transition. The locations seem familiar and many people assume that we comprehend and understand the nature of these locations. This misinterpretation stems from our broken modes of interaction with the space around us. Theses spaces are disregarded because they don’t conform to our idealized expectations of landscape.

My work functions on a personal level in that I am seeking a reconnection with my surroundings through a physically intense interaction with the land. It is an attempt to reengage the land, to form knowledge, awareness, and a sense of belonging. I have a pervasive feeling of disconnection. The absence of a sense of belonging is a result of numerous relocations throughout life. Having not remained stationary for an extended time I have not formed a bond with any particular place or region. These feelings are furthered by a decreased reliance on and a lack of direct interaction with the land.
I am inspired by Ana Mendieta’s artworks that explore connection with land. Mendieta illustrated her desire for this connection stating, “I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette). I believe this to be a direct result of having been torn away from my homeland during my adolescence. I am overwhelmed by the feelings of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I reestablish the bonds that tie me to the universe” (Viso 109). Mendieta, in her Silueta Series, placed herself or a surrogate form into the landscape, exploring concepts including identity, body, death and rebirth, and ancestral heritage. When I insert myself into the landscape, I explore issues related to a transient life and search for a reconnection by using the land as a stage for figurative and metaphoric exploration.
CHAPTER THREE
PERFORMANCE

This segment of the work is based on my experiential performances in which I traverse through the landscape. The video documentation of the walks provides a lens to view the interaction that happens between my body, as physical object, and the interstitial space. I use video to document my performances because as a time-based medium it encourages my audience to identify with my physical experience. This level of engagement invokes a sense of empathy within the viewer that cannot be obtained through still photographs that more obviously reference time past. Susan Best reinforces this idea by saying that “film gives us a sense of being there, of actually experiencing the scene, thereby losing the tension between here and formerly, presence and absence, while photographs embody the illogical conjunction of the here and the formerly.” (Best 74).

The geography of our daily lives is filled with areas we expect we know. However, our understanding is incomplete at best. The sites I investigate rise to my attention because I find a feeling of displacement or disturbance attached to them. I do not scout a site before a performance. I see it as raw and uncharted territory that will unfold as I engage it. I do not map out specific routes prior to the performance because I want to maintain the immediacy of the experience. It is through the performance and image-making that my knowledge and perceptions are actually formed. I come into the space with a false vision and knowledge that is supplanted by the experience. My attitude before a performance is set largely by glancing or distanced observation. My unfamiliarity with the space is integral in shaping my experience. There is a substantial
divide between my perceptions of the space before the performance, and my understanding of the space as it is altered through the performance.

The movements through these spaces are slow and studied. The deliberate, measured gestures are necessitated by both my internal fear and the impediments thrust against me by the environment. This dialogue takes a visual form in my videos and suggests that while I am an intruder in the landscape I am not an aggressor. During the initial stages of the walks I am acutely aware of the physical engagement. The environment asserts itself through a push against my presence. This absorption is rivaled by fear of the unknown elements that may manifest during the exploration. My plodding pace and teetering movements inform the viewer that I am encountering resistance and a degree of pain. As this experience enables me to reconsider the space, the documentation pushes the viewer to reconsider his own interaction and initial perceptions of the space. I intend for the documentation of the walks to allow for a panoptic view of the scene but also ask the viewer to consider the microscopic interaction that takes place.

By presenting a visually compelling setting and continually redefining it with my movements, the work vacillates between the splendor of a visually engaging scene and the consciousness that the space is exacting of my body. Commonly the scenes are contextualized through audible components such as traffic noises; these sounds often break the serenity of the image once my figure has exited the frame.

*Edwards Street Walk* (Fig. 3.1) takes place in the early morning during winter, with the last of the morning frost on the ground. To maximize my connection to the surroundings I remove my shoes for the walk. While this heightens my awareness, it
increases the difficulty and intensity of the interaction. The viewer follows my receding figure through the space. In the video the foreground is sharp and clearly delineated, but looking into the space things dissolve into light and the image slips into an ethereal space. The further I move from the camera the more my body dissolves. My physical distance from the camera distances the viewers from the immediacy of my engagement with the site. This break from the physical and material symbolizes transcendence. My absence from the frame inserts the viewers into the role of explorer, it is here that they are encouraged to question their engagement to their surroundings. The expectation of transcendence is subverted when I reappear and subsequently navigate to the point from which I started.

The physical exertion leads to moments in which I enter into an altered state of consciousness; entering into this state of consciousness my experience of the space changes. The space becomes quiet, still, peaceful and I experience a euphoria moment. This meditative moment is only partially accessible to the viewers of the documentation. The moments that do present these qualities are often broken by sounds originating from outside of the frame. As the length of the documentation unfolds it becomes difficult for viewers to sustain any sort of meditative experience they may have while watching the video; any glimmers of transcendence are therefore undone.

In *Highway 124 Walk* (Fig.3.2), I again find myself as the performer in an area of isolation. The space acts as a transitional area between urban sprawl and the surrounding rural neighborhoods. Because the space is located next to a maintenance road it is in a state of perpetual transition. I enter the frame through a clearing and enter a dense area of
undergrowth. This substantial growth veils what lies beyond the initial facade and what lies within. As I pierce the boundary of the land, the land pierces my exposed skin. Once I have crossed the visual threshold the prolonged time I am absent from the frame allows the viewer to return to a relaxed state. The image regains its innocuous state. It is here that I find an echo of the interstitial. These thresholds are not purely metaphorical. During the walks there are junctures where I am able to suppress my fears of the space, and distance myself from the inflicted pain, thus rising into a meditative state. At this time I become hyper-aware of sounds, smells, and a new communication between the space and myself. I become open to experiences and perceptions that were largely veiled or obscured by the site’s nature and my inability to process the multitude of stimuli.

*Tyger River Walk* (fig. 3.3) differs from the previous performances in that it is documented via triptych format. The view offered is an ideal river scene, framed with lush vegetation and trees. The chosen composition of the scene conceals as much as it reveals. The river and surrounding parcel of land are positioned between housing developments and are littered with plastic sheets and used tires. This selective view, which edits out the detritus, points to the nature of framing. “A frame establishes the outer boundaries of the view; it gives the landscape definition. The frame literally defines the landscape, both in the sense of determining its outer limits and in the sense that the landscape is constituted by its frame: it wouldn’t be a landscape without that frame” (Andrews 5). I draw attention to the artificiality of landscape representation by framing the image in triptych format. The breaks between the picture planes are empty spaces that echo my own gaps of knowledge of a space that is foreign to me. The unfilled spaces
allow viewers to become aware that they have not been given complete information. Through the act of withholding and by making visible the disjunction of the frame I ask the viewer to consider the difference between the real and the representational.

In order to complete these performances I must commit to the act of moving through the space and accept the difficulty of this navigation. My stamina is often tested during my exchange with the land. There is also a test of the viewer’s perseverance to see the performance in its entirety. When viewed at full duration the performance allows for a gamut of emotional and inquisitive responses. The slowness of my performance is compelled by the difficulty in navigating the landscape.

I intend to have minimal impact on the land, while becoming open to the land’s effects on my body and psyche. This interaction comes in the form of cuts, bruises, bites and long-term plant dermatitis, the effects of which prolong the interaction between the spaces I explore and my body. As my interactions with the spaces continue over time I begin to see the land not as a stage to act upon, but as a living organic form to communicate with. Temporality is a necessity in my performances. I feel that my approach to the land is in direct opposition to the Land Artist of the seventies as the landscape was commonly treated as a boundless resource (Beardsley 47). I consider my practice and impact to be temporary, fleeting. I feel that by working in this manner I am in conversation with the work of artists such as Richard Long and Ana Mendieta whose lasting impressions on sites is negligible. Long uses materials found during his performance walks to create work that address concepts of time, distance, and place. His sculptures are low impact and often temporary. In *A Line Made by Walking* Long’s
imprint is superficial and light. It is a consideration of the land that is distinctly different than the work of many Land Artists such as Micheal Heizer. I view Heizer’s work *Double Negative*, in which he displaced 240,000 tons of earth, as an exercise of authority and mastery over the landscape.
CHAPTER 4

PHOTOGRAPHS

The picturesque becomes an access point through which I invite the viewer to consider the photographic image. Here, I offer views that speak of ideals of nature’s beauty and complexities. The photographs are made at the locations of the performances; however, they do no function as documentation. Instead, the staged images show an alternate view of my interaction within the landscape. Here, I construct tableaus that speak of exploration, a search for knowledge through consideration of space, and transcendence in the landscape experience.

The photographs are created using a large-format 4x5 field camera and color negative film. This is an inherently slow process that allows prolonged exposure to the space and this process reflects my adopted method of extended observation and interaction with landscape in all of my work. Using this format I am able to produce a negative that can be greatly enlarged without loss of fidelity. These large-format images are highly detailed, and due to their size allow for a viewing at varying distances. In order to observe the entirety of the image the viewer must stand at a removed distance; however, they are also invited to closely inspect the image and discover the minute details within.

Here, time is suspended. The size and stillness of the image invites contemplation. These images ask for a different consideration than the video documentation. They allow for a passive engagement, allowing the viewer to experience an interaction that requires a
less intense investment. This passive nature of the photograph can be considered a resting point within the overall installation of my work.

The first image, *Highway 124* Fig. (4.1), contextualizes the remaining photographs in the series and points to the idea of the *interstice* as the working space. The contents of the scene are at once chaotic and organized; the composition of the frame is simple and complex. A singular point of focus is withheld and the apparent lack of a focal point mimics the disordered characteristics of the land. The lack of a focal point is not the result of a haphazard approach to composing the image, but rather an observation and reflection of the complexities of an organic system. The space is layered; thin new growth in the foreground allows for the density of the older growth to be seen. This older growth appears visually and physically impenetrable. The small trees stand in defense, guarding against entrance into the forest. The distance between the camera and the first line of trees informs the viewer that the camera is situated in an area that has been recently cleared; at once making human intervention in the land visible.

*Main Street, Taylors* (Fig. 4.2) is an ambiguous image. It functions as a eulogy to the natural world as civilization encroaches. The top half of the image depicts an unmanaged area, abundant with untamed growth. The bottom portion consists of an incline made of piled debris. Stumps and logs are mixed in this mound of displaced earth. This form creates a harsh collision between the thriving, living growth of the background and the lifeless material in the foreground, highlighting the delicate balance between man and nature. My figure is caught in a moment between contemplation and movement. Here I am seen as an explorer, similar to the figure in Casper David Friedrich’s *Wanderer*
above the Sea of Fog. Unlike Friedrich’s figure I have yet to finish my ascension to the top of the slope. Symbolically this failure to reach the peak of the incline places me in a subordinate relationship to the land. The view of the mound of debris conceals the contents of the valley. Although I have chosen to present the back of my figure, my stance and gestures resonate with my figure’s wonder at the hidden scene. There is a tension within the image and it is unclear if my sensations while looking over the top are of awe or fright.

All photographs in the series were made using available light. I planned for the times of day that offered an extreme play of light. The quality of light is a coded signifier of a transcendent experience. Main Street, Taylors was made during an overcast day, resulting in muted and somber tones of elegy. Another reading of this image is one of reclamation. Here, the land is reclaiming territory and fighting the degradation inflicted by human presence. The trees seem to be enclosing the debris pile and my minute figure.

Tyger River’s Woods (Fig. 4.3) is peaceful and contemplative. The space is structured so that the figure is entirely surrounded by growth, and in the foreground is an ominous dark patch. I am in conversation with something unseen and the distance of my gaze suggests that I have journeyed to this location in search of insight and knowledge. The distance of my gaze informs the difficulty of this process. I am present in solitude and in a moment of reverie.

Similar themes are present in Highway 124 Forest Interior (Fig. 4.4), where my figure is presented in the midst of a forest. As the season is winter, the trees are largely without foliage; even so, an intricate web of tree branches creates a canopy that chokes
out access to the sky. The surrounding trees dwarf my figure and it is not apparent whether the landscape is the subject or the setting.

The final image, *Tyger River with Floating Figure* (Fig. 4.5), is a romanticized construction of my relationship with the landscape. I am pictured floating in the slow moving Tyger River. It is an idealized conclusion to a search for the understanding of the nature of this space. It is a metaphoric baptism or cleansing. The trees above me seem to be moving inward and down toward my body as if they are accepting my presence. The sun’s rays heighten the enveloping movement of the trees, creating a path that places my figure at the heart of the landscape image. The combination of water and light speaks of transcendence. It is a view of a utopian ideal and illustrates the search for a bond between nature and myself. The space’s location between two housing developments is hidden through the framing. I have elevated the space by editing the visual information.

In her series *Forest*, Jitka Hanzlova shows us a forest interior that she has come to know intimately through her studied observations and photographs. Her images, made in portrait orientation, reveal much more than landscape characteristics. She has found the ineffable within. Hanzlova’s collection of images forms a portrait of the forest’s interior. Like Hanzlova, these images are a way to know the space.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE IN-BETWEEN

The photographs are not intended to act as a counterbalance to the video documentation of the performance; instead they act as the second participant in the dialogue. When considered together, a dialogue between the two mediums creates a third critical space. Within this meta space viewers must understand all of the images in relation to one another and consider the mutual impressions made by both.

Each offers a different mode of looking and interacting with the landscape and thus a different type of knowledge is gained. Once viewed, the information from the two methods becomes inseparable. To reach a conclusion the accumulated experiences must be acknowledged. Considering both approaches and the outcomes leaves one in their own state of transition. While reflecting on the work viewers question their experiences with landscape.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

I use the landscape as a stage. I gravitate towards areas that I deem to be under valued and attempt to draw attention to those spaces. Through large-scale photographic images I arrange tableaus that draw upon historic landscape depictions and create an idealized sense of understanding of the natural world. Through video documented performances I suggest that a highly physical engagement with land can challenge distanced, idealized representations of landscape. The two different modes that I explore alongside one another create a third space for reflection and understanding. Here viewers can evaluate different approaches to representing landscape, see how difficult it is to reconcile them, and ponder new ways to experience land.
Fig. 3.1 *Edwards Street Walk*
Fig. 4.2 *Highway 124 Walk*

Figure 3.3 *Tyger River Crawl*
Fig. 4.1 Highway 124
Fig 4.2 *Main Street Taylors*
Fig. 4.3 Tyger River’s Woods
Fig. 4.4 *Highway 124 Interior*
Fig. 4.5 *Tyger River with Floating Figure*
Figure 5.1 *Instillation View 1*
Figure 5.2 Installation View 2
Figure 5.3 View 3
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