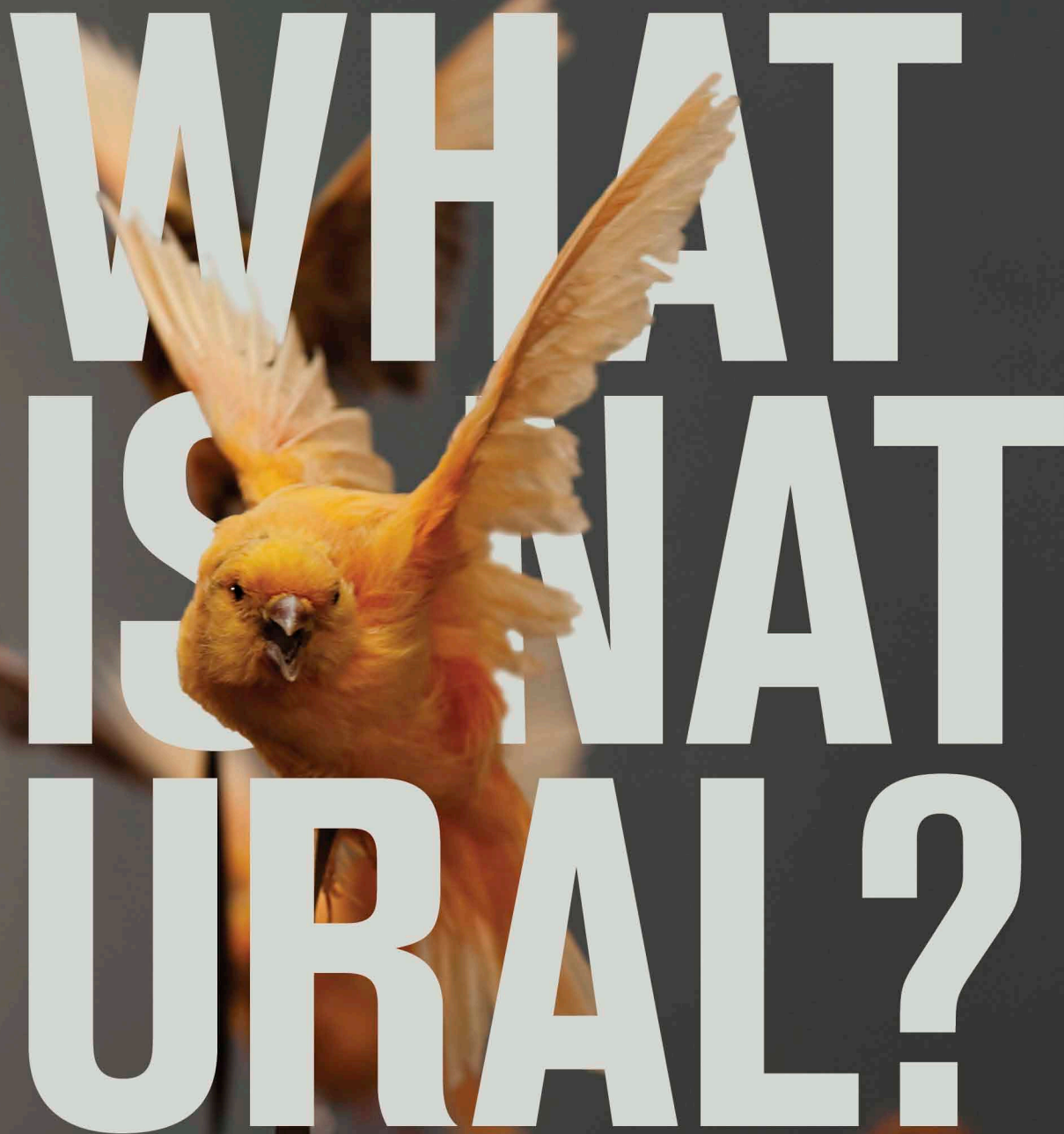


NATIONAL MUSEUM *of WOMEN in the ARTS*

WHAT IS NAT URAL?



FANCIFUL and FRIGHTFUL works by WOMEN you need to know.

ORGANIC MATTERS—WOMEN TO WATCH 2015

Artist Interviews

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Artist Interviews

Organic Matters—Women to Watch 2015 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) showcases innovative and adventurous women artists exploring the complex relationship between humans and nature. *Organic Matters* includes a range of artworks by emerging and underrepresented women artists from South America, Europe, and the United States. These artists engage with nature to expose its many meanings—from bizarre and beautiful to fragile and fearsome.

NMWA Associate Curator Virginia Treanor interviewed *Organic Matters* artists about their artistic processes, their works on view at NMWA, and how they are inspired by the theme of nature. The artists' responses collected here reveal their varied influences, techniques, and perspectives. Through these interviews, explore the artists' perspectives on the ambiguities and fascinations of the natural world.

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Artist: Jennifer Celio

Nominating committee: Southern California Committee
Consulting curator: Corrina Peipon, Hammer Museum



Jennifer Celio, *NIMBY (national park)*, 2012; Graphite on Yupo paper, 38 x 50 in.; Courtesy of the artist; Photography by Alan Shaffer

Artist: Jennifer Celio

Nominating committee: Southern California Committee

Consulting curator: Corrina Peipon, Hammer Museum

1. How do you think your “NIMBY” series relates to the theme of nature?

My drawings are equally about the natural world and the human-made environment. I have a deep respect for nature and have always seen the need for us humans to act as responsible stewards of all its ecosystems. My work is more specifically about where human civilization meets the natural world, the places and ways in which flora and fauna collide and interact with people. I'm most interested in how animals and plants adapt to human intrusion into their habitats, even reclaiming those spaces in new manners. There is also an ongoing, dark fascination with how people remove nature and then replace it with facsimiles, and what effect that has upon the human spirit and the loss of connection to the larger world.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does the “NIMBY” series fit into your larger body of work?

The “NIMBY” series evolved to encapsulate everything I had developed in my drawings. I wanted to create drawings that felt large in scale by virtue of depicting these imagined environments that were full of details showing plants, wildlife, mountains, airplanes, cell phone signal tower “trees,” and people—often messy and definitely dystopic renderings of our world. Probably the best way to describe my work is that it depicts situations and places that I hope never come to exist.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

At the risk of sounding cliché, I would have to say it is the internal sight, the imagining of what can be, of what can then be created in the actual sense, using pencil or paint on the two-dimensional surface. I can't begin to describe what a rush it is when an idea hits me, and then to see that idea through to fruition.

4. What are your sources of inspiration or influence?

Most of my inspiration is from the city, the urban environment. The act of driving brings out most of my ideas. Often it is some graffiti or a building or noticing a tree that has been chopped down that sparks an idea. Going out into nature, hiking, camping, etc., is essential for my sanity, but those situations don't spark ideas right away. Rather, I take photos and jot down phrases in my notebook, waiting until eventually I can amalgamate the seemingly random bits into a cohesive whole.

I must admit I'm an unabashed admirer of Andrew Wyeth's art. His work has been a huge influence since I was a child. I was enamored by his labor-intensive style, the patience it took to render his scenes, the time spent becoming intimate with those subjects. The precisely rendered textures, white negative spaces, and detailed realism of his work have shown themselves in my own drawings. There is a pursuit of Wyeth's “magic realism” that I hope to capture in my own work.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

I usually have mixed reactions to almost every exhibit I see. Love and hate. I have seen many thought-provoking shows at galleries in Los Angeles recently. It is great to walk out of those exhibits all fired up, whether it's to discuss the work or because it sparks the fire under me to get back into my studio at that very moment.

Artist: Goldschmied & Chiari

Nominating committee: Gli Amici del NMWA, Italy

Consulting curator: Iolanda Ratti, Museo del Novecento



Goldschmied & Chiari, *Nymphaeas #12*, 2007; Color print, 49 1/4 x 131 1/8 in.; Courtesy of the Podesta Collection

Artist: Goldschmied & Chiari

Nominating committee: Gli Amici del NMWA, Italy

Consulting curator: Iolanda Ratti, Museo del Novecento

1. How do you think your work *Nympheas* #12 relates to the theme of nature, and specifically to environmental concerns?

Nympheas #12 is part of a body of work that we started in 2002, mostly pictures of polluted landscapes inspired by Impressionist flânerie. The works in this series include photographs of plastic bags that appear like flowers, floating atop the polluted Tiber River in Rome. At the time we made these works, we were influenced by post-feminist theories and their questioning of what “natural,” “cultural,” and “artificial” were. That’s why we started representing an artificial nature, using polluted landscapes and the common tool of plastic bags to show our personal view of flowers. We were asking ourselves about the relationship between gender and nature in history, keeping in our minds a mistrust of pureness.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does it fit into your larger body of work?

The *Nympheas* are representative of our oeuvre. This body of work is the first step in our practice that highlights the need to go beyond the limits of nature and history, to inquire about the cultural, social, and visual construction of gender and landscape.

3. As artists, what is your most essential tool? Why?

Our most essential tool is our relationship as an artist duo because it feeds our art practice, for example, so that we see multiple sides of one issue.

4. Who or what are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

Philosophy, visual, and social studies, and our Italian historical background, which is often a subject of our works.

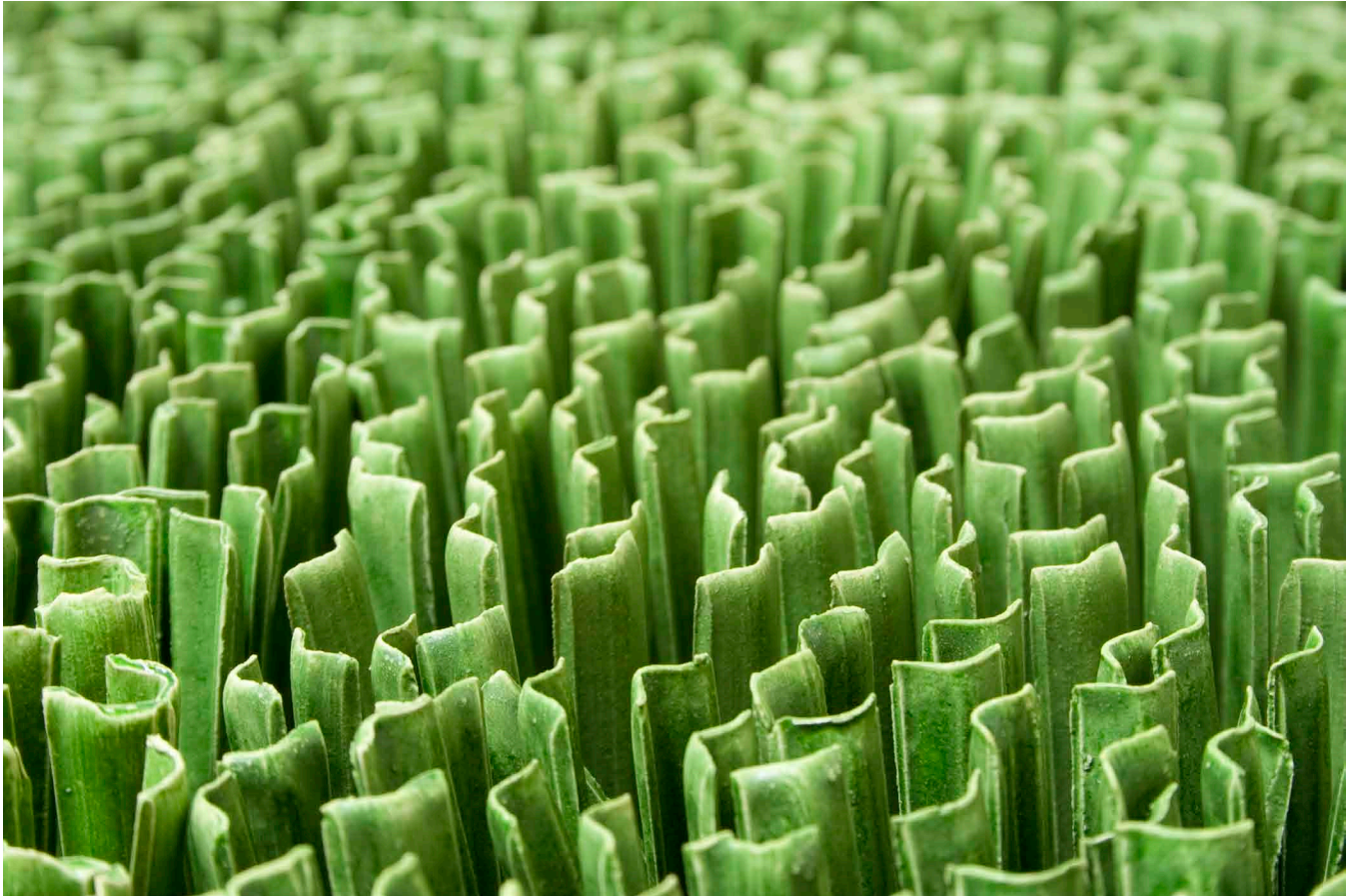
5. What’s the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

Late Turner at the Tate Modern during our recent research.

Artist: Dawn Holder

Nominating committee: Arkansas Committee

Consulting curator: Courtney Taylor, Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas



Dawn Holder, *Monoculture* (detail), 2013; Porcelain, 2 1/2 x 92 x 176 in.; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Dawn Holder

Nominating committee: Arkansas Committee

Consulting curator: Courtney Taylor, Arts & Science Center for Southeast Arkansas

1. How do you think your work, *Monoculture*, relates to the theme of nature?

I find the intersection of nature and culture to be fertile ground for artistic exploration. I am particularly interested in the way we cultivate, manicure, rearrange, and exploit the natural world. The lawn, which I explore in *Monoculture*, is of particular interest to me because of its multivalent nature. It is a “natural space” in that it is comprised of plants and landforms, yet the lawn is a wholly artificial construct, a highly controlled space requiring labor, chemicals, and specialized equipment to maintain. I am fascinated by suburban America’s desire to construct this hybrid artificial-natural landscape and what it signifies in terms of time and resources. I think the lawn is our culture’s fantasy version of the natural world.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does *Monoculture* fit into your larger body of work?

For almost a decade, my work has explored the idea of landscape and domestic space through installation and sculpture. Aesthetically, my recent installations, such as *Monoculture*, have been influenced by the way Minimalist sculptures occupy space. Yet rather than being simplified, my work is highly detailed and engages surface as much as form. I align my practice to the repetitive and decorative craft tasks historically relegated to women, such as needlework. I think of my current studio explorations as combining *horror vacui* surface with minimal form, a Maximalist Minimalist approach. So far, *Monoculture* is definitely the most labor-intensive installation that I have created . . . But the visual reward is worth it and I don’t see this aspect of my work changing.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

My mind is my most essential tool, along with my hands, a bag of plaster, and maybe some random pointy objects . . . I could get by with a shish kabob skewer and old paring knife if I had to. Since my forms and materials change so much from project to project, the ability to brainstorm and solve problems has become an integral part of my creative process. Also, having the ability to push onward when mind and body are ready to give in becomes really important when making thousands of the same form. This perseverance pays off when I see all of the pieces massed together.

4. Who or what are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

I read every day—books, essays, and articles about current events, social issues, the environment, pop culture, and art/craft theory. One idea I have been incredibly interested in lately is the necropastoral, a term explored at length by poet and critic Joyelle McSweeney. She states that the necropastoral is “a political-aesthetic zone in which the fact of mankind’s depredations cannot be separated from an experience of ‘nature’ which is poisoned, mutated, aberrant, spectacular, full of ill effects and affects.” Something about the forcefulness with which this idea recognizes and combines the devastating powers of the Anthropocene and the sublime forces of the wilderness strikes a chord with me.

5. What’s the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

I was recently in New York and had the chance to see Samara Golden’s *The Flat Side of the Knife* at PS1. This two-story installation depicts interconnected multiple levels which are variations of a domestic space, sparsely furnished with beds, plants, musical instruments, and other objects made from reflective insulation board. Mirrors and upside-down placement of objects further serve to confound the viewer, as do a number of misdirected staircases. I was enchanted by the way Golden’s installation plays with perception and dimensionality. The contrast of the aged, brick walls of the gallery space and Golden’s use of surface and material works to create an impossible, unreal, yet familiar space. The private nature of the setting also added to the unsettling and voyeuristic quality of the piece. I am attracted to work that creates an alternate space that I can project myself into, or even better, that I can momentarily lose myself in.

Artist: Rebecca Hutchinson

Nominating committee: Massachusetts State Committee

Consulting curator: Jen Mergel, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Rebecca Hutchinson, *Patterns of Nature* (detail), 2014; Porcelain paper clay, fiber, and organic material, 10 x 36 x 96 in.; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Rebecca Hutchinson

Nominating committee: Massachusetts State Committee

Consulting curator: Jen Mergel, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

1. How do you think your work *Patterns of Nature* relates to the theme of nature?

My work is inspired from ecosystem research, how things grow and survive within specific dynamics. Patterns are seen both formally and behaviorally.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does it fit into your larger body of work?

This piece is new work; a new series working from the floor yet connects to the history of my work through ecosystem research. In this case, I have researched rock outcroppings and forest floor as well as botanical motifs in Persian rugs.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

A bucket. Everything is mixed with water, whether clay or fiber, and collected there again after being prepared waiting to be manipulated and used.

4. What are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

I look at both folk art and contemporary works by trained artists as well as aspects of nature.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

A solo show of Eva Hild in Chelsea—forms were sensual and masterfully gripping.

Artist: Mimi Kato

Nominating committee: Ohio Advisory Group

Consulting curators: Reto Thüring, Cleveland Museum of Art; Rose Bouthillier, MOCA Cleveland



Mimi Kato, *Landscape Retreat: In the Woods* (detail), 2012; Archival pigment print diptych, each print 28 x 65 in.; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Mimi Kato

Nominating committee: Ohio Advisory Group

Consulting curators: Reto Thüring, Cleveland Museum of Art; Rose Bouthillier, MOCA Cleveland

1. How do you think your work *Landscape Retreat: In the Woods* relates to the theme of nature?

My interest in nature and landscape stems from my longing for the familiar landscape of my home, Japan. Drawing landscape from my memories, photographs, and online street views, I started to think about our daily landscape and how our lives, activities, and actions constantly affect its form.

Exploring urban landscapes, I noticed many green spaces hidden under and between urban structures, such as under highway bridges and empty abandoned lots. These green spaces do not come to mind when we talk about nature even though they function in an ecosystem, supporting the lives of plants and animals. The series "Landscape Retreat" focuses on one such landscape by analyzing human perception and categorization of nature.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does it fit into your larger body of work?

Yes. Inspired by theater, especially Japanese traditional mask theater and contemporary Butoh, I started to perform in my work. Every figure presented in my work is me, conveying the narratives of the compositions through poses and acts. My interest, ideas, and narratives have shifted over time; however the performance aspect remains and is also present in the series "Landscape Retreat." The process of my work, performing, sewing costumes, making props, and directing narratives, resembles the process of the theater and I often refer to my work as one-person theater.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

The most essential tool for me is curiosity. Asking many "why" questions to even the most mundane things that surround our lives could reveal new findings.

Recently, I collaborated on a project with the invasive plants management crew from the Cleveland Metroparks. This project started with a very simple question about familiar plants from Japan in the American landscape: "Why are they here?" Following this curiosity and finding the answers, the project pushed me out of my routine studio practice, leading to a collaboration and site-specific installation. A simple question opened up a new possibility and challenges in my art practice.

I believe curiosity is an essential tool in any field and can enrich and strengthen one's thinking process and way finding.

4. What are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

Things that surround me, especially landscapes at this moment. It is fascinating to see how we humans have been marking our existence in the landscape.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

Forty-Part Motet by Janet Cardiff at Cleveland Museum of Art, *The Paradise Institute* also by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, and *The Visitors* by Ragnar Kjartansson at Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland.

Artist: Ysabel LeMay

Nominating committee: Texas State Committee

Curator: Virginia Treanor, National Museum of Women in the Arts



Ysabel LeMay, *Reflection*, 2014; Color print diptych, 61 x 72 in. overall; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Ysabel LeMay

Nominating committee: Texas State Committee

Curator: Virginia Treanor, National Museum of Women in the Arts

1. How do you think your work *Reflection* relates to the theme of nature?

Nature is omnipresent in my work. I strive not only to honor its beauty, grace, and power, but to go further, to explore and learn from nature's consciousness, its infinite procession of interrelationships. *Reflection* speaks of the mirror effect that a relationship with another can offer, especially when we are aware and specifically choose certain challenging relationships as opportunities to grow and to awaken to our own beauty and individuality.

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre? How does it fit into your larger body of work?

From a technical perspective, *Reflection* shares the hypercollage technique I employ throughout my body of work—an enhanced approach to digital collage, in which fragments of original nature photography are woven into tableaus with the cohesion and persuasiveness of classical painting. Thematically, this specific work continues an ongoing story established with *Les Naturalistes*, a piece I created a few years back. It represents two people who profoundly love each other, but decide to depart from their shared relationship, to grow individually, respecting their own natural rhythms.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

Observation. I like to say, if you just take the time to relax and observe, you can have access to the gates of creativity.

4. What are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

I am influenced by my personal awakening and the things that trigger the opening of my heart. Nature, art, people

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

I recently visited Armory Week in New York City, and felt that the collective energy emanating from the artists' works had changed since the last few years. Less shocking, less in-your-face, but more introspective and aesthetically graceful. There is a need, perhaps, to explore again the brighter side of life—a place I have been expressing visually for many years now.

Artist: Andrea Lira

Nominating committee: Chile Committee

Consulting curator: Soledad García Saavedra, independent curator



Andrea Lira, *RHYTHMS*, 2013; Video and animation; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Andrea Lira

Nominating committee: Chile Committee

Consulting curator: Soledad García Saavedra, independent curator

1. How do you think your work *RHYTHMS* relates to the theme of the natural world?

Most of my work refers to the natural world, since it is directly related to the environment I inhabit. I carefully collect raw materials like plants, sounds, and observations that I later bring to the studio. Sometimes they lead me into drawings, videos, or objects. In this case, I made the video *RHYTHMS* while I was doing a residence in Berlin, so the materials I used were all plants and organic debris collected from the streets. I wanted to create metaphors about our similarities to the natural world and small gestures that showed those transformations and behaviors. Each vignette is an action or gesture from nature in a way. However, nature is more than a theme to me, it is a way of understanding life's cycles and a language. Understanding the language of nature can help us create balance and harmony in our lives. The idea of recycling and repurposing is also part of my work, since I am constantly giving new shapes and meaning to the elements I collect, cutting them, tracing them, preserving them, etc.

2. How does *RHYTHMS* fit into your larger body of work?

I like to experiment with different materials and mediums, from drawing to animation, objects, and installations. However, the themes I investigate are mostly inspired by the language of nature, the morphology of plants, its behaviors, complex beauty and how we interact with our environment. The video *RHYTHMS* was done very spontaneously. I didn't want to force any aesthetics, but experiment. It looks very different from my earlier videos, which were more elaborate and premeditated. Overall, the important thing in my work is the process that leads to the final work and the idea. Some pieces look more finished than others, but I like to have that freedom. It allows me to create more and not get stuck with the technical side.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

First of all, observation, and then a passion for the act of drawing and understanding the world through images. The more I observe, the more I can connect concepts and forms. Then, drawing, because of its flexibility and expressiveness. Everybody can relate to this language, we have all drawn at some point in our lives, I drew before I started to talk. Drawing always surprises me. I can pull images from the unconscious, memories,

trace gestures, visualized complex patterns, emotions, music, or drawings with different materials. The important thing is the action of making a personal mark that will reflect your personality, a rhythm, a unique gesture. It is sometimes a form of meditation and similar to writing, I can express my ideas faster with a pencil.

4. What are your sources of inspiration or influence?

Most of my inspiration comes from nature and our relationship to it. But my first influence was my father, who as a surgeon taught me to observe trees and flowers, and to appreciate insects and the fragility of the human body. We could spend hours drawing and talking about a bone.

My world is also inspired by movement, the language of the body, dance, and sound. I was influenced by performance artists such as Bruce Nauman, Gordon Matta-Clark, and Trisha Brown, who used their bodies as tools and were constantly experimenting. Then I felt very connected with minimalist artist Agnes Martin, who can express a very powerful emotion through a simple line and color. Her work can translate the beauty and peace that I find in nature. But overall, my influences are constantly changing. I am now reading a very interesting book by Manuel Lima that talks about how we understand data and information graphically.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

The last exhibition I saw was a retrospective of Yayoi Kusama, who experimented with multiple mediums and really took control of her career as an outsider and independent artist in New York during the '70s. Her body of work is fascinating, from her early giant Minimalist paintings to her performances and colorful installations. She had a very rich personal world and was not afraid of exhibiting her fears, political views, obsessions about the body, sex, and even fashion statements. She used the media and the press as another outlet to convey her messages. Finally, she moved back to Japan to reinvent herself as an artist in a completely changed country, where she has voluntarily lived in a mental institution. Her art was not only her profession, but maybe a type of therapy to understand and cope with her own persona. In one way or another, we want to make art so we can see beyond our physical lives and truly try to understand the mind and our deepest emotions.

Artist: Polly Morgan

Nominating committee: U.K. Friends of NMWA

Consulting curator: Lisa Le Feuvre, Henry Moore Institute



Polly Morgan, *Systemic Inflammation*, 2010; Taxidermy and steel, 51 1/8 x 44 1/2 x 44 1/2 in.; Private Collection, London; Photography by Tessa Angus

Artist: Polly Morgan

Nominating committee: U.K. Friends of NMWA

Consulting curator: Lisa Le Feuvre, Henry Moore Institute

1. How do you think your work *Systemic Inflammation* relates to the broad theme of nature? What does the use of taxidermy in your works allow you to do that you could not do with any other medium?

Taxidermy is an ultimately futile effort to harness nature, it allows us to manipulate and control the body of an animal in a way we would struggle, or in my case would not wish, to in life. *Systemic Inflammation* reimagines a Victorian invention for a flying machine; where a passenger would be transported by birds shackled to a carriage. Flight, or more specifically wings, is the ultimate symbol of freedom. Seeing these birds outside of, but harnessed to, the cage presents a paradox: who is free, passenger or bird?

Most objects can be art; a urinal, a bed, etc. A dead animal presents a problem in that it decays and can therefore only exist a finite amount of time before being altered irrevocably. Taxidermy has thus allowed me to incorporate animals in my work the way other sculptors use "found objects."

2. Is this work representative of your oeuvre?

With this work I was thinking of the mythological Phoenix rising from the ashes. I chose to use only orange birds as I wanted them to resemble flames, and to blacken and burn the cage to make it look as though it had been dragged from a fire. Like many of my works it reflects on the cycle of life and death, so in this way is representative of my oeuvre.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool?

It might sound trite, but my brain. My practice is more and more varied and the most consistent tool I use is my imagination. Practically speaking I wouldn't be able to get very far with just one tool, but a scalpel would be high on the list of essentials!

4. What are your sources of inspiration and/or influence?

I never know what or whom I'll be inspired by so it's just important to try to keep spending time with interesting people, reading books, watching films and seeing exhibitions. Many of my favorite ideas have come to me when I'm walking my dogs as it's an opportunity to rest my mind and to cut back on aural stimulation.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

I recently saw the work of American artist Sarah Sze at the Victoria Miro gallery in London. I love her use of everyday, even scrap, objects and think of her as being one of those alchemical artists who can elevate the mundane and give it depth and beauty.

Artist: Françoise Pétrovitch

Nominating committee: Les Amis du NMWA, France

Consulting curator: Julia Garimorth, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris



Françoise Pétrovitch, *Untitled*, 2014; Ink on paper, 63 x 94 1/2 in.; Courtesy of Semiose galerie, Paris; Photography by Hervé Plumet

Artist: Françoise Pétrovitch

Nominating committee: Les Amis du NMWA, France

Consulting curator: Julia Garimorth, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

1. How does your work relate to the broad theme of nature?

In my work, the animals are almost always associated with humans; sitting in the palm of their hands, leaning close to a face or floating over a body. They show the presence of nature, the animal aspect of humans and that nature is the reflection of an interior world. It is a mental landscape, a dream world.

2. How does this piece fit into your overall body of work? Is it representative of your oeuvre?

Yes, it is representative of my work. This is a recent series (*Les allongés*, or "Lying down"), where the body is in the foreground and the bird is in an imagined space. They are big drawings where the space is undetermined.

3. What is your most essential artistic tool or process?

Drawing is what drives my work. What I enjoy is its speed in execution, its direct relationship to my thoughts, and its freedom of expression. I enjoy the lightness of touch which it requires.

4. What are your sources of inspiration?

I find my greatest inspiration in literature, as I feel it can be very intimate and often reveals that which we refuse to see. I am touched by the novels of Edna O'Brien, Joyce Carol Oates, Marguerite Duras, Anita Desai, Nathalie Sarraute . . . books written by women who tell, in their own way, of the intimate relationships between sisters, and between mothers and daughters; these stories resonate with my work as they describe a certain fragility and at the same time the violent relationships these women have with the world which surrounds them.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

Recently, I went to the Bonnard show at the Musée d'Orsay. I was able to immediately "enter" into his work; one feels as though one is drowning in his ultra-sensitive, enveloping universe. It is amazing to see the same touch, the same light which emanates from the paintings from 1908 and others from 1938. It is a fabulous pictorial lesson of cohesiveness.

Artist: Lara Shipley

Nominating committee: Greater Kansas City Area Committee

Consulting curator: Catherine Futter, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art



Lara Shipley, *In the Ozarks There Are Lights (Devil's Promenade)*, 2013; Inkjet print, 30 x 37 in.; Courtesy of the artist

Artist: Lara Shipley

Nominating committee: Greater Kansas City Area Committee

Consulting curator: Catherine Futter, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

1. How do the works from your series “Devil’s Promenade” (specifically, *In the Ozarks there are Lights* and *False Lights*) relate to the theme of nature?

“Devil’s Promenade” is about the relationship between rural culture and landscape, specifically Ozark culture in Southern Missouri and Northern Arkansas. The project is framed around the story of a mysterious light on a wooded road, called the Spook Light. It is seen in an area referred to as Devil’s Promenade and it is said the Devil also lives on the road and steals wanderers’ souls. In this place you can either find redemption or damnation. These are two very extreme options, and it’s a fate lacking in volition. Whatever happens, happens to you. This story takes place in one of the most consistently impoverished areas of the country, where limited opportunity creates a struggle for agency. I find it fascinating how certain physical locations become the settings for specific stories, and by going there, you are able to reflect on their significance to your life.

The two pieces in the *Organic Matters* exhibition reference the story of the mysterious light in the woods, putting the viewer in the vantage point of the wanderer. But in neither image is it clear if the light will provide good or harm. In the frozen state of photographic time we have no resolution to this question.

2. How do these pieces fit into your larger body of work?

All of my work focuses on rural American community and its relationship to physical place. I also am a portrait maker, a writer, and a bookmaker. For me the final project is a combination of all of these elements.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool?

Open eyes, open ears, and an open mind. They keep me from just remaking what I already think I know. Which is very little.

4. What are your sources of inspiration or influence?

Really too many to name! Some of my initial inspirations came from novels. Growing up in the country I didn’t have access to a lot of culture. My mom was a librarian and has always been a voracious reader, and to entertain me as a teenager, would give me novels that were perhaps a little adult for my age. Through writers such as Virginia Woolf, Margaret

Atwood, Steinbeck, and Gabriel García Márquez, I began to understand symbolic thinking. I remember the excitement of first tapping into this coded language, like discovering a hole in the floor to another world. This really put me at odds with the evangelical community I grew up around, which looks at the world, and the Bible, very literally. Both fascinated me, but it was very confusing trying to reconcile the two. This tension is very present in my project Devil’s Promenade.

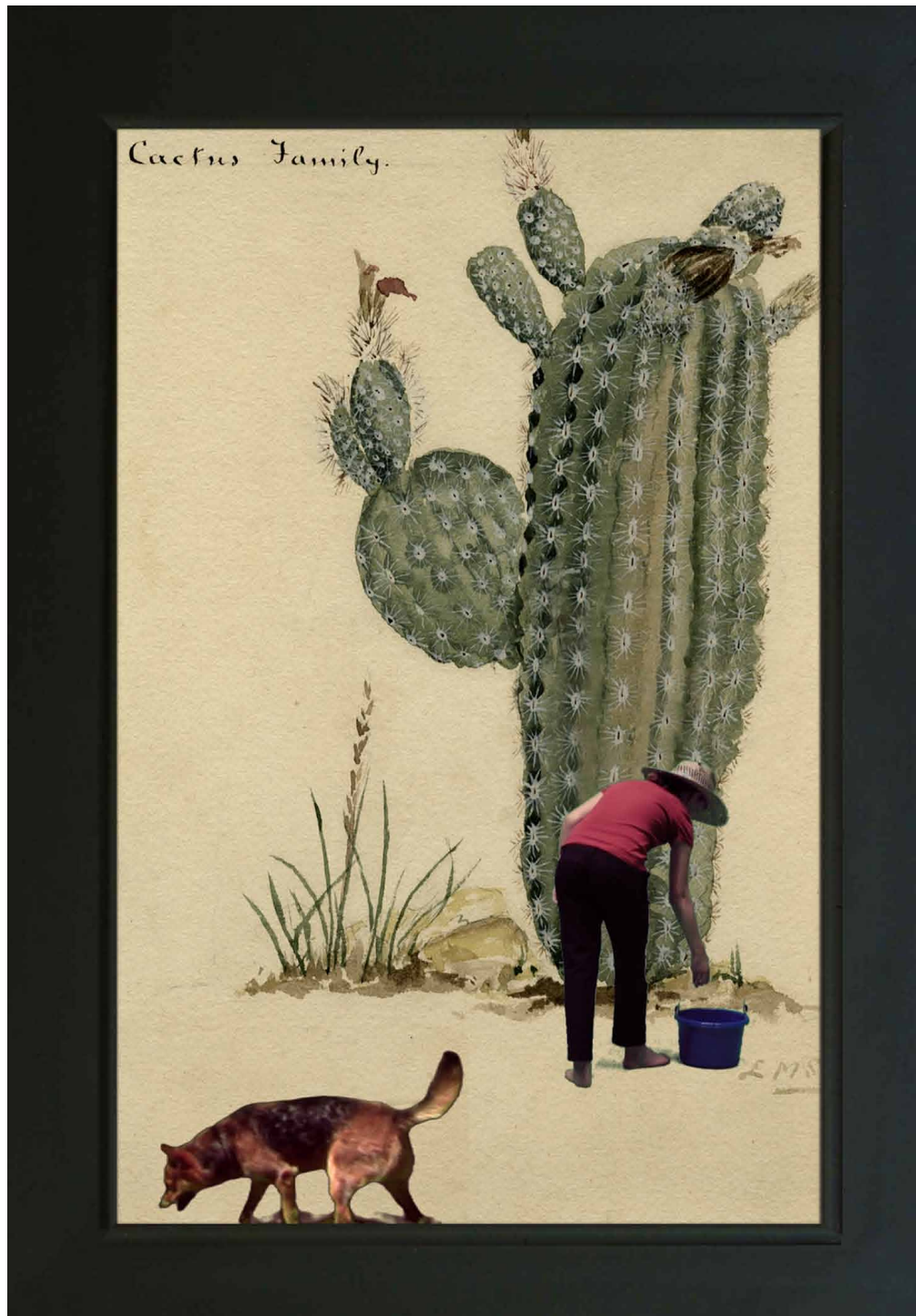
5. What’s the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

There are two great group exhibitions up in Kansas City right now. *American Soldier*, a photography exhibition at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, and *Making Histories*, a primarily video exhibition focusing on global events at H&R Block Artspace. Both do a fantastic job, in my opinion, of bringing together artists who take a wide variety of approaches to topics more frequently relegated to journalism. The pieces in these shows are both beautiful and challenging, and the experimentation present was really inspiring and gave me a lot of hometown pride!

Artist: Mary Tsiongas

Nominating committee: New Mexico State Committee

Consulting curator: Lisa Tamiris Becker, UNM Art Museum



Mary Tsiongas, *The Mercurial Dog Anticipates Her*, 2013; LED monitor, 2-minute HD video loop, media player, and wooden frame, 33 x 24 x 4 in.; Courtesy of the artist and Richard Levy Gallery

Artist: Mary Tsiongas

Nominating committee: New Mexico State Committee

Consulting curator: Lisa Tamiris Becker, UNM Art Museum

1. How does your work *The Mercurial Dog Anticipates Her* relate to the theme of the natural world?

My vision for this piece, which is part of a body of work called *The Likenesses of Light*, was to relate the interdependence of plants, animals, and humans to the interrelationships of art forms through contemporary media. The work is informed by early film history, and in *The Mercurial Dog Anticipates Her*, I used a botanical print by Edward Skeats (a little-known artist in the collection of the UNM Art Museum) as a backdrop or environment for the action to happen. The work shows a scenario in the desert that alludes to childhood fables and folklore but also our deep dependence on water and animals for survival. I evoke fables and folklore because as children this is one way we learn about nature; we learn that nature is animated, alive, wise, tricky, powerful, humbling, etc.

2. Is this piece representative of your oeuvre? How does it fit into your larger body of work?

It is fairly representative of my most recent works. In the series *Vanish* and *The Likenesses of Light* I use paintings and drawings of landscapes/plants/animals by other artists as backdrops and then add or animate characters that manipulate the work in some form. The figures inhabit the paintings/drawings, erase them, blur them, and change them, alluding to our manipulation of and effect on our environment. The work also suggests the potential impermanence of new media and the durability of paintings. I was hoping for a playful dialogue with painting as an older tradition; it's a frozen frame, a created moment in time, whereas video moves, connotes lapsed time, and is more ephemeral. The piece that is in *Organic Matters* has a botanical drawing of a cactus as a backdrop and in the foreground I've added a figure of a girl and a coyote-like dog that appear to change and alter the cactus and thus the drawing. I am hoping the work tells a story of the interdependence of humans, animals and plants.

3. As an artist, what is your most essential tool? Why?

I do a lot of research for my work, or perhaps more appropriately "hunting" for information, images, objects that will spark the evolution and development of whatever I'm

working on. So the computer is probably the most essential tool I use. But I also go to libraries and bookstores, and I walk in the desert to find this "information" as well.

I would also have to add a skill that is essential for me, and that is editing. Not just for video editing on my computer, editing is ultimately one of the most important skills an artist can have. You have to know what stays and what to get rid of or what doesn't belong in the work.

4. What are your sources of inspiration or influence?

In addition to my interest in folklore and metaphysics, I also have a background in science. I am currently reading (and sometimes rereading) Julian Barbour's book *The End of Time*. It's a book on the physics of time. Several years back I became very interested in "time" and how we understand it as humans. It evolved from an interest in trees and their immensely long lives; and in dendrochronology, the study of tree ring dating. I have been reading up on different ideas of time as much as I can. A few years back I saw David Wilson's stereoscopic video *Book of Wisdom and Lies* at the Museum of Jurassic Technology in L.A. I was amazed how it seemed to represent the idea that time and space are linked; it's also absolutely gorgeous. It has been another great inspiration.

5. What's the last exhibition you saw that you had a strong reaction to?

Last fall I was part of an exhibition called *Late Harvest* curated by JoAnne Northrup at the Nevada Museum of Art. It was a remarkable exhibition that juxtaposed contemporary works, some of them using taxidermy, with historical wildlife paintings. The diversity of works and the way they were installed in the space was quite entrancing. There were works in the show that were disturbing, and many that were quite inspiring.