

Imagining the World, Imagining Ourselves
Perception of Place, Sense of Self, and Creative Witnessing

by

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M.F.A. University of Colorado Boulder, 2018

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Colorado in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
Department of Art & Art History
2018

This thesis entitled:
Imagining the World, Imagining Ourselves:
Perception of Place, Sense of Self, and Creative Witnessing
written by Julia Topla Rose Klema
has been approved for the Department of Art and Art History

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

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Imagining the World, Imagining Ourselves: Perception of Place, Sense of Self, and
Creative Witnessing, *Thesis directed by Professor Melanie Yazzie*

This thesis examines how artistic response to landscape is both an act of definition and representation of place as well as a product of how an individual perceives the places they encounter. I investigate my own artistic practice, which is centered around expedition travel by river. From the vantage point of a river, a landscape may be seen in a dynamic way; a river is a natural and active pathway through the space. As a result of physical immersion in place, I creatively respond to rivers through photography, then work over the photographic images with printmaking and drawing techniques. Through the combination of these processes, I analyze how creative process may be a method through which it is possible to further understand our environments. Simultaneously, I dissect how artistic practice can be a means to develop knowledge through which we self-situate by correlating how acts of perception and representation relate to how we define ourselves. I examine how photography and drawing-based media function differently as representational and investigative tools, and how each entails varying levels of interaction, observation, and temporal involvement with landscape. In the text, I analyze how engaging in creative process challenges me to consider and reconsider how I understand my environments, scrutinizing how my preconceptions of landscape influence my creative practice. I question how artworks result in being both constructions and discoveries, records and interpretations, and how layers of interaction contained within

creative process – person with place, person with creative act, and creative product with place – ultimately generate specific understandings of the world. I consider my work within the context of Rick Dingus’s photo drawing work, David Maisel’s aerial photographs of mines and lakes, Barry Lopez’s writings about interaction with landscape, John Berger’s explorations of drawing process, Rachel Jones’s deliberations on *not knowing*, Roland Barthes’s analysis of visual representation, and Robert Macfarlane’s philosophy on movement through landscape, among others. Through this inquiry and by approaching environment through creative practice, it is possible to see not only the makeup of landscape itself, but frameworks of representation as ways to cultivate, question, and challenge awareness. Through the creative act, I examine how artist and landscape form and inform each other.

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INTRODUCTION

Creative response to place is a reaction to what is outside ourselves while also an investigation of ourselves, as we interface with our surroundings. This is an act of witnessing, a process during which artist and place simultaneously form and inform each other. Landscape becomes an expression and interpretation by the artist, a lens through which we self-situate, while simultaneously, we exist as part of the landscape itself. Barry Lopez writes in *Arctic Dreams*, his seminal book in which he discusses relationship to place, that “The mind can imagine beauty and conjure intimacy. It can find solace where literal analysis finds only trees and rocks and grass.”¹ At the center of my inquiry is how interactions between people and their surroundings can develop into something central to self-identification and knowing. This question becomes more complex when considering artistic response. How does creative process reinforce and further a sense of belonging to place and understanding of self? Through a creative practice combining photography, printmaking, and drawing, I investigate the connection between myself and my environment.

In my work, I attempt to create a sense of the physical spaces of landscape while also recognizing the passing of time. Visual expression gives form to my own acts of record-keeping and documentation, observation, as well as subjective and emotional response. My work becomes an approximation of the experiences of observing, interacting, and *existing* within a landscape. Through the combination of media, I

¹ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* (First Vintage Books, 2001), 391; Lopez is a writer and biologist.

examine photography as a medium that assumes aspects of truthfulness in its representation. In contrast, I consider the interpretive implications of printmaking and drawing. Through my research process, I incorporate these artistic techniques and their representational frameworks into physical immersion in place. Different modes of my own viewership (as artist) are thus inherent in my process of working, as well as in the way I approach landscape. I become, as a result, both visiting entity and integral component of the landscape, my experience of place reflected in my process of working.

Taking on multiple roles and structuring my work in this way is the natural outcome of an intricate layering of interactions I find occurring between myself and the natural world. These interactions include everything from experiencing the physical suffering of cold, hunger, and fatigue, to being drawn into overwhelming awe at glimpsing wild wolves, to the wonder of profound silence in remote locations. These innumerable, complex, and nuanced points of connection comprise my experience of place; small details of experience converge, composing my sense of place and determining my sense of self in relation to the places I investigate in my work.

My interest in exploring wild landscapes through art is rooted equally in curiosity about land itself, as well as how my interactions with place engender my concept of self. In considering the complexities of this inquiry, I find resonance in how photographer Rick Dingus describes his photo drawing work. Through this work, he is

...exploring connection between inner landscapes of the mind and the external world...studying not just how places change physically over time, but how places also change us...investigating how the places we visit, travel through, and live in

affect and alter who we are and who we become by creating impressions we carry that inform our ongoing choices and actions.²

By way of creative process merged with investigative travel, I explore how we define ourselves and our relationships to our environments. I question how the places we experience shape us. I examine how each layer of interaction – person with place, person with creative act, and creative product with place – ultimately generates specific understandings of the world we immerse ourselves in.

² Rick Dingus's, *Shifting Views & Changing Places*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 79. Dingus combines photography and drawing as a way to explore his own understanding of place and his ability to perceive it. He scrutinizes both change in landscape over time as well as the potential of image as a tool to translate information.

Ch. 1 Rivers: A Foundation of On-Site and Studio Practice

My interest in wild places originates from having spent three decades of my life in southwest Colorado, immersed in both mountain and desert ecosystems. In this region I extensively explored the myriad features of the Colorado Plateau and beyond, developing a strong sense of belonging and involvement in the landscape. Primarily, I traveled by boat on the many river systems that transect the expanse of the Southwest. Moving in this way allowed me not only to venture beyond easily accessible areas, but also to immerse myself for days or weeks at a time in the wilderness. This close engagement with the landscape encouraged and cultivated in me a manner of in-depth observation and interaction with the places that surround me.



Figure 1, Colorado River in Grand Canyon, 2007

By developing discernment in conjunction with the immersive experience of travel by river, I gained a deep appreciation for how water shapes the land around us. By traveling the length of a river, or even part of one, it is possible to see how a landscape is composed: small rivulets join to create streams which join to create rivers, which wash away and cut into the rock and dirt of the earth surface. Noticing fundamental structures of landscape amounts to an initial understanding, to paraphrase conservationist Martin Litton, that water is the essence of the place, and without it you cannot understand the landscape.³ Indeed, water is at the center of the topographic development of the places we inhabit, defining in some way (either presently or historically) all of the landscapes we know. It is a central factor of healthy ecosystems, a requirement of our own physical survival, and the architect of the complex and profound beauty of riverine terrain. My creative research is in part rooted in the essential nature of water to the landscapes we exist within. Through my creative process, I describe and engage with ecologically diverse and sensitive river channels around the world.

From the vantage point of a river, moving through land by water, a landscape may be seen in a dynamic way; a river is a natural and active pathway through the space. My research process begins with visiting a specific river in person and rafting or kayaking long sections of it. This may entail spending up to several weeks living alongside and with the river, a rare opportunity. Subtle awareness resurfaces and

³ Kevin Fedarko, *The Emerald Mile* (Scribner, 2013), 83-84; this comes from Litton's historic speech to the Sierra Club that galvanized the group to oppose several massive dam projects proposed on the Colorado River in Grand Canyon. Due to their opposition, the dams were never built.

natural circadian rhythms resume. This can manifest through simply having time to spend in observation – my mind becomes uncluttered and receptive to my surroundings. Days become straightforward, carried out only in response to the land: I make physical adjustments to shifts occurring in the environment, travel through the terrain, and fulfill my curiosity about the place. I am able to spend time in observation, and the land becomes something of great interest. I may spend an hour in the morning watching the light shift along a riverbank, taking in the sights and sounds of where I am, or, when in the Arctic, may be constantly attentive to the movement along shore of grizzly bears, caribou, and muskoxen. With reawakened and heightened sensitivity, I gain greater awareness to observe and immerse myself in location. Barry Lopez writes: “This is an old business, walking slowly over the land with an appreciation of its immediacy to the senses and in anticipation of what lies hidden in it.”⁴ It is with this sentiment that I approach coming to know a river and its milieu. The composition of the greater landscape and ecosystem begin to make sense when experienced through the comprehensible pace of water and its trajectory. I see the shorelines as continuous lines of intersection for everything in the landscape. Here evidence of the shift and movement of water is visible. Traces of passing animals are stumbled upon. Unanticipated things can be found. I record my observations and experiences by writing, drawing, and photographing. At times, I do none of these things and instead simply witness my surroundings. Understanding of place slowly develops through this combination of responsive processes.

⁴ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* (First Vintage Books, 2001), 254.

One of my recent works, *Ice Banks*, was the product of a trip to the Firth River in the northwest corner of the Yukon Territory of Canada. Not only was this river striking because of the stark nature of the Arctic landscape, but also because of the timing of my visit there. My expedition group and I went in early June, just when the ice embedded in the river channel begins to break up and melt away. In fact, we were uncertain if we would be able to descend the stretch of river we initially planned on because of ice obstructions in the channel. We determined on our flight into the wilderness that we could portage the impassable sections if necessary. We began at a point in the river that is eighty miles from where it flows into the Beaufort Sea off the north edge of the continent. We were lucky in this because we saw and experienced the river in shift. Massive ice blocks were gradually tilting into the river and the banks lining the water often consisted of up to twelve feet of solid ice. Visually, this was stunning. The ice at that time was the most visibly dynamic part of the landscape as it was constantly readjusting to the changing season. At the points where it rested on rocks of the riverbed, it became cast by their shape. I photographed the ice extensively, both close upon its surface as well as from the river channel. I was specifically drawn to the rocks embedded on the underside of the ice. As I looked at them, I was able to imagine how the ice formed over the rocks, and how building up over time, it increased its downward pressure, deepening the imprint the rocks made into it.



Figure 2, Aufeis, Firth River, 2017

Following my direct interactions with rivers, I return to my studio. There I work with the photographs, drawings, and writings I completed on-site. In the case of the images from the Firth River, I was interested in creating an image or images that could somehow give simultaneously a sense of the intimate delicacy of the ice while also communicating the grandeur of the ice banks. I was experimenting with a few alternative photography processes at the time. The deep blue of cyanotype prints seemed to fit the rich tones found in the ice. I began coating and creating contact negatives for full sheets of printmaking paper, exposing large yet detailed views of the ice surface. From seeing the ice in person to beginning to reconstruct what I understood of it through my photographs, my work gradually developed from my initial

contact with the river itself.

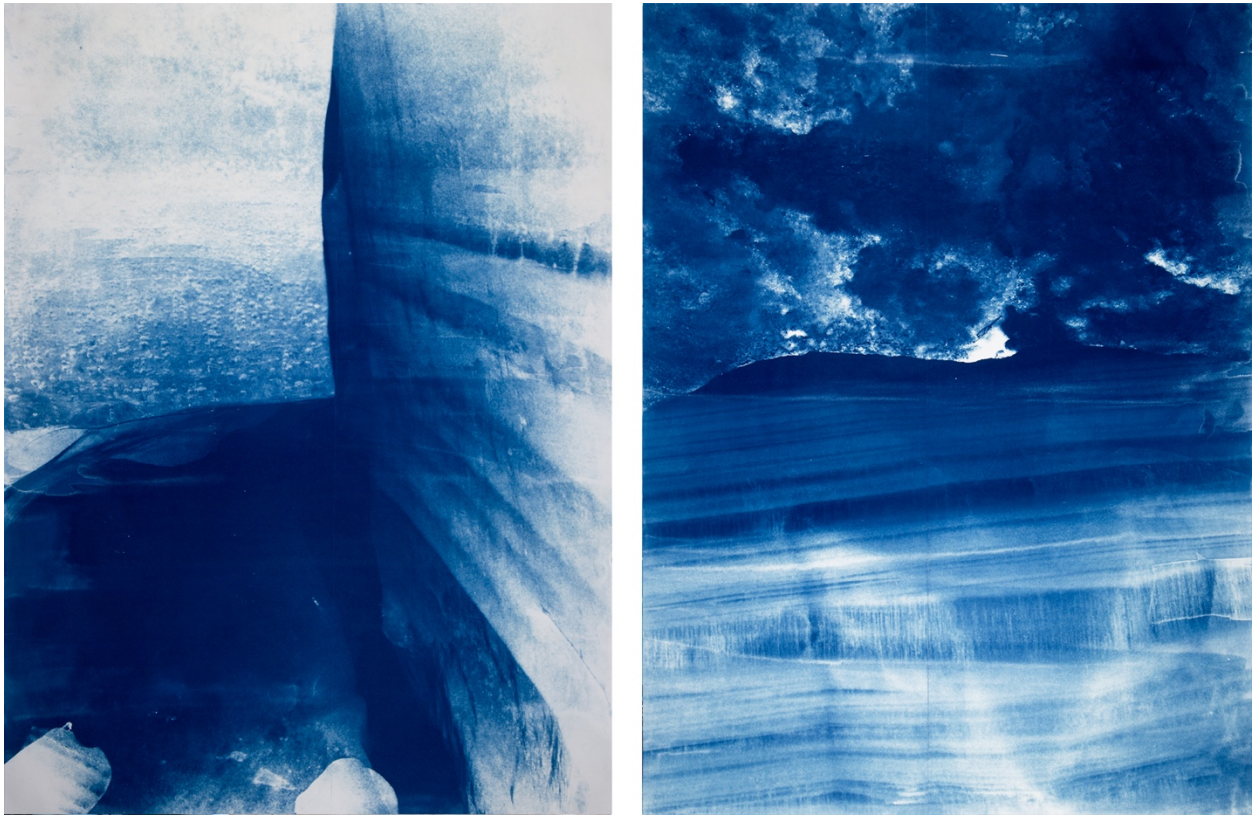


Figure 3, Julia Klema, *Ice Banks 4 & 2*, 2017, cyanotype

My creative act is initiated by witnessing and interacting with landscapes and rivers. It develops into the secondary step of response on location, primarily that of taking photographs. It later continues to develop through a reinvestigation of the space and my own perception with the addition of drawing-based media to the photographic surface. I use the term drawing or drawing-based media to refer to both hand produced line and the printmaking processes used in my work, because drawing is the basis of both. In my process, photographs indicate the immediacy of certain moments of perception. Drawing participates as a secondary consideration and envisioning of the subject. I elaborate on or redefine features in the image, highlighting points of interest.

I bring to mind how water has affected or might fill and travel through the space.

Drawing is an action through which I bear witness to how water moves, nourishing the plants and animals along its path and shaping the land it passes through.

Simultaneously, drawing acknowledges my own experiences of observation and contact within the landscape.

Through my artistic process, I continually gain new insight into the land and my own relationship to it. In combining photographs I took on-site with hand produced line, I reference different experiences I have had of the place or subject. These may be fleeting glimpses, comprehensive study, or something in between. What I am able to convey through a multimedia approach is an indication of the layers of nuanced and multitudinous interactions that have become what I know of a place and of myself within that place. My work becomes a composition of the experience of witnessing both inner and outer landscapes in instantaneous and continuous ways, while considering different methods of seeing and response to my surroundings.

Ch. 2 Defining the Edge of What We Know: The Photograph

The layered and distinct moments of experience that I use as a means to understand place and self are exemplified by the precise ways that photography and drawing each differently represent and reference subject matter. Parallels exist between pure acts of perception and the moment by moment observational steps these media necessitate while the artist is engaged in them. Through artistic process, and through investigating the ways that art creates connections between artist and place, it is possible to see not only the makeup of landscape itself, but frameworks of representation as ways to cultivate, question, and challenge awareness.

Photography is a powerful tool that can be used to describe and investigate the world. The photograph closely approximates what is perceived by the human eye, and as such may hold within its frame a sense of truthfulness, representing objects as they exist in the real world. By means of the mechanical function of the camera, photographs carry connotations of being records of what is before the lens, indexical in their representation of the real world subject. As Rosalind Krauss notes: “Countermanding the artist’s possible formal intervention in creating the work is the overwhelming physical presence of the original object, fixed” in the work itself.⁵ Indeed, with the development of the camera, photography replaced drawing as the primary way to document what we observe around us.⁶ As Roland Barthes identifies:

⁵ Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America”, *October*, Vol. 3 (1977): 80.

⁶ Katharine Stout, *Contemporary Drawing: From the 1960s to Now*, (Tate Publishing, 2014), 14.

...to shift from reality to its photograph, it is not at all necessary to break down this reality into units and to constitute these units into signs substantially different from the object they represent...of course, the image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect *analogon*, and it is just this analogical perfection which...defines the photograph.⁷

The photograph can present an equivalence of reality. Absent from the photograph (most of the time) is obvious interference by the artist or structures of relay that are necessary to show (and re-present) the subject, as exist in drawing. Photography's role as a tool of documentation has endured since early photographic processes were developed, and yet the initial expectation of its factual representation is confounded by the extent with which photography can also be used to interpret and imagine the world we see. The creative and exploratory dimensions of photography in combination with its documentary implications culminate in what I would consider to be a selective truth: accurate impressions of tangible forms that, while being real, simultaneously reveal a constructed concept of the world – that is, a specific and individual viewpoint crafted by the photographer. The intent of the photographer, technical limitations or decisions made in the making of an image, and ways the artist understands their subject all combine to give singular representation of what is before the lens. To this effect, American photographers Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Ansel Adams attempted to address through their work the role of the photograph as it bridges being both creative work and document:

⁷ Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc, 1985), 5.

[these photographers] worked to describe the association between the photographic image and the real world subject, to define the relationship between the photographer's mind and the physical object before his camera...they concluded that the photograph is no mere copy of the outer world, and, although they granted that there was...linkage between what the photographer knew and that outside world, they believed that there is no point-by-point correspondence between the two. Bias, viewpoint, technical limitations, and of course creativity—all these (and more) meant that what the photographer has to say about a subject, and how the photographer represents that subject, are distinct, sometimes joyously distinct, from the observed subject.⁸

The divergence between real world subject and photograph is the opening where creative use of photographic processes equates to creation of meaning within image.

The photographer steps further than just creating clear reproductions of what exists in the real world. They instead bring to light their individual relationships with and perspectives of diverse subject matter. No photographer photographs the same subject in the same way that another would. All of the many factors involved in making an image combine and contribute to result in distinct viewpoints. Photographs have “the dual nature of being both constructions and discoveries”.⁹

A vivid everyday example of the dualism and selective truth of photography can be found in images of Delicate Arch in Arches National Park of Utah. This iconic landform is much visited and photographed. Photos you encounter of it portray a seemingly pristine and remote location, often devoid of people, which contrast the improbable form of the arch against its red rock and mountain surroundings. If you, in fact, go to Delicate Arch, you see that dozens of people are there at any one time. A

⁸ David P. Peeler, *The Illuminating Mind in American Photography*, (University of Rochester Press, 2001), 3.

⁹ Peeler, 8.

line forms allowing everyone their chance to photograph the arch without people (or without unknown people) within the frame. What the photographs show first is the unpopulated arch, which is in fact before the camera, but more so a wished for reality. The photographs become a vision of the place which does not align with the actuality of visiting this spot, the crowds standing behind each person who is pressing the shutter button omitted from the images. In this context the process of capturing a photograph of Delicate Arch can be seen as simultaneously a response and a creation, a record and an interpretation.



Figure 4, Delicate Arch, Imagined and Experienced.

With the camera trained on it and the photograph re-presenting it (recording and concurrently interpreting it) the world becomes something mediated by the two-dimensional image and the viewpoint or mindset of the photographer. The camera and photograph become interfaces between artist and landscape. The photograph embodies the ambiguity of photography's representational role, the photograph being something not fully real, yet not fully imagined.

The imprecise relationship between a photograph and the photographic subject parallels my own relationship to place, both as individual and artist. Under scrutiny, the

connection between individual and place is revealed to be part construction, part an imbuing of place with our own emotion, part invitation for our surroundings to envelop us. As William Tydeman writes in observation of the act of writing in response to landscape, “There is a way of writing about place, in which the place itself—becoming part of you as you reach out into the world you witness—seems to participate”.¹⁰ The exchange Tydeman points to between individual and place in writing holds true in the visual arts as well. In a literal sense, the way in which the photograph indicates real world forms by responding to the light bouncing off of them reiterates the sentiment Tydeman touches on. Exceeding that, by simply observing, recording, and interpreting the world around us, we are responding to place by letting it influence us, touch us, and tell us something about itself. There is reciprocity in creating art about place and writing about place in which the artist and the subject meet and jointly participate, creating an exchange through their interaction.

In my own process of photographing remote landscapes and rivers, the camera and the photograph are secondary to my own unimpeded interactions with what surrounds me. Unhindered contact is the primary origin of my creative act, and here is where any image I make, drawing I produce, or essay I write always begins. Through unrestricted involvement in the landscape, I am able to allow the place to draw me into it. I respond to landscape in an almost passive way, allowing the sensations and sights of the place to influence and direct me to especially compelling parts of itself. The land becomes a determining factor in how I photograph it, as I allow its suggestion to direct

¹⁰ William E. Tydeman, *Conversations with Barry Lopez*, (University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 6.

my focus. I may, for example, follow a small trickle of water moving through the desert, to find its source, the water itself enticing me to move through the land in this direction. Through my photographs, I attempt to capture a sense of the perceptive and receptive state I experience within the landscape. In this case, the photograph is a document, certainly of the object or space before the camera but also of the moments spent in this direct interaction. Drawing and working back on top of my photographs both furthers the sense of capturing the primary experience as well as understanding it more intricately. The way in which artist Rick Dingus combines photographs and then in part obscures them through making marks upon the surface becomes an acknowledgement of the continuous and multifaceted nature of our understanding of place. Dingus says of his work:

“I became interested in... [landscape] as a constructed vernacular environment instead of as a beautiful picture or a pristine natural setting. I saw it as the world reflecting our changing choices, roles, and understanding. Landscapes became any environment—interior or exterior—where visible intersections of culture and nature existed that seemed worth pondering.”¹¹

In my artistic process, making art about place has also come to be a pursuit in which I am making art about myself and the human experience. I am striving to understand who I am because of landscape, questioning how my perception of place concurrently causes and is a result of how I position myself in the world. Photography becomes a tool in this process that builds initial understanding.

¹¹ Dingus, *Shifting Views & Changing Places*, 29.



Figure 5, Rick Dingus, *Empty Soda Well near San Ysidro, New Mexico*, 1989

...

When photographing within a landscape, I often photograph close in, sometimes abstracting the space, finding small details of interest: the way rocks cast shadows on themselves, how debris is imbedded in ice, remaining traces of a past flood, or the curving striations of bedrock. This method reflects how I conceive of my own understanding of place: an accumulation of seemingly insignificant moments and observations that coalesce into a rich sum of understanding. The result is a gradual and growing discovery of my surroundings; experiences of witnessing landscape and

involving myself with place continually develop into layers of knowledge of place. Knowledge becomes the composition made up of these moments of experience that inform how I comprehend the vast expanse of a terrain. My choice of framing, limiting the view available from my photographs, highlights how the intimate parts of a landscape still portray the essence of it; the greater character of the land is evidenced in its details. Abstracting my subjects through my choice of framing forces an imaginative wandering beyond the edge of what is visible and a questioning on the part of the viewer of what they are looking at. The necessity of investigating my work correlates to my own processes of investigative contact with land. Discovery becomes a method to sustain wonder and to, in turn, propel revelation of things not initially evident in landforms or within images. As Rachel Jones discusses, there is a state of potential inherent in initially not understanding what we see:

*Not knowing constitutes on the one hand an inevitable effect of the perspectival limits that allow us not only to think, but to exist at all, as the temporarily individuated entities that we are; and on the other, a condition of becoming, of the possibility of the not-yet and still-to-be, without its emergence being overshadowed by what already is and has been.*¹²

Temporarily being uncertain, being limited in our scope of understanding, becomes an opportunity: what we know and see is not overshadowed by what we already know and have already seen. I cultivate this state through the way in which I attempt to let landscape influence me during my photographic process, an intentional counteracting of expectation and preconception from changing how I see a space. Similarly, the

¹² Rachel Jones, "On the Value of Not Knowing: Wonder, Beginning Again and Letting Be", in *On Not Knowing*, ed. Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), 16.

abstraction of my photographs produces this state in those who view my work, forestalling any translation of the images “into the conceptual and symbolic frameworks we use to make sense of the world.”¹³



Figure 6, Julia Klema, *Schist 7*, Colorado River, 2018

When I was photographing the schist (an ancient igneous rock) along the Colorado River, what I found most alluring in its form was the highly polished and

¹³ Jones, “On the Value of Not Knowing”, 19.

sculpted surface of it. The best way to get a view of it was from the river itself, so I was in my kayak, letting the current spin me slowly downstream. I relinquished control of the movement of the boat most of the time, allowing the water's currents and pace to determine my perspective of the shore. I only had a few moments at a time to identify and set my camera correctly to photograph certain sections of the rock before I would be spun in the other direction. The trajectory of the river itself in this case participated in my perception of the landscape. In this, I found an instantaneous response to the forms in front of me. I zoomed in slightly on the beautiful curves and lines of the rock, finding parts of the rock which showed the erosive traces left by water. From these intimate views I could begin to imagine and discover more of the greater makeup of the cliffs before me.



Figure 7, Photographing on the Colorado River, 2018

Photographer David Maisel has a similar approach to photographing landscape. He creates visually seductive, lush aerial photographs of open pit mines, poisoned lakes, and deforested tracts of land. These images are at once initially mysterious and abstract; it takes a moment to understand what we are seeing. Speaking to this, Julian Cox in introducing Maisel's book *Black Maps* says,

repeatedly the photograph's bounding frame formulates space by limiting it, simultaneously lavishing the imagination with a sense of vision beyond what is shown. What we are left with are complex visual shards that pulse with life and embody the photographer's concentrated thoughts and emotions.¹⁴

The coinciding limitation and creation of space reiterates the sentiment of reaching out into the world in an effort to know it, while simultaneously it is acting upon us while we carry out the creative act.



¹⁴ David Maisel, *Black Maps*, (Steidl Publishers, 2013), 10.

Photographing our surroundings is an act of defining things we know as well as those we don't. I envision myself on some indeterminate line, the bounding edge of the photograph perhaps, poised between the known and the unknown and finding through my photographs the exact contours of this stance. Maisel eloquently describes flying over and photographing contaminated bodies of water: "Red, pink, coral, rose, pearl, graphite, opal. The seduction of surfaces. The dizzying collapse of one system into another. We gathered images in a vain effort to comprehend...We expose our film and map our inability to know".¹⁵ Through the act of photographing, we undergo a visual exploration of our surroundings, often on the verge of the unknown. We come closer to understanding the world and ourselves within it, delineating at the same time that which is beyond our comprehension. Barry Lopez reflects:

We all...apprehend the land imperfectly, even when we go to the trouble to wander in it. Our perceptions are colored by preconception and desire. The physical landscape is an unstructured abode of space and time and is not entirely fathomable; but this does not necessarily put us at a disadvantage in seeking to know it.¹⁶

Creative inquiry and response is a way to begin to situate ourselves in the places we exist within. It is a method through which we can learn about change in our environments as well as alterations in and the effects of our own perception. Through looking, investigating, photographing, we can find beauty within damaged or imperfect places, as Maisel does and as I do. It becomes an act of witnessing. My works of

¹⁵ Maisel, *Black Maps*, 123.

¹⁶ Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, 257.

photography, printmaking, and drawing are an ongoing and evolving attempt to find the defining moments of my interactions with wild lands. Through these moments, I create the conceptual reference points that become my understanding of place. Each photographic fragment, drawing, and print contained in my bodies of work, acts as a notation which corresponds to my in-person experience of land, corroborating my memories as evidence of place. This amounts to an attempt to know, an establishment of structures of experience through which to approach landscape, in the face of vast unknown.

Ch. 3 Drawing: Sight, Surface, and Time

Through drawing we begin to define ourselves by considering what it is we see. We replicate our lines of sight and create physical marks upon the page. Drawing implies an extended sense of both the duration involved in creative production as well as the requisite amount of time spent in interaction with the subject. It is a powerful representational and investigative tool, but with the artist becoming the central mediating factor between the subject and the final image, it also incorporates personal narrative. Historically, drawing has been considered to be indicative of the artist's process of thought, pages of sketch books being where artists formulated ideas that were later put into finished works.¹⁷ Drawing as a medium has since shed this limited framework; however, it still implicates the cognitive activity of the artist because it often includes long periods of looking, observing, and coming to know a subject.

As photography suggests realism, drawing implies investigation and subjective representation. The differing representational referencing of photography and drawing is grounded in how each depicts a subject, while also being expressive of the steps they involve as artistic processes. The content of a drawing has been filtered through the mind and body of the artist and because of this contains strong connotations of individual understanding. While photography has "been described as an indexical moment but with a different temporal register from drawing, which unfolds over time," drawing may approximate reality while also maintaining some distinction from the idea

¹⁷ Stout, *Contemporary Drawing: From 1960s to Now*, 12.

of being a direct trace, imprint, or contiguity.¹⁸ For viewer and artist, drawing is another way in which we extend ourselves into the world that surrounds us as we attempt to know it. Artist, writer, and critic John Berger writes:

...the lines on the paper are traces left behind by the artist's gaze which is ceaselessly leaving, going out, interrogating the strangeness, the enigma of what is before his eyes...The sum total of the lines on the paper narrates an optical emigration on which the artist, following his own gaze, settles on the person or tree or animal or mountain being drawn.¹⁹

There is no way to isolate the visual definition produced of an object through drawing from personal perception. Drawn representations become formulations and translations of cognitive recognition, another reflection of self upon the landscape and landscape upon the self – a point of meeting. As such, as Roland Barthes discusses, a drawing exists as an image that contains

a supplementary message which is what we commonly call the *style* of reproduction...a second meaning, whose signifier is a certain "treatment" of the image as a result of the creator's action...the duality of messages is obvious in all reproductions which are not photographic...²⁰

The additional information contained in a drawing is the visual translation of individual perception, to be decoded by viewers of the work. As Barthes states, "every image is polysemous."²¹ Drawings encompass not only the representation of their subjects, but also the artist's visual sensibility and discernment. Tension and potential for discovery arises from the additional implied meaning within an image.

¹⁸ Stout, *Contemporary Drawing: From the 1960s to Now*, 14.

¹⁹ Berger, *Landscapes: John Berger on Art*, (Verso, 2016), 22.

²⁰ Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, 5.

²¹ Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms*, 28.

In my own practice, I draw both on-site as well as in my studio. Drawing provides a gradually-emerging knowledge of my subject as I visually explore the aspects of its physical presence. Drawings produced on location relate strongly to specific moments and places, becoming records of time spent face to face with my subject, repositories of memory. Drawing requires me to look deeply. It demands investigation of my own understanding of shape, color, form, and shadow, prompting me to develop more subtle awareness of what I am looking at. Drawing in this way is like telling a story: an act of defining objects or moments by ascertaining their defining features, of finding traits that delineate their form, making them recognizable, and putting that down on paper. Creative response through drawing is a re-envisioning, a recollection, an exploration.

In my series *Monsoon Flood*, which depicts residue of a desert flash flood that took place in an Arizona canyon, the photographs I took become the substrate on which I explore the movement of water as well as my own viewership. Lines, marks, and textures of the stream bed overlay the image as a structure of response. Through drawing I consider what is shown in the photograph and further develop it, enhancing, obscuring, and exploring the space. I tell the story of my visual and perceptual interaction with place, reconstructing it through the artwork.

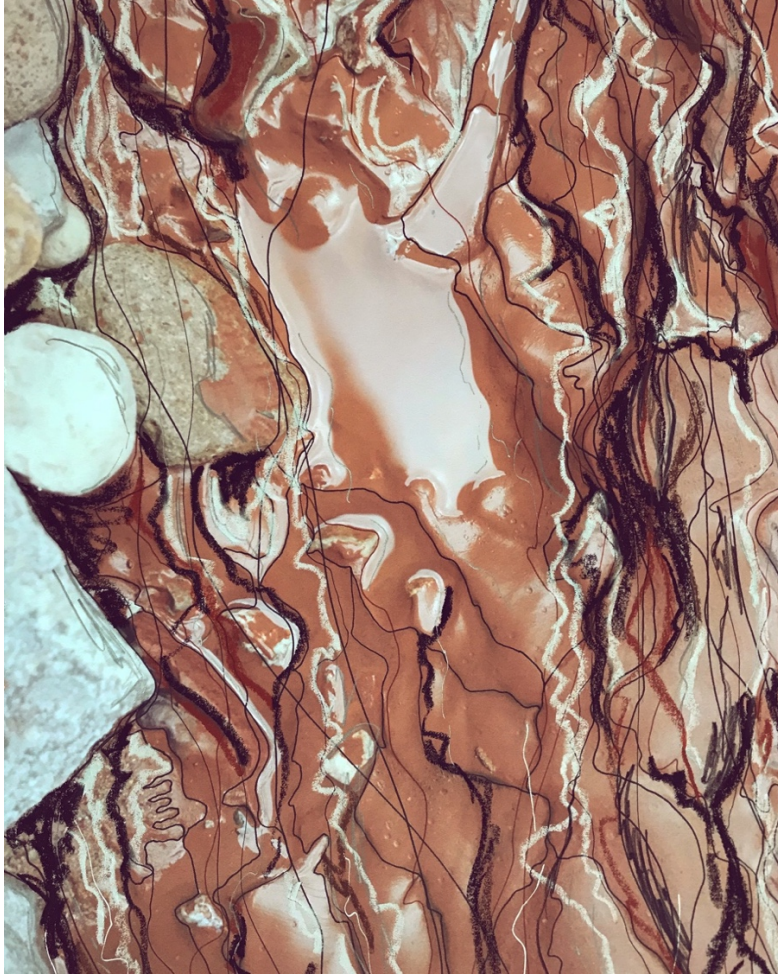


Figure 9, Julia Klema, *Monsoon Flood 2*, Grand Canyon, Arizona, 2018, pigment print, pen, and pastel

Drawing denotes and prompts observation. While making cyanotypes of the ice I saw at the Firth River, I wanted to bring more attention to parts of the images (and thereby the landscape) that I had specifically noticed. Particularly, this was the magnitude of the ice as well as the rocks of the riverbed that were contrasted against the underside of the ice. I began to recreate the banks, combining the thirty by twenty-two inch individual images into a single large panel. I arranged a row of images depicting the water and ground level, the rest showing the towering surface of the ice above. The images didn't fit together perfectly, each photograph an independent view of the ice. Instead they complemented each other, at times parts of one seeming to

continue into another, combining to create an understanding of the subject that must be discovered or inferred through their fragmentary nature. Continuing, I created drawings that could overlay the photographs as a screen print and would bring attention to the rocks. Because these rocks had so captured my interest and I had spent considerable time observing them, it seemed fitting to similarly spend time focusing on them in the development of the creative work. By adding the drawn portion over the photograph, I was replicating my experience of looking while also asking viewers of my work to perform an investigation of the rocks and the ice via the marks upon the image.

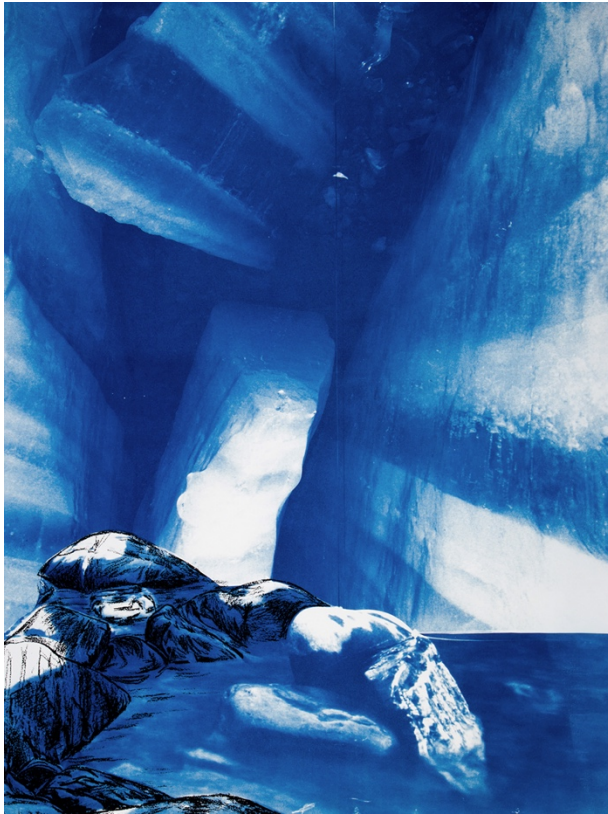




Figure 10, Julia Klema, *Ice Banks*, Firth River, Yukon, 2018, cyanotype and screen print

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In my art process, I also consider drawing from an additional perspective, one in which I am moving through the landscape, touching and traveling the surfaces, learning terrain through the senses. Physical contact with landscape is a reinforcement of the act of drawing on paper, while also being an act of drawing itself: movement becomes a source of visual knowledge while simultaneously the physical interaction of myself with place is a temporary inscription of my presence and my passing traces upon the landscape. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, “All things are engaged in writing their history...The ground is all memoranda and signatures; and every object covered over

with hints”.²² As the taking of a photograph is an encounter between light and object, physical touch is part of the reciprocal relationship between landscape and artist, each affecting and influencing the other, altered due to coexistence.

The broader concept of drawing and reciprocity relates on many levels to surface. In art, surface is simple to consider as it is often the surfaces of paper, clay, metal, or canvas that we shape, alter, cover, or draw upon. Camera lenses and sensors become surfaces through which we interact with our photographic subjects, recipients of the light that, again, responds to the varying surfaces of what is in front of them. Our eyes as well are surfaces that interpret and receive impressions. In wilderness, surface is dirt, rock wall, water, ice, ground, sky, and more. As an individual in interaction with those natural surfaces, to gain my perspective and the ability to define or depict my surroundings, my skin surface (in addition to my eyes) is the way I come to know a topography. When I walk across the rainy tundra, evidence is left of my passing across its muddy exterior, threads of current in the river temporarily shift from where I swam. Drawings are, in this context, imprints and marks, records upon the landforms.

Trace-making also takes place within the landscape itself, evidencing specific moments of interaction. My *Schist* photographs show the delicately fluted and sculpted surfaces of the rock, the outcome of sediment-laden water wearing down the forms. Small pebbles get stuck in cracks and, scraping slightly back and forth underwater, erode smooth fins. Ice, too, is a record of environmental interaction: extending back

²² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works*, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-4), vol.4, pp. 261-2.

from the exposed surface is documentation of the moments water interfaced with frigid air as, bit by bit, it solidified. The ice archives temperature and air movement, fluidity and solidity, a temporarily immobile record of interaction.

Water, too, draws across the landscape, much as we do if we repeatedly walked the same path. It imprints while also responding to features of the topography, cutting into soft shale, redirecting itself around immobile granite. In traveling through landscape via river channels I find these erosive traces. When looked for, the paths and vestiges of water are ubiquitous. I begin to imagine and research the movement, force, and imprints of water moving across the land, responding through one form of drawing to another.

In my twenty-piece panel, *Schist*, I explore different scales of water's impression on landscape. The photographs in this work are detailed portraits of the rock surface. Over the top of approximately half of these images I overlaid a screen print depicting the marks a river makes across the vast area of a river delta. The curving shapes and lines of the rock surface interplay with the delta's vestiges. I juxtapose visual components of the landscape that are distinct and yet also interconnected: erosion of the landscape produced by the same mechanism but on different scales across the landforms. Again, I combine discreet images into a large panel, giving semblance of the dimensions of the rock formations as well as showing the immense amount of variation in the rock surface. The photographs become the space in which I consider my personal vantage points, from close in and with distance, and find correlations within the landscape that are not initially apparent.



Figure 11, Julia Klema, *Schist 1*, Colorado River, 2018, pigment print and screen print



Figure 12, Julia Klema, *Schist 13*, Colorado River, Colorado, 2018, pigment print and screen print



Figure 13, *Schist*, Colorado River, Colorado, 2018, pigment print and screen print

In traveling paths of water, I find myself following active and natural routes drawn through the land. While of course a river provides a physical way to move through space, the trajectory of a river through landscape becomes a pathway of my imagination, with direction and future unknown. Alongside this, pencil drawing becomes a configuration of my sight, my footprints a record of movement. Robert Macfarlane writes about walking historic pathways:

these are the consequences of the old ways with which I feel easiest: walking as enabling sight and thought rather than encouraging retreat and escape; paths as offering not only means of traversing space, but also ways of feeling, being and knowing.²³

²³ Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, (Viking, 2012), 24; the term "old ways" refers to the ancient pathways and trails that Macfarlane walks.

Movement itself becomes an act of welcoming the unknown, an undertaking with potential to confound expectation, a route to gaining new understanding. Berger notes: “A drawing is an autobiographical record of one’s discovery of an event—seen, remembered, or imagined.”²⁴ Drawing, both in its standard definition and in one considering movement, is a medium that reinforces learning, perceiving, and coming face to face with the unknown. Like photography, drawing creates points of reference that tie us to the subjects we investigate with it, initiating a process of deciphering ourselves alongside our environments.

²⁴ Berger, *Landscapes: John Berger on Art*, 28.

Ch. 4 Experiencing Image: Narrative and Maps of Perception

From beginning to end, my creative process forces me to contemplate my own perception. The narrative of my awareness becomes the consistent undercurrent of my work, final images testament to the many ways I experience and interact with land. Carrying out art processes themselves challenges me to consider and then reconsider how I understand my environments and how my preconceptions of them influence my creative response.

Through photographs I revisit the instantaneous moments during which I saw my surroundings. As Dingus notes, photographs are a way of extending experience.²⁵ In a photograph I find something that both returns me to the places I have visited and that also causes me to imagine anew my interactions with them.

In subsequently marking over photographs, I attempt to capture more enduring interactions with landscape. Drawing becomes a practice of engaging with ongoing perception; revisiting the photographic surface becomes a remembering and re-envisioning of the visual space. As a secondary investigation of the image, drawing embodies the careful observation, intuitive response, and the imaginative encounter between myself and place. Hand-produced line recalls and augments the extended and slow exchange that took place between me and my subject. The exploration continues to take place for viewers of my work. Berger compares the viewer experience of drawing with other media:

²⁵ Dingus, *Shifting Views and Changing Places*, 27.

In front of a painting or statue [or photograph]...[the spectator] tends to identify himself with the subject, to interpret the images for their own sake; in front of a drawing he identifies himself with the artist, using the images to gain the conscious experience of seeing as though through the artist's own eyes.²⁶

The discrepancy noted here in reading images or works of arts relates back to how these media act within the artistic process. In the photograph (being the *analagon*), manipulation of the image is not expected, so we identify an objective reality within it. In a drawing, we ascertain an individual style or “shorthand” of representation that is a result of the artist's recognition of their subject; the artist's perspective becomes a central feature of the work.

Combining photography and drawing in my work integrates and opposes the assumptions made of each of these artistic processes. I confront the viewer with both a possibly *objective* reality of my subjects alongside a *discovered, imagined, or subjective* reality. I ask for viewers to decode and unpack my images, deciphering the compressed and divergent viewpoints that I present. The works require this discovery as well for their polysemy to emerge. Meanwhile, viewers themselves must confront their own experiences of perception while making sense of mine. By merging artistic processes (and thereby experiences of reality), my work becomes impetus to observe, discover, and face the world with an inquisitive mind. Dingus says the drawn marks overlaying his photographs “served as counterpoints of intuitive and imagined responses to challenge the documentary associations that were commonly projected onto photography.”²⁷ The addition of drawing to my photographs brings to the work the

²⁶ Berger, *Landscapes: John Berger on Art*, 28.

²⁷ Dingus, *Shifting Views & Changing Places*, 28.

subjective and interpretive knowledge of place carried from my direct experience, largely absent from the photographs themselves, and which comprises much of my understanding of the world. To the same end, I am interested in my own participation in landscape and how different modes of viewership (both as artist and audience) affects my sense of place. Macfarlane states:

I have long been fascinated by how people understand themselves using landscape, by the topographies of self we carry within us and by the maps we make with which to navigate these interior terrains. We think in metaphors drawn from place and sometimes do not only adorn our thought, but actively produce it. Landscape, to borrow George Eliot's phrase, can 'enlarge the imagined range for self to move in'.²⁸

Through my work, I compel viewers to reconsider their understanding of how they see the world around them by giving form to my own reconsideration of my environments. My work encourages re-examination of initial impressions of what constitutes the landscapes we encounter. I scrutinize my own "interior terrains" with regard to how they confront physical terrain. By changing the framework of the physical space depicted by my images through the combination of media, I indicate the interior space as it becomes projected onto the physical.

The integration of different media confounds preliminary expectations. It becomes requisite to take a further look. The secondary and continuing inquiry made by viewers of my work is equivalent to my own experience of continuing investigation of place following my initial visual impressions of a landscape I visit; the viewer's process

²⁸ Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, 26; George Eliot was an English writer of the Victorian era and the quote used by Macfarlane is from *Felix Holt: The Radical*, ed. William Baker and Kenneth Womack (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2000), p.47.

of discovery corresponds to the involved and extended experience I undertake both in making of work as well as in observing and gaining understanding of land. It is, again, expressive of how I grasp my own understanding of the world: as an accumulation of small details, moments, and interactions that coalesce to create the larger picture of what I know of the world. Similarly, my choice of creating images that join to create large panels reiterates this sentiment. Here, the fragments of image suggest a reality that is somewhat discreet from what we see, pointing towards a specific stance in artistic viewership, and embodying the tension of finding the dividing line between the known and the unknown. My work revolves around and gives visual description to the narrative of what it means to come to know a place, my work becoming a map of my own experiences of perception.

Conclusion

Art is an opportunity to begin to understand the unknown. It has the capacity to both capture and encourage wonder at our surroundings and to make us see more than we might otherwise realize is within our scope of vision. Through creative response to place, I find the tools necessary to confront the incomprehensible space that is landscape. Giving visual definition to my encounter with place not only furthers my understanding of it, but is a means through which I am able to describe what is outside of myself, what is inside myself, and what portions of these two domains overlap. I construct and reconstruct a place through my artwork, also attempting to identify how the place has constructed me. Through this process, I become “suspended in the unknown and surrounded by the unpredictability of becoming.”²⁹ My work becomes a conduit through which I scrutinize my perception and the effects of it on my sense of place. I confront the objective and imagined realities that continually exist as part of my cognizance and manifest in my works of art. Lopez writes:

As I traveled, I came to believe that people’s desires and aspirations were as much a part of the land as the wind, solitary animals, and the bright fields of stone and tundra. And, too, that the land itself existed quite apart from these. The physical landscape is baffling in its ability to transcend whatever we would make of it. It is as subtle in its expression as turns of the mind, and larger than our grasp, yet still knowable. The mind, full of curiosity and analysis, disassembles a landscape and then reassembles the pieces—the nod of a flower, the color of the night sky, the murmur of an animal—trying to fathom its geography. At the same time the mind is trying to find its place within the land, to discover a way to dispel its own sense of estrangement.³⁰

²⁹ Jones, “On the Value of Not Knowing”, 22.

³⁰ Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, xxii.

During a time when environmental crisis is seen in every direction and the identity of society's greater relationship to the natural world is uncertain, this work bears witness to changing landscape and individual experience in recognition of perceptive nuance as an initial point from which we may explore this relationship. The process of experiencing landscape becomes a way of discovery, creative response, a means of developing relationship to place. Attentiveness grows into a way of enlarging our scope of vision, and contemplation a means of interpreting and valuing our environment. My works of art are an offering – an expression of this perplexing yet wholehearted journey of deciphering landscape and self.

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