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ES-SEN-TIAL

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Art & Design
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by
Lyn A. Govette
August 2017

Patricia Mink Chair
Scott Contreras-Koterbay
Mike Smith

Keywords: Landscape, environmental, fiber art, installation, mountain top removal

ABSTRACT

ES-SEN-TIAL

by

Lyn A. Govette

This thesis is in support of the exhibition entitled *ES-SEN-TIAL* on display in Tipton Gallery located in Downtown Johnson City from February 27, 2017 to March 10, 2017.

The exhibition is a presentation in fiber medium of the human impact on the landscape, specifically using the extractive industry of coal mining as example. This is accomplished through the use of digital imagery printed on textiles, hand and machine embroidery, and surface design techniques of dyeing and layering. This body of work reflects the artist's interest in art activism and the utilization of photography, fiber arts, ideas and techniques, as creative process to formally explore the landscape.

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It is with the greatest sincerity, I thank the members of my committee for the guidance and support they gave to me for this thesis exhibition and for the mentoring over the years of my studies in the Department of Art & Design at ETSU.

This acknowledgement page would be incomplete without thanking some people by name for their efforts on my behalf - Lee Stone, who gave me the opportunity to take the photographs and was always there when I would call for a ride to take more photos and to Marissa Angel for her enthusiasm and documentation of my exhibit. Many thanks to Karlota Contreras-Koterbay for the many opportunities to learn about exhibiting and curating, it has been invaluable in this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 I began traveling in Southwest Virginia and Eastern Kentucky. I accompanied a fellow artist on his documentary trips looking at the loss of community and towns due to the decline of the coal mining industry in the Southern Appalachian coal fields. I had read articles, and books, and seen films about Mountain-Top Removal (MTR) as the latest mining technique being used for coal extraction but nothing prepared me for seeing it in person. Traveling back up, we continued to return to Wise County, VA over the next few years and found ourselves getting greater access to Looney Ridge. As the last of the coal was removed more of the ridge was opened for exploration and eventually the companies left completely, leaving me to photograph more freely.

My intention in presenting the subject of MTR in this body of work is to call into question our acceptance of this mining process and our complicity with the act of coal mining as a necessity for living. The venue where this exhibition took place is in a community that is not directly impacted by MTR or any other extractive process. I want the viewer to understand that living in an area that has no resources to be exploited does not necessarily mean there is no human impact on the environment. The impact may not be as obvious as losing your family's land, having to pay for trucked-in water because the water source was polluted by mine drainage, or losing your job due the mining company abandoning the project because of too many fines or violations or any of the many other events that disrupt the lives of the people and towns in the coal fields of the Appalachians. *Es-sen-tial* asks the questions, what is the impact that we living in a non mining area have on the land? What is our involvement in the continuing utilization of unsustainable resources?

Many people have spoken of the destruction that is MTR in word and song addressing the tragedy of the commons¹ through the eyes of the people who have been affected. I chose to look at this human impacted land through the lens of a camera and used my skills as textile artist to highlight the devastation and beauty of this mined out land. I can't put back what is missing, although I do make attempts at repair by stitching into some areas of the pieces to draw the eye to a small detail of beauty in an otherwise desolate landscape.

While standing on the top of Looney ridge in Southwest VA, what I noticed most was the lack. The lack of what I had come to expect from these mountains I have been calling home; the green, the trees, the vines, the sounds of life, the mosses, the fungi, the patches of sky above me barely glimpsed through the canopy of trees. There was none of that, the comfort of forest that I was used to was gone. In its place was this great expanse of graded ground, bare of vegetation for the most part, with roots and branches of felled trees scattered about; unprotected ground open to the elements of wind, rain, and snow with little hope of reclamation, much less restoration.

I wanted to share these images with others who, like me, might wonder: if I had been asked; "Hey, we can blow off the top of this mountain so you can have light and heat?" would I have agreed? Am I willing to trade off the lives of other beings for my own comfort? I think the answer to these questions was the reason I chose the topic of MTR to base my thesis on. It was a desire to increase our understanding of the impact of putting our needs before other beings. It is not just the land that is impacted, MTR impacts our fellow humans, the ones who mine for us, run the machines, depend on this industry for their livelihood until it leaves them in a lurch, the mining done, the coal gone and nothing left behind to build a life on.

¹ Hardin, Garrett. *The Tragedy of the Commons*, 1968 Canonical works, www.oxfordbibliographies.com

The creation of this body of work was a way to demonstrate to the community I live in my concerns about the environmental degradation that is going on all around us in the pursuit of the comforts of life. I used my skills in making to give voice, through the use of photographic imagery, stitching, dyeing and layering – to what I saw on those trips through the coal fields and to Looney Ridge.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL CONCEPTS

Many of us live in relative comfort surrounded by all manner of goods² as well as the ability to change our indoor climate with the flick of a switch. This ease of living is made possible by our agreement that the fossil fuel resources are part of the bounty that has been designated for our use by divine right.³ This body of work endeavors to comment on the seriousness of our environmental problems by using the images of MTR as an example of such degradation.

The concept of divine right comes from early human history, the Eurocentric colonization of the Americas which asserts that the earth and all its bounty was created for our sole use and is relying on our implicit agreement with this idea of our need for dominance over nature. This notion that we, as humans, have been given such bounty is only quite recently being challenged, as it becomes increasingly apparent that the unmitigated plundering of natural resources is catastrophic for all. The initial beliefs of the early immigrants that land was to be cared for and managed well for future generations was discarded fairly early in the history of the United States of America (USA). That, coupled with the perception of unending land for all, led to poor farming and land use practices.⁴ I feel that this approach to land use and the practices that stem from that indifference to sustainability lead to the concept which allowed energy companies to see MTR as the next logical step in coal mining. The cost of this

² "What is a list of things made from coal?". www.reference.com.information_source/worldcoal.org. accessed October 2016

³ ³ Genesis 1:28 King James Version (KJV)

⁴ Judith I de Neufville, *The Land Use Policy Debate in the United States*, Springer Science & Business media, 2012, pg. 224

indifference is reflected in many ways, I chose to explore my understanding of the disconnectedness between us and the world we inhabit in *Es-sen-tial*.

The concept for this thesis exhibit came in layers. It started with observing and photographing Wise County, VA and surrounding counties. The intention to take photographs was to record the devastation and the unsettling beauty that was all around me in this place. Not only was the destruction of land, trees, and water evident but also the abandonment of cable, tools, trash, and heavy equipment strewn across the landscape painted a bleak picture. Each time I returned, I found myself standing on these windswept desolate places attempting to wrap my mind around the concept of going to such lengths to obtain coal. I began to realize that the images I had been recording with my camera, were capturing the human impact on the mountain landscape. Deciding that this effort could become the essence of my thesis exhibition was a slow process. Every time, over the past seven years, that I would travel back up to that part of the Southern Appalachian region it became clearer, that the exploration of MTR impact on Looney Ridge was the basis for a thesis exhibition.

The idea that photographic images could be used in a form other than a framed paper rendition was part of the appeal for me. I do find the actual image to be important to the work. In acknowledging this aesthetic choice, I intentionally chose a minimal approach to the layering and the use of embroidery so as not to be the dominant feature of the individual pieces.

There is a desire to use the seduction of materials to express the concept of devastation. We, as humans, are drawn to the haptic qualities of textiles, we choose to wear, sleep and utilize cloth which fosters a familiarity of fabric in our day to day lives. The use of cloth as the substrate for the photographic image abstracts it, possibly softens the image to entice the viewer to linger longer, to go past what are the formal qualities of the image to consider the idea of human impact on the land.

There is no expectation that the audience who sees this exhibit will run out and do a complete lifestyle change or take up protesting MTR. Yet, there is there is a part of me who hopes that an increase in knowledge about the subject of MTR and sustainability will cause some changes in everyday utilization of resources by the persons who chose to see this exhibit. The real expectation is that the exhibit was cohesive and engaging to those who attended. There is also the desire that the viewers of this body of work find it intriguing, and come away satisfied with their experience in viewing *Es-sen-tial* as art.

CHAPTER 3

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Eco-activism in the arts has a long history of influences prior to the 1960's. The land art movement that began in the 20th century is the most recent iteration of environmentally engaged arts/artists. It must be acknowledged that the painters of the 14th – 17th century and their portrayal of the 'mastery of man over nature', such as still lifes done during the Dutch Golden Age or the grandeur as expressed in landscape paintings of Casper David Freidrich or Albert Bierstadt, were examples of a growing understanding of the human-natural world connection; if not precisely how we are coming to understand our relationship to the earth in the 21st century.⁵ The initial approach of eco- art in the 1960's was to use natural materials to make the art and was known as "Earthworks". These works became the contemporary roots of eco-activism and attention paid to human's impact on the land by the art world. Eco-art goes beyond depicting our physical world and human's place in it, to questioning through making how we engage with social and ecological issues as artists.

On one of my first trips in the southern Appalachian coal fields, I met Jeff Chapman-Crane and saw "The Agony of Gaia" in his studio in Eolia, KY, a larger than life size sculpture of MTR in the form of a human figure, that the artist had created to deal with the issues of broad form deeds⁶ and the effects of coal mining on the land. Crane was quoted in an interview for Appalachian Voices, "Looking at Gaia, the human form of a mountain in agony feels familiar while the damage inflicted on the natural world is put into perspective. I wanted to express that

5 Andrew Brown, *Art & Ecology Now*, Thames & Hudson, NY, NY 2014, Introduction PRINT

6 Ronald L. Lewis & John Hennen, Jr., eds. *The "Broadform" Deed: A Sample, in WEST VIRGINIA: DOCUMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF A RURAL INDUSTRIAL STATE 194*, 1991, www.as.wvu.edu/WVHistory/documents/073.pdf.

the earth is not just this source of raw material we can exploit for coal with no cost to the earth or ourselves,”⁷ Seeing this sculpture in person with the view of an MTR site on the ridge just outside his studio window was powerful. The visit to his studio and the conversation we had changed how I saw the landscape on my drives through the southern Appalachian Mountains and influenced the photographs that I took for this thesis exhibit.

I was first introduced to Edward Burtynsky’s work in the documentary “Manufactured Landscapes”. His photographs are astonishingly beautiful and compelling even after you realize that the image you are looking at is documenting the destructive cultural footprint of our industrialized way of life. Burtynsky’s multiple series of human impacted landscapes began in Frackville, Pennsylvania, according to the introduction of “Quarries” and numerous interviews since that publishing of that book. Originally Burtynsky’s photographic orientation was of traditional landscapes, but that changed when he found himself standing on a riverbank looking across at birch trees growing in low hills. He took photographs of that riverbank and later, after developing the prints, he realized that the hills he saw were slag heaps left over from years of mining and that the entire river bank was a mine waste dump.

The exposure to Burtynsky’s photographs, and his approach towards examining the human impact on the landscape, resonated with me, not only in ways of seeing, as I was traveling around the coal fields with camera in hand, but also in how I would choose to present these images. In considering how to present my own work, I needed to take into consideration the immensity of the landscape I was documenting and that the scale of each piece must attempt to

⁷ appivoices.org, December 2011

⁸ Burtynsky, Edward. “*QUARRIES*”. Steidel Publishers, 2007, Germany,

match the scale of the place photographed for this exhibition to be successful.

Leonardo Drew wrote “I am concerned with what the viewer sees and discovers when they engage with my work. My work should operate as a mirror. The viewer should be able to realize some aspect of themselves in front of my work”.⁹ This statement addresses one of the questions that has been put to me about my work in general and this body of work in particular. Aren’t these images too beautiful to portray what you intend about the devastation of MTR? Is the media of digital imaging on fabric obscuring the concept you wish to depict of desolation and disorder? I find artwork that is engrossing and pleasing to the senses, aka beautiful, does not necessarily have to be of a lovely subject, yet it must be appealing, stunning or captivating so as to raise a question about what is being shown in the work. The formal quality of the images has a beauty. The large human gashes in the landscape laid down digitally on cloth display this relationship of humans to the earth, to ask consideration of the questions. What price we are willing to pay? Is the destruction of a mountain and all that lives in and on it worth the price of continuing the lifestyle we deem indispensable?

The landscape photography of Yao Lu is exquisite, drawing one into the image that at first appears to be classic Chinese landscape with those particular qualities of ink and brush. Examining the photograph closer, it becomes apparent that the misty ethereal quality of these images hides the reality of construction as it is being carried out in the rapidly changing country that is China, Lu states:

Today, China is developing dramatically and many things are under constant construction. Many things have disappeared and continue to disappear. The rubbish dumps covered with the ‘shield’, a green netting, are a ubiquitous

⁹ Leonardo Drew, “30 Americans” 2016, Exhibit, Cincinnati Museum of Art, 30 Americans May 2016

phenomenon in China. Concerning the style of my works, I believe in maintaining a beautiful feeling in the framing of the image, including composition, line, density and framing, all the elements regularly contained in painting. I think a good artwork is composed of many elements, and it should reflect the knowledge and the skill of the artist. A good artwork has intelligence. The flexibility of photography provides an expressive space for me. I can work with it in many ways in making my creations.¹⁰

In interviews, Lu notes that beyond the aesthetic expressed by him in his work, there is a social factor in these photographs. The towns and regions where he took the photographs take into account the pride of the local people, who participate in creating and living with the heaps of rubble covered by the ubiquitous green cloths, who see those green heaps as a sign of prosperity and progress. This understanding of Lu's compares to the pride of place coal miners and their communities in Appalachia feel for the work they do and they have not in the past seen the destructive aspects of mining as bad, only a part of doing good work for society. Lu's approach re-framed how I saw the re-contouring of the land by the mining companies. I began to look for some evidence of beauty in the devastation of this human impacted land or at the very least how the miners and coal companies could see what they were doing was of benefit to society.

During this research on artists who were exploring the impact of humanity on the landscape, I came across art critic, Gerry Badger, who writes about the photographs of Richard Misrach:

And yet, however problematical, photographs clearly are powerful and seductive

¹⁰ Yao Lu, artist statement, prixpicet.com, 2016

vessels of visual communication. So, aware that the medium is a suspect witness, photographers have tended to convey their truths in other ways. The best of them have endeavored to make their cameras function both as witnesses and vehicles for metaphor and symbolic speculation. In short, they have intended that their photographs attain the complexity and condition of art.¹¹

“Desert Cantos” explores the western deserts of the North America as a wild place and documents the effects of human impact on this land. The photographs of muted desert colors portray manmade events that have often devastated the land. His photographs have an irony that I am drawn to - the way he illustrates the changes on the landscape from human interference or human’s very presence. The effect of focusing our eye on the impact humans have on that romanticized desert land changes the manner in which the viewer perceives beauty and allows for devastation to exist in the same photograph. In the interview, Misrach notes he is exploiting the conveyance of truth as he, the artist, sees it.¹²

From the many fiber artists who utilize photographic digitally printed imagery in their pieces, I chose to use Wen Redmond, as an example. Her works focus on the beauty of the landscape, on the pastoral affect. Redmond abstracts the images by cutting up and re-piecing the photographs back together in the computer prior to printing on fiber. She then stitches into, and uses transparent overlays, matte medium and other collage methods to further add layers. This manipulation of surface and imagery is the only possible evidence of devastation that could be assigned to her work.¹³ She says:

¹¹Gerry Badger, www.gerrybadger.com/in-photographica-deserta-the-desert-cantos-of-richard-misrach/

¹² ibid

¹³ www.wenredmond.com

Making my art allows me to tap into levels of myself, becoming more aware, more conscious, & more grateful. I've loved photography my entire life. This brings a tender sensitivity to one's surroundings. An eye. Sometimes, I look with intention, focusing on everything with the possibility of creating a composition. And sometimes it just happens. A quick glance becomes the image for a future work. These moments are my well, my source. I hope to bring that energy into my art making, to communicate the positive. When I work, I allow and encourage a collaborative process with spirit or that mind-boggling principle of the universe. Creation gives me ideas. My passion is to put them into art. My art are my prayers.¹⁴

There is no intent by Redmond to explore the landscape as an eco artist or other political orientation. The influence her works have had on me were her manipulation of the images and the formal qualities of the photographic images in her compositions.

Fiber artists have been working with digital imaging on fiber use photographs of natural elements and landscape in their work, using techniques of mark making, surface design, collage, and layering. The artist that I have selected is the one who I responded to the strongest while researching. The history of fiber artists moving away from the traditional functional manner of making, taking the fiber works off the bed to hanging on the wall or out in the space of the museum or gallery has been influential in my approach on my artistic practice. The exposure to Lenore Tawney, Sheila Hicks and other ground breaking fiber artists¹⁵ led me to explore ways of

¹⁴ <http://fiberartgoddess.blogspot.com/p/artist-statement.html>

¹⁵ Constantine, Mildred. *BEYOND CRAFT, THE ART FABRIC*, 1973, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company; 1st Ed. edition

making fiber art pieces that are the foundation upon which I build to create this thesis exhibit.

Another significant influence on this body of work came from the photographers who are portraying the impact of humans on the landscape.



CHAPTER 4

MATERIALS AND PROCESSES

In my research of digital printing on various types of textiles, I came to two understandings. The first was that some images don't read as well as others when printed on fabric. Secondly, was that the fiber type became important for me, making the choice of fabric sustainability and issue of re-use were not the only factors to consider. As an example, recycled polyester fabric is available and the saturation of the printed image is excellent but polyester degrades as it ages and will not return to a benign organic substance as cotton, silk, or other natural fibers will.¹⁶ The investigations and studies done revealed synthetic fiber types were more receptive to color and saturation, yet this did not satisfy all of the parameters I set for creating this body of work and so virgin fabrics and pigments were chosen for use in many of the works. As part of this effort, it was important to deal with businesses that are working to be sustainable in their process and material sourcing.

In order to fabricate the forest, which became *The Beauty Strip*, the objects not only had to be constructed to impart the idea of trees, the individual pieces had to occupy space. This presentation of trees was an ongoing investigation in installation that began with the collaborative 2015 exhibit *SPLINTERS*. This current iteration was a mix of dyed, stitched, silk screened patterns on repurposed fabrics and digitally printed bark photos on cotton – to create a relationship with the forms and tactile qualities of the materials. There is an armature in each tree to maintain a suggestion of roundness as well as using tones and colors which humans

¹⁶ Williams, Alan. "Washing clothes releases thousands of microplastic particles into the environment, study shows", www.plymouth.ac.uk, 2016

tend to associate with trees. The conceit of *The Beauty Strip* as employed in this manufactured landscape is to conceal what lies behind,¹⁷ such as in the case of clear-cutting or MTR. *The Beauty Strip* being placed as the first piece encountered in the exhibit was a fanciful moment of “pay no attention the the man behind the green curtain”.¹⁸

In choosing to work in fiber, I deliberately used what was comfortable and familiar to me. These processes of piecing, layering, and stitching were employed as a strategy to present the images that are so disturbing and uncomfortable in an agreeable and familiar context. The concept for this body of work is the mining company’s attempts to resolve the MTR issues of disturbing the land, biodiversity, and watershed sustainability by the use of re-contouring, land benches and redirection of the underground water and streams disturbed by the mining process. I explored the idea of comfort with our human choices to extract coal, as absolutely necessary for use, using fiber to create the three dimensional layered images and two dimensional pieces. Working with images printed on fiber to create an environment reflective of the destruction of MTR, I used what is generally associated with the domestic, the decorative arts, and the feminine, subversively. There is an association of the mundane, soft women’s work with fiber art that leads to an expectation that the subject matter be of a similar vein, I exploited this assumption with my choice to to use the medium of fiber.

The placement of the pieces, to enter into the forest forms initially and then move on to the rest of the pieces that make up this exhibit was to give the feeling of being on Looney Ridge and experiencing MTR’s destruction. The soft beauty of the trees made of a cloth was purposefully done to entice the viewer in to view all of the works. In all of the pieces there is a

¹⁵ Broydo, Leora. “Planted Hollywood” MAY/JUNE 1999 ISSUE; www.motherjones.com

¹⁶ Morgan, Frank. “The Wizard of OZ”, Director Victor Fleming, 1939

minimum of stitching; the practical purpose of keeping the layers of cloth and batting (when used) in place and the other purpose of the hand and machine embroidery was to bring attention to certain details; to draw the viewer in for a more intimate inspection. This subject of MTR has a darkness to it that I exploited to imply the toxic nature of these images, this was enhanced by the use of fabric paint to further degrade the surface of those works.

The creation of this thesis exhibit increased my understanding of the potential of the fiber medium. The work that I submitted when applying to graduate school is related to this thesis by the intention to work with found materials to create with as an art practice that was influenced by my understanding of the concept living sustainability. Digital printing on fiber substrates and increasing the scale of the work became the experimentation and exploration. The technical skills of piecing, stitching, the formal properties of fiber allowed me the opportunity to explore these processes in new way. In combining the foundation of traditional methods of creating with fiber that I was familiar with, there was a freedom to examine the possibility pushing past my comfort level with the processes and materials. Using the tradition of quilting in a non-tradition way combined with digital printing I gained an appreciation of the versatility of fibers to express my ideas.

CHAPTER 5
THE EXHIBITION

Es-sen-tial as a site specific installation was created with the exhibition space in mind. There was a desire to express my own environmental activism of living sustainably through art.



fig.1 *The Beauty Strip*

When entering the gallery, the viewers are invited to walk through and interact with a constructed forest, the intention was to create a somewhat familiar if obviously artificial space. There are no natural elements (other than the silk, linen, and cotton used to create the pieces), no leaves, no twigs, no vines or other props from the ‘real’ world. Biologists say that trees are social beings. They can count, learn and remember. They can warn each other of danger by sending electrical signals across a fungal network and for reasons unknown, keep the ancient stumps of long ago felled companions alive for centuries by feeding them a sugar solution through their roots.¹⁹ I found learning of this recent finding of the scientific community

¹⁹ Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of TREES – How They Feel, How They Communicate*, Greystone Books, UK, 2016

influential in the creation of the installation of ersatz trees. These woods are completely hand made and creating a rigging from which the trees would be hung so they are not touching the floor felt the best choice to add to the deceit, as trees are rooted and this is well documented by Peter Wohlleben²⁰ This was more an attempt to beguile the person with these fiber forms than to portray an accurate rendering of trees.



fig. 2 detail *St Paul on the Way to Damascus*

As you pass by or through the forest you get a glimpse of a brighter area beyond the strip of trees intended to capture the viewer's attention and to facilitate moving into the rest of the exhibition space. The two layers that make up *St Paul on the Way to Damascus* are dreamy and airy. The torn transparent layer draws the viewer forward to investigate the otherworldly

²⁰ ibid

green of the scene that is underneath, printed with the same image that has been “damaged”. Attempts to repair the hidden damage are made visible with the use of fabric paint and an addition of layered repeat transparent images that are stitched to the surface to imply putting the ‘torn and tattered’ areas back together. This piece is the introduction to the wall images in the exhibition, which lay deeper inside the gallery. The conversion of an illegal dump (where the photograph was taken) back to a wetland in SW Virginia implies the hope for the rest of the land, that what has been destroyed by MTR in the pursuit of coal, can be reclaimed. The damage to the layers of this piece proposes to highlight that restoring MTR sites may not be easy or even possible. This work serves as the first inkling that what lies behind the floating wall in the gallery might be uncomfortable or challenging.



fig. 3 detail *Hydrologic*

Hydrologic is a view through trees of re-contoured land that includes a stream bed. It consists of one sheer silk photographic image and employs the use of stitch as line to bring focus to the water flow. This piece was installed off the wall so the gallery lights would create a

layering of a shadow on the wall behind the work. A streambed filled with clean clear flowing water is an expected scene when driving or hiking through the mountains, this tumbling of water over rocks is something we are familiar with. This stream, however, is man made and I have placed it at the start of this journey to draw attention to water. What is not seen, just off the image portrayed, is the settling pond that has sprung a leak, the clear clean bluish water is not what it appears, it is a leakage of harmful water through erosion in the wall of the manmade impoundment above. These intermittent and ephemeral streams that appear and disappear with the seasons and the rains do not create a foundation to restore the broad forest ecosystem that was destroyed by the mining event.²¹



fig. 4 *GHOST*

The piece *GHOST* was the first work created from my photographic travels into Wise County, VA. This image is taken at the beginning of the road that transverses Looney Ridge.

²¹ John Mc Quaid, Mountaintop Mining Legacy: Destroying Appalachia's Streams, e360.yale.edu, 20July2009

GHOST, a layered image of what is left is the next work in the exhibit. It was the first image printed and the impetus for the focus of this thesis exhibition. The image in the piece consists of the remnants of a mountain that is part of Looney Ridge. At first glance, it appears to be right out of the Southwest part of the North American continent, then it becomes quite apparent that this piece is of a mountain with much missing, the road leads up to, and goes past, this diminished mountain peak. The piece consists of two layers, transparent silk over cotton of the same place on that road that is hung slightly separated so the top image appears to be floating, suggesting a mere shadow, semblance or trace of the mountain that was there.



fig. 5 detail *An Unnamed Road in Appalachia*

An Unnamed Road in Appalachia, is an abstraction of the road that traverses Looney Ridge. In the gallery space, the cut up and stitched into image was displayed across two walls. The piece, like the road it portrays, serves the purpose to direct the viewer on from *GHOST* to the next piece in the exhibit. We are familiar with roads; they are connections to get us from

place to place. This road had a purpose for the mining process but is deteriorating as it's use is no longer needed, the land impacted then left to restore itself.



fig. 6 detail *UNSETTLED*

UNSETTLED continues the theme of reclamation and water as issues that MTR does not adequately address. The impact of this type of mining, more so than other forms of coal mining, has on the trees, rocks, dirt, air, and living creatures is the constant leaching of toxins by exposure to the elements. This piece has been worked back into with fabric paint, hand stitching, and machine embroidery to bring attention to the details of the image. The overburden, which is a product of surface coal mining, is used to create the walls of this settling pond evoke a dark, dingy and foreboding presence.



fig. 7 detail *RECLAIMED*

RECLAIMED, like *St Paul's on the way to Damascus* addresses the concept that the damage to the land by MTR can be dealt with by putting back what was removed. The issue at hand here is the only reclamation that is going on is being done by the birds and the wind. This scattering of coltsfoot seeds which have taken root in this inhospitable ground and bloomed is embroidered in yellow situated in the foreground to make the point that became the title of this piece.

The images used in this exhibit were arranged in the gallery in the order they were found during my travels. The placement of pieces and the use of lighting was done purposefully to engage the viewer in what I experienced traveling up, down, and across Looney Ridge. Employing the familiarity of fabric, the enhancing of small beautiful details with embroidery, the layering of transparent over solid fabrics, to display what is awful about MTR is a conceit I readily admit to. Nature is often referred to as the feminine and so too is the fiber art – I used

this commonly held point of view to invite one into not being off put immediately by the content of the exhibit.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This journey of learning, exploring, testing, and researching was at times daunting, at times frustrating yet overall enriching. That may seem trite yet it is the purpose of taking what skill sets I had learned and challenge myself to explore further. There is a desire to take what one's sees in their mind as a finished piece and put it through all the labor of figuring out how to do the work needed to make a finished piece. Which substrate, which image, stitch or not, then how much to accent with marks of thread? The challenge was to see this process evolve from my photographic journeys into the mining areas into resolved works that would create a cohesive exhibit. As much as I am drawn to work in cloth and other fibers, I am equally intrigued with utilizing photographic images printed onto textile substrates. In past pieces, I have used the images as a base to making of stitched marks, highlighting many of the details I wanted noticed and ensuring that the presence of the stitch as line was as important to the piece as the image.

This body of work was about the content of the images, each printed abstracted image presented details to enhance and that process led me to being very minimal in my choices of working back onto the surface. I approached this exhibit as an installation, which has been an ongoing inquiry for me over the past three years. The trees were in their fourth iteration, the learning curve being rather steep on how to use them as hanging 3D pieces that would impart the concept of their disconnectedness to the land. The use of fabric as substrate as in *The Beauty Strip* tree forms made use of our familiarity and comfort with cloth and the desire to touch it. This was a conundrum for some in the gallery setting as we are specifically prohibited

from touching art, but here it is soft and beckoning touch. The wall pieces also had this quality of temptation to touch, to explore the haptic. I observed viewers peering around the edges to see how the piece was done or to observe the shadow cast by gallery lighting against the under-layer or the wall.

Exhibiting at the Tipton Gallery was influential in my choice of color palette and placement of works. As the work developed from one piece, to maquette of the gallery space to the pieces being completed and temporarily installed in my studio - I began to see that the intention of exhibiting these works in a way that the persons who saw the exhibit could have an experience, albeit artificial, of being on a MTR site.

I admit to an activist theme in my work over the years with this being the first solo exhibit I have done on the environment. There is, of course, the question of whether this is the beginning of a path that will continue to speak to environmental damage done by human impact through art? This body of work has the possibility of influencing my practice and continuing to inform how I work.

I started this journey with the intention of finding ways to make work within the context of sustainability, reuse and repurpose. This body of work was definitely a detour from some of that work ethic, as I gave into an aesthetic desire to use certain materials to achieve what I saw as important to this exhibit's cohesiveness. It was very specific to the subject of MTR. In future, I will continue to make work from existing materials relying as I have most heavily on textiles and other fibers. The landscape as visual resource for my work intrigues me and it will be a subject to continue to explore in my creative process.

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EXHIBITION CATALOG



Installation of ES-SEN-TIAL

Tipton Gallery 126 Spring Street Johnson City, Tennessee

February 27, 2017 – March 10, 2017



Installation of ES-SEN-TIAL

Tipton Gallery 126 Spring Street Johnson City, Tennessee

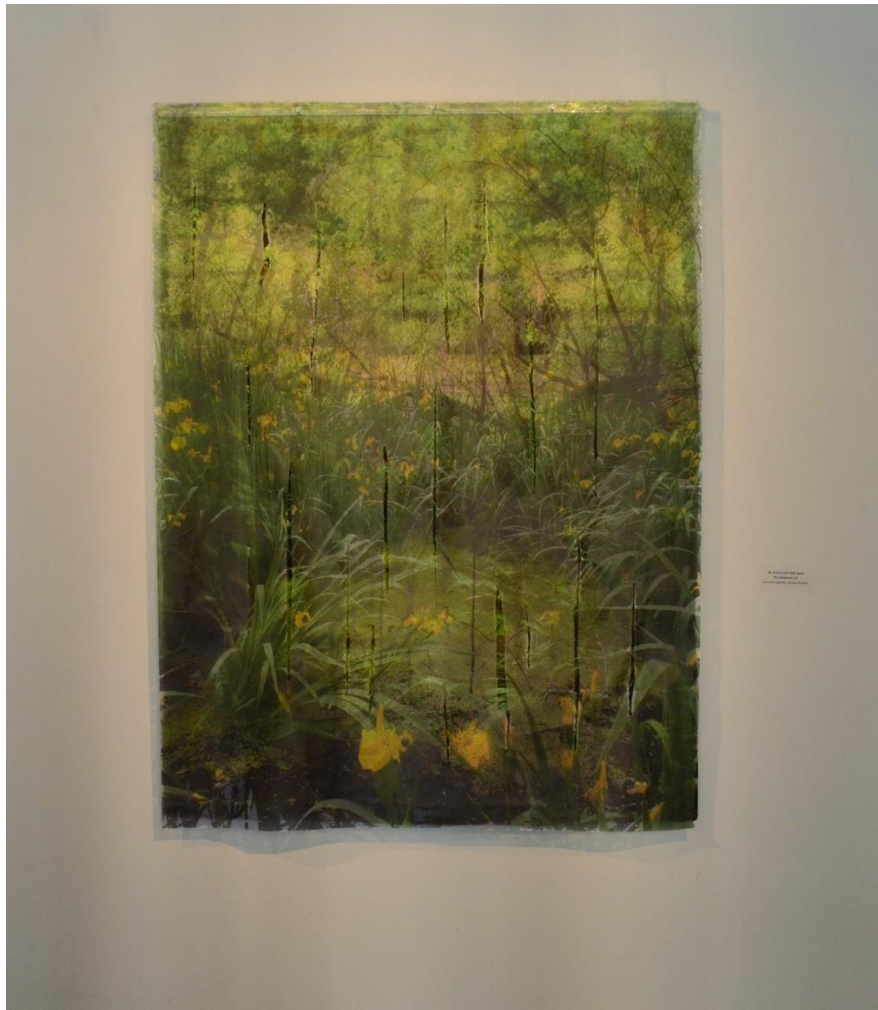
February 27, 2017 – March 10, 2017



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St. Paul on the way to Damascus

Digitally Printed silk and cotton - hand embroidered

42" x 72" 2016



hydrology

Digitally Printed silk - machine embroidered

41" x 90" 2017



GHOST

Digital Printed silk - layered over cotton

42" x 56" 2015



An Unnamed Road in Appalachia I

Digitally Printed cotton and silk - hand and machine embroidered

64" X 40" 2017



An Unnamed Road in Appalachia II

Digitally Printed cotton panels - hand and machine embroidered

72" x 40" 2017



UNSETTLED

Digitally Printed Kona cotton - painted, hand, and machine stitched

42.5" x 63" 2017



RECLAIMED

Digitally Printed eco canvas - machine and hand embroidered

49" x 49" 2016

VITA
LYN A. GOVETTE

Education: MFA – Concentration Studio Art Fibers & Textiles East Tennessee State University 2017
Master of Physician Assistant Science, University of Nebraska 1998
Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant Program Alderson-Broaddus College WV 1988

Exhibitions: THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY Reece Museum March 2017
ES-SEN-TIAL MFA Thesis Exhibit Tipton Gallery March 2017
HIGH SIGNS SPA Annual Tipton Gallery February 2017
RECLAIMING / REMAKING Curator/Exhibitor Tipton Gallery 2016
SYNONYMS OF EXPERIENCE Reece Museum 2016
DIGITAL DIALECTIC Reece Museum 2016
THREADS OF EMPOWERMENT – Co-curator & Exhibitor Tipton Gallery 2015
Toe River Juried Art Show - TRAC Gallery, Spruce Pine, NC 2015
TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS – Tipton Gallery 2015
BEHIND THE LENS: Women Photographers on The South and Appalachia Co- Curator (The Do Good Fund) Tipton Gallery 2015
THROUGH THE FISHBOWL – Annual MFA Exhibit Reece Museum 2015
SPLINTERED - Collaborative show with Marissa Angel SUBmarine Gallery 2015
SPA Treatments – Student Photography Exhibit Tipton Gallery 2014

IMPRESSIONS – Co-Curator/Exhibitor Tipton Gallery 2014

ETSU Art & Design Student Honors Show Slocumb Galleries 2014

here & there SPA Annual Nelson’s Fine Art Center 2013

FIBERS: Fiber Art & Artists’ Book Exhibition Tipton Gallery 2012

THREE FRIENDS – A Retrospective Kingsport, Renaissance Center,
2012

Women’s Arts Forum, 2004 Semi-Annual Show, Baltimore, MD. 2004

“UNITY” a woven work, Permanent Collection Chicago Peace Museum
1985

Women’s Conference – Co-coordinator | Curator of Gallery Exhibit
Tusculum College, 1976

Publications: THREADS OF EMPOWERMENT – Exhibition Catalogue Tipton Gallery
2015, Co-Editor

EVOXE 2nd Edition 2015

BEHIND THE LENS: Women Photographers on The South and
Appalachia – Exhibition Catalogue 2014, Co-Editor

Awards/

Honors: ETSU Quillen Scholar – awarded 2014 - 2017

ETSU Art & Design Student Honors Show First Place
Foundations Award 2014