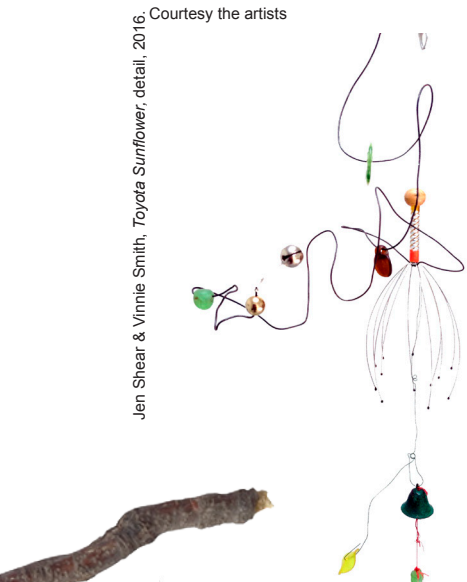


Martha Rosler, *Seattle: Hidden Histories*, 1991–95. Courtesy the artist and Electronic Arts Intermix, New York



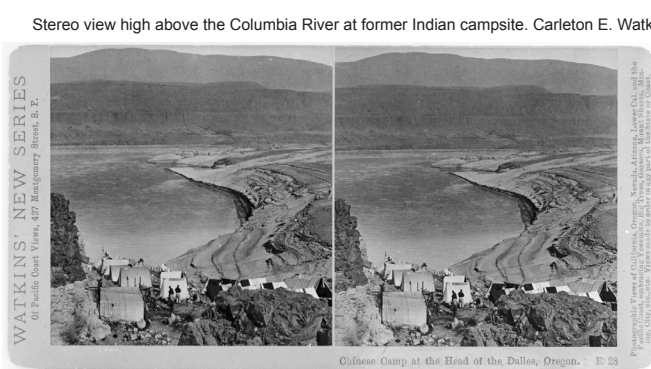
Jen Shear & Vinnie Smith, *Toyata Sunflower*, detail, 2016. Courtesy the artists



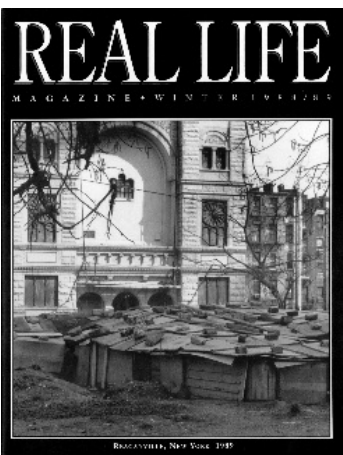
Jackie Winsor, *Bound Grid*, 1971–72. Wood and twine. 84" x 84" x 8" diameter © Jackie Winsor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York



David Askevold, video still from *Don't Eat Crow*, 1994. Courtesy David Askevold Estate and CANADA, New York



Stereo view high above the Columbia River at former Indian campsite. Carleton E. Watkins, Courtesy Oregon Historical Society (b0014690)



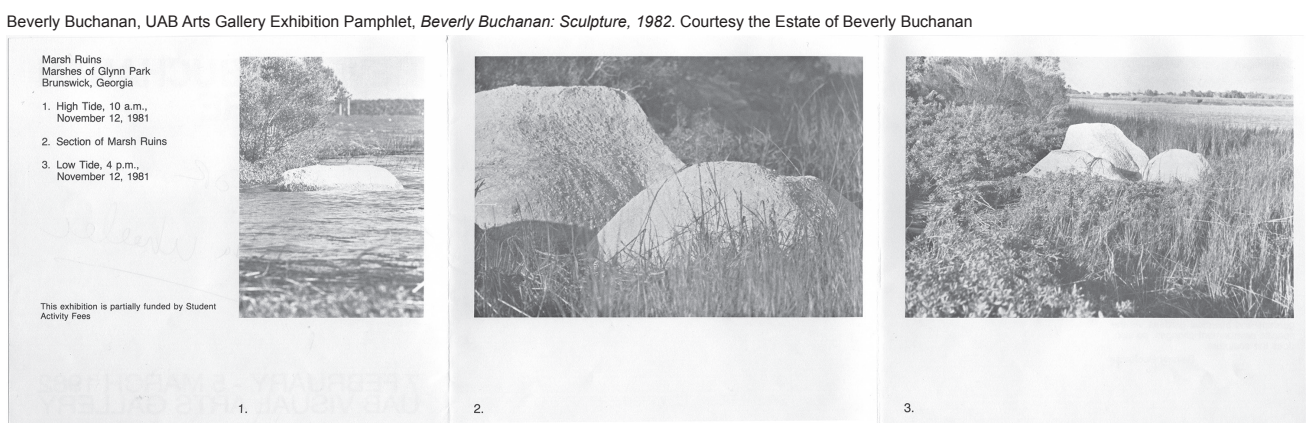
Real Life magazine #19, Winter 1989



Martin Beck, video still from *The Environmental Witch-Hunt*, 2008. Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal, New York



Charles Gaines, *Trisha Brown Dance, Set 7*, 1980–1981, Cibachrome photographs, ink on Strathmore paper. Set of 4 small drawings, 2 large drawings and 2 photographs. Small drawings: 11" x 19 1/2" each, large drawings & photographs: 16" x 20" each © Charles Gaines. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York and Susanne Viehmetter Los Angeles Projects



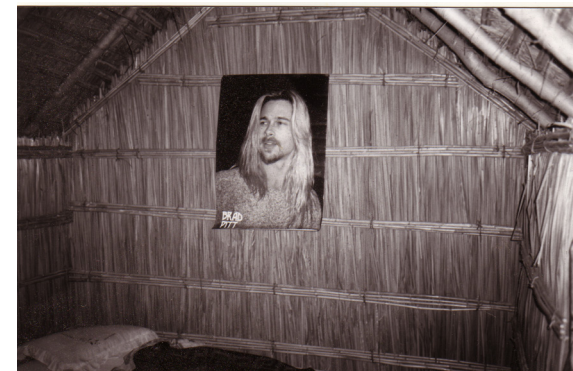
Beverly Buchanan, UAB Arts Gallery Exhibition Pamphlet, *Beverly Buchanan: Sculpture*, 1982. Courtesy the Estate of Beverly Buchanan

TREES IN THE FOREST CURATED BY KARI RITTENBACH

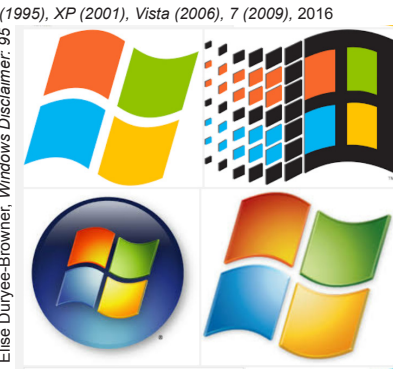
JULY 23–SEPT. 2, 2016



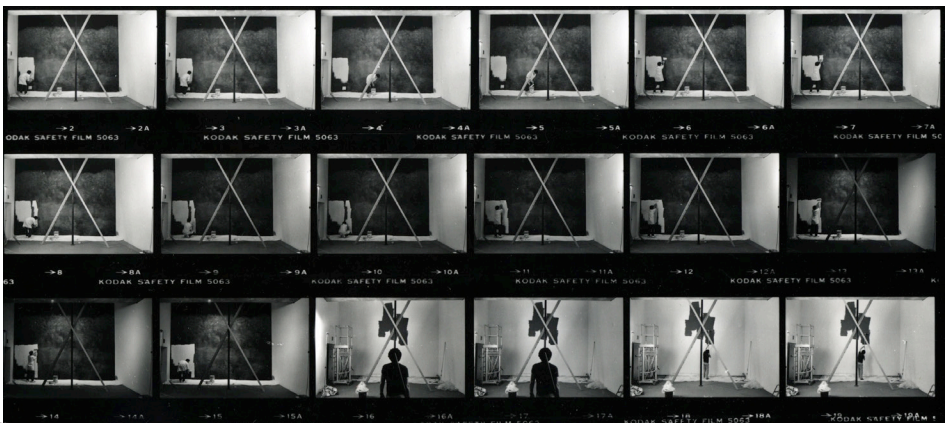
Andrei Koschmieder, *Plant on radiator (if the phone rings...)*, detail, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Real Fine Arts, New York



Nina Könnemann, *Madagascar*, 2004. Courtesy the artist



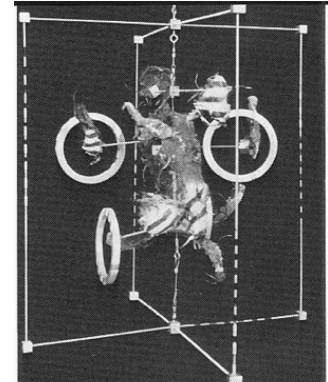
(1995), XP (2001), Vista (2006), 7 (2009), 2016
Elise Duryee-Browner, *Windows Disclaimer: 95*



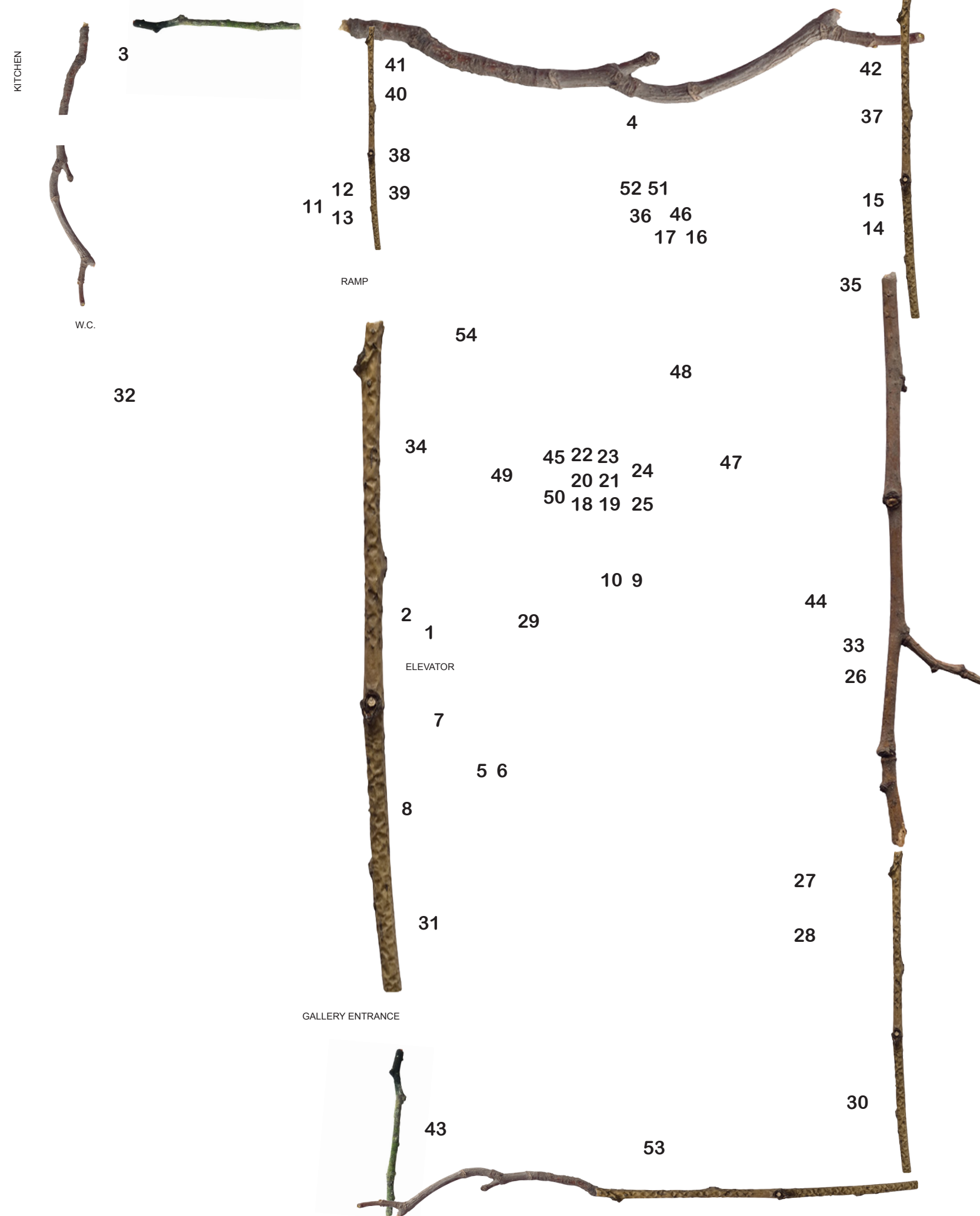
Howard Fried, *Fireman's Conflict Resolution #4* and *Fireman's Conflict Resolution #5*, 1982. Courtesy the artist. Photos: Tim Young & Ben Blackwell



Bernice Bing, September 1965. Courtesy the Estate of Bernice Bing



CARLOS VILLA—"A monkey is a very, very free being, particularly in the jungle. I think of monkeys as being gods in Southeast Asia...[as being] comical, or experimented on, in this country. There is a light side to the monkey but what intrigues me is that there is a dark side to the monkey, too...There is this duality."
A shaman, Villa is a sculptor/painter who invests paper, feathers and aluminum steel with nerve-tingling power. His "caged" monkeys refuse to stay still, defying space and time.
Photo: Untitled sculpture, 1988
Courtesy the Estate of Carlos Villa



TREES IN THE FOREST

I saw a man in pyjamas walk up to a tree, stop, regard it, and change his posture.

Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion*, 1974

The title of this group exhibition is a play on the English idiomatic phrase—dating from the sixteenth century—that sets close-range observation at odds with general comprehension of the long term and the large scale. Taken as a negative expression, one’s lack of ability to “see the forest for the trees” implies a sense of disorientation with regard to greater principles or overarching goals, even those held in common. The cultural understanding of this phrase, however, presumes first of all that there are extant (figurative) forests in which we might find ourselves wandering or lost; and second, that the current system of contemporary social life has a clear, recognizable, and agreed-upon form that would simply telegraph our pitiable position to us, much like a compass would, if only we could attain a less constrained point-of-view. But seeing the forest in this monolithic fashion—as a minimally graded canopy, its form inseparable from the landscape, a dark biomass defining the very face of the terrain—eschews postmodern particularism; or in ecological terms, the species diversity that results from complex evolution over millennia, and other regional or seasonal adaptations necessary for survival.

Located within the Cascadia bioregion, which stretches from southern Alaska to northern California, the Pacific Northwest is home to the largest temperate rainforest on the planet, including the three tallest species of trees: Coast Redwood, Coast Douglas-Fir, Sitka Spruce. Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has written about the impact of forest plantations on local social and environmental ecosystems, and the modern transformation of our ancient forests, as a process of industrial management:

Oregon’s forests played a key role in the U.S. Forest Service’s early twentieth-century formation, during which foresters worked to find kinds of conservation that timber barons would support. Fire suppression was

the biggest result: Loggers and foresters could agree on it.¹

In fact, the particularities of individual organisms (to fulfill an ecological niche) and singularly destructive events within the multispecies forest have significant effects on overall health: This is a problem that a mere scale change in outward perspective alone cannot “solve.” And the indiscriminate eradication required to see *through* the trees (i.e., clear-cutting) has unknown consequences for us and for our environment. While deforestation inevitably continues, how can we perceive the macroscopic, as it slips away from view?²

But during the last century it came to be realized that society itself is a force of nature, as blind as the others, as dangerous for man if he does not succeed in mastering it. At the present time this force weighs upon us more cruelly than water, earth, air and fire; all the more so since it holds in its own grasp, as a result of technical progress, the control of water, earth, air, and fire.

Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*, 1958

This question, and the inverted idiom with which we began, form the conceptual basis for the complex constellation of interdisciplinary and intergenerational artworks in TREES IN THE FOREST. Upon closer examination, what evidence can finer detail convey about past or future circumstances, or the so-called bigger picture that is culturally implied? Historical objects, films, paintings, skills, and competencies that have survived the late modern period in relative isolation—outside the latest market boom and the hegemonic critical discourse of New York City—are often taken to be regionally or temporally marked, as material or aesthetic outliers characteristic of a particular time and place (e.g., the rural South, or Venice Beach in the late 1960s). Or else they are relegated to the radical fringe, as a short-lived sub-cultural trend or topical identity. While these

distinct traces of roots and nonconformist feeling may certainly be apparent, the regionally and ethnically scrubbed universalism implicit in the dominant (American) art historical paradigm still insufficiently accounts for diversity of form, genre, context, and experience.^{3,4}

That we are bound to the earth does not mean that we cannot grow; on the contrary it is the *sine qua non* of growth. No noble, well-grown tree ever disowned its dark roots, for it grows not only upward but downward as well.

C.G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 1944

The ambition of TREES IN THE FOREST is to locate a substantive perspective within a series of problems and recent practices that may offer alternative models for contemporary concerns, and to open up a generous field of reference for the rich commingling of styles, approaches, and conventions. Here, density, depth, and decomposition are paradigms, counter to an aesthetics of the context-less and the digitally diffuse. By carefully examining the remaining “trees” sheltering our era—and by carefully extending the metaphor—what indigenous “forest” (or its ruins) might we find?

The artworks on view here share a unique sensitivity to physical, natural and cultural surroundings. More importantly, they provide studied, material, and multiple perspectives on the world at large that together challenge a straight (Western) view of ecology, and the false consciousness of neoliberal environmentalism in the continued service of consumer capitalism. The exhibition ecology of TREES IN THE FOREST considers what might constitute new forms of environmental art practice today, beyond mere spatial immersion, or romantic projections of the apocalyptic and the Arcadian.

Won’t you come and see loneliness? Just one leaf from the kiri tree.

Matsuo Bashō, 17th Century

1. “Meanwhile, loggers were eager to take out the ponderosa pines that so impressed white pioneers in the eastern Cascades. The great ponderosa stands were logged out by the 1980s. It turned out that they could not reproduce without the periodic fires the Forest Service had stopped. But firs and spindly lodgepole pines were flourishing with fire exclusion—at least if flourishing means spreading in ever denser and more flammable thickets of live, dead, and dying trees.” See: Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 30.
2. From 2000 to 2010, global forest cover disappeared at an estimated rate of 13 million hectares per year. See the report: Remi D’Annunzio, et al., *State of the World’s Forests*. Rome, Italy: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2011.

3. “[M]ulticulturalist trends in the American art world came and went, flourishing in New York for a brief period between the late 1980s and the early 1990s and all but collapsing after the 1993 Whitney Biennial,” Elaine H. Kim, Margo Machida, Sharon Mizota, eds. *Fresh Talk, Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, p. ix.
4. “To question our cultures is to question our own existence, our human reality.” In Ana Mendieta, *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women of the United States*, (exh. cat.). New York: A.I.R. Gallery, 1980: n.p.

In an essay on his mentor and some-time collaborator, Mike Kelley compared David Askeveld's fascination for the American landscape to that of Hudson River School painter Frederick Edwin Church, who sought to capture on canvas a metaphysical sense of the heavens through an especially expressive rendering of lofty sky, color, and river valley.⁵ Askeveld's short performative film *Nova Scotia Fires* (1969) in fact sets a Technicolor blaze raging along the titular timber-dotted coastline, although the tight frame of his camera's perspective belies the miniature scale of the flame's controlled, combustible path. His spooky scored soundtrack—synthesizer, tuning forks, and voice processed through a homemade distortion chamber—invokes a defamiliarizing, ritualistic confrontation with(in) nature that counters the rationality of filmic documentary. Two other narrative films by Askeveld demonstrate the artist's development of the experimental genre throughout his career, and ongoing existential engagement with place. *My Recall of an Imprint from a Hypothetical Jungle* (1973) layers excerpted interviews with Vietnam War veterans over the sounds of charging electrical equipment and a live slow-motion performance captured via densely shaded camera-work. *Don't Eat Crow* (1994) features unpublished novelist Katherine Grevatt reading a series of letters to her friend Norma Ready describing her increasing financial and creative despair, as Askeveld's camera trains on a pair of birds feeding indifferently outside her window.

The films of Nina Könnemann, by contrast, are distinctively nonnarrative, and not exactly choreographed. *M.U.D.* (2000), was shot on the morning after an impromptu meet-up at a nature preserve near Stuttgart, Germany for participants in real-time fantasy fictions known as “multi-user dungeon” games. Könnemann's camera observes the real and virtual outward effects of this alternate world on the otherwise serene local environment. Through meticulous recording, her animations *Early Morning Lessons* (2004), and *The Fence* (2008), reconstruct forms of shelter on the island of Madagascar, and are stitched together from a series of individually exposed stills, partly due to the lack of available electricity for

video production. These intricate twig, branch, and dried palm structures echo the log-frame walls captured in Beverly Buchanan's photograph of *Mary Lou Furcron's* (1989–90), and the organic, post-minimalist hemp and wood sculptures by Jackie Winsor that first engaged the coastal landscape of Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1971 (*30 to 1 Bound Trees*, destroyed 1972). If Vitruvius, Marc-Antoine Laugier, Henry David Thoreau, and Martin Heidegger all theorized the origins of architecture in the “primitive hut”—and to a certain extent, liberalism as it pertains to the social isolation of the individual (man)—it is worthwhile to consider the people who still practice such forms of organic habitation or process-based, one-to-one making today, and their strained relations with industry and the legacies of post-Enlightenment thought.

Buchanan's major work of Land Art, *Marsh Ruins* (1981), rigorously extended her interest in structural (historical and social) decay, demolition, and memory as a critical form within suppressed and subaltern—specifically Black American—experience. Her permanent installation on a cluster of three large rocks partially submerged in the Marshes of Glynn, in Brunswick, Georgia, can be seen in a handful of contemporaneous photographs, and a typewritten report showing the work in process that Buchanan completed in fulfillment of her Guggenheim Fellowship grant. The work remains on view in public today, although the tabby surface that Buchanan once applied has been left to degrade in obscurity. The visibility of her *Ruins* continues to wax and wane concurrently with the tides, a littoral metaphor for the marginal within collective historical memory. An organic construction material widespread in the coastal American South, often used in place of more expensive brick, tabby is a type of concrete made by crushing and burning oyster shells to create quicklime, which is then hydrated and mixed together with sand, ash, and broken shells. The intensive production process depended on slave labor, a fact that accounted for its falling into general disuse after 1865.

In July of 1868, at the invitation of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, self-taught photographer Carleton E. Watkins spent four months traveling by train up and down the Columbia River, documenting the company's rail portage-

es and its expansion across the scenic landscape. Watkins was the first person to photograph the Pacific Northwest, and his strikingly composed images capture a wilder, pre-industrial moment as it was disappearing.⁶ Art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson has described the conflicting conservationist and touristic tendencies that inspired East Coast collectors of Watkins's impressive stereoviews of the Mariposa Grove, Half Dome, El Capitan, and the Yosemite Valley (photographs for which he eventually became famous).⁷ These popular stereoviews effectively transmitted the symbolic iconicity and spectacular beauty of their sites, cultivating a consumer audience for the splendors of the American West and ultimately contributing to its more rapid development.

Elise Duryee-Browner's stained glass pane, *GovtOS* (2016), is a loosely rendered depiction of Half Dome viewed from Olmsted Point, modeled after an image found online. The title of the piece is taken from the name for the Apple operating system allegedly created to allow U.S. government access to the 2015 San Bernardino shooters' locked iPhones. Despite the privacy paradigm of the post-9/11 environment, Apple's successful legal negotiation with the U.S. government indicates an eerie transfer of citizen policing from the courts of the state to the databases of the technology sector, where biopolitical information is increasingly stored and exploited. Considering the ramifications of this potential threat to humans' social existence, the company has cynically named its operating systems after iconic locations in California (Mavericks, Yosemite, El Capitan, Sierra). Additional trademarks are held on Redwood, Mammoth, California, Big Sur, Pacific, Diablo, Miramar, Rincon, Redtail, Condor, Grizzly, Farallon, Tiburon, Monterey, Skyline, Shasta, Sierra, Mojave, Sequoia, Ventura, and Sonoma, as if to somehow naturalize a monumental corporate presence through softly lit screen

6. “At the time of initial European contact, Cascadia native groups spoke more than a dozen distinct languages (Thompson and Kinkade, 1990) and lived in a complex social landscape with both similarities and differences between groups. Collection and recording of native stories began in the 1860s ... almost 100 years after initial contact in Cascadia, and nearly 50 years after European settlement began. As a result, as much as 95% of native oral traditions may have been lost (Jacobs, 1962).” In R.S. Ludwin, R. Dennis, D. Carver, A.D. McMillan, R. Losey, J. Clague, and K. James, “Dating the 1700 Cascadia Earthquake: Great Coastal Earthquakes in Native Stories.” *Seismological Research Letters*, 57:2 (March/April 2005), p. 140.
7. Hutchinson, “They Might Be Giants: Carleton Watkins, Galen Clark, and the Big Tree,” *October*, Vol. 109 (Summer, 2004): pp. 46–63.

saver, an ideologically perverse symbolic metonymy.

As comparatively dry visual compositions, the sharply distilled character of Charles Gaines's gridwork and Trisha Brown's early vernacular choreographies strategically disappoint viewer expectations of spectacle. Much of Brown's early gestural (dance) language derives from habits and practices local to the Northwest region. Gaines began *Walnut Tree Orchard* (1975–2014)—his first series to include photographs, let alone figurative representations—in the agricultural lands of Fresno, in the California Central Valley. Within his highly structured triptych systems (for *Walnut Tree*, numbering 26 in total), the spindly cultivar functions as a standard linguistic symbol,⁸ first flattened by the camera's single-point perspective and afterwards subjected to numerical translation, then composite overlay in subsequent drawings. In this more or less arbitrary system of representation defined by the artist, subtractive and additive progressions together alienate or “atomize” the ultimate legibility of the symbol. Attempting to grasp the visual world through non-pictorial means, Gaines's use of the grid in *Walnut Tree Orchard* reveals both the irrationality of its practical application and the resistance of even a highly controlled industrial subject to accurate reflection in its rigid formal code.

Martha Rosler's series of one-minute public service announcements, together titled *Seattle: Hidden Histories* (1991–1995), was originally produced for the Seattle Arts Commission's city-wide exhibition “In Public: Seattle 1991,” although the spots never aired on broadcast television as planned. Rosler's interviews with local indigenous persons, as well as historians, linguists, and tribal leaders touch on the preservation of Salish languages and traditional stories, the proper pronunciation of the name “Seattle,” the politics of tribal recognition, and urban life. More recently, when cross-referenced with the seismological record and dendro-chronological analysis of “ghost forests” (dead stands of cedar trees) in coastal

8. Here, art historian Howard Singerman notes the particular influence of Ferdinand de Saussure in the mid-1970s: “The tree was ... the very emblem of the sign and the autonomy of language, its rule-bound arbitrariness in relation to the world.” Howard Singerman, “Charles Gaines's Fresno.” In Naima J. Keith, ed. *Charles Gaines: Gridwork, 1974–1989*, (exh. cat.), New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2014, p. 95.

estuaries of Washington and Oregon, members of the Duwamish Tribe and others indigenous to the region were able to precisely confirm, from stories passed down through oral traditions, the date of the most recent Cascadia subduction zone (CSZ) earthquake.⁹

The painting and performance work of Carlos Villa incorporates invented indigenous elements that belong to an inaccessible cultural history, partially lost through migration and assimilation. Eventually recast through the Bay Area abstract expressionist school of painting in which Villa was trained, in the late 1960s the artist began to explore the cosmic materialism of the shamanistic, as well as patterns and rituals practiced by aboriginals in the South Pacific. With the addition of substances such as bone, feathers, blood, urine, and semen, Villa's canvases soon transformed into powerfully expressive, wing-like mantles, or garments, that could be worn as robes. The series of hanging sculptures exhibited here, or caged “monkeys,” as the artist referred to them, present the primate's deconstructed form, adorned with feathers, as a series of trickster-avatars silently rehearsing the coerced performativity typically required of both artistic and minority positions.

Howard Fried's large-scale sculpture *Fireman's Conflict Resolution #6* is a new reconstruction of a previous work (*Fireman's Conflict Resolution #2*, 1978) originally made by the artist at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York.¹⁰ It consists of two ladders placed at opposing angles alongside a greased pole, and three “scripts” or potential scenarios for entering and exiting the pole-and-timber system based on three basic types of psychological conflict (approach-approach, avoidance-avoidance, approach-avoidance). Fried's deceptively minimal yet physically precise site-specific sculptures in fact structure complex pathways intentionally designed to both defer

9. “A story from Vancouver Island says that all creation rests on the back of a mammoth whale, and that Thunderbird causes thunder by moving even a feather and carries a large lake on his back from which water pours in thunderstorms (Carmichael, 1922). Shaking and ocean surges can be inferred from the story of Thunderbird driving his talons deeply into Whale's back, and Whale diving and dragging the struggling Thunderbird to the bottom of the ocean.” In R.S. Ludwin, et al., *op. cit.*,” p. 144.
10. Fried's first iteration of the sculpture was installed by Vito Acconci in the exhibition “Performance Spaces” (1972) held at the art gallery of the School of Visual Arts, New York. *Fireman's Conflict Resolution #3* (1979) was made for the University Art Museum, UC Santa Barbara; *#4* (1982) at the University Art Museum of UC Berkeley, although its black painted background was ultimately eliminated prior to exhibition so that only *#5* (1982) was publicly shown there.

and prolong—or even collapse—inherent decision-making processes as a particular form of conceptual endurance at times only partially related to the final structural, literary, or formal qualities of a work. The background staging scenery of *Fireman's Conflict Resolution* has featured, in various iterations, hand-drawn wall- paper and multiple layers of black, white, and red paint rolled, splashed, or brushed onto the wall behind the sculptural elements to indicate various (psychological, metaphorical) intensities of heat, smoke, or flame. *Fireman's Conflict Resolution #6* here includes a facsimile of the rear wall, at the Everson Museum, as the artist recalls it, providing an opportunity to renegotiate figure-ground relations with respect to this particular version of the piece, and the haunting, unintended “cooling effect” of the blue hallway that once led into the gallery where the sculpture was installed. For Yale Union, Fried's newest ladder sculpture, *The Edge of the Forest: Keystone 1* (2016), abandons the struggle with referential fire-fighting tendencies of earlier works in the series to enter a more purely formal sculptural condition for which no script, no background, and no tested psychological approach is a given.

Figurative language emerged early in the paintings of Bernice Bing, a contemporary of Joan Brown whose first solo exhibition took place in San Francisco at Bruce Conner's Batman Gallery in 1961. From abstraction through calligraphy, Bing later studied both the linguistic and formal character of the Chinese ideogram: “an inclusive gestalt not an analytic dissociation of senses and functions like phonetic writing.”¹¹ She attended the first class of the Esalen Institute and later became interested in descriptions of form and material from quantum theories of particle physics, and the interrelations of light, color and energy for both perception and painting.¹² Her *Lotus Sutra 1* (early to mid-1980s) and the late ink on paper studies displayed here trace the cultural, natural, and philosophical influences on Bing's underexamined practice, only hinting at the bold brushwork and impressive scale of the room-sized canvases she once painted.

11. Bing, diary entry. c. 1960. Estate of Bernice Bing.
12. “As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated ‘building blocks,’ but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole. . . . In atomic physics, we can never speak about nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves.” In Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1975, p. 68.

5. Mike Kelley, “David Askeveld: The California Years.” *David Askeveld: Cultural Geographies and Other Works*, (exh. cat.). Charlottetown, CA: Confederation Centre Art Gallery and Museum, 1998. pp. 61-68