

Shifting Landscapes: Signal Fire Washington State University Gallery 2

October 9 through November 2

November 2 Closing Reception 4:30

November 2 Fireside Chat 5:30 - Enjoy an informal symposium by a simulated campfire with several participating artists. Free and open to the public

It is a stretch to say I have curated this exhibition. The original curators of this wonderful group of artists are in fact Signal Fire, an artist-run non-profit based in Portland, Oregon. Signal Fire seeks to connect artists with wild places by organizing residencies and wilderness excursions. This exhibition presents works from a diverse group of artists who participated in Signal Fire's 2016 summer program, Unwalking John C. Fremont. I have organized this exhibition by reconnecting all the artists who participated, including art historian Jessica Landau who wrote the thoughtful piece below. I was fortunate to participate in that excursion as well. In the van ride back to the airport at the end of the journey, several of us artists discussed the possibility of eventually doing a group exhibition that would pay homage to the bonds we made and the ideas we considered. Months later, while determining Washington State University's Department of Fine Arts 2017-2018 season of programming, several Master of Fine Arts candidates democratically settled on *Shifting Landscapes*—an exploration of ecological changes and environmental issues. Call it serendipity. Thanks to the support of my colleagues Reza Safavi and Michael Holloman and with tremendous help from graduate students on the visiting artist and scholar committee, I am pleased to present *Shifting Landscapes: Signal Fire*.

Joe Hedges
Washington State University
Assistant Professor of Painting/Intermedia

Visiting Artist and Scholar Committee:

Associate Professor Michael Holloman
Associate Professor Reza Safavi

Jared Boorn
Anna Carpenter
Morganne Couch
Megan Culbertson
Krista Fogt
Marguerite Gilbertson
Brett McElmurry
Mana Mehrabian
Ayanno Nayo
Dustin Regul
Tay Sanders
Amelia Warden

Shifting Landscapes: Signal Fire
by Jessica Landau
PhD Candidate, Art History
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Donna Haraway's newest book confronts what many call the Anthropocene or even the Capitalocene: terms used to describe the current geological age, an age in which human impact on geological processes--through the mere existence of homo sapiens sapiens or through the species' pursuit of capital and wealth, respectively--have reached proportions that far overshadow species living in this time or at any other known time on earth. Rather than simply decrying human activity and bracing for extinction, Donna Haraway focuses instead on "staying with the trouble," finding ways that we, as a species, can "become with," or create a state of "being in relation" with others, be they human or not.

Walking up on a mountain with eleven people you have just met and staying there over two freezing June nights, discussing issues of environmentalism, settler colonialism, and indigenous knowledge could be called a way of becoming with. In 2016 when a group of artists and one art historian participated in one of Signal Fire's "unwalking" residencies through the Lava Beds and the Warner Mountains of Oregon, they could not have fully anticipated the trouble our nation and environment would face just six months later, after the 2016 election.

All of these artworks demonstrate an effort to stay with the trouble, however. Inspired by the urge to create kin across species lines, counter environmental devastation and decolonize, as well as a general love for the outdoors and our public lands, this exhibition *Shifting Landscapes: Signal Fire* presents the work of unnatural kin, becoming with and staying with the trouble together.

Through different media, geographies, and times, the artworks in this exhibition grapple with the collective trouble, while addressing the specificities unique to each place or moment. This includes confronting our troubled histories - as Rachel Stevens does in *Collect Pond*, which studies the complicated economic, political, and colonial histories of water use in New York City. The adjacent Ilvs Strauss' dance performance video work takes place in a shipping container, evoking ideas about global transport of resources. Stephanie Rothenberg's work is a documentation of a piece that engages the entire world, in a video-game like simulation of natural resources (including human labor) moving around the oceans to various labor stations. Palmarin Merges also thinks with water, reading the ways that our personal histories intertwine with societal ones, matching land erosion to bodily scars. Merges' work asks viewers the question: can we move with the landscape instead of through it? Sarah Farahat challenges the ways we view and move through the landscape in *One Minute Meditations on Light and Shadow*,

giving us glimpses of landscapes through silhouetted sections and the sound of footsteps.

Many of the works exhibited ask similar questions of the way we mark, label, and use our land. Mika Aono's series *Filling A Hole*, envisions the landscape as always in a state of becoming, re-marking emptinesses to challenge the ways we shape and claim the land. Ka'ila Farrell-Smith's work is a perennial disruption of settler-colonial land claims. Through her painted layers, Farrell-Smith demonstrates the complexities of Native American identity against stereotypical labels. Ryan Pierce also investigates the methods we use to divide up and make use of the land, acknowledging both the devastation of the natural world, and hope for its recovery. Pete Railand's work similarly focuses on the hopeful recovery of the environment, seeing this possibility in future generations.

Together, these artists interweave our complex relationships to land, environment, history, identity, and the trouble that is created when all of those mix. While each artist represented works within a separate creative practice, the exhibition and the dialogue created is born out of the collective goal of speaking, reflecting together, and finding ways to create kinship and confront the trouble together.

Several artists sent additional information to help contextualize their works:

Rachel Stevens

Collect Pond: Waters Past and Water Futures

Walking tour, map, visualization (fabric)

6' x 6' x 6'

2017

In June I conducted a walking tour of Collect Pond in lower Manhattan exploring relationships between water and finance/speculation. As you many know, Collect Pond is a former fresh-water pond fed by tributaries that used to provide all the potable water to NYC inhabitants, provide recreation, fishing, etc. Collect Pond has an interesting history. After arriving in 1609, European settlers rapidly polluted it with trash, etc., then drained the putrid water into the Hudson via a canal (now Canal st.) and filled it in in the early 19th cen. The site became a damp and shifting piece of land that then became the notorious Five Points area and is not surrounded by courthouses. Before the pond was filled in, Aaron Burr headed a water distribution company that sold water from the tributaries. The company did a sub-par job, using hollow wooden logs to move the water, etc., and took the bulk of the \$ they had raised to start a bank. The bank eventually became Chase Bank and the current logo is based on a cross section of the wooden pipe.

Palmarin Merges

Shirts

thirteen cotton tee-shirts

wall-hanging

5' x 12' x 12'

2017

My earliest memory of water is the Pacific Ocean on the island of Oahu. The roaring of the surf a backdrop of many hours spent playing on the shore and in the waters of the Pacific. I have come a long way. And so have we all traveling through space, time, land and sea, air and thought to here, where we are now. A collection of scars and quickly forgotten pleasures, our internal landscape shifting in a call and response to the dictates of our daily lives. This piece, connects my past in Oahu to my present in Oregon by including on the edges of the piece the ocean currents that are borne in the

Pacific Ocean from the N. Pacific current to the Californian current south to the N. Equatorial current then towards Japan and following the Kuroshio current and once again up to the N. Pacific Current towards California and heading south back to the N. Equatorial current. The text attempts to follow the flow main flow of the Klamath from southern Oregon and northern California - of the river from the Upper Klamath River out to its terminus near Klamath, CA.

Water wears down the land, it is imperturbable, and relentless in its movement across the landscape. Like water, humanity has left its mark on the landscape. In our inexorable desire for movement and speed we force our way through, over, under and thru spaces by any means necessary. We must learn from the way water moves fast over cliffs and slow through level plains moving gently with the flow of the landscape in order to live with the land and not in opposition to it. Man with Nature instead of Man vs. Nature.

The text, Peace on the Klamath by Matt Jenkins from High Country News June 23, 2008, is taken from a group of readings while Unwalking John C. Fremont's fraught trail through Native American Country. Part of the reading has been transcribed into marks on the t-shirts. Other parts of the same reading will be text sewn into water soluble material using a sewing machine. I chose this reading because it shows how two groups usually opposed can come together and find peace. Even more than happiness, it is all that any of us are truly looking for.

Stephanie Rothenberg
The Secret of Eternal Levitation
video (demo of interactive installation)
7 minutes 18 seconds
2012

"they have learned the secret of eternal levitation" – Sheik Al Maktoum of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in his reverie to the enigmatic floating island of Laputa in "Gulliver's Travels"

"The Secret of Eternal Levitation" is an interactive installation with an augmented reality (AR) mobile device component that explores the power dynamics and structural relationships between contemporary visions of utopian urbanization and real world economic, political and environmental factors. Drawing from existing interpretations of the "ideal" global city as projected by the fantastical constructions of cities such as Dubai or Beijing, the project creates an interactive narrative around a fictional multinational developer called "Laputa Isles" who is engaged in the process of envisioning the next urban oasis.

The artwork references the floating island of Laputa in “Gulliver’s Travels” in which enlightened aristocrats are too impractical in their lofty thoughts to meet their basic physical needs and must extract resources from the villagers below in order to survive. When the aristocrats on Laputa were angry at the villagers, they would float the island over them, covering the region in shade preventing rain or sunshine and thus destroying crops and food production.

Based on this theme, the interactive installation is designed as a futuristic sales kiosk owned by the transnational real estate corporation “Laputa Isles.” At the kiosk, gallery visitors can create a custom dream home in a gated community of their choice: Tiki Bay, Desert Oasis, etc. The gated communities are actually 3D modeled virtual floating islands. Using the kiosk’s glowing joystick, visitors navigate the earth (via a simulation of Google Earth) sucking up the resources needed to build their dream home community including building materials, energy and labor. A data visualization shows how much resources are needed for each step of the process.

When their dream home community is complete, visitors can use a mobile device (smart phone or tablet) to view their home “virtually” floating in the sky.



The project debuted at the 2012 International Symposium on Electronic Art and was exhibited at 516 Arts in Albuquerque, NM. Funding and support through a 2011 HARPO award. Computer programming by Tim Scaffidi. 3D model assistance through Center for Computational Research at University at Buffalo