



William Bradford, *Home Port, Coast of Labrador*, 1865, oil on canvas, 32" x 42"

Faultlines: The Shifting Perspective on Landscape in American Art at GP Presents in New York City

by Mary Hrbacek

The exhibition entitled *Fault Lines: Shifting Perspectives on Landscape in American Art*, at GP Presents, displays five contemporary nature-oriented artists whose process-based art engages natural motifs with fresh intentions. While they offer new contexts that dismantle and restructure nature as a subject, the artists are fully engaged in exploring it as a hot topic. Curated by Anna Ortt and Alexandra Vigil Polemis the show explores contemporary perspectives, with attitudes, within the scope of an array of 19th and 20th Century master landscape painters including Albert Bierstadt, Arthur Dove, Max Weber, and William Bradford, to name a few. By expanding interpretations of the landscape by the use of personalized

individual processes, the artists seem bent on reinvigorating the influential though waning genre. Kristine Moran, employs oil on canvas, while Nick van Woert, Jason Middlebrook, Shane McAdams and Christy Gast focus on process, arriving at their images as corollaries of their intuitive use of diverse media, including ball point pen, coal slag, tar paper, the cyanotype process on canvas, and slices of maple trees that display the concentric rings of their cross sections.

Landscape for all intents and purposes went underground during the "culture wars" of the 1990's when it fell out of fashion in the agendas of Lacanian curators who wearied of seeing landscape defined by the invariable green fields with rounded

trees lined up on horizons. Who can blame them? Unfortunately abstract and representational nature-based art was a collateral casualty. In order to revitalize and legitimize this genre, bringing it to the forefront of the mainstream where it belongs, it is key for artists to use new terms for updated and innovative materials, and new definitions to enhance acceptance of their process based practices. Many 21st Century curators speak in precise and vigilant intellectual terms; artists today must master their language.

Kristine Moran's lush painting series *Woman into Wilderness*, 2,3,4, provides a poetic oblique glimpse of leaves and tree trunks, seen up close. Sensuous flesh-colored strokes add a human reference to the soft leafy components of her oil on canvas works that are small in scale (16 x 20") and intimate in feeling. They are luminous and personal. In his compelling work entitled *Least Resistance (Flow)* (ballpoint pen, oil

and resin on panel) Shane McAdams creates a link between a mountainous river gorge, and a striking "sky" field of pink and green stripes, that reload the predictable horizontal clouds to fashion a reconfigured vertical sunset. The stripes are mirrored subtly in the rivers reflections. By fusing abstraction with a recognizable landscape vista, McAdams makes a bold move, yet the piece has a tendency to tell two stories. To be entirely unified the composition could be divided unequally.

Jason Middlebrook takes painting in an alternative direction by exploring geometric patterns in maple wall works inspired by the tree rings found in the cross sections of the wood. He skillfully paints colored geometric patterns and structures that playfully over-lap the rings of the organic tree sections, converting them into diverse decorative emblems of transformation, that suggest in turn fingerprints, colored wall structures, and in the piece *We Can All Relate* a metaphoric reference through color and configuration to the human body.

Nick van Woert's engaging *Untitled*, black boulder (coal slag, tar paper, white bronze and urethane) signifies a mysterious unnamable object that suggests a moon rock or a volcanic fragment; a title would augment the significance and meaning of the work. Completed in an open-ended process by probing the industrial materials, Van Woert's powerful abstract wall work entitled *Stucco* (coal slag and steel mesh) yields a contrasting shine of hardware store steel mesh integrated with the bumpy appealingly tactile surface of matte tarpaper and coal slag. To strongly express the dark vision of its promise the piece could configure more perceptibly. Christy Gast's four casual looking cyanotype prints on linen, hung loosely from wooden strips, are created with objects she recovered on a cross-country road trip, in the tradition of the artist-explorers of past eras.

It is obvious that the circumstances of nature have changed radically. Whether one works from plants in an arboretum, in city parks, or in the barren New Jersey flats, nature

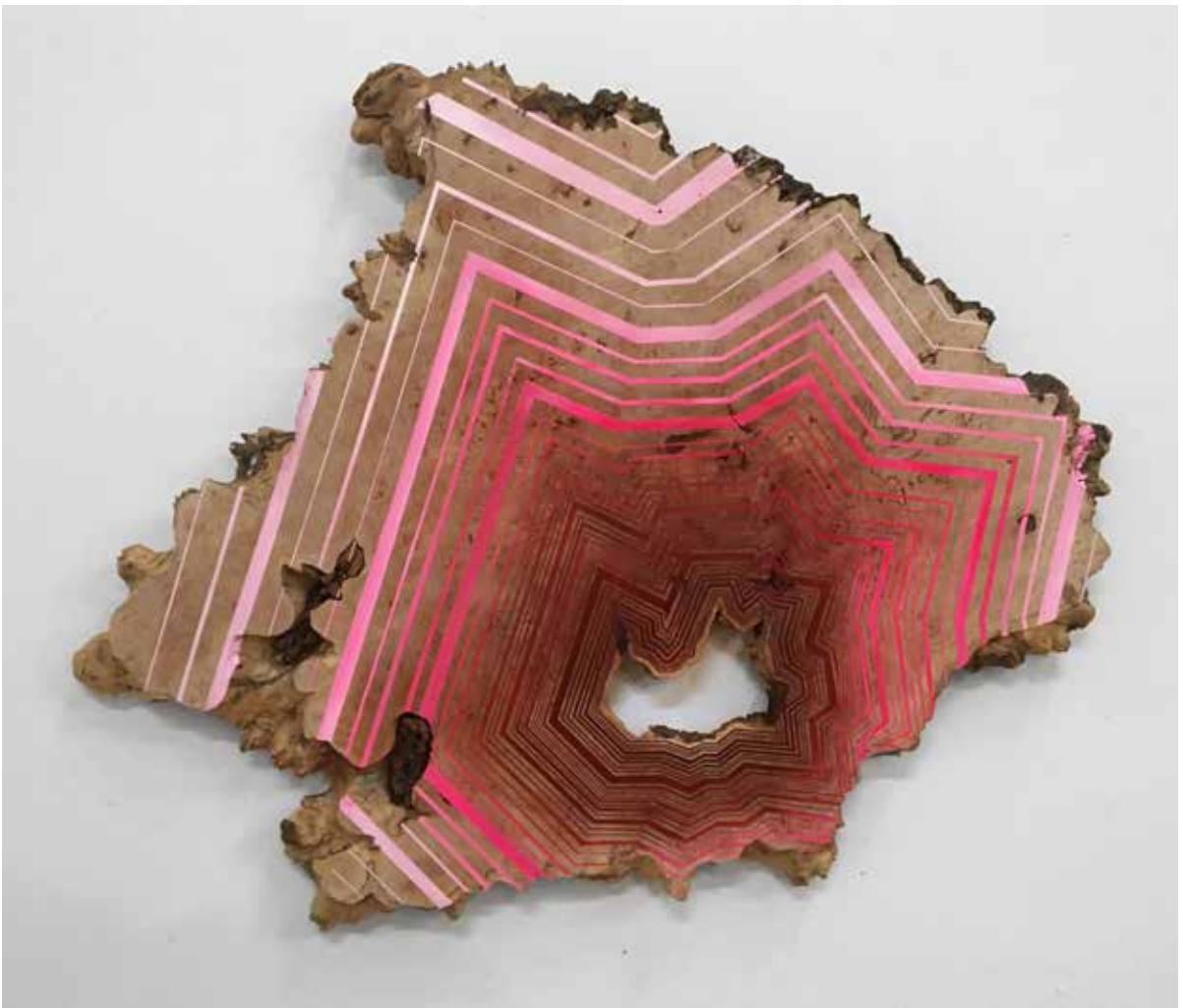
need not justify its authenticity or its significance. If anything, its endangered status makes its relevance more urgent. Nature is, it exists. It is our source. Despite its diminished stature it continues to sustain us. After all, trees breathe in toxic carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen. Nothing gets more vital than that. The truth is that nature-based process art has been with us for some decades; luckily new

interpretations channel fresh meaning with reinvented use of industrial/ construction materials. It is time nature as a subject regains its stature. It is and has been a major genre in painting's history for centuries.

We cannot afford to merely replicate nature, as special and spectacular as it might be. Many of the artists employ accident to arrive at unforeseen visions. They are not



Nick van Woert, *Untitled*, black boulder, coal slag, white bronze and urethane
On wall: Stucco, 2014, coal slag, steel mesh, tar paper, plywood, steel frame., 60" x 48"



Jason Middlebrook, *We All Can Relate*, 2015, acrylic on maple, 22"x 28" x 1"

copying nature, they are becoming nature, and nature is becoming them. When asked if he ever needed to refer to the natural world, Jackson Pollack, the master of process in his action painting made the statement "I am nature."

The dynamism of the natural environment is accentuated by the close-up views envisioned by the artists; in their imaginations their unconscious minds seem to see themselves united with the spirit of their subjects. Their desire and longing for this closeness signals a sense of protectiveness, a feeling of unease at the danger of loss

as their motifs become increasingly scarce.

More than any other method, process-oriented art comprises the opportunity to create fresh forms combined with the chance of failure. The practice is the ultimate in self-belief, as it requires courage and skillful guidance of the accidental manipulation of the media. This seems to be the attitude that the artists in the show are demonstrating. The mixed media artist Alberto Burri is a master at infusing sheer authenticity and meaning into the plastic Celotex combustions and paint he uses in

his process oriented approach to art making in the last century.

The contemporary works on view generate a singular voice among the masterworks of American art that present nature's expansive grandeur in a land where the beauty of its geography for several centuries defined its greatness. William Bradford, Albert Bierstadt, and John Mix Stanley and sixteen 19th and 20th Century artists contribute works of solemnity and stature that create a continuum of landscape visions that span artists' landscape and nature-based practices today.



Kristine Moran, *Woman into Wilderness*, 2,3,4, 2016, oil on canvas, 16 x 20"



Shane McAdams, *Least Resistance (Flow)*, 2014, ballpoint pen, oil and resin on panel, 48" x 48"



Max Weber,
California
Landscape,
1952,
oil on canvas,
19.25" x 28"