

June 16 - July 23, 2011

Artist Talk

Thursday, June 16 | 6-7 pm

Opening Reception

Thursday, June 16 | 7-9 pm

Meredith Setser

Germinal Rhizome



Germinal Rhizome, detail of installation in progress, etching on handmade and dyed wool felt, dimensions variable, 2011. Created under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2010-11.



Gallery Hours
Tuesday to Saturday, 12 to 5 pm

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Meredith Setser: *Germinal Rhizome*

by Katy McDevitt

The French surrealist Paul Éluard famously noted that “There is another world but it is in this one” (“Il y a un autre monde mais il est dans celui-ci”);¹ that is a notion with immense power and resonance for me, and an absolute article of faith. Sometimes I get headspun into a strange, skin-prickly away-place that skews my perception in a way that I like very much because it allows a seeing that differs from the seeing of quotidian life, offers a fleeting glimpse into that other world. There are no hard-and-fast rules for what catalyses me to that state, although I definitely have certain susceptibilities. A particular concatenation of words can do it, or the way a fern unfurls in the forest. A minor chord can do it, or the way my very black cat suddenly glows red when the sunlight hits his fur at the right angle. Art and what is made by humans might catapult me to that state, as might aspects of the natural world; equally, however, ideas and then the playing out of those ideas, whether in three dimensions or only within the life of the imagination have that catalyzing capacity. And sometimes it’s just a simple noun that engages me in that way—a simple noun, like, for instance, this one:

Intersection.

Now *there’s* a word I can get behind. Not so much for its graphemic grace—I wouldn’t say it has a whole lot of that; visually, it looks pretty lackluster on the page. But oh! Conceptually! Conceptually, that is a word to love and love.

The beauty of that word lies in its promises—of a coming together and a joining, of the creation of the additional. When two things butt up against one another, encroachment and intermingling become possible, and the formation of some kind of more or new becomes possible. Which is very much the case with Meredith Setser’s work in *Germinal Rhizome*, produced during the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency.

Right from the outset, there is a Venn quality to the work; not literally, of course—these works don’t manifest themselves as mathematical diagrams on a page—but conceptually, in the intersection of two disparate realities from which arises a third. Felt is handmade by the artist, printed with agricultural planting patterns and, finally, imbued with actual seeds that are allowed to germinate and grow. There’s a lot of richness at play here, with riffing on conventionally rendered gender roles going on: the textile work references traditional feminine domestic pastimes, while the seed-planting alludes to the established masculine occupation of farming. The coming together of the two spheres—the male and the female, the home and the away, the interior

and the exterior, and, most of all, of fabric-making and agriculture—leads to a hybrid genus of the human-rendered that we could call “fabriculture.”

“Fabriculture.” I like it. I like it a lot—it’s a portmanteau word and those are very full of delightment, for sure—but its substrates of meaning and reference are even more engaging and enchanting. It’s about order, this work of Meredith Setser’s, but also about chaos, about control but also about abandon. It’s about the mindful effort made in creating the cloth, in marking it with carefully rendered planting patterns, and finally in painstakingly sowing it with seeds. But then, then ... it’s about the thrilling abandonment of control, about acquiescing to the riot of green and growing life that asserts itself and blurs and obfuscates the boundaries that have been so carefully demarcated on the cloth.

Contained within this work is a recognition, too, of the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*, the notion of imperfection and impermanence, and the related principle, also Japanese, of *mono no aware*, the awareness of the transience of things. Without question, there is a human tendency towards order: we are wired to desire system and structure, it seems. To that end, we are vigorous in our attempts to bring to bear control on the natural world. Our attempts to render it submissive to our needs, to impose order on the random green chaos of the places that are unpaved are often successful. But for all that, nature has the capacity to exert itself and knock us about quite violently (most recently we are reminded of this by the twin natural disasters of earthquake and tsunami experienced in Japan, and the third human-engendered disaster of nuclear meltdown), or via the less ferocious means of entropy. We can pave paradise and put up a parking lot (or, indeed, millions of the damn things), but Gaia can and will avail herself of the option either to slap us down—*pow!*—or just to more quietly grow greenly and gently and to inexorably erode all the concrete and steel we’ve put in her path.

All of these realities are beautifully and subtly referenced, rendered, and explored by the work Meredith Setser offers up with the fabricultural fabrications of *Germinal Rhizome*. This rich body of work provides its viewers with a delicious opportunity to meditate on what happens when worlds collide.

¹ Llewelyn, John. *Margins of Religion: between Kierkegaard and Derrida*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2009. 307.

Katy McDevitt is a Toronto-based writer and editor who is ridiculously fond of books and art and music and whiskey and stormy weather and swimming and running and typewriters and the colour green and run-on sentences and bad swears. (Especially bad swears.) She owns and operates www.unruly.ca, where she writes about art and craft and design and music and books and the act of making, amongst other topics, and sometimes publishes the writings of others, too.

She is also the principal of Unruly Editorial Services (www.unrulyeditorialservices.com) a publishing services company based in Toronto, Ontario.

Through the Visiting Artist Residency Program, Open Studio is accessible to all professional artists, with or without printmaking experience, to explore and develop new bodies of work through print media. Each year, four artists produce their work in the Open Studio facilities followed by two-person exhibitions in the Open Studio Gallery.

Open Studio, Canada’s leading printmaking centre, is dedicated to the production, preservation and promotion of contemporary fine art prints.

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Meredith Setser is a printmaker, textile artist and assistant professor of printmaking at the Herron School of Art and Design (Indianapolis). She studied at Edinboro University (Pennsylvania) and Indiana University (IUPUI campus) for her undergraduate studies, earning a BFA in 1997. She attended graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, completing her MFA in 2004. Meredith has taught printmaking courses as an adjunct instructor at both the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Milwaukee School of Art and Design. She has exhibited widely, including the *Qijiang International Print Exhibition* (China), the *12th Annual Washington Printmaker's Small Print Exhibition* (Washington, DC), *Folly*, a solo exhibition at Basile Gallery (Indianapolis) and *Perform/Install III* at the South Bend Museum of Art (Indiana). Meredith has also given several workshops and demonstrations in felt making across the United States. Meredith Setser would like to acknowledge and thank Indiana University's New Frontiers in the Arts and Humanities program for support in the form of a New Explorations Travel Fellowship which enabled her to attend Open Studio in December 2010. She would also like to thank all the wonderful printmakers she got a chance to meet while working in the studio during her residency. Special thanks go to Sara Kelly, Jill Graham, Astrid Ho, and Liz Menard for all of their help, advice, and support during her stay in Toronto.

Jennie Suddick is a multi-disciplinary artist. Her work has been exhibited in Canada, The United States, Germany and Italy. She received both a BFA and Advanced Visual Studies Certificate from The Ontario College of Art and Design, where she was the recipient of multiple awards. She received a Masters of Fine Art at York University. Her work, created in print, photography and sculpture, deals with issues of Canadian identity, cryptozoology, museological display, and hyper reality. Recently, she has shown at Board of Directors, Blackwood Gallery's *Drop Out 2009* Nuit Blanche exhibition, The Gladstone Hotel's *upArt* and participated in *Hallwalls' Artists and Models: Stimulus* in Buffalo, New York. She received the Award of Excellence at the 2009 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition. Jennie Suddick would like to thank Hazel Eckert, Rose Bouthillier, everyone at Open Studio, and of course, Bigfoot.

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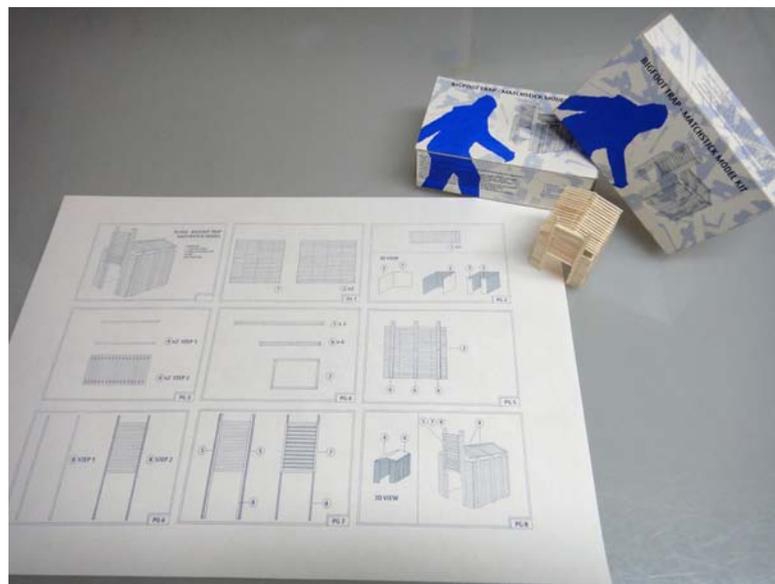
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Jennie Suddick

TRAP



Bigfoot Trap Matchstick Model Kit, Artist Multiple – Hand printed and constructed box, screenprinted blueprints, 300 matchsticks, wood glue, acetate sheet, 2011. Created under the auspices of the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, 2010-11.

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Jennie Suddick: TRAP

by Rose Bouthillier

In 1974, the North American Wildlife Research Team built a trap in Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest. Sturdily constructed from metal enforced beams and staked to the ground with telephone poles, the roomy, 10'x10', hut-like structure might have been an attractive resting spot along the migratory route of its elusive target: Bigfoot. Actively baited for six years (resulting in the capture of a few black bears), the trap eventually fell to neglect and disrepair. Now maintained by the Forest Service, and steps away from newly forged paths, it remains as a shrine to futile pursuit – an endearing and mildly threatening oddity.

In the work created during the Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency, artist Jennie Suddick has integrated this relic of cryptozoology—the search for unproven species—with another pastime of yearning, the matchstick model. Traced back to the hands of naval prisoners in the 18th century, this souvenir craft originated as a way to call up the outside world, establishing a connection to the far-off through the creation of miniature replicas. Today, many manufactured kits are based on monumental works of architecture, such as the Arc de Triumph or the Taj Mahal—exotic and out of reach for many. These hobbyists actively construct relationships to the *unseen*, much as those who track *unknown* creatures develop a thorough knowledge of the supposed.

Suddick's approach to this merger is light-hearted and consumable; the brightly coloured package, meticulous instruction booklet and retro promotional poster are charming, desirable objects. Encapsulating the novelty and nostalgia of the original, now a frequently visited tourist attraction, Suddick's *TRAP* revels in the aesthetics of obscurity. Quietly lingering alongside this fun, however, is something profound about the strange comforts of the unobtainable.

It's no coincidence that Bigfoot and UFO sightings have been known to converge— these phenomena both express anxiety about our place on the Earth: one symbolizing complete harmony with environment, the other with technology. Further, both are connected to the desire for something more, a companion species for humanity. Bigfoot is not so far removed from us—only a few steps back—closer to nature and free of the social, economic and political conflicts of modern life. Model building, an absorbing, solitary pastime, also provides a relief from daily realities, an escape, or at least temporary dislocation. As theorist Susan Stewart writes, the function of the souvenir is “to authenticate a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, to discredit the present. The present is either too impersonal, too

looming, or too alienating...”¹ The matchstick model both slows down time (through its painstaking construction) and freezes it (the miniature model is never-changing).² Likewise, cryptids—the animals cryptozoologists study—are timeless in a way, remnants of another era scattered throughout both ancient and contemporary folklore.

The contained escape of model building parallels our ambivalent and often controlling relationship to the natural world, which is a recurring theme in Suddick's practice. *Enclosures* (2008-2010), is a series of maquettes housed in small Plexiglas boxes, showing furry, hominid-type creatures engaged in distinctly human behaviours. Though engaged in some leisure activities (sun-bathing, nature walks), under the tight encasements the figures seem like animals in a zoo, a few of them raising their hands to the glass in sullen curiosity. *Nothing of Harm to Dread* (2011) incorporates the tent caterpillar, whose sporadic, nebulous cocoons spur the destruction of the trees they rest in, which are often burned to stop the insects from spreading. These convergences of safety (nests, enclosures) with menace (eradication, imprisonment) are echoed in the design of the Siskiyou Bigfoot trap—homey, but meant to capture; standing guard to protect, while inviting in the radical potential of the unknown. The urge to control, manage and organize nature is always met with anomalous forces, from within and without, both psycho- and ecological.

The playful nature of Suddick's creations suggests that such conflicts are open to humorous reflection and aesthetic appreciation. In the classic cryptozoological text *Creatures from the Outer Edge*, authors Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman consider the complicated process of logical reasoning when it comes to mysterious sightings: “the physical evidence is always just enough to suggest that the reported manifestation was not purely hallucinatory; it is never enough to prove that it was objectively real.”³ This state of suspended disbelief can be a pleasant one, a site of imaginative engagement and possibility, where we may grasp some of what we can never hold on to.

¹ Stewart, Susan. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. 139.

² In fact, studies have suggested that when engaging in the world of the miniature, the experience of time is compressed in proportion to scale. Stewart sites Alton J. Delong, “Phenomenological Space-Time: Toward an Experiential Relativity,” *Science* 213 (1981): 681-683.

³ Clark, Jerome and Loren Coleman. *Creatures of the Outer Edge*. New York: Warner, 1978. 195.

Rose Bouthillier is the Assistant Curator at Oakville Galleries. Her writing has appeared in *frieze*, *esse* and *Museums Roundup*.