

My artwork is inspired by the impermanence of material. In time everything decomposes, breaks down and becomes something else. Through my artwork, I try to visualize the changing qualities of materials that are created by natural processes over time. It is capturing and displaying this transformation that has been my principle artistic endeavor.

The structure of a log or stump is often used in my work as a symbol of time and process. Each ring found in a cross-section of a tree represents a year of the specimen's life. These annual rings are a natural mark of time through pattern. Furthermore, the form of a tree cross-section symbolizes the influence of humans on nature. Only the human hand can produce that clean cut which allows us to clearly see these annual rings. Naturalist Aldo Leopold explains the historical significance of these natural marks of time and the power of the human saw in his book, *The Sand Country Almanac*:

The saw works only across the years, which it must deal with one by one, in sequence. From each year the ranker teeth pull little chips of fact, which accumulate in little piles, called sawdust by woodsmen and archives by historians... It is not until the transect is completed that the tree falls, and the stump yields a collective view of a century. (Leopold 16)

Inspired by the deep meaning that can be found within this natural form, I created my own cross section made out of newspaper. I took many issues of The New York Times and built a log by tediously wrapping the strips of paper. This artwork has taken time and it represents time. The annual rings are composed of our events, and as they accumulate, it grows. Furthermore, the newspaper itself is

a document of time. I have worked on this artwork continually throughout the academic year and it has become an artifact of my final year at Mount Holyoke College. It has grown with me and I have grown with it.

This artwork also speaks of the relationship between trees and paper. Trees are cut down all over the world and turned into pulp to produce paper. Stumps and logs are not the only remains of cut down trees. Paper is a product from trees and it lives on. However, the newspaper will decay in time much like the trees of which it was made. It will start to yellow and breakdown, illustrating the continuous cycle of material.

I find the cycle of material fascinating. Everything that surrounds us (no matter how far removed from nature we may think it is) was at one point extracted from the earth and it will naturally return, eventually. By comparing the physical qualities of material, you can see how everything is interrelated. As land artist Andy Goldsworthy once wrote, “When I’m working with materials it's not just the leaf or the stone it's the processes that are behind them that are important. That's what I’m trying to understand, not the single object but nature as a whole” (Goldsworthy 1). I enjoy finding physical similarities among materials and presenting them. I want my audience to see this interconnection as well.

These works are my studies and inspire further investigation of relationships among various materials. In one series I investigated the qualities of wood compared to other materials. Taking bark curls that had fallen off a branch, I rolled up another material to take the place of the wood. The rolling of the

material simulates the same pattern of tree rings. Two of my most successful examples used canvas and handmade paper as the interior. These two materials are not just similar to wood in their color but also in the way that they fray at the edges. Interestingly, both of these materials are made from plants and are often stored in rolls. Sometimes our actions reflect those of nature.

Collecting is a vital part of my process as a maker. I have never been able to walk a far distance without stopping, observing and picking up something that I find interesting. It takes time for these objects to be formed in nature and my collection of them represents time. Found items such as pieces of bark and wood continually inspire me. Their forms, textures and colors draw me to them. When they are removed from their original environment and taken to my studio, they become something else. Sometimes it is hard for me to separate what I have made and collected because together they become a body of work through their relationship with each other.

A visit to the beach during a trip to Nova Scotia, Canada, helped me realize the connection between my work and my need to collect. Pieces of rounded driftwood, rusted metals, shells and glass are all shaped by the power of the ocean water. The ocean is a tumbler so to speak, we make things and it takes them and gives them back in a new form. Often I would pick up these weathered forms of wood and metal and wonder, “What was this?” However, the ocean breaks these objects down without completely erasing their histories. The ocean

returns fragments of these objects and they become puzzle pieces that can be reconstructed or left to decompose into something else entirely.

By collecting I am sorting through the natural world and finding things that appeal to my aesthetics. Although they are made by nature, they are selected, arranged and displayed by my hands. The collected items fill my studio along with my studies, experiments, and works in progress. Bottles of harvested rust, pieces of wood, and scraps of paper from bigger projects surround me. Even the objects that I make with my hands are collected and seem to belong with the found objects because they both accumulate in time, simulate my creativity, and keep me moving forward.

The construction and arrangement of *Collection* in the College Museum taught me a lot about myself as an artist. I had known that it was important for me to include a display of selected pieces of my ever-growing collection in the thesis exhibition. However, I didn't realize how insightful this process would become. I came to the exhibition space with boxes and boxes of my found objects, handmade objects, studies and experiments. Thoughtfully, I designed white wooden display shelves so that they would not overpower the objects. The shelves were arranged so that my collection could be placed in a fluid manner. Many of the objects I selected to display related to one another and were fragments of my artistic investigations throughout my college experience. I placed each item with intention. The result was a systematic display that looks deceptively simple. Much like the work of the artist Vija Celmins, my obsessive attention to detail

allowed *Collection* to look natural but deliberate. Seeing all of these collected items come together in this way was truly rewarding. Each individual object is interesting but when put together, they create a powerful statement about time and material. It became a visual representation of my process and interests as an artist.

A smaller collection of wood pieces was also installed as part of my thesis exhibition. Wood is a material that constantly surrounds us, a common building material used in construction. Even a space that appears to contain no wood can be alluded to the natural world by comparing its structure. For example, the classic column, a common element in architecture, stands tall and strong much like a tree trunk. With this idea in mind I began to plan an installation for one of the columns in the College Art Museum.

For this installation entitled *Growth*, I altered the pieces of wood that I had been collecting throughout my years at Mount Holyoke College to fit on a column. These pieces of wood were all unique shapes that I found discarded at various sites where trees had been cut down. Most of the collected pieces were knots and burls, unsuitable to be processed into wood for construction or other human needs.

I was drawn to the large concrete columns that can be found throughout the Art Building's design. However, they tend to be unnoticed by the public. It was my intention to draw attention back to the column. By attaching these wood pieces to the column, they would have a setting again but would still be misplaced. *Parasite*, an installation by the artist Nia Katchadourian, also

connected seemingly-unrelated objects through installation. She placed blue resin-cast rock climbing holds on rocks found outside. The blue climbing holds look so unnatural in comparison to the rocks they are attached to (Katchadourian). Both of our works create a dialogue between natural forms and man-made forms. It is not my intention to merely camouflage the column, but instead have the work cause the viewer to think about what this structure is similar to.

As made evident by my interest in the column, I enjoy working with both the human made and the naturally made. Steel is a processed material that I frequently use in my work. Its components are extracted from the earth and combined to create the common material that is used in construction and daily life. However, steel rusts in time, as its surface becomes exposed to air and moisture. This process of oxidation is made evident by the presence of rust. It is a natural indicator of decay and time. Therefore, I embrace the oxidation of steel. It is the iron content within this material that causes the steel to rust and it is this same iron that runs through our veins and makes our blood red.

In my studio I soaked pieces of scrap steel in order to harvest my own rust water. *Rust Canvas* was one of the first pieces made with the rust I had harvested. I systematically applied the rust water to a canvas in layers. As it accumulated, I had expected the layers to become thicker but was pleasantly surprised when the color of the rust began to change. As the steel pieces broke down, the rust pigment changed from a bright orange to a deep umber, creating visual evidence

of the steel turning back into earth. The resulting canvas became a timeline of decay.

After this discovery, I wanted to continue working with the scrap pieces of steel. I was losing the materiality of the rust by brushing it onto the canvas. In order to regain the materiality of the rust, I began working with handmade paper. This paper was a special material that I had processed from a plant with my own hands. Through this intricate process, I became familiar with the strength and thinness of Japanese kozo paper and thought it might absorb the rust in an interesting way.

I began drying the scrap steel on top of the kozo paper. When the paper was dry, the metal pieces were removed. The paper had indeed absorbed the rust formations from the steel, allowing the color to come through on the paper in a detailed manner. Using this method I began working on a series of *Scrap Steel Papers*. Although the steel is decomposing, this series is not about the steel's loss but instead about the paper's gain of another material.

Although the handmade paper was an improvement, I was still just placing the rust on top of another material. The rust was just on the surface. Instead, I wanted a to create a more meaningful relationship with the handmade paper and sheet steel. Towards the end of the papermaking process, the freshly pressed piece of paper needs to be dried. In the Japanese method, one takes the moist piece of paper and applies it skillfully to a wooden board to ensure that the paper dries flat. Knowing that the kozo paper absorbed rust well and that the fresh-pressed sheets

could provide the moisture needed for the steel to rust, I dried my pieces of paper on a panel of sheet steel instead of the traditionally used wood. The result was breathtaking! As I removed the paper from the steel, I could see that rust had indeed formed. The relationship between the steel and the wet paper had caused the rust to form in flower like shapes. Even though, rust is an indicator of decay, the steel was literally blooming with it. This development blurs the line between what is decay and what is growth, proving to me that they are interwoven.

Inspired by the evidence that rust blooms, I welded steel frames and covered them with the handmade paper to create screens. I watered the frames to grow the rust. By soaking the bottom edge of each screen, the paper absorbed the water and the steel began to rust from the moisture. The rust diffused through the paper with the water creating jagged lines. The lines became mountain-like and remind me of lines made by the heart on a display monitor. It is interesting how patterns like these can allude to so many others that we find in the world.

In the rust screen's current state, you see marks made by the processes of decay and diffusion. These marks created an upward movement that is not usually associated with decay. The movement is linear though and I have come to understand time through the cycle of material, which is circular, not linear. In future pieces, I wish to explore methods in which I will be able to grow rust in an outward direction.

Many of my works are made in collaboration with natural processes. However, they are made in the controlled environment of my studio. For my next

artwork I worked outside, where natural elements had more influence on my work's outcome. This was important in order to truly document weathering. *Dirt Canvases: 4/20/2010-5/1/2010* was a project that I reworked after learning a great deal from the first attempt, *Dirt Canvases: 12/1/2009-12/12/2009*.

Twelve square canvases were used to act as surfaces on which to document the weather's effect on the ground. Pulverized mudstone was applied to each canvas, completely covering the surface. These canvases were then put outside. Each was laid down with its surface facing the sky on April 20th, 2010. Documentation throughout the process of this piece was crucial. After photographing the canvases, I took the first canvas inside that very day. This canvas was labeled 4/20/2010 and placed inside, to end its process. Each day another canvas was removed, labeled with the date and placed inside. This method showed physical representations of how the canvases were affected by the weather throughout a twelve-day period. Heavy breezes, light rain showers, and heavier rains that occurred during the set timeframe had their effect on the canvas surfaces. Dirt was blown and washed off, leaving subtle textural differences on the surfaces. Canvases that were left out longer had less material left on them and were lighter in color as the deep brown of the ground-up rock was weathered away.

In addition to the twelve canvases there was a surface documenting the process underneath them. I stretched a large piece of fabric underneath the board on which the canvases were resting. When it rained the dirt washed off the

canvases, settled onto the fabric and was reabsorbed. By having this absorbent surface underneath the canvases, I documented what was lost while showing what was gained. Interestingly, the dirt applied to the canvases was not the only material in movement throughout this project. Pieces of debris from blooming trees such as pollen, petals and other little pieces of organic matter landed on the canvases throughout the process. Though subtle, this gain further illustrates the continual cycle of material in nature, by showing its movement from one place to another. Much like the *Scrap Steel Papers*, this artwork is not just about the canvases' loss of the dirt, but is instead about the fluidity of material as it goes from one place to the next.

Though I have made a body of work for my thesis project, I do not consider any of my works as complete. I make with the understanding that natural processes will always be influencing my creations. The words of the artist Joseph Beuys reflect my intention perfectly:

My objects are seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture, or for art in general... That is why the nature of my sculpture is not fixed or finished. Processes continue in most of them; chemical reactions, fermentations, colour changes, decay and drying up. Everything is in a state of change. (qtd. in Sonit 51)

Material is impermanent and so is my artwork. The materials undergo changes that are made evident by the passage of time. Each piece becomes an artifact of time and shows physical evidence of its transformation. Using methods of sculpting and collecting, I have established an ongoing collaboration with natural processes. Together we influence materials and mark them with time.

Constantly, natural elements and human actions work against each other. However, through my work I hope to articulate the complex interconnection between the naturally made and the human made. Each influences the other and in the end both are subject to the cycle of growth and decay.