Discerning lines of demarcation

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DISCERNING LINES OF DEMARCATION

A Thesis

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Agricultural and Mechanical College
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by

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Discerning Lines of Demarcation is an investigation into the accumulated landscape of distressing times. Situations of mass destruction, loss of family, substance abuse, domestic violence, loss of friendship, and uncertain health have all been encountered within a steady progression in the last five to six years of my life. The digestion of these situations has been slow as the events overlap and intertwine each other. I have tweezed and distilled these circumstances. This is described through different types of terrains that create physical boundaries to represent psychological fears or events. Tied to Your Hate; How Much More Will Fall, Untitled, Loss Can Ruin but Growth Can Be Found, and Precarious Footing are all pieces that reach for a greater understanding of many trying events.

The work uses the format of installation as the vehicle in which to articulate the landscapes or yards. This format allows the viewer to be inside the workings of the various pieces.
DISCERNING LINES OF DEMARCATION

Discerning Lines of Demarcation is an investigation into layers of accumulated events and emotions. The metaphor of landscape is used to describe the underlying forces that created these circumstances and feelings. This takes shape in the form of yards or small terrains because the domestic landscape contains “the phenomena of nature and culture.”¹ Within this installation you come across both the iconography and objects that have been created by humans and the natural world.

“Landscape is the material home, the language of landscape is a habitat of mind.”² It is a reference that is familiar to everyone that has been in the outdoors or in his or her own backyard. The experience of the natural world is a shared memory that has been directly experienced through the body as a sensation of touch, smell, sound etc. It is also easily applied as a mirror to the cycles and events that we experience as humans. We live in and derive from the same matter as everything else on this planet. Parallels can be drawn between the world of nature and humans through personification and other poetic devices so that one can talk about larger or hidden forces.

The domestic landscape is also a part of a cultural memory. The icons of a picket fence and house can bring about various associations of the perfect household of the fifties or the concept that the grass is always greener.

These landscapes are the expression of actions and ideas in place.³ They are not recreations or a transcription of what happens in the natural world. They are metaphors for human emotions and the human observations during specific events.

My Approach

There is much in this world that is not seen or verbalized. I use the realms of emotion, personal experience, myth, science and philosophy to explore enigmatic areas of existence. Through a multi-faceted process, the use of varied material, repetition and installation, I begin to tap into what is intangible.
In everyday events, we unconsciously correlate characteristics to matter and objects. Our daily routines give us an awareness of a teacup in hand, the sound of a glass breaking or the knowledge that a stovetop is hot. A substance might be cold, soft, brittle, sharp, or precious. These qualities become second nature to us. My interest in material lies in challenging its norms by honing in on particular traits and revealing them or shifting their outcome. I do this by making an object out of an unlikely material, by the context in which a substance is placed or by extending attributes of a given substance through testing and altering. Essences are revealed through contraries or paradox. It is successful when perception belies knowledge or vice versa. To access the unknown, one cannot be on stable ground.

Repetition and installation are other means by which I attempt to bridge the ephemeral with the perceived. My process reiterates ideas and forms. The action of repeating a form builds a resonance as one echoes another. Each piece is an individual and when they are placed together their reverberation creates a larger meaning. The installed forms constitute a foundation or netting of common visual threads. This allows viewers to enter a construct that is not fully recognizable and yet familiar at the same time.

I seek to bridge the visible and invisible worlds while never fully exposing them - for without the unknown there is no room for the imagination.

**Influences**

In preparation and during the beginning work for thesis, I spent a fair amount of time reading and looking at books. I had a sense for what I was looking for but I couldn’t articulate it. I started out with some direction but also got lucky by perusing the stacks. The first people that I looked at were: Andrew Wyeth for his abstract realism; Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois for their work with various materials and their writings; Agnes Martin for her mark making and writings; and then Hans Haacke, Lygia Clark, David Medalla, Helio Oiticica, and Agnes Denes for their work with various natural phenomenon and concepts of space; Gego, Alexander Calder, Francois Morellet and Georges Vantongerloo, for how they approached larger universal systems; Wols, Henri Micheaux, and Gordon Matta-Clark for the perceptions that they put onto paper. I read about constructivism, landscape architecture, Japanese printmakers and some of “The Poetics of Space” by Gaston Bachelard.

The range of these artists was not something that would be unusual for me because the work that I create is a domain with very few boundaries. With the accumulation of these sources, I more fully realized that I was most interested in how one proposed and conceptualized a person or object interacting with their imagined or perceived environment. All of the outcomes vary in media or approach, but what is produced as an end product is a distillation of what one reaps from their concentrated focus of their surroundings and perception.
Title

In creating the installation of “Discerning Lines of Demarcation”, I have delved into events in my life that were hard to make sense of. This is true in most cases not only due to the number of emotions that came from these circumstances but also the conflicting emotions that would happen simultaneously. I have used the word “discern” because it is the nearest definition to what I feel that I have been trying to do.

1. To perceive with the eyes or intellect; detect.
2. To recognize or comprehend mentally.
3. To perceive or recognize as being different or distinct; distinguish.

I am trying to discern events that overlap and are not so cut and dry because there isn’t a right or wrong but lots of in-between. So in distilling these events I have created grounds that reflect on the processes of change, weathering, history/memory, transformation and lack of confidence/stability. This process has also allowed me to come away with a better understanding of some of the underlying forces and/or emotions of: healing, petrification, hope, destruction, rage and hate that I saw others go through and that I sometimes experienced as well. It is my attempt and way to make sense of the numerous gray values in these events and in life. This is why the postcard was produced in shades of gray. The textures and materials chosen were also a matter of discernment. For in collecting them all over the past year and a half, I have pondered and considered the options for their best use

Demarcation is:

1. the determining and marking off of the boundaries of something.
2. separation by distinct boundaries: line of demarcation.

The word is partly derived from the Italian word marcar; to mark. Through the chosen processes of making this work I have marked time, space, history, decay and my thoughts. The physical presence of the work creates boundaries but also how they were made was a way to mark as well. The fence posts are a prime example of this on multiple levels.
form of the post, as a cultural memory, represents a boundary. In the space of the gallery, it creates a physical boundary between the pieces. During the act of creation I emphasized the process of laying in the separate pieces of clay and letting that show. So the surface and the later “drawing” on the fence allowed me another way to record the idea of time and history. The fence is emphasizing that events and memory are not something that is so straight and narrow and that the perspective can change depending on which side of the fence you are standing.

**Installation**

I use installation because it allows me to create an environment where one can be fully immersed in their surroundings. The viewer becomes apart of the piece. During the exhibition, greater significance was brought to the work by having people stand on either side of the fence. Integration between the work and the space also can determine how the participant moves through the space and their approach to see the work. Within this show the viewer is taken on a journey through various yards. The pathways that are created, guide each individual to view the pieces in a particular orientation. This is especially true with the piece “Loss Can Ruin But Growth Can Come Forth”. The positioning of this piece allows the viewer to approach it on either end of the work. One can experience it going from something lush and fertile to destruction but also from what has been destroyed to something that has grown and prospered.

When looking at the space as a whole, the floor was carefully considered. The idea of ground is a constant metaphor throughout the whole exhibition. I have used alternating materials in areas of the viewer’s walkway or path to create differences in surface so that the viewer physically feels a difference from walking on the soft carpet to the hard wood. This also allows me to give the viewer a physical as well as visual connection when moving from one piece to the next.

Repetition and the size of forms are other mechanisms that help to solidify the landscape and to make it more believable to the participant. Things are on a human scale. And though the forms are repeated none of them are exactly the same. They are individuals that can stand on their own but with a grouping the resonance becomes greater.
Process

My process is a marriage of aesthetic decision with natural phenomenon and systems. I allow the systems of transformation to occur so the objects are created through processes and patterns that exist in the universe that I would not be able to access in any other way. This is most strongly represented in the ceramic pieces within this installation. “Precarious Footing” is comprised of tiles that are made from various leaves, twigs and other natural objects that are burned away. Though I do set up the constructs and have the technical aspects of how to keep the tiles together, the tiles never have a predictable final outcome. Colors and compositions shift, some show the various layers and others do not and I embrace all of this. For as Vantongerloo expressed, “Nature cannot be defined, to define it would be to set limits to it.”

Materials

I gather and collect, store and ponder, experiment and stretch various materials to use within my work. I do this for two purposes, one, because I think materials hold the ability to trigger memories and relationships within all of us. We have knowledge of the sight, sound, smell, taste and feel of many different materials that we have lived with all of our lives. They are a link to our everyday reality. By using materials in various states, such as broken ceramics, the sound of something shattering is referenced whether the viewer hears it break or not.

Secondly I study materials and experiment with them to stretch them so that they become unrecognizable or transformed into the unexpected. This is done through testing the materials, by putting them in a contrary form or juxtaposing them with something unexpected. Examples such as the pampas grass seed plume looking like feathers or the porcelain tiles being perceived as being soft are two examples being used within this installation.

The following materials are used within the show and these are the attributes that made me choose them:

Porcelain and Ceramic: I use this as one of my primary mediums because it is so versatile and can be easily transformed. Different techniques and clay bodies are chosen for various qualities. Clay can be perceived as being brittle, fragile, stone like, bone like, like an eggshell, soft, aged, etc. The glazing and oxides incorporated with the clay are used to further enhance the range to what clay can convey. I have used a range of glazes as well as a couple oxides within the various pieces. And though I do much testing there is always some aspect of the material that has its own voice and creates certain effects that are not “planned”. This aspect of the materials is something that I fully embrace. Even if I am using molds to replicate forms I am not interested in them being exact replicas of each other. I like to have variation.
Pampas Grass Seeds: The physical aspect of the plumes being soft give them an aspect of nurturing that is important to the piece. Conceptually the attribute of this plant being able to fairly quickly adapt to most places is also important. It is able to do this because it produces millions of seeds that develop without pollination.

Charcoal: The following connotative qualities lead me to choose charcoal as another medium: Fire, death, destruction, stillness, and rejuvenation. I also gathered it from a house that had burned down in my neighborhood. This added another layer of meaning.

Mica: It has layers that are created by pressure and heat. The layers are held together by a weak chemical bond that is easily broken. It is a silicate and has glasslike qualities of being seen through. It was used for the windows of homes and dwellings. It is also a good insulator against heat.

Content

I have been looking at events that have had a haunting effect on me within the last 5-6 years. Each of these circumstances has had a mixture of loss, mourning, fear, stress, worry and destruction. These situations have included: the loss of two of my closest family members (my father and grandmother), the dissipation of long term friendships and love, exposure to domestic violence and substance abuse, the disasters of September 11 and Hurricane Katrina, as well as the uncertainty of my health that could lead to the loss of numerous bodily functions as well as death. The accumulation of all of these events happening in such close time frames to each other did not allow for understanding, rest or clarification of what had taken place. Emotionally there was often a sense of groundlessness or of unsteadiness.

Fenceposts: Fence posts are an interesting symbol to me because they are more of a psychological barrier than a real physical barrier that would prevent someone from entering into a yard. They allow you to see what is beyond their border but you are to see them at a distance unless you are allowed entry. I use them as a symbol to represent different psychological states.

Each side of the large and small fence posts have used different techniques for building as well as differing

“Untitled”, 2007, porcelain, 3.5’ x 28’ x 3”
surface treatments. I have made them out of porcelain to emphasize the futility of putting up such boundaries. The front surface treatment is a geology of time and memory. The porcelain is left bare to the elements and so that it appears more bonelike. The layers are to reference time and the layering of events. The other side of these posts has a long thin opening to represent a wound. The surface of the face is handled to represent something that is charred or has been burned.

The small fence posts are a symbol that represents the psychology of trying to protect ones home and self. The front of the fence post has a dripping or melting away pattern because of the precarious nature of this circumstance. This pattern is to emphasize the unstable or unsustainable events that occur within their borders. The interior faces of these pieces have wholes to represent birdhouses. For me they represent the homes for the birds that in turn symbolize: the things that one might hold dear, hopes, or dreams. The fallen birds are the inability for these things to soar. I have built the posts out of many clay-bodies to create color variation between them all so that some appear older and weathered and some appear newer and brighter.

“Precarious Footing”: This piece originated with the idea of creating a ground that would express...
walking on eggshells. It is to reference a yard but also to reference a mental landscape. It is a place that is fragile, intricate, and not easily traversed. It welcomes and repels all at the same time. It is also simultaneously familiar and unknown.

I created this piece to emphasize the uncertainty of a ground. I used leaves, twigs, acorns and other natural objects to create the tiles. The process of layering various ceramic materials abstracts the quality of these forms slightly so that they become less defined. Sometimes this layering is more exposed and it allows more of what is hidden to show through. There is a range of values of white. Some are more blue, grey, or yellow. When they are interspersed within the whole your eye keeps moving to see the whole composition.

“Loss Can Ruin But Growth Can Come Forth”: Loss on various emotional levels is addressed with this piece. The charcoal juxtaposed to the plumes of pampas grass creates a strong contrast to emphasize the extremes of growth and destruction. I have used the pampas grass because it has the ability to resemble feathers. It is in the form of a rectangle to reference the idea of a bed. It is soft, welcoming and attracts one to touch. But it is also a symbol of rejuvenation because it is created of seeds. The charcoal alludes to sudden ruin. Transformed from what it once was, there are still remnants that have not been lost. The charcoal was gathered from the site of a former home to continue the connection of referencing a place as well as a self.

The fence posts with the charred surface witnessed the happenings, have been exposed and have been wounded. The wounds now just a sliver, are starting to heal. Transformation is taking place. Whether it is for the positive or the negative is for the beholder to decide.

“Loss Can Ruin But Growth Can Come Forth”, 2007, pampas grass, charcoal, wood, porcelain, 3.5’ x 16’ x 28’

“Precarious Footing” (detail), 2007, porcelain, 3.5’ x 28’ x 3”
“Tied to Your Hate, How Much More Will Fall?”: I was sandwiched by two couples that had differing extremes of domestic violence for the first six months that I lived here. My home was in the middle of a battleground. Though one of the couples moved out the other continued for another year and a half. I had known this couple before I had moved here. It was very difficult to witness how their interaction wore down each individual’s self-confidence to the point of self-hatred.

The house is a symbol of a shattered home as well as a shattered self. Mica is used on the exterior and reflective mylar is used on the interior. It is reflective to emphasize the idea of self. The reflective mylar also has a relationship to the birds. When some birds see their reflection, they will fight it sometimes until their death because they see it as another bird and are angered at the presence of that other bird.

The multitude of fallen and dead birds is to reflect how the hatred was sublimated to other people and objects. Hopes and dreams could not get off the ground. The amassment of birds is there to emphasize the accumulation of time and repeated outbursts. The broken birds are to further the connection to the destruction of objects and help the viewer to connect with the sounds of things being shattered and destroyed in this home.

The fence posts are a reference to the white picket fence.
CONCLUSION

Situations intermingle and our memories are not pure but the residue of how something makes you feel can be quite distinct. This is especially true when they are not isolated events but something that occurs over a period of time. Events of this nature can be so strong that the ground or what grounds you may seem to be shaky or they are hard to quantify.

It has been important for me to fully investigate these situations so that I can glean lessons and put things to rest. I hope that in using the process of installation and by breaking events down to larger or broader concepts, the viewer can relate his or her own experiences to the pieces and to their lives as well.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Jennifer Poueymirou was born in Westwood, New Jersey. Through her adolescent years she lived in upstate New York where she formed a great fondness for the outdoors. After receiving her B.F.A. from Alfred University, she has lived in various cities throughout the country. Seeing the landscapes throughout the United States and parts of Mexico and Canada has informed her work endlessly. She will continue to pursue this investigation with the possibility of obtaining a landscape architecture degree.
Discerning Lines of Demarcation is an investigation into the accumulated landscape of distressing times. Situations of mass destruction, loss of family, substance abuse, domestic violence, loss of friendship, and uncertain health have all been encountered within a steady progression in the last five to six years of my life. The digestion of these situations has been slow as the events overlap and intertwine each other. I have tweezed and distilled these circumstances. This is described through different types of terrains that create physical boundaries to represent psychological fears or events. Tied to Your Hate; How Much More Will Fall, Untitled, Loss Can Ruin but Growth Can Be Found, and Precarious Footing are all pieces that reach for a greater understanding of many trying events.

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