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BLAZE

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art & Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by

Meg Roussos

December 2019

Tema Stauffer, Committee Chair

Travis Graves

Vanessa Mayoraz

Keywords: walking, landscape, photography, immersive art

ABSTRACT

BLAZE

by

Meg Roussos

The photographer discusses her work in “*BLAZE*,” a Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibit held at the Tipton Gallery from September 16th through October 4th, 2019. The exhibition consists of 11 archival inkjet prints, two photographic artist books, a nine-channel video installation, representing the artist’s exploration of how to experience the landscape. Using non-traditional approaches to photographic imagery, experimental exhibition layout, the artist forms questions around themes of walking and landscape. The artist investigates sculptural land art installations represented through photographic documentation. A catalog of the exhibit is included at the end of this thesis.

Roussos examines formal and conceptual influences throughout historical and contemporary artists. Non-photographic influences include: the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich; literary works of Rebecca Solnit and Alexandra David-Neel; immersive artists, Nancy Holt and Hamish Fulton. Historic and contemporary photographic influences include: Carleton Watkins, Todd Tido, Christina Seely, Awoiska van der Molen, and Thomas Flechtner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to recognize the various artists and institutions that have graciously allowed me permission to publish visual figures in this thesis.

I would like to thank my committee members: Tema Stauffer, for her support and guidance during the creation of this thesis; Travis Gravis, for introducing me to the world of 3D; and Vanessa Mayoraz for expanding my understanding of art while valuing my vision.

Thank you to Mike Smith, Professor Emeritus, for sharing a studio space. I am grateful for our conversations, support, and friendship. Thanks to Karlota Contreras-Koterbay, the Tipton Gallery for offering space to visualize my thesis exhibition and ETSU School of Graduate Studies Research Grant program.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends. Thank you to my parents who are the foundation of who I am, and my brothers for their endless support.

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“The emotion stirred by the landscape is piercing,
a joy so close to pain when the blue is the deepest on the
horizon or the clouds are doing those spectacular fleeting
things so much easier to recall than to describe.”

-Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Four times I was honked at for having the temerity to proceed through town without the benefit of metal.” -Bill

Bryson, A Walk in the Woods

Exposure to the landscape was an intrinsic part of my childhood. My first memories of sleeping outdoors were camping on my Great Uncle David’s farm in Brown County, Ohio, with my Dad and two brothers at six years old. We left my uncle’s house, walked past his barn, out into the fields, ventured down a gradual hill. Eventually crossing a small creek, we made our way into the woods past the first large crop field. It felt like it took forever, as if I was on an immense journey across a vast landscape walking miles, finally to reach our destination. At the age of six everything seems larger. I remember the distinct feeling of leaving my ordinary world then entering somewhere unknown. Early exposure to nature was a positive influence throughout in my life. It laid the foundation for a path that I am still on today.

My first intentional experience with photography was in my high school black and white darkroom class at William Mason High School. Quickly completing all the classes offered, I proceeded to create an independent study with my photography teacher, Mrs. Roberts. The darkroom at school wasn’t enough. My parents instinctively created a space for my photography exploration to continue. Sometimes it feels like photography feel onto my lap and I ran with it.

While I learned the introductory basics of photography in high school, it was during my undergraduate program that I really understood the power of photography. At the intensive photojournalism undergraduate program at Ohio University, I learned how to develop visual stories with photographs by connecting with strangers through being a part of their life. This taught me how to give a voice to others. During this education, we focused on the objective over subjective. Throughout those formative years on my own time, I mainly photographed the

Welch's, a family of five, living inside a school bus in harmony with the land. What started as a passion project outside of school expectations, turned into a life changing experience. I built a tipi to live in my senior year on their property while photographing a first-person perspective of my experience living off the grid (fig.1.) If I wanted to stay warm in the winter, I had to build a fire. I had to fetch fresh water and use the restroom outside. That year informed who I have become.

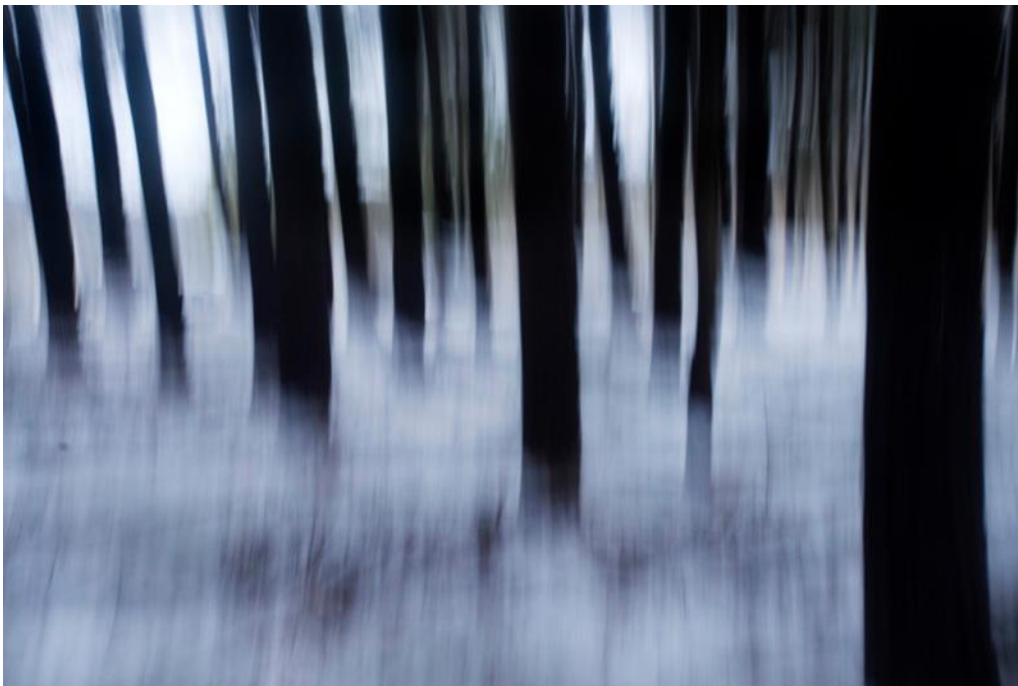


Figure 1. Meg Roussos, Untitled, Athens, OH. 2013. Archival Inkjet Print

While I always carried a camera, I didn't know that subconsciously my idea of photography was changing. I discovered a revitalized relationship with the landscape. The process of simple living was something I wanted to continue after I graduated. A week after graduation I set out on a thru-hike of the 2,600 Pacific Crest Trail.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT AND CONTENT

“I like walking because it is slow, and I suspect that the mind, like the feet, works at about three miles an hour. If this is so, then modern life is moving faster than the speed of thought or thoughtfulness.”-Rebecca Solnit, Wanderlust: A History of Walking

Prior to pursuing my Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art and Design at East Tennessee University, I walked thousands of miles continuously throughout the United States. What began as an outlet to break free from my undergraduate studies eventually led to repetitive cathartic experiences in the wilderness. During those long-distance hikes, I walked one path, usually starting at the Mexican border, then finishing 2,600 miles +/- north at the Canadian border. I have completed this hike three separate times. Each hike brought new perspectives, I realized there was something important to pursue within the correlation of self, nature, and walking. The fact that two feet could provide all the tools needed to walk across the country with everything I needed on my back was immeasurable. These early notions have grounded the body of work that I created for my thesis exhibition.

My first year in graduate studies was spent documenting a local tobacco family, creating portraits by hitchhiking around Johnson City, while hiking and photographing with less intention. During my second year, I started to take an interest in the landscape as a concept. This entry point explored themes of walking, spirituality, immersion, eventually creating *BLAZE*, the body of work for my thesis. My images do not intend to relay semimetal or celebratory imagery of the landscape, but to conceptually place ourselves in the wilderness to identify an individual's connection to self. In my photographic series, *Pseudo Night*, I use a method to photograph trails in the landscape in a way to reflect the suspended meditative moment in time that happens during

my long walks. I construct an image through using an external graded filter, and stop down the aperture while under exposing the image. I photograph in overcast days creating atmospheric images, or during the bright noon light to imitate moonlight (fig. 2.) This effect is meant to mimic the night, although I photograph during the day. It references the practice used in old western films when films produced night scenes during the day.



Figure 2. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 8, 2019*. Archival Inkjet Print

The image *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 1, 2018* (fig. 3) exhibits a wide grassy road covered in frost. The road curves in the frame leading the viewer's eye toward the dark background, eventually vanishing into darkness. The outline of the forest background is illuminated by a purple sunrise. My titles do not expose where the images were photographed to keep the mind untethered to a specific location. This was the first image I photographed for my series, *Pseudo*

Night. I became fascinated by the idea of constructing an image rather than documenting an observational moment.



Figure 3. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 1*, 2018. Archival Inkjet Print

I found myself in the land trying to revert to a mindset I had on my thru-hikes. Every time I would go for a hike, I would photograph at different times of the day, trying to imitate the night. After I transitioned off trail, I found a similar mindset in a novice practice of Zen Buddhism through meditation. This mindset finds similar sets of challenges the trail provided. Philosopher Jean-Jaques Rousseau is known to have said, “I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think; my mind only works with my legs” (Solnit 14). The mechanical movement of steps on a trail awoke me to a level of awareness with the landscape. The solitary experience in the wilderness allowed me to sit with myself. After starting this photographic series, I found my morning meditations to be more valuable.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL INFLUENCE

"All truly great thoughts are conceived by walking." -Friedrich Nietzsche

I have often found great influence outside of the medium of photography. Painting has influenced my critical thinking of art. The Romantic movement in arts originated in the late 18th century. This movement emphasized inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual (Kehoe). Our contemporary movement of technology advancement, political turmoil, and disregard of the seventh generation, makes me sympathize with the Romantics. There is a kinship between Romanticism, Zen, Transcendentalism, where I find myself in a triangle between walking, nature, and self. Two historical influential artists that work within the landscape, Caspar David Friedrich and Carleton Watkins, used the land as their backdrop to express an understanding of greatness in the outdoors.

Caspar David Friedrich

"[Caspar David] Friedrich [was] the sole landscape painter who...had the power to move every part of my soul, the one who created a new genre: the tragedy of landscape," -Pierre-Jean David d'Angers

19th-century German Romantic landscape painter, Caspar David Friedrich, paved the way by creating sublime experiences through his art. As an innovative painter who used the landscape as an experiential subject, Friedrich's paintings were often dark, grand, and emotional. Figures were frequently silhouetted against the backdrop of an expansive view, contemplating nature. The term *Rückenfigur*, a compositional device seen by placing a figure from behind in the frame, was popularized by the Romantic painters. Friedrich used the *Rückenfigur* compositional device to allow the viewer to put themselves through the perspective of the figure in the frame.

Friedrich's life was peaks and valleys, but his work never strayed from the foundational influence in art history. His paintings induce an additional response beyond a beautiful landscape painting. Friedrich works through the sublime, a high divine power. He transformed landscape art.

Sublime is separate from beauty. It is a different way of aesthetically judging the world while getting pleasure from the experience. Author of *Philosophize This!*, Stephen West, talks about the sublime versus beauty in a coherent way, "Beauty doesn't stimulate the mind, you find beauty in the world and its more passive, you enjoy it, but when the mind finds something sublime, the mind swells, much more active, much more real, a more important aesthetic than beauty" (West). I engage the viewer with my photography beyond just a beautiful image. I invite you to pause for a moment to reconfigure how to observe a landscape. Often, I photograph in uncomfortable weather situations where there are few people. Those situations are far from sublime, but they are more difficult than a beautiful passive experience. Either way, conducting my art outdoors is imperative. Connecting to the wilderness is necessary.

Friedrich's paintings engage in dialogue with my trail night images. His paintings use the human silhouette as the focus, as I use the carved path of trails in my photography. As seen in Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape*, 1811, and Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night, I*, 2018 (fig. 4, fig. 5), each scene is dark, winter, and unfamiliar. Both of our images convey a spiritual quality in the landscape, an individual experience, and intend to evoke an emotional response to nature.



Figure 4. Caspar David Friedrich, *Winter Landscape*, 1811. Oil on canvas.



Figure 5. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 1*, 2018. Archival Inkjet Print

Carleton Watkins

Photographer, Carleton Watkins, explored the new western landscape during Manifest Destiny, a 19th-century belief that the expansion of the U.S. throughout the West was inevitable. Watkins spent most of this life using the western landscape as his subject focusing on Yosemite Valley. His photographs heavily influenced the United States Congress through the preservation of Yosemite National Park. His documentation of the Yosemite Valley impacted the world. Watkin's travels in the mountains changed his perspective on life, and his images changed the idea of what landscape had to offer. I can relate to this intense awakening, hiking in the back country for months at a time creates a significant bond with the outdoors.

Among supporters of Watkins many were Transcendentalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were central figures in this movement. Original members of transcendentalism believed society and its organized institutions (religion and politics) were corrupting the purity of individuals. They believed the essential values were: individualism, idealism, the divinity of nature, and it was imperative for individuals to connect with nature. Rather than a religious doctrine of strict rules or commandments, I find this structure to life a genuine approach to a set of beliefs. Emerson even hung Watkins' images in his living room in Concord, Massachusetts.

Watkin's images were the first photographic view into the backcountry wilderness. Many of his images have no trace of human presence; no trails, parking lots, or vista views, just pure uninhibited wilderness. A similar sublime presence, a magnitude that over powers human presence, exists between Friedrich's paintings and Watkins images. In the photograph, Cape Horn, Columbia River, Oregon, negative, 1867, printed, 1881–1883, (fig. 6), Watkins photographed the Columbian Gorge along the border of Oregon and Washington. There is a man sitting in a small boat faced forward to the vast landscape that surrounds him. Similar to Friedrich's painting, *LANDSCHAFT MIT GEBIRGSEE, MORGEN (LANDSCAPE WITH MOUNTAIN*



Figure 6. Carleton Watkins, Cape Horn, Columbia River, Oregon, negative, 1867, printed, 1881 – 1883. Albumen silver print.

LAKE, MORNING) (fig. 7), another small figure is surrounded by a mountainous landscape and a body of water. The two pieces are from different time periods, use different mediums, but each showcase similar experiential moments. They search for a deeper meaning within the appearance in nature.



Figure 7. Caspar David Freidrich, *LANDSCHAFT MIT GEBIRGSEE, MORGEN* (*LANDSCAPE WITH MOUNTAIN LAKE, MORNING*). Oil on canvas. 1774-1840.

CHAPTER 4

LITERARY INFLUENCE

“I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in.” -John Muir

Written words give reason to thought, contextualize ideas, describe visual imagery, and give a voice to memories. Without written words, poets would be left with their emotions, explorers unable to create a record of travels, philosophers’ incapable to defend their ideas. German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, established the school of Phenomenology. Husserl thought by questioning the ontological bedrock of history, there was a possibility to re-contextualize everything. Phenomenology is a method to better understand the underlying structure of human thought (Biemel). Writer, Rebecca Solnit shared in her novel, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, “The phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl described walking as the experience by which we understand our body in relationship to the world, in his 1931 essay, *“The World of the Living Present and the Constitution of the Surrounding World External to the Organism.”* The body, he said, is our experience of what is always here, and the body in motion experiences the unity of all its parts as the continuous ‘here’ that moves toward and through the various ‘theres’...Husserl’s proposal differs from earlier speculation on how a person experiences the world in its emphasis on the act of walking rather than on the senses and the mind” (Solnit). Within my art, I find photography an effective way to express my experiences with the world. These literary influences help me understand a greater context of what I am trying to describe.

Alexandra David-Neel

I have gained considerable influence from female writers who deal with the landscape in some capacity. Each writer has her own vision, experience, and voice. Alexandra David-Neel, a French explorer from the 1800's has given me validation to my desire to walk long distances. Alexandra David-Neel devoted her life to travel. David-Neel, the only western woman who succeeded in entering the forbidden city of Lhasa, was a revolutionary woman who embraced the idea of an immersive lifestyle to further her research. In 1923, at the age of 55, the former opera singer, dedicated student of Buddhism and the East, disguised herself as a male pilgrim and went on a journey to the ancient Tibetan city of Lhasa. David-Neel shared, "How happy I was to be there, en route for the mystery of these unexplored heights, alone in the great silence, tasting the sweets of solitude and tranquility" (David-Neel). David-Neel believed in exploration as I believe in walking. Her literary text provides the evidence of her journeys and experiences as my photographs are evidence of mine.

Rebecca Solnit

“The rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts. This creates an odd consonance between internal and external passage, one that suggests that the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it. A new thought often seems like a feature of the landscape that was there all along, as though thinking were traveling rather than making” (Solnit 11)

American writer, Rebecca Solnit, has published over twenty books on feminism, western and indigenous history, popular power, social change and insurrection, and wandering and walking (Solnit). She has had an immeasurable impact on structuring my thoughts about walking in the landscape. Solnit often uses photographic examples when writing about art and the lineage connection within the landscape. In her novel, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Solnit discusses the concept of being lost as a state of mind, desire, and an emotional connection to a place. “...there is a place where sadness and joy are not distinct, where all emotion lies together, a sort of ocean into which the tributary streams such sadness is the only side effect of art that describes the depths of our lives, and to see that describes in all its potential for loneliness and pain is beautiful...” (Solnit 119). I often find it difficult to vocalize or write about my walking experiences. Photography has become my visual language to bridge that gap.

Solnit has a poetic way of explaining the history of walking. She singles out the activity of walking and places it in the history of the world, societal evolution, and personal experiences. In her novel, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Solnit describes, “Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our

bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts” (Solnit 5). This quote embodies my experience with walking, how I view my photographic series, *Pseudo Night*, as a meditative moment in time, lost in thought in the landscape. I want my work to transcend the physical state of walking, speak to themes of time, impermanence, record, and mark-making. There is a freedom walking gives me, physically and mentally.

CHAPTER 5

LIGHT AS INFLUENCE

“Daylight is too easy. What I want is difficult: the atmosphere of lamps or moonlight. -Edgar Degas

Photography is frozen light. Light evokes emotion and visually conveys time. I am using a light technique within my photographic series that references day for night filming. My images are grounded in the technique, but it is about the sensation. There is something amiss in the light, but you know it to be real, surreal, and sublime. Many contemporary photographers also use light as a concept within their own work, such as: Todd Hido, Christina Seely, Awoiska van der Molen, and Thomas Flechtner.

Todd Hido

American contemporary photographer, Todd Hido, has produced several books while also exhibited widely. Hido’s night imagery captivates me. He photographs on long solo drives while using the suburban landscape as his backdrop. He relies on the quality of natural and artificial light in the American landscape. Hido’s series, *Homes at Night*, is similar to my series, *Pseudo Night* with the use of natural and artificial light. Hido’s photographs use the available artificial light present in the environment, while I bring my artificial light technique with me. “Hido takes his pictures in a “fairly undirected way”, he says, but edits his negatives together manipulating them until he produces an image that represents his experience. In describing his process, Hido explains, “I shoot sort of like a documentarian, but I print like a painter” (Todd Hido). I resonate with that statement, because I photograph my landscapes with an exterior filter, construct any necessary changes in post-production and printing.

Images in, *Pseudo Night*, are quiet. There is human presence without a figure. They are nightscapes that are a blank canvas for individuals to place their own memories and connections

into. I wanted to take my personal experience to create a jumping off point for viewers to place their relationship within the frame. Hido shares a similar view point, “Because of the very simple fact that if it is an empty shell, the viewer can place their own memories within it or create a narrative that would otherwise be blocked by the reality of what is actually inside”

(LensCulture). As seen in Figure 8, *Homes at Night, #2077*, Hido photographed a residential yellow crosswalk that leads the viewer across the street where there is a yellow pedestrian sign just on the other side of the sidewalk. Across the street stands a home with two separate windows lit from inside. The sky is muted purple. The street’s asphalt is lit from a street lamp just out of frame. I can’t help but wonder who is inside the home, what is causing the house to light up, and what I would be doing this time of night inside my own home. *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 5, 2018* (fig. 9), exhibits an old logging road intersection covered with fresh snow. The road winds around the inclined landscape, as one road sign is half legible. The muted purple sky resembles Hido’s. Both images speak to how we interact with the landscape. Each hint toward various ways we travel, move through space, whether it being with vehicles or with our feet.



Figure 8. Todd Hido, Homes at Night, #2077.



Figure 9. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night 5*, 2018. Archival Inkjet Print.

Christina Seely

Christina Seely has used the medium of photography to record effects of environmental shifts. Seely, artist and educator at Dartmouth College, has photographed around the world, creating projects that address energy use, animal extinction, and science. Her first monograph, *Lux*, was co-published in 2015 by Radis Books and the Museum of Contemporary Photography. Seely states, “*Lux* documents the artificial glow produced by major cities in the three bright regions as seen on a NASA map of the world at night. In a time when it is argued that no aspect

of nature is unaffected by human impact, my work reflects on a lifestyle that fosters an intense need to control nature while existing in an increasingly delicate balance with it's resources and rhythms" (Smithson). Her images visually show numerous glowing cities varying in distances and composition, yet they evoke a sensation, a feeling of the light.

There is evidence of the physical intervention within the landscape, our presence within the landscape, and the feeling of disruption the light causes. *Metropolis, 35 ° 41'N 139° 24'E* (fig. 10) exhibits a high vantage point of dark trees in the foreground then a starkly contrasted, vibrant, washed out monotone night cityscape in Japan. The background of the city lights start to haze then blend with the horizon line of the sky. It is the light that makes these image, the feeling of the light. "Man is not so insignificant in these images, but a powerful adversary blocking out and blinding the natural. In a way, this work not only reveals our genius but how we have forgotten our place. Regardless of the attempt to establish true dominion over the natural world when the Sun comes up there is no competition." Seely explains (Mansky).



Figure 10. Christina Seely, *METROPOLIS 35° 41' N 139° 46' E*.

Awoiska van der Molen

Dutch photographer, Awoiska van der Molen, has gained wide recognition through her thoughtful, dark landscape imagery. The light in her black and white photographs is delicate. She treats the landscape with curiosity. Although black and white imagery of the landscape is not revolutionary, van der Molen's process is part of her final imagery.

Van der Molen uses her solitude experience in the landscape to photograph the core of her experience. She often spends weeks at a time in solitude in the wilderness. Van der Molen expresses that sitting within her surroundings is necessary to her process. I sincerely connect with her methods of photography. I feel what she describes about her work. "It's not meditation, exactly, but it's a state of mind that occurs when you are very open to the landscape, a moment when your mind slows down on its own. Normally, I'm too worried about little things and all

this stops when I'm alone in nature. I can leave behind the luxuries and the wi-fi and the distractions and finally discover myself" (Molen). This is exactly what I experience on my long walks. I constantly find myself distracted daily by technology. Physically removing myself from those situations, makes me present to sit with myself, know myself, a rarity in today's world.

Awoiska van der Molen's images are quiet and mysterious. The softness invites me to sit with the image more than I would have expected. I find myself coming back to sit with them.

Van Der Molen does not describe or name her location, but applies a simple numbering system for her images, as to not detour the attention away from the image. These images aren't a description of the landscape, they are a representation of a psyche. In *#511-7, 2018* (fig. 11), the photograph is evenly presented with a blooming tree completely engulfed with Spanish moss swooping toward the ground. The tree acts as a doorway. The contents behind the tree is unknown. The light source is above which paints the moss which frames the dark entryway in the center of the frame. One could say, van der Molen is inviting us into her mind, her psyche. As with, *Untitled, Pseudo Night, 3, 2018* (fig.12), I am focused on the individual experience of what it's like to walk through the lit landscape.



Figure 11. Awoiska van der Molen, #511-7, 2018. Silver gelatin print.



Figure 12. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night 3*, 2018. Archival Inkjet Print.

Thomas Flechtner

Thomas Flechtner is an artist that uses walking to create his imagery. In this Swedish artist photographic series, *Walks 1999-2001*, Flechtner walks in the fresh backcountry snow, methodically leaving track marks with his skis. Often walking up to 12 hours, he tramps up sides of mountains or through snow fields, leaving his camera on a long exposure to record his movement. When daylight isn't available, you can see evidence of his movement through his headlamp on the trail. In *Walks, Chli Tinderhorn, 1999* (fig. 13), the dark blue sky matches the dark blue snow of the early morning. His headlamp illuminates the entire frame indicating he has walked the entire frame. Without his illuminated headlamp, there would be no photograph. The sensation of walking would disappear.



Figure 13. Thomas Flechtner, *Walks, Chli Tinderhorn*, 1999. Chromogenic print.

This photographic series has a similar foundational concept to a collaborative land intervention piece I exhibited in *BLAZE*. Working in collaboration with artists Ross Byrd and Shanna Glawson, we created, *Fingerprinting the Landscape* (fig. 14). This outdoor artwork determined the elevational change on a site-specific hillside. We walked a hillside, staked the ground, and drew the topographical map on the land.



Figure 14. Meg Roussos, *Fingerprinting the Landscape*, 2019. Archival Inkjet Print.

The concept of *Fingerprinting the Landscape* is to reveal the identity of the landscape, specifically what makes it unique to any other parcel of land. We walked this hill multiple times, marked every five-foot change in elevation from the valley floor to the top of the hill, then ran lines across the face of the hill that consistently followed the initial elevation point. The mapping process revealed the typography of the landscape and altered the way we viewed it. It revealed that our eyes, notions about the land that we view, could deceive us. The hillside was much more intricate than we had anticipated. *Fingerprinting the Landscape* awakened my senses beyond photography into movement, physicality, and tactility. I discovered that the act of walking could become another component in my imagery.

CHAPTER 6

IMMERSIVE ART AS INFLUENCE

"Nature is never finished." -Robert Smithson

Nancy Holt

Intervention in the landscape is a theme throughout my work. I use a trail, a blaze, or an outdoor treadmill to show the evidence of a human presence in nature. Nancy Holt, a forefront land artist, sculptor, videographer, and photographer, worked within similar themes throughout her career. Holt used different art mediums to allow her ideas to dictate the form. She used photography to document land art, then frequently presented the images in sequence. "I always do my own photography of my outdoor site-specific works – I consider the photographs of the work my art as much as the sculptures themselves," Holt explained (McLean-Ferris). One of her photographic works that has largely influenced me is, *Trail Markers, 1969*. This photographic work consists of a set of photographs that follow a series of orange dots across the Dartmoor landscape in Britain. This series speaks conceptually to space and time. Seen in *Trail Markers, 1969* (fig. 15), the photographs appear sequentially to mimic a filmstrip, which gives indication to time, space, and implying the trip in-between (Dargavel-Leafé).



Figure 15. Nancy Holt, *Trail Markers*, 1969. 20 inkjet prints on archival rag paper from original 126 format transparencies.

During my long-distance hikes, trail blazes were a comforting navigational key. I'm interested in the man-made mark and our presence competing with nature. I re-visited the Appalachian Trail several times, photographing the prominent white trail blazes along the trail. Taking influence from Holt, I was interested in the journey between, the conceptual idea that these markers were the points between the journey. I developed my images into a book form, uniform, simple, with no words accompanying the book, just GPS numbers as indicators from the distance changed between the blazes.



Figure 16. Meg Roussos, *Blazes*, 2019. Archival Inkjet book.

Holt's most notable work, *Sun Tunnels 1973-76*, now conserved by the Dia Art Foundation, are four giant concrete tubes crossed to orient the human figure so the tubes frame the sun on the horizon at the summer and winter solstices. (Kron) These tubes live in the barren desert landscape on the border of Nevada and Utah. Of all the land artists from the 60s, Nancy Holt's work stands out to me. Unlike Robert Smithson, or Michael Heizer, who frequently carved or severely altered the landscape, Holt quietly, yet significantly interacts with the landscape without damaging it. This piece is about light. It is a site-specific light sculpture with running themes about time, space, and landscape. The drilled holes along the exterior create star constellations and act as intimate sun dials when you walk inside the concrete cylinders. The human figure completes this artwork. Pointing back to my influence of artwork made around

light, Holt's, *Sun Tunnels*, fits perfectly into this arena. (*could delete whole paragraph and sun tunnel influence?*)



Figure 17. Nancy Holt, *Sun Tunnels*, Great Basin Desert, Utah, 1973–76. Concrete, steel, and earth, 9 ft. 3 in. x 68 ft. 6 in. x 53 ft., diagonal length: 86 ft. Each tunnel: 18 ft. 1 in. x 9 ft. 3 in. diameter, from the collection of Dia Art Foundation with support from Holt/Smithson Foundation, © Holt/Smithson Foundation and Dia Art Foundation, licensed by VAGA, New York.

Hamish Fulton

English walking artist, Hamish Fulton, is one of the most influential artists of my graduate career. Fulton has spent his career walking extensively. Fulton has stated “‘If I do not walk, I cannot make a work of art.’ He has summed up this way of thinking in the simple statement of intent: ‘no walk, no work’” (Hamish). Fulton does not take anything from the land, nor leaves anything, practicing the commonly known, Leave No Trace Principles (LNT). He

often photographs his treks, writes field notes, only to circle back to those elements later when creating conceptual typographical works. A text work (fig.18), lays out a narrative of a seven-day journey through Scotland. Like Holt's *Trail Markers*, Fulton's journey is the concept.

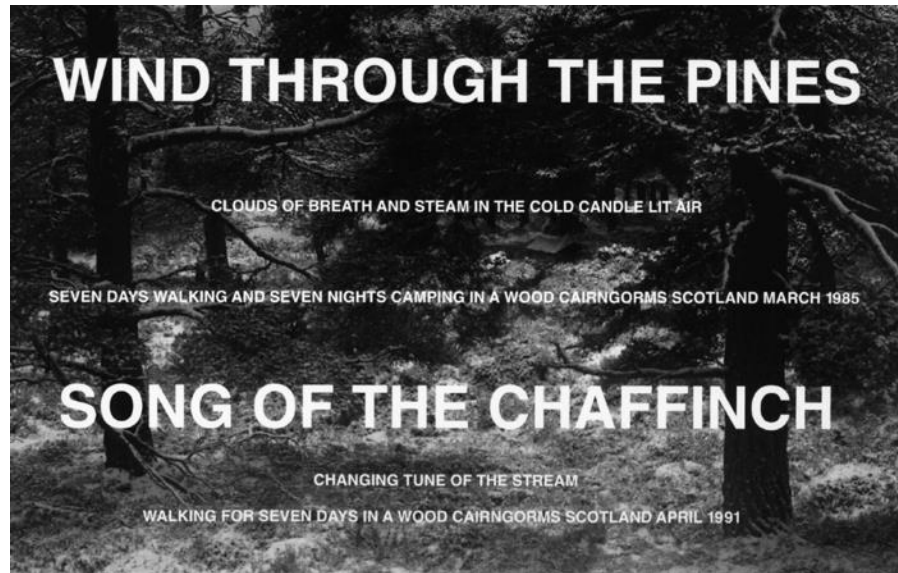


Figure 18. Hamish Fulton, *Wind through the Pines*, 1985. Screenprint on paper.

“I see walking as my form of meditation,” he says. “If we were going into the mountains and there was no trail, then we wouldn’t be able to think very much, because we would be paying attention to not breaking an ankle or falling over. Then walking becomes meditative. You stop the endless thinking mind. And that’s a good thing – because every now and then you want to stop going down the same neural pathways. Then you have other perceptions” (Sooke).

CHAPTER 7

BLAZE

My thesis, *BLAZE*, considers interventions in the landscape as experienced through a variety of lenses. I work from the highly personal, to the social and technological. Each series of work evokes a different experience. My photographic series, *Pseudo Night*, reflects the meditative, suspended moments while walking. It is indicative of my personal experience with solo hiking in the wilderness. I conceptually uncovered ways to emulate my long-distance walks into an experiential presence. *Registers* and *Blazes*, are photographic artist books that take a narrative form, revealing stories from trail registers. These stories speak to the vast variety of experience humans have while sharing a communal path. In *Registers*, you see a register entry photographed that is included in the book (fig. 19). The image is black and white encapsulating the simplicity in textures of bark, paper, and pen. It reads, “‘Your zipper is down,’ he said as he handed me this pen. He didn’t know what to write - funny thing is, I don’t either. I am just writing it’s finally cold and the ‘winter blossoms’ of 2015 died off. Hope we make it. Beautiful here. -c + j + s” The right page reveals the entry then to the left page shows faint evidence of a prior entry.

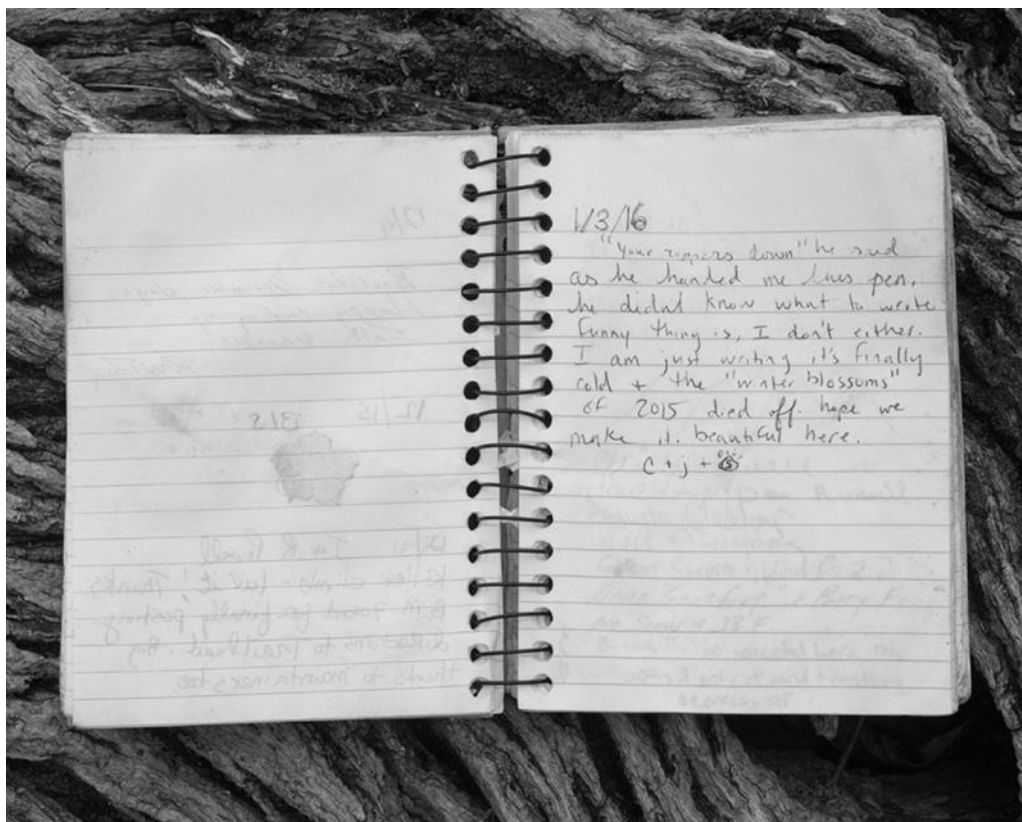


Figure 19. Meg Roussos, *Registers*, 2019. Archival Inkjet book.

The large land intervention documentation (fig. 20) engages the viewer with a non-traditional presentation. The documentation itself becomes an individual work to be considered. These works are not framed. I did not want the photographs to be constricted or have a barrier between the images and the wall surface, instead, I wanted the pieces to take form of the landscape in the gallery space. Each piece encourages interaction, whether it is walking through the topographic lines, or walking across the wooden floor, the pieces themselves are not complete without the human presence. I printed then mounted these pieces to emphasize the interventions *Fingerprinting the Landscape* is displayed askew. The image is mounted in a corner of the gallery, allowing the viewer to step into the photograph and become enveloped by

it. *Inlay*, is presented lower to the ground to create movement from the previous piece, and as it is literally grounded in the woods.



Figure 20. Meg Roussos, Exhibition still, 2019.

Another component of *BLAZE*, is a video installation, *#treadoutside*. This is a social sculpture that occurred on a trail in Tennessee. For *#treadoutside*, I carried a treadmill into the woods, where unsuspected hikers came across a piece of walking technology with a trail camera mounted near. Some engaged the treadmill, others took selfies, some ignored it. This piece looks at the multitude of ways that we engage with walking and technology in the landscape. In a still frame from *#treadoutside* (fig.22), two figures are passing through the frame, faces down fixated on their cell phones simultaneously walking on the trail after photographing the treadmill.

Disconnected from the experience, they immediately immerse themselves in technology, rather than engaging with the sculpture. Solnit talks about the evolution of walking in our society and landscape. The piece *#treadoutside* speaks to our relationship with the outdoors and how we engage with it. “Many people nowadays live in a series of interiors...disconnected from each other. On foot everything stays connected, for while walking one occupies the spaces between those interiors in the same way one occupies those interiors. One lives in the whole world rather than in interiors built up against it” (Solnit). By disconnecting the relationship of a treadmill indoors and placing on a trail, I raise a conversation about how we engage with the outdoors and technology, the amount of time we spend walking outside, and the economy of effort. This piece is re-contextualizing the act of walking and juxtaposing the treadmill outside. I chose a treadmill as a way of re-thinking my experience while on my long hikes and the methodical movement while on the trail.



Figure 21. Meg Roussos, *#treadoutside*, 2019. Video still.

These works vary in medium and presentation, but they all connect with walking in the landscape. My thesis exhibition is intentionally displayed in the gallery in a way that prompts the

viewer to move through these different experiences of the landscape. Upon entering the gallery, viewers first encounter photographs that reflect my individual experience, then land intervention, and finishing with observations on social technological in nature. My research results are successful because each piece within this body of work encapsulates a different facet that I encountered during the 8,000-mile trek.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The work presented in, *BLAZE*, prove to be my most experimental and conceptual work to date. The practice through my graduate studies at East Tennessee State University has born a new artistic approach. The self-doubt in acknowledging my personal experience as valuable, has given me confidence to produce a body of work that is authentic.



Figure 22. Meg Roussos, *Untitled, Pseudo Night 7*, 2018. Archival Inkjet Print.

The internships and mentorships during my time at East Tennessee State University has provided me with a lot of exposure to new artists. This exposure permeated into my research, then into the creation of this body of work. It would be impossible for me to have imagined this exhibition upon the start of my graduate studies.

My fascination for the landscape has only heightened because of my research. *BLAZE*, serves as an entry point for me to move forward with confidence, experience, and awareness to pursue future projects. Walking may seem like a one definitional act, but it is complex and offers different layers within the landscape. Artists often strive to spotlight the personal things in life that often go unnoticed. My art encourages viewers to explore their own relationship to the landscape, as there is a larger conversation to be had with walking, nature, and self.

CATALOUGE OF EXHIBTION



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 1*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night*, 7, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 6*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 8*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 4*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 5*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Pseudo Night, 3*, 2018, Archival Inkjet Print. 30" x 24"



Meg Roussos, *Blazes*, 2019, Photographic book. 6" x 9"



Meg Roussos, *Registers*, 2018, Photographic book. 8" x 10"



Meg Roussos, Ross Byrd, and Shanna Glawson, *Fingerprinting the Landscape*, 2019, Pine stakes, engineers tape. 300' x 500'



Meg Roussos, *Inlay*, 2019, Tongue and groove floor, plywood, screws. 16" x 4" x 2"



Meg Roussos, #treadoutside, 2019, Treadmill, trail camera. 60.5" x 47" x 1", *dimensions variable*

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Color, Explorations & Expressions, Specto Art Space, Bridgewater, VA, 2018

The Face of Danger, Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN, 2018
 Regular Style, University of Montana, Online, 2018
 Make Daytime Quiet, Fluorescent Gallery, Knoxville, TN, 2018
 At Night Issue, F-Stop Magazine, Online, 2019
 Winter Pictures, Humble Arts Foundation, Online, 2019
 Loss, Humble Arts Foundation, Online 2019
 Archiving Time: Aging & Legacy, Light Leaked, Online, 2019
 Athens Voices USA, Athens, OH, 2019
 Pushing Paper, Indianapolis Art Center, Indianapolis, IN, 2019
 6th Open Call, Rhode Island Center for Photographic Arts,
 Providence, RI, 2019
 Forms of Violence, Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN, 2019
 Kill Your Darlings, Slocumb Galleries, Johnson City, TN, 2019
 Jonesborough's Juried Art Exhibition, McKinney Center,
 Jonesborough, TN, 2019
 Johnson City: Then and Now, Reece Museum, Johnson City, TN,
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 Appalachia, Aff Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 2019
 BLAZE, (solo) Tipton Gallery, Johnson City, TN, 2019

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 Ohio News Photographers Association, Student Photographer of
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 Tuition Scholarship, Johnson City, TN, 2018
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