

2007

Toward a New Kinship Constellation

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TOWARD A NEW KINSHIP CONSTELLATION

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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By Nellie Helen Appleby, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Major Director: Paul Thulin.
Committee Chair, Department of Photography and Film

This thesis attempts to elaborate on my artwork during my graduate studies, while contextualizing it within the framework of the art world and the works of other artists. A main project during this time was to minimize the singular interpretation and framing of a fine art photographic print, while expanding its possibilities of meaning through the addition of important ephemera and objects such as plants, drawings, moving imagery, conversation and the unknown.

Preamble

“I would love to live
Like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise
Of its own unfolding”

John O’Donohue¹

“The task of writing about this exhibition was never going to be easy: a show created through a meandering, ill-formed thought process where the minutest of incidents can, and have, instructed major decisions. I described it as a process of objective chance, but I have been more the dilettante than the devotee. My route has not been linear and obedient to the rules of that creed but has sprouted new shoots from various points along the way and gone off in diverse and conflicting directions, leaving me many paths to follow and some I refused to go down. I have shown no fidelity to the true unconscious process: some of my decisions have been associative, while others feel like they have been very formally arrived at.” (Tacita Dean)²

Writing, well, it involves words, of which art is not made of. The content and the puzzle-like structure of my artwork oozes and bounces about like poetry. You can’t quite get your finger on it as it always invites reinterpretation. Writing about it is somewhat like dissecting pudding.

¹ O’Donohue, John. Conamara Blues. New York: Bantam Books, 2001. 41.

² Dean, Tacita. An Aside. London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2005. 10.

Habitual Hopefulness

Awe. Astonishment. Hopefulness. On the ground, or in the dirt, woods, and weeds, sniffing it out, laying in the fields, searching the sky for it, floating in the river, observing how the light bounces off the water, diving down deep to be with the fish, the mussels, the snapping turtles. Gardening. Walking. Wandering city streets with time to be drawn toward this or that interesting situation or person, I construct a lifestyle that maintains the space to be enchanted, mystified and drawn towards the unknown. These tactics are for people practicing positive thinking in the face of the current state of the world. I collect awesome, magical and mysterious data centered on the natural world, to reproduce and arrange as art. Art that proposes questions or that is in fact questionable, not a statement nor literal, rather a free-verse visual poem, inviting the viewer to fill in the blanks and hopefully triggering a similar state of wonder.

“...many years ago when I became aware of the destruction of our planet I decided to only take a ‘positive’ attitude. The translation of this is not that I cast a blind eye to the ever-increasing scale of environmental problems. At the time, what I felt was important was that these small birds *do* have beautiful songs. My love of nature, I hope, is implicit in my work. Referring to a photograph, the attitude of saying ‘this mountain should continue to look like this’ is only one option. When I took this so-called positive position, I understood it might not be clear to everyone. At that time I totally rejected the idea of showing destroyed, polluted environments- because then the pollution becomes the subject- rather than these beautiful bird songs I was mentioning. We need to save the birds, for themselves. Having spent thirty years working first in this ‘positive’

way, I feel now –in theory at least- able to consider the negative as well...Whether positive or negative, my attitude requires what is called ‘joyful effort’.” (Hamish Fulton)³

My practice seeks out magical moments present in the daily landscape, or creates them, and makes a habit and a ritual of this practice. When I use the word ‘magical’, I mean supernatural, phenomenal, mysteriously enchanted, or that which with scientific explanation remains daunting for the mind to grasp as ‘real’, even in its everyday-ness. For instance, the sunset; that glorious flaming ball in the sky bouncing light around. I visit and photograph the sunset every evening for six months, I find the best spots to observe the under-appreciated diurnal phenomenon, commune with it, and I am wowed again and again. I know what to *do* at that time every day, directed by the spinning of the earth, which also dictates the growing patterns of another of my most passionate investigations, PLANTS. I collect these pictures, which are used in my installations as ephemeral footnotes to the central idea of a piece.

The Sun

*Have you ever seen
anything
in your life
more wonderful*

*than the way the sun,
every evening,
relaxed and easy,
floats towards the horizon*

³ Grande, John. “No Walk, No Work! Hamish Fulton.” Art Nature Dialogues: interviews with environmental artists. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004. 134.

*and into the clouds or the hills,
or the rumpled sea.
and is gone-
and how it slides again*

*out of the blackness,
every morning,
on the other side of the world,
like a red flower*

*streaming upward on its heavenly oils
say, on a morning in early summer,
at its perfect imperial distance-
and have you ever felt for anything*

*such wild love-
do you think there is anywhere, in any language,
a word billowing enough
for the pleasure*

*that fills you,
as the sun
reaches out,
as it warms you*

*as you stand there,
empty handed-
or have you too
turned from this world-*

*or have you too
gone crazy
for power,
for things?*

Mary Oliver⁴

⁴ Oliver, Mary. New and Selected Poems. Boston: Beacon Press. 1992. 50.

Similarly, gazing at the stars one feels connected to a history of the world. Not only a human connection of *homo sapiens* studying the cosmos, but also of turtles in the garden under the stars and the moonlight, waiting for just the right moment to take a bite out a ripe tomato; of migrating herds of zebras in Africa, a mass of illuminated stripes cavorting in the moonlight, of the deep oceans not oblivious to the heavens above them. I like to imagine the planet before human presence, in its formation, with wild jungles of plants now known through fossil remains and of the stars shining above them as well. These ruminations make me feel part of something larger, infinite and godly. So, if in my work I can utilize the mechanics of the camera, with long exposures, in cahoots with my choreographed prancing about in the night with flashes in each hand, to fabricate, to 'capture' a constellation and bring it down to earth, down to the beautiful, snowy, dirty parking spot, down to the fires we've started on the ground, I do.



hovering constellation, 2005



visitation, 2006

The ritual becomes to document these acts of relating to nature and the earth, to make images of the “joyful effort”. As nuns lay prostrate to God, I lay prostrate to mystery and nature, even if it is a new millennium post-nature nature. As in Zen meditation when a practitioner sits, then paces, sits then paces; I advance the film, perform the action of communing with the earth, advance the film, and perform the action again. From these acts a single photograph is chosen to represent.

These pictures could also be filed under ‘photographs that can live on their own but often do not’, as the reading of their performative content is expanded with the inclusion of related objects, such as living mushrooms growing wood, a salt garden

forming on a sponge, or a simple houseplant in the midst of its photosynthesis (see *peace be with you*).



the new habit, 2007



urban survival techniques, 2007

Making cyanotypes engages me another ritual practice, observing and collaborating with the weather. The exposure depends on the angle of the sun and the strength of its light at that given moment of the day. This angle dictates the form of the shadows cast and I experiment with them to compose the work. The process of making cyanotype photographs requires a basic chemistry, that when combined becomes light sensitive, and is applied to a foundation of paper or fabric. I cultivate plants or gather specimens from the wild, which I use to cast shadow and it versus sunlight acts as the negative. Thus the exposure is made outdoors and developed and fixed by running water, producing a graphic image in tones of blue and white. I am thrilled at the parallels in the processes of the cyanotype and photosynthesis.



safety squash, with 54x120 inch cyanotype, 2007

FORM/FORMATION or Complicating Matters and Collage by Mounding, Piling and Arranging Materials

“I believe in collage because that’s how I see things. I focus on many things...simultaneously. I move back and forth. I like to keep moving (even when my body is still). I take pieces of things, thoughts, experiences, and conversations and weld them into shapes that are unfamiliar. The more unfamiliar the better. I derive pleasure from the unfamiliar. I function best when I can move freely, when I am not restricted. I could never write a novel. In fact I don’t even like writing that much. But I could tell you a million short stories and then perhaps they could add up to a little book.”
(Doug Aitken)⁵

I transitioned from using primarily two-dimensional imagery of the natural world to simultaneously working with plants and digital peripherals as a three dimensional, living art. The two dimensional photos are accompanied with tangential elements of my practice, such as drawing, moving image, social situations, conversation and plants, to present a more inspired cacophonous collage. This amalgamated unit has multiplied points of access for the viewer and provides the chance to explore the work critically and intuitively with spontaneity and freedom. The goal is to minimize the singular interpretation and framing of a fine art photographic print, while expanding its possibilities of meaning through the addition of important ephemera positioned to generate a constellation of entertaining and complex interpretations, observations and statements. As an artist, there is an interest in engaging the viewer’s response as an extension of the process and as an integral ingredient, the unexpected. For instance, one interesting response to the “nature ritual imagery” juxtaposed with technology (e.g.

⁵ Aitken, Doug. Doug Aitken A-Z(Fractals). Ostfildern-ruit: Hatje Cantz. 2002.

laptops and monitors) and living in-flux plant materials such as dirt, water, and minerals; is an emotional space of tension and unease that seemingly reflects the clash of contemporary culture with the natural world. Simultaneously the 'livingness' of the plants is apparent in the pulsating moving image on the TV monitors, they seem to breathe even in the full awareness of their artificiality. The layering of media gives the viewer the chance to explore the work and accumulate his or her own set of 'facts'.

Each piece is site-specific, in that it never moves in its exact form to another space. It may retain its core, but loses parts, and picks up others on its travels. The white gallery space gives the works a context; no, this is not my studio, this tire planter is not on the street, it is elevated, while laughing at itself, by coming into the gallery.



scenario, mixed media installation, 2006



shroom terrarium, detail from *scenario*, jar and clover, 3 inches, 2006



mound 2007

Participatory Projects

Expanding upon the notion that a viewer becomes an essential ingredient of an artwork, a living medium like the plants, some of my works have a focused intention on initiating specific performative actions and involving the viewer as participant in a fluid but directed gathering. An awareness the viewer has of becoming participatory in the construction of the meaning of the work is distinctly different than the other pieces I create in which the viewer merely reacts intuitively. These structures of art presentation have been utilized by many artists and termed 'relational aesthetics' by Nicolas Bourriaud.⁶ The artwork provides visual and situational cues to jumpstart interaction: an unknown course, and a place for the eyes to settle during commotion or pause.

In the piece, *laying in bed with fellow MFA candidates*, a colorful, Modrian-esque grid of mattresses, pillows and blankets was pieced together on the floor. As we all lay together and watched super 8 films projected on the wall and playing on computer monitors of puppies playing in the summertime grass and silver haired characters tending their bountiful gardens, we joked and relaxed and the ties between us were strengthened. There is also something to be said for viewing art with your body horizontal rather than vertical.

⁶ Bourriaud, Nicolas. Relational Aesthetics. France: Les presses du reel.1998/2002



laying in bed with fellow MFA candidates, 2006

At other times I served tea or oranges along with the installations as a gesture of thanks to the viewer and in the hopes of facilitating conversation and community. I found amongst small groups of folks, the conversations flowed, people felt at ease and able to 'be there together'.



serving oranges during an art presentation

The Bread and Puppet Theater is a leader in participatory artwork and over their thirty-five years of art making have collaborated with legions of volunteers. The audience can join the production mere moments before the show and with minimal instruction are thrust onto the stage as main actors in the play. Peter Shuman, the founder of The Bread and Puppet Theater, conducts the chaos and pulls of the impossible with hundreds of untrained actors. He bakes hearty bread in outdoor ovens, which is served

with garlic and given to the crowd. The theater is low budget, yet makes masterpieces out of cardboard, house paint, clay, and straw. Their materials reflect their ideals of living simply and their storylines offer hope, beauty, humor and song within the very dark political landscapes they present and critique. Their participatory action turns the viewer into the artist who makes the very work they have come to see.

Specifically on Botany and Gardening

Plants are so extraordinary they are hard to comprehend. From agriculture to medicine, to the byproduct of the photosynthesis, oxygen, plants sustain us and our connection to them is so deep, it is inherent. Yet we have forgotten. During a summer as a gardener at Monticello outside of Charlottesville, Virginia, I observed the busloads of school children coming for field trips who gravitated toward the garden, blown away to see vegetables, yes, growing *out of the ground*. Currently, as large corporations attempt to control the variety and supply of seeds, gardeners across the globe defy them, saving seeds and the genetic possibilities contained in them, which are often passed down through generations of a family or a community. In the face of almighty capitalism their gentle deeds are radical.

Gardening in and of itself can be, and is, considered an art, by composing a landscape through choice of plants, their succession of flowerings and their forms. People also take the opportunity to use their gardens and yards as a place to make and display art. A vernacular 'yard art' is seen worldwide and could be viewed as shrines to nature or simply an opportunity for space and a green backdrop for creativity right outside your door. Tire planters, totems, painting on scrap materials, whirly-gigs, and the use of ready-mades like bottles, stuffed animals, and 'junk' have been compiled as spectacular installations in peoples' yards, outside the realm of the contemporary art world.

While many contemporary gardens are glorious visual displays, it is interesting to look back to a more primal relationship with plants.

“For most of their history, after all, gardens have been more concerned with the power of plants than with their beauty—with the power, that is, to change us in various ways, for good and for ill. In ancient times, people all over the world grew or gathered sacred plants (and fungi) with the power to inspire visions and conduct them on journeys to other worlds; some of these people, who are sometimes called shamans, returned with the kind of spiritual knowledge that underwrites whole religions. The medieval apothecary garden cared little for aesthetics, focusing instead on species that healed and intoxicated and occasionally poisoned. Witches and sorcerers cultivated plants with the power to ‘cast spells’—in our vocabulary, ‘psychoactive’ plants. Their potion recipes called for such things as datura, opium poppies, belladonna, hashish, fly-agaric mushrooms (*Amanita muscaria*), and the skins of toads (which contain DMT, a powerful hallucinogen). These ingredients would be combined with hempseed-oil-based ‘flying ointment’ that the witches would then administer vaginally with a special dildo. This was the ‘broomstick’ by which these women were said to travel.”(Michael Pollan)⁷

One still finds many of these psychoactive plants like the common morning glory in contemporary gardens, yards and alleys. But more than molecular structure within the plants whose effects can have visionary, transcendent capabilities, the present day transformative power can reside in the basic visual presence of the plants. Be it with houseplants or in the garden, facilitating the growth of plants in their ever-morphing form is a non-verbal relationship in which one can feel love and a deeper connection to the earth.

At times the study of botany has been a popular frenzy. People were fanatics for investigating the plant world, enchanted and mesmerized by its godliness. Thomas Jefferson was one of these fanatics, experimenting and overseeing a massive garden at Monticello, trading seeds and shipping plants specimens to Europe. Jefferson was one of

⁷ Pollan, Michael. The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World. New York: Random House. 2001.119.

the first lovers of tomatoes, which were formerly thought to be poisonous, but once they were found not to be they were considered an aphrodisiac and called by the French the Pomme d'Amor, or the apple of love. Some of the first botanical photographs were cyanotypes. Anna Atkins spent ten years, 1843-53 dedicated to her project, *British Algae*, in which she diligently researched and recorded her specimens. I was fortunate to see her original prints in the New York Library and they are still the brightest of blues. My exploration of the plant world and use of the cyanotype to make botanical prints makes me feel akin to Jefferson and Atkins.

As plants began to travel the world, foreign species came to the USA, and some have loved it here. These are the trees we see growing up through city sidewalks, out of the sides of buildings, over abandoned lots and along the highway. The Paulownia tree, and the Ailanthus tree (commonly called the 'ghetto palm'), are vigorous growers and can thrive in the poorest of conditions. These 'non-native invasives', among other weeds, provide much of the greenery in the urban landscape. One falls in love with them for sprucing up the place and their make-do attitudes.

I incorporate non-native invasives into my work for their ability to grow in sub-par situations (the studio and exhibition space) alongside weeds and typical houseplants that share in their common-ness. These plants add to the work symbolically, with their 'livingness', and through their form and color.



ghetto palm, your mom, call her, 2006

As a collaborator with nature, I navigate my way in the world through plants; observing, hunting for, collecting, classifying, cultivating, collaborating with, lobbying for, and eating them. The springtime resurrection of the plants mentally and physically sends me into the throes of love. I am giddy and high, and I am physically turned on. I believe in the psychological benefits the *color* green can give people, along side, of course, the necessary sustaining element of oxygen produced by the plants. My artwork aims to showcase these components, to be lighthearted, buoyant and stunning, without

dogma or a proselytizing stance, rather to re-propose the natural world in a manner that can awaken something in the viewer.

The Landscape/Context/Relationships

Nature as subject in art is, as they say, ‘old as the hills’. Artists throughout history have “looked to it for the revelation of basic truths”⁸. As the ultimate inspiration, nature has inspired works from the connecting of stars into drawings called constellations to cave paintings to landscape paintings, from the Olmstead landscaping extravaganza called Central Park in New York City to the Earth and Land works movement and the new directions artists take today. Various eras in art history and their attitudes have provided culture and thought routes to interpret, investigate and recall the human relationship with nature. They suggest a continuum in which my own artwork can reside.

The word ‘picturesque’ finds its roots in landscape painting, the artist chooses what to include in the work omitting the unsightly. This was the aim of the landscape painter of the 1800’s, to present a romantic, bucolic image. Similarly the gardener or the designers of parks cull elements of the wild, to create a benevolent image of nature. In the history of photography, Ansel Adams provided a picturesque foundation for the medium with his majestic visions of American landscape.

As industrialization gave way to cities, artists reacted to the change of their environment in their manner of art production. The wanderings of the Situationists, the parties of the Dadaists and Fluxus can be viewed as humankind seeking interaction with their new modern landscape, that of the city. A contemporary artist nowadays may

⁸ Deitch, Jeffrey. “Artificial Nature” Allocations : Art for a Natural and Artificial Environment. 182.

construct their works on the landscape out of trash, plastics or the very “industrial materials out of which our environment is being reconstituted.”⁹

During the sixties the landscape of the gallery itself came under the artists’ scrutiny. The artists of the Land and Earth works movement sought a new venue, the actual landscape, or as Robert Smithson coined, the ‘site’, and location and medium intermingled. Smithson felt he and his colleagues’ works had less to do with ideas of nature, rather that by a site being the work, or relocating elements of the site into the gallery in what he called ‘non-site’ works, that they were bringing up “not only specific overlooked locations, but also a conceptual relation between viewers and boundaries, inside and outside, center and periphery.”¹⁰



Robert Smithson, *Rocks and mirror square II*, 1971

⁹ Deitch, Jeffrey. “Artificial Nature” Allocations : Art for a Natural and Artificial Environment. 185.

¹⁰ Wallis, Brian. “Survey.” Land and Environmental Art, Kastner, Jeffery, editor. New York: Phaidon, 1998. 25.

It has been pointed out that my work *most constant hot lover* works under the of the site/non-site philosophy, in its presentation of both the actual object and representations of the object. The real and the mediated reverberate with one another.



most constant hot lover, 2007

The works of Smithson and Michael Heizer “remained an imposition on the landscape” whereas works made a few years later by Ana Mendieta whose “ritual performances and artworks reflected a merging of the body with the land that had a very different resonance. She almost seemed to have sensed this transformation, this move away from an art that dominated the land in her earth performances”.¹¹

¹¹ Grande, John. “True to Nature.” Art Nature Dialogues: interviews with environmental artists. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004. xviii.



Ana Mendieta, *Imagen de Yagul*, 1973

One sees a relationship between my work and Mendieta's in that it is a record of a communing, collaborating, and a search for small epiphanies on sacred ground (see *the new habit* and *urban survival techniques*). In the photograph *nocturnal garden*, glimpses of a body are seen in the lit up greenness of the plants as if by hovering stars surrounded by a black night. The photo is the record of this love affair, this rolling among the plants in the nighttime garden.



nocturnal garden, 2006

We see another attempt to join the landscape in the super 8 film *i am Joshua Tree*. A character dressed in a safety orange jump suit walks through the desert, as the picturesque journey continues, the protagonist's gait quickens. He/she finds themselves in a certain grove of Joshua Trees, and proceeds to blend into the landscape by covering them self with a floral drapery of the exact palette of the desert.



i am Joshua Tree, film stills

The works of Joan Jonas relate to my work in their non-linear storytelling and her use of the character, or the body confabulating with the earth. Along with vernacular mystical animals, like dogs, she benevolently colonizes the landscape, where each is the muse of the other. In her films made outdoors she establishes new countries, where fantasy and whim are encouraged. She displays her work in a cacophony of elements including performance, dance, film, projections, objects, drawing, sound and whatever else she may feel is important to coalesce the feel of the particular piece.



Joan Jonas, *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, 2005

Stances on Nature and Environmentalism in Art



I join the army of the trees, 2006

“The rise of environmentalism, born in the US with Thoreau and raised by Muir, came to a kind of proactive maturity in the 1960’s. Between Rachel Carson’s ecological call to arms, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, and the first Earth Day in 1970, environmental consciousness forever changed. The development of Land Art in many ways mirrored the post-war evolution of eco-thought. The early wilderness colonizing efforts of the first generation American Land Artists actually paralleled the ideas of conquest and exploitation that characterized the industrial era. At the same time many artists experienced a nostalgia for a pre-industrial Eden, which precipitated, first, a critique of these conditions and, ultimately, a proactive stance in which the individual began to feel empowered in the problems that had been identified. The great earthmovers who worked to forcibly rearrange the stuff of the natural world in an effort mediate our sensory relationship with the landscape were succeeded by artists who sought to change our emotional and spiritual relationship with it. They, in turn, spawned a third approach, that of the literally ‘environmental’ artist, a practice which turned back to the terrain, but this time with an activity meant to remedy damage rather than poeticize it.” (Jeffrey Castner)¹²

¹² Kastner, Jeffery. “Pre-Face.” Land and Environmental Art. New York: Phaidon, 1998. 17.

Currently with the planet on the verge of environmental disaster, the subject of nature seems a dire priority for cultures' contemplation and action and artists have taken various routes in regarding the issues. In terms of speaking on the state of nature, I propose four appreciated routes artists have taken which relate to my own practice: the experiential, the positive, the active, and the mystical.

Experiential: When Tikrit Tiravanija cooks a meal for people to eat together in a gallery or on site, we commune, and are reminded of the *importance* of community, of conversation, of eating, of the nutrition of the food that sustains us, and where it came from. Olafur Eliasson's "Weather Project" fabricated a huge indoor glowing sunset, supplemented with mists, for people to congregate and watch together. It raises the question; do we now need a media presentation and a museum to show us the sunset?



Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project*, 2003

Andrea Zittel's ranch, dubbed A-Z, in the Joshua Tree Desert doubles as a venue for outdoor art installations, in which the viewer hikes or drives back roads of the desert, often getting lost, from one project to the next. This style of art presentation raises the landscape to equal footing with the art works, and gives the viewer something more, and that is the experience of unmediated nature itself.

Artists of the 'positive' stance aim to present to the viewer the marvelous-ness of living and of the natural world. Perhaps they hope this will invigorate the viewer to reconnect and be active citizens in whose interest it is to care for the planet. Hamish Fulton takes extensive walks through the countryside, and brings back moments in the form of singular photographs, or installs poetic phrases derived from his walk, scripted like advertising on the gallery wall.

In the 'active' view the artist creates work that can effectively make change, be it in peoples' attitude, public policy, or sustainable planning. Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison examine ecosystems and propose plans for maintaining water quality and biodiversity, while promoting communication between citizens and policy makers. Mark Dion's tongue and cheek critique of the state of nature and culture's systems of classification of the natural world are often humorous while direct in their call to action.



Mark Dion, *Iceberg and Palm Trees*, 2007

Joseph Beuys straddles the active and mystical stances of considering nature and the landscape. He is overtly active in his work ‘7000 Oaks’ in which he organized the planting of seven thousand trees in Kassel, Germany. In the work “Coyote; I like America and America likes Me”, he lived in the gallery for three days with a coyote (an endangered species at the time and an animal considered sacred to American Indians). It seems he was speaking simultaneously of the beauty and godliness of the animal, and of the American landscape and American Indians devoured by the formation and ‘progress’ of the United States of America. The drawings and sculptural work of Kiki Smith looks at the molecular make up of, and the whole cosmos, blood and stars, to contemplate the phenomenal intricacy that makes up the everyday. Her work speaks of astonishment.



Kiki Smith, *Blue Girl*, 1998

Art can function in society as a way to interpret and understand the world. Some artists approach the subject of the land with an activist stance while others may utilize the powers of inference and dreaming to arouse the viewer. The subject of nature and the environment is pervasive in the arts, but rather than this fact making my own projects feel diminutive or derivative, it makes me feel part of a constellation of thinkers and practitioners with interrelated passions.

Thesis Exhibition Work

For my thesis exhibition at Anderson Gallery in May 2007, I presented two works, *toward a new kinship constellation*, and *peace be with you*. Embedded in *toward a new kinship constellation* was the piece *most constant hot lover*, which can live on its own, but in this case did not. *toward a new kinship constellation* comprised of many elements:

- one large, stretched cyanotype lit from the back with black light, causing it to glow
- fake palm trees with paint protruding from the cyanotype
- two Paulownia ‘weed’ trees on pedestals
- a TV monitor playing a loop of the film *the feet* depicting lovers’ feet playing heavy footsy in the grass
- two cinderblocks and 2x8 board painted white with safety orange stripe visible when one peered behind the cyanotype where one would also see
- a starburst painting made with neon pink gaffers tape on paper
- three fluorescent black lights behind the cyanotype
- a 30x30 photograph, *urban survival techniques*
- sentimental houseplants given to me at various occasions of celebration or mourning; Pencil tree, Oleander, Jade, and Night Blooming Cirrus, Avocado and the Jimson weed.

The piece *most constant hot lover* is embedded in *toward a new kinship constellation* and consists of:

- a TV monitor playing a loop of the film *riverstars*
- two semi-circular mirrors, one on the floor, one leaning against the TV
- a spider plant rooting in a glass of water
- a stack of black buckets with one green, topped by
- one massive spider plant with twenty five to thirty baby plants sprouting off it
- a spotlight casting the shadows of the baby plants onto the gallery wall
- a fan causing the baby plants and their shadows to sway
- a six foot two inch stretcher draped over with
- a cyanotype printed on a bed sheet of the *Ailanthus* or 'ghetto palm'
- a black light inside the reverse of the stretcher causing the cyanotype to glow
- a cinder block to keep the stretcher standing upright, sitting on top of which was a
- a living *Ailanthus* or 'ghetto palm' tree in a pot
- a spotlight casting a shadow of the living *Ailanthus* plant onto the backside of the cyanotype, which was also apparent from the front

The piece *toward a new kinship constellation* succeeded in enticing people to investigate, to peer into its glowing cracks to be rewarded with small gifts. It instigated conversation. The piece glowed, and bounced light, and gave off oxygen. The video piece titled *the feet* was overtly sexy, while other elements were hopeful and pointed out everyday phenomenon.

The work *peace be with you* greeted the visitors to the Anderson gallery, as it was in the first exhibition space, and hoped to shower them with well wishes on entering and

exiting our group MFA exhibit. It consisted of the photograph *the new habit*, a wood veneer tabletop inscribed with 'peace be with you, and also with you' and on a pedestal sat; a night blooming Cirrus, a mason jar of mica collected from a stream, on top of which sat a salt garden grown in the top of a spray paint can, living oyster mushrooms grown on wood, a dangling Swedish Ivy houseplant, a Spider plant rooting in a jar of water, and a wooden box presenting my business cards.

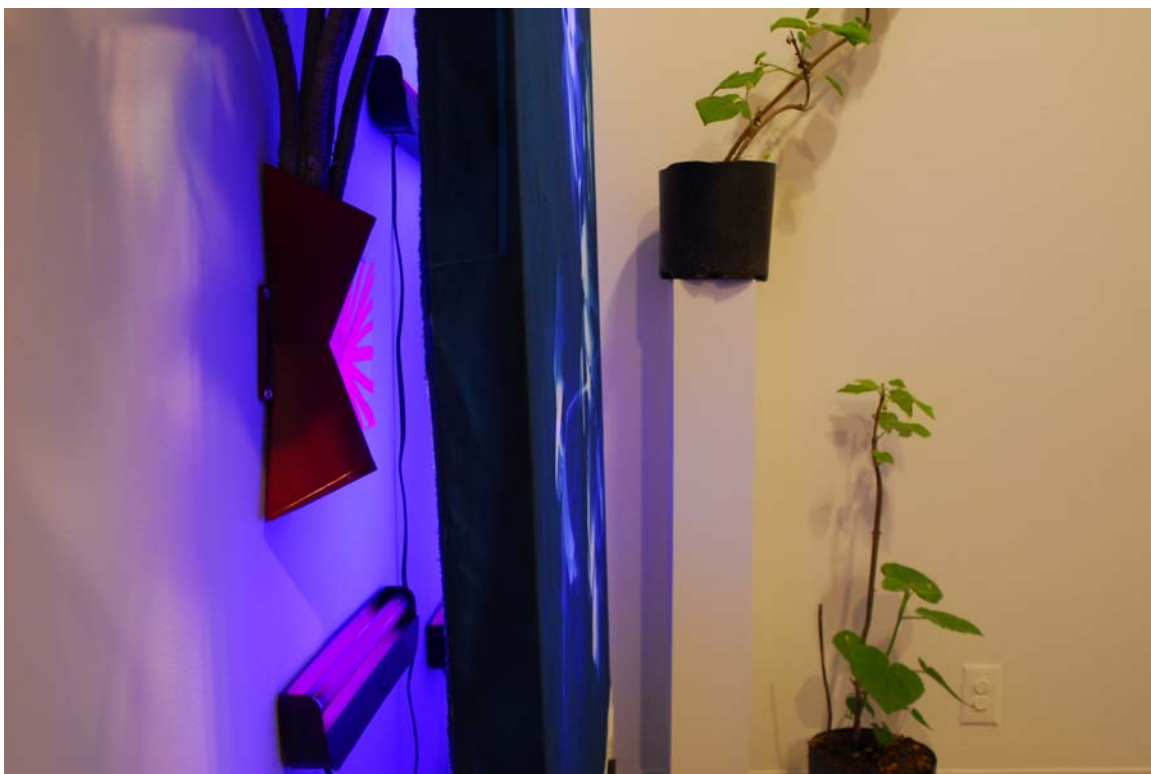
On Mothers Day some elder women friends and my mother came to see my thesis show. These specific people had introduced me to and taught me of gardening, art and spirituality. To celebrate we ate the mushroom growing from the work, a communion of sorts. Later when people asked where the mushroom went, I reveled in answering, "We ate it!"



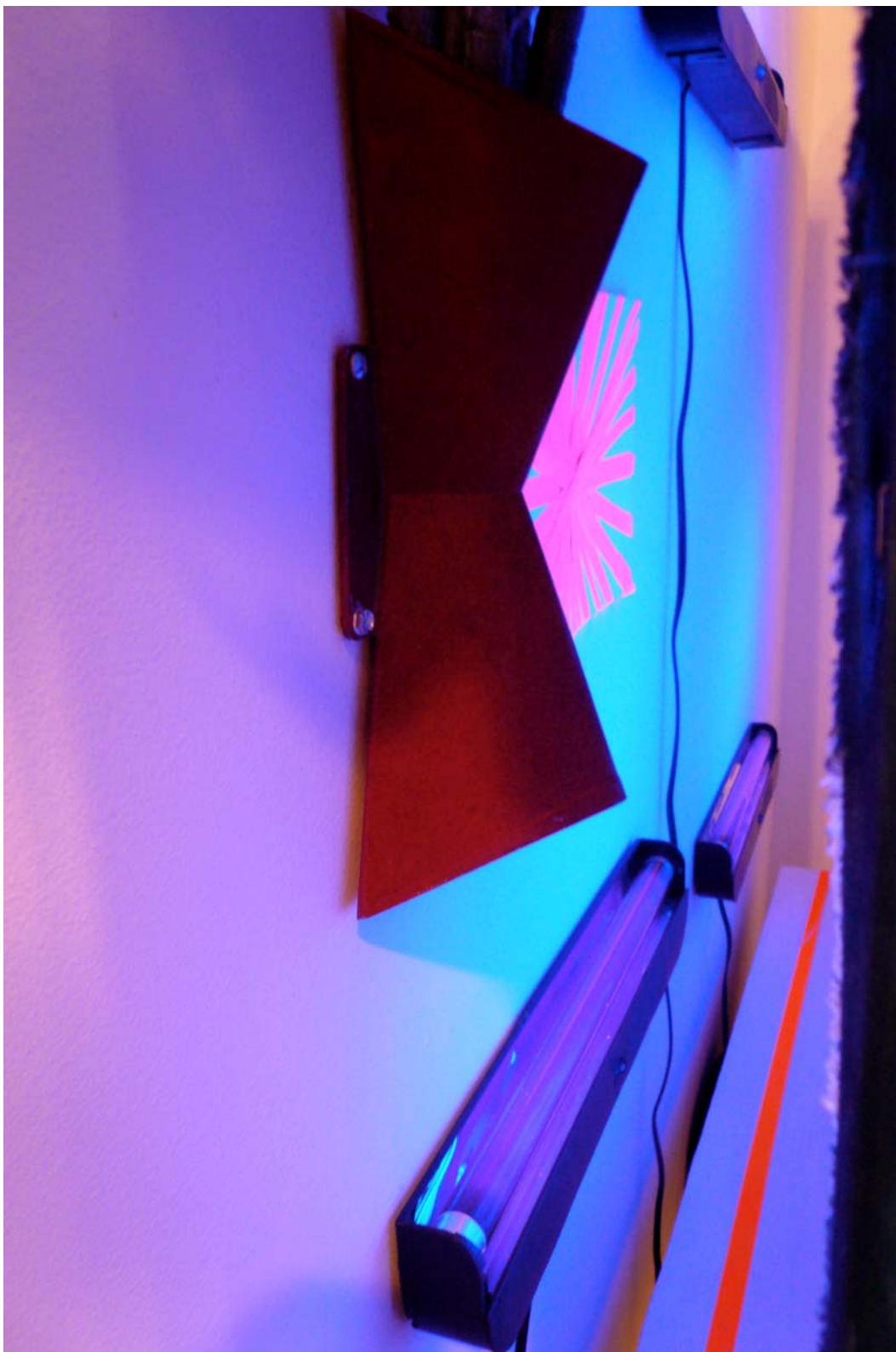
toward a new kinship constellation



toward a new kinship constellation



A visitor peering behind *toward a new kinship constellation*, and the view.



toward a new kinship constellation, view behind the cyanotype



the feet, film stills



most constant hot lover



most constant hot lover, view from the rear



most constant hot lover, details



riverstars, film still



peace be with you



peace be with you, detail showing a Night Blooming Cereus, a jar of mica, a salt garden grown in the lid of a spray paint can, and a living Oyster mushroom

Appendix A

APPROPRIATED

Artist's Statement

by nellie appleby 2006

Introduction

Juliana Engberg

Art is still, in my opinion, one of the most effective and meaningful measurements of the pulse of life. By its own complexity and search for meaning among metaphors, it delivers to us a synthesis of thought and outcome that reflects our sense of humanity as we contemplate the reasons of existence.

At the end of this century we have cause to assess the last 100 years, a century in which we have seen the rise and fall of ideologies, the devastation caused by wars around the globe; the persecution of many races, species and landscapes; the eventual and influential emergence of feminism; the redrawing of world maps, and the unprecedented migration of peoples. As we pass from one century to another, it seems important to reflect on some of these issues. Naming the inaugural Melbourne International Biennial 'Signs of Life', I wanted to draw attention to the role artists play in helping us define and think through the ways in which we encounter life.

If there has been a tendency in art, of late, to peer microscopically at the prosaic aspects of daily life, and to elevate the banal, then nellie hopes to register a larger picture. In the works gathered here, in both the major exhibition and Collaborating Country Projects, the re-emergence of mythology, a re-investigation of systems and models of utopias, a concern with many social communities, the contemplation of body and structured space, projections into the future, and a search for the meaning of mutuality, all seem to point to the interest nellie has in enlarging her scope of inquiry.

This interrogation takes us into areas such as the environment, psychology, biology, museology, architecture, physics, and cartography. Equally, it ranges through history, both social and art, and re-familiarises us with the traditions of narrative and drama. I believe nellie displays a lively cross-researched engagement with art and other disciplines which helps us understand our present intellectual, political and physical environment.

In contemplating some of these issues, we see nellie concerned with art-making that has returned from academic absentia to re-emerge as legible, materially rich, textural and multi-layered in its theoretical density. Above all, I believe nellie re-international Biennial 'Signs of Life' exhibits a very human set of projects, as should be the case as we leave the twentieth century and begin to engage with the next millennial frontier.

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Vita

Nellie Appleby was born in the mountains of southwest Virginia in 1973. Her amazing parents with a group of friends had just founded The River Farm, a small commune that cares for a swath of land and a mile of the Clinch River until today. During the eighties the Appleby family live in Botswana where they were involved in social justice work and wild ridiculous adventures in the bush.

In 1997 Nellie received a Bachelors of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Virginia. Since then she has divided her time between an urban life in New York City and a country life in Virginia, trying to create her ideal world. She has received several grants and residencies including a Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship, and has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows. She received her Masters in Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2007.

Now, she is ready for anything.