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BLAST ZONE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

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For my parents

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ABSTRACT

BLAST ZONE

By Eleanor Mahin Thorp, MFA

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2022

Major Director: Caitlin Cherry, Assistant Professor, Painting and Printmaking Department

My works emphasize the animistic qualities of extracted or displaced stones. This paper will explore my practice in relationship to practices of image reading, and drawing images within images, particularly rocks. I will use traditions of landscape painting, geological study, and Persian image making to talk about displacement of materials and stones.. I will explain how viewers can be trapped inside of the rock and my use of pastels, rock mediums, colored pencils, and my fingers to build these rocky landscapes.



Figure 1. Image of Sufi Saint etched on silver
Artist unknown
18" x 24"
Iran

INTRODUCTION

Of the few things my mother brought to the United States from Iran was this image of a Sufi Saint (See figure 1). The artist is anonymous much like the features of this man's face. His features are made of connecting images, made of animals, other humans, and birds. For me this image has always served as a reminder of how we become one another.

This etching is an intricate weaving of figures embracing each other, and holding the image of the man . Without the figures, man disappears.

In Ram Dass's lecture¹ "*The Sacred in the Everyday*" he states: *We do not focus on the group because we are so fascinated with the figure. The ground is the way in which we are not different. The way in which we are all the same.*" The answer is in the ground.

Because this was in my mothers home, it was the image I studied the most. But there were other faces I was looking at. Mountain and cliff faces of Utah. At the intersection of the Great Basin, the Rockies, and the Colorado Plateau, there is no doubt to me that this Sufi face became ever present in the rock faces of my home. These images in the landscape are a means of communication and tell us about our own demise and cycles of time. Which is why I dedicate my practice to look at rock and stone for its mystical qualities.

¹ Dass Ram, Sacred in the Everyday, 45:01

ANONYMOUS ARTIST

Stones are the reminder that we too are as Ellen Melloy calls “prefossils”². Stones serve as an artifact and physical record of history and time. They are abstract images, accumulated over long billions of years. They live and operate on a different time scale than humans, trees, plants, insects, fungi, and bacteria. Minerals solidify images of past lives through fossilization, and attract seekers of knowledge and beauty. Rocks are both figurative and abstract landscapes, and are able to present meaning through line and color. In this way, the drawing of stones helps me to see beyond my own time scale and study our oldest relatives.

Even a simple agate is formally complex and a reflection of time and extraction. Agates, formed through millions of years of silica rich water seeping through small holes in the ground, presents a slow unseen drawing process. Each passing of water is a new glaze, and a new layer by the anonymous artist. In addition to silica other minerals give agates their pigmentation, making them cosmic and geologic wonders. Subject to gravity, they create figures, entire landscapes, and representations of past lives. In co-creating with stones I explore how images can exist within images. Take Australian opalized fossils as another example. Not only are these opals³, but they hold the shape of the fossil as a literal representation of a previous lifetime, embedded in the image of the stone. These observational records not only express previous lifetimes, but the rocks ability to produce and abstract the living world.

² Melloy Ellen. Anthropology of Turquoise, pg 319

³ As water seeps through the ground, it combines drips water onto turtle shells and dinosaur bones, jaws, and teeth. Through as the water evaporates, slowly but surely bones and other remnants turn to opal.



Figure 2. Eleanor Mahin Thorp
Gravitas I
Pastel, charcoal, graphite, and colored pencil
2021
48" x 60"

Petrified wood is both a representation of its past life, but all of its elements have been replaced with stone, nature sculpture, unearthed. Is the unearthing a form of the abstraction? And us unearthing it further inflicting a kind of gravity onto the stone?

The extraction of coal is an abstraction from its previous state, just as its release as a CO₂ gas is also a type of abstraction. In this sense rocks become abstractions, while also completely representing themselves.

Finding images within landscapes, within stones, within particles is to simultaneously depict the stone and their animistic qualities. I am drawing images within images, as a way to read between the lines of a stone's history and aura. I am exploring what attracts us to stone and whether they call to us or we gravitate towards. The *lusus naturae*⁴ supposes that we gravitate to stones because of their representational abilities. My drawings are horizonless, and compositionally trap the viewer in the formal qualities of the stone. Without the horizon, the works slip between figuration, representation, and abstraction, asking the viewer to come closer and inspect the relatable forms. From one distance, my drawings represent rocks, but upon closer inspection, this image falls apart. The details in the drawings are miniatures, and reflect my close inspections of stone

I also explore the idea of gravitational pull through scale. My drawings are all large scale works that make a direct relationship with the body, as if you were rock climbing or confronting the stones. These large surfaces are sublime and grand, as well as miniature and delicate.

⁴ Caillois, Roger, *Writing of Stones*, pg 36



Figure 3. Eleanor Mahin Thorp
Gravitas II
Pastel, charcoal, and colored pencil
2021
36" x 42"



Figure 4. Eleanor Mahin Thorp
Portrait of Coal
Oil on Wood Panel
2021
24" x 36"

Another way of explaining gravitation towards stone can be described by Jane Bennett. Because of self organization⁵ all matter is lively, constantly moving and *becoming*. By using pastel I can emulate the collection of minerals. I can extract them by erasing, blowing away dust, eroding the surfaces, and building them up to have weight and gravity. The works are always becoming and disintegrating, and these dusts with each movement of my paintings also erode and disappear. My drawings are a collecting of minerals into rocky blocks, serving as a representation and an extraction of the rocks themselves.

This is why pastel has become a muse and poetic material for me. Pastel, a condensed dust, typically made from rock or plant pigments, are layered in my work. Through this accumulation, the layering becomes a time based medium, morphing into an image, while emulating the qualities of rock. Between me, the pastel, and my surface there is an exchange of material that builds up into a solid image. The pastel rubs off onto my hand, the oil of my hand onto the pastel, and the pastel and my fingers onto the surface eventually creating an image of stone. Depending on the work, I add moments of speed or friction through the use of colored pencils.

This process allows me to think about dust as a animistic material, always recycled, passing through the Earth as a vector⁶, and eventually turning to stone. In thinking about animism⁷, and rebirth through particles and space, every object is a subject in flux. In Andreas Weber's book *Matter and Desire* everything on earth, including stones are in relationship with

⁵ Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter*. pg 97

⁶ Vector, being a point or line but also has Sophy Burnham, refers to the Zoroastrians in her "book of Angels". The Zoroastrians in Persia believed the world is constantly in a battle of vectors or spirits between "good and bad"

⁷ Animism being the spiritual essence in all objects, elements, nature. etc.

something else as a result of gravity⁸. Whether it is sand blown into the wind, or water eroding stone particle by particle. In this sense, stones gravitate towards us.

In Jimmie Durham's *Dangers of Petrification*⁹ he examines how we see rock as other imagery or meats. The work is a display of stones; as representations of meats and cheeses. This work emphasizes the material world's ability to create and continually co create with life by representing it, both literally and figuratively. In many ways, the stone charcuterie is a rearrangement of minerals. Perhaps the cave bacon is simply a rearrangement of the bacon on your plate, and makes its way to being a rearrangement of us. If so, my works also serve as rearrangement. We are like dust who arrange ourselves into each other, in constant exchange of rubbing off on one another, and *becoming*.

In Andrew Mcphee's book *Annals of a Former World*, he refers to geology as a descriptive science. A field that relies on observation in order to parse out the history of the stone. Through waving bands of color geologists have been able to determine when extreme extinctions, seismic activities, interactions with foreign bodies, and slow changes have occurred over time. The color and material make-up of a stone can tell us the conditions of every lifetime it has endured. Color is a distinct marker of time. Color is layered due to its direct relationship to gravity; depending on what layer is placed in relationship to other colored layers tell their own narratives about Earth's history. They can be read by the directions of the color banding, interruptions of line, holes and can tell us about how they were heated, cooled, pushed, receded, eroded, and collapsed, etc. One may think of the dark layer of earth called the *Cretaceous-Tertiary (K/T) boundary layer* that represented the end of the Jurassic period, and can

⁸ Weber, Andreas, Matter and Desire, pg 43

⁹ Franke, Anselm. *Animism*. e-flux. Episode 1. 11/20. Web. <https://animism.e-flux.com/episode1/>

be found all over the world. Through the layering of colors I can pay homage to these original creators within a human time scale. I can also use this methodology to think about what it means to understand stone beings. If geology is a science of observation meant to parse out how color and form operates beneath the surface, then how can we use geology and the study of rocks to understand the stones' creative abilities in making themselves visible?

My drawings rely on the observations of rocks and the landscapes in which they live, much like the practices of geology. In some cases, my works are portraits of the stones themselves, like in the image *Portrait of Coal (Figure 4)*. In this image I used images of pre-jurassic plants, layered with images of decomposing wood, fungi and bacteria to greater understand the life of these materials. My images are a collection of images that make up the face of a rock. Through source images, rock samples, meditation, and site visits I construct representations of the rocks themselves, and all of these elements constitute an observational study.

My practice is interested in the creative power of rocks, and seeks imagery within the stone faces to tell stories of their previous lives and the ways in which they capture and interact with human vectors and energies. I consider how lines and color of stone are developed over millions of years and can tell the stories of thousands of years of time. I search for the hidden imagery within the stones to construct both literal representations, and abstractions present in elemental creators.

While the overall image of the stone is true to its source imagery, I find ways to exaggerate images in the stone. Using bright pastels I can exhibit vibrancy¹⁰.

¹⁰ In Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* vibrancy is not just literal chromatic or tonal vibrance, but as Bennett uses the word to describe matter that is living on conscious.



Figure 5. Eleanor M. Thorp, *push and leak and oil and dust*, Oil on wood panel, 2021, 48" x 36"



Figure 6. Eleanor Mahin Thorp
Untitled 1
Pastel, liquid chrome, rock medium, colored pencil, graphite, charcoal
2022
42"x56"

Before my stone works, I was making numerous mountain studies and imagery of landscapes. I was deliberately dividing planes to embed the image with multiple viewpoints. What bothered me about these works was that they did not let the subject of the painting express itself in a straightforward way. For example in the work *push and leak and oil and dust* (Figure 5) I layered images of an oil mining field in Utah, Shell oil maps, mountains, tectonic plates, ancient maps, and road to create an image of oil leaking back into the landscape. Though this image presents multiple viewpoints, the image of oil does not imagine itself. In works such as in *Untitled I* (Figure 6) the stone, lichen, and man made holes create eyes that stare back and make up ambiguous figures. This drawing shows holes in rhyolite where miners have chiseled out topaz, leaving behind gaping holes. Other images such as *Untitled III* show the disappearance of plant life on a piece of blasted mountain.

In many ways, this brings the image of the stone into a human timescale, and allows me to think about how fast rocks have changed in relation to Earth's history. The quick blow of dynamite is a very different time scale than the slow changes of plate tectonics.



Figure 7. Eleanor M. Thorp Untitled 2, Pastel, rock medium, liquid chrome, colored pencil, 2022, 42 x 85.5"

GRAVITY

Considering the works *Gravitas I* and *Gravitas II*, I think through Roger Caillois's book *The Writing of Stones*. In the book he introduces the idea of the *Gravitas*¹¹. Through examples of stones that present images of landscapes, faces, and animals, Caillois described gravitas as something that is unchanging, or can attract through "an intrinsic beauty". The veins, atomic structures, colors, qualities, and arabesques stone contain are indicative of time and location, and have attracted collectors, enthusiasts, and prospectors for thousands of years. Stones hold intrinsic power and knowledge, as they are our oldest ancestors.

Aside from being visually intrigued by rocks, I am particularly interested in sites that engage me in this gravitas. My thesis exhibition focuses on a private blasting zone, at Topaz Mountain in Utah. Topaz Mountain is a mountain consisting of rhyolite and Topaz in the Great Basin Region in the United States. It lies between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevadas, and just south of the Great Salt Lake. As the Pacific tectonic plate pushed up the Sierras, much of the great basin region shifted and allowed for rock to extrude upwards and magma to slip between the cracks.¹² In the last stages of magma cooling in this porous basin, precious gems in colors ranging from brown, yellow, pink, to white formed, and these are all Topaz¹³. I have visited this site countless times with my father since I was a child. This space is one that either accepts your presence or can make you disappear. Japanese internment camps lie several miles away, mysterious disappearances, murders, and scams ensue in this landscape.

To get to this mountain, you must drive 70 miles on a two lane road. The journey from Salt Lake city is about 160 miles of a slowly disappearing Sagebrush Steppe riddled with

¹¹ Caillois, Roger. *The Writing of Stones* pg 3

¹² McPhee, *Annals of Former World*

¹³ <https://www.ga.gov.au/education/classroom-resources/minerals-energy/australian-mineral-facts/topaz#heading-4>

agricultural land, mines (particularly coal), and signs of both the oldest and newest human settlers.

The landscape surrounding Topaz is flat, with a few mountains that stand out like pyramids or ancient ruins. Only industrial signs are visible: train tracks, massive power lines, and road signs. On my last visit I drove this road 4 times in one day, I only passed a single semi truck driver in the full 280 mile journey. Closer to the mountain, there is the intermountain power plant, a facility that powers most of Utah, lower Idaho and Las Vegas. On a clear day, a necklace of mountain ranges is visible towards the East and West. Fence posts and stacks of tumbleweed make walls against barbed wire fences. Dry summers and inversion in winter cause the air to be murky.

These divisions of land are all remnants of the Desert Land Act beginning as early as 1877¹⁴. According to the Mormons, who had not yet agreed to become a part of the United States, it was seen as a ploy and caused a great deal of fraud in these regions and “appeared to be advantageous only to capitalists and speculators.”¹⁵ Because of this, much of the unique sagebrush steppe has been grazed over, burned coal fills the air, and industrious mysteries are hidden behind tumbleweeds. The Topaz Mountain is also a maze of public and private mines, a legal trap for the curious visitor.

For thousands of years, any gem with a yellowish color was considered a Topaz. We now know that Topaz is more rare than once believed. The yellow, orange, and pink topaz are considered to be the most valuable of these colored gems and are often called *Imperial Topaz*.

¹⁴ Stathis, Stephen W., Utah's Experience with the Desert Land Act, Vol. 1980 No. 2 Utah Historical Quarterly

¹⁵ Stathis, Stephen W., Utah's Experience with the Desert Land Act, Vol. 1980 No. 2 Utah Historical Quarterly

The world wide primary source of imperial topaz is in the mountainous town of Ouro Preto, Brazil.

Brown or champagne colored topaz is referred to as a “precious topaz” to distinguish itself from quartz like stones, while white or clear topaz is the most common. Clear topaz typically loses color because the stone is light sensitive and loses its colors with exposure to sunlight. At Topaz Mountain you will likely find clear and if you are lucky, you may find something pink, yellow, or champagne colored. Clear topaz is a stone of psychic gifts and aids in “envisioning and realizing one’s highest spiritual path”¹⁶ While golden or pink topaz opens the door to spiritual consciousness, “enhances creativity, personal will, and manifesting desire.”¹⁷ As wonderful as these stones sound, they both “provide a great magnification of whatever energy is focused through it. Therefore, it is important to hold positive intentions”¹⁸. If this is true, what happens to a space that can harness so much transcendental energy, when humans have violently imposed desires and fears onto the space?

For the works in my exhibition *Blast Zone* I have focused on the color grey. The works are images of topaz in rhyolite, a grey igneous Rock, and its various adaptations to color due to blasts, hand tools, erosion, or other touches. In these works I am interested in how the rhyolite can hold various chroma in its banding. As an exploration of vibrancy, I am interested in how grey can exist as a full chromatic scale, versus just a tonal scale. *Blast Zone* also includes many oranges, set over the greys. The orange develops from damage and erosion to the rock, but also presents itself in the brightly colored lichen, which still desperately clings to its million year old home.

¹⁶ Simmon, Robert, *Alchemy of Stones*, pg 447

¹⁷ Simmon, Robert, *Alchemy of Stones*, pg 447

¹⁸ Simmon, Robert, *Alchemy of Stones*, pg 447



Figure 8. Eleanor M. Thorp. *Topaz with Rhyolite*. Pastel, rock medium, liquid chrome, graphite, colored pencil, 2022, 42"x 85.5"

One way I think about animism in the landscape is through the lens of Persian miniature painting. Persian miniatures have the ability to make stone forms transcend the representations of themselves, turning into figures, a landscape in motion, and demons.



Figure 9. *The Concourse of the Birds*. Folio 11r from a *Mantiq al-tair*, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Ca 1600

Persian miniatures such as “Language of the Birds” by Bihzad presents (figure 9) a landscape primarily dominated by the natural world. A grand gathering of birds perched on rocks and trees. In this scene, the hoopoe in the right side of the image is persuading the birds to travel east

The poem¹⁹ is elusive but uses anecdotes to create a dialogue on the soul. Particularly how the soul is caged by the body, or by material, and can only be awakened by a higher presence. According to Michael Barry²⁰, the amorphous rocks²¹ in this painting are juxtaposing figures to the birds ready to travel Eastward. The birds are a metaphor for spiritual



Figure 10. Eleanor Mahin Thorp *Confederate Signatures at Grand Caverns*. Pastel, colored pencil, and graphite. 2021 48”x 68”

ascension, while the rocks are trapped and displaced souls.

¹⁹ Attar, Farid Ud-Din *The Conference of the Birds*. pg 48

²⁰ https://web.archive.org/web/20110514052854/http://www.princeton.edu/~nes/faculty_barry.html

²¹ Barry, Michael. [Michael Barry: "The Canticle of the Birds" - Part 1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQm1CG2cvgc) Youtube. Stanford Iranian Studies Program. March 18, 2019 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQm1CG2cvgc>

The Persians are not alone in casting spirits into stone. Most recently Japan's famous "Killing Stone" which held the spirit of the demon Tamamo No Mae's has split, perhaps re-releasing the demon. The Pima of Arizona believe the rocky face of Superstition Mountains is where the brains of the mountain demon Hauk were scattered "and became the seed for other evil"²².



Figure. 11. Eleanor Mahin Thorp. *Love to watch you, watch me appear/disappear*
Pastel and charcoal, 2021. 48"x 36"

²² Skinner M. Charles. <https://www.legendsofamerica.com/ah-arksuperstitionmountains/>

In Jane Bennett's book *Vibrant Matter* she describes how all materials have a life, agency, and can act as micro or macro actants²³. Because all materials are active, they participate in assemblages which participate in questions²⁴ of "moral responsibility and political accountability". If this is the case, rocks are a point of intersection between time, spirit, geopolitics, history, and moral accountability. Taking this idea from Persian miniature I think about how the rocks of a mined landscape can contain demons.. In this way, the violent removal and rearrangement of rocks becomes a space in which man-made demons are held, and erected. In the work *Love to watch you watch me disappear/appear* is of an open face coal mine. This work thinks about how through the violent mining of a space, demons are inflicted into the space and are erected in the form of mercury and cadmium. The rocks in the space are tortured, and leak cadmium and mercury back into the space, to poison us as revenge.

Another instance in which demons are enacted in the work, is in *Confederate Signatures at Grand Caverns*. This work is of a rock at Grand Caverns, Virginia in which confederate soldiers carved their names into a rock. This rock had been growing for millions of years until the surface was violated with the names.. Through the carving of their names, their evil became embedded in the stone. Like the demons of Persian miniatures, this visual exchange exhibits them as demons forever trapped in stone.

The artist Leslie Shows²⁵ expresses in her work how geological time and human culture mirror one another in their cycles of creation and destruction. Shows, a master of material can manipulate aluminum, resins, paints, and inks to make works that make one think of "fools gold

²³ Bennett, Jane .*Vibrant Matter*. pg 23

²⁴ Bennett, Jane .*Vibrant Matter*. pg 21

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-CIoZNkiDg>

²⁶” or something “other worldly”. The representation of geological material can immediately bring the viewer to think about their relationship to a present landscape and time. By representing geological material, a viewer can visualize but perhaps not totally grasp how the landscape has slipped and shifted on an astronomical time scale. Like Shows, I am interested in the slipping of time, abstraction, and representation. However, my pastel works are more concerned with exchange or energy, material, and spirit between me and the stones I depict.

In order to understand this exchange, during my drawing process I keep the stone close to me. I look at images of them, images of their atomic structures, meditate with them, and try to further explain through drawing how they are communicating with me. While developing my Topaz works, I keep Topaz grids in my studio in order to amplify their alchemical power. Simmons argues that geologic material is not divine itself but through the touching between us and stone, we can reach the divine. In the case of my works, I am interested in the potentials of stone, and their ability to communicate directly with me. I recognize as an extractor that somehow they have a power over me, and are able to influence the works.

As eco-anxiety surrounds, drawing is a way to cocreate with Earth. It is an opportunity to understand a subject through deep observation, and reexamine landscapes, as they’ve been turned inside out. Drawing and geological study is a way to really *see time*. The medium of drawing not only offers itself to geological texture but to its representation of time and accumulation.

Recognizing the divine power of Stone is crucial to a future on this Earth. Stone has served as witness and physical record of all major extinctions and upheavals of natural material.

²⁶ https://www.christies.com/features/OneToWatch_Leslie_Shows-5607-1.aspx

As stones set the stage for our new epoch, they can offer us ancient wisdom in how to contend with violence and destruction. However, our stones are slipping away. Our landmasses have been penetrated, eroded, and new hellholes open everyday²⁷. The ever growing sea is taking new stones to its depths, as one mine becomes abandoned, a new claim is made, and our gravels are moving faster than the construction equipment. Our entire planet is completely terraformed and Stones are moving at lightning speed.

²⁷ <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/video/arctic-sinkholes/>



Figure 12 .Eleanor Mahin Thorp. Accelerated Erosion. Pastel, charcoal, colored pencil, graphite, 2022, 42"x 85.5"

THE UNSEEN

As iron lays in the ground it courses through our blood. The iron calls to our own bodies in the way they make surfaces, colors, and images of other life forms in their seemingly unmoving nature.

Since I was a child my father would take me to Arches National Park in Moab, Utah, in lieu of a birthday present. Because it is an ancient sea bed, not only is it vast and romantic it oscillates between reds and greens. Presenting of areas of oxidized and unoxidized stones, a remnant and representation of oxygen on the sea bed. Plants such as mormon tea are reminiscent of corals and sponges. A lesson in color theory and abstraction. In this place, sculptures are also made. Iron rich sands and spring run off waters erode sandstone masses, creating intricate forms, sculptures, and ruins. Elemental architecture analogous to that of the ancient Romans, before the existence of the empire. This landscape's strange structures and impressions of an ancient sea bed not only attract people to its beauty and power, but to its oil deposits and nearby coal mines. In this sense, landscapes and the stones that create them are active creators in cultural, economic, and spiritual exchange with human subjects.

The painting *Moab* by John Singer Sargent, shows Moab's ancient sea bed as a rocky untouched plane of iron rich sands and endless skies. A landscape that in Sargent's "time was seen as unchanged since the time of Christ". Though this painting relies on observation, it presents the landscape as timeless and without intrusion. It is true that Sargent saw a different Utah than the one I grew up in, but still felt the immense energy and tension this desert-sea presents. The same landscape today is divided by barbed wire fences and interrupted with oil rigs



Figure 13. John Singer Sargent, *The Mountains of Moab*, Oil Paint on Canvas, Tate, 1905.

descending to hell holes. His painting served as a portrait to American/Christian ideals, absent of industry, exchange, and intrinsic power. Paintings like this would inspire other Utah painters to think about Gods landscape and his tools²⁸ provided to his people. An inviting space to Western expansion. How can we begin to explain the energy abuse brings to this landscape brings?

Many of my works diverge from this kind of representation of landscape. Through horizonless images of mined Utah landscape, the viewer is confronted with the image of stone itself. By exploring the rocks of a space, I can begin to parse out what was previously unseen. I can find particular moments of communication between the rock and myself. A vector or spirit that was hidden by layers of Earth that ultimately builds the history and aura of the space. These

²⁸ Book of Mormon

tight abstractions defy vastness, and speak to the divided rectangles of the landscape through hundreds of years of privatization and industrial penetration.

Many American landscape painters have engaged in a spirit of place. For Sargent, he imposed a Christian spirit onto this space in order to create a national identity, and cover the ugly scars of colonial domination. The spirit of the American landscape has changed in such a way that not only does geological power overwhelm a subject, but so do the traumas we as humans have inflicted on the space. The rocks receive these energies, which is why I depict and co-create with them. In a broader sense we can think of The *Group of Seven*, who in the early 20th century painted pristine surrealist landscapes that spoke to the nationalist sublime landscapes forged through manifest destiny.

I am interested in British surrealist painter Paul Nash, early in his career painted war torn landscapes, exploring the spirit of place, or a *genus loci*²⁹ in archeological sites and sites of trauma. As a government appointed painter of WWI landscapes, his works invoke a sight of human and environmental violence. His more sentimental works are of the various English hills and sites that explore their energetic pulls

Georgia O'Keeffe was engaged in a *genus loci* in the landscapes of New Mexico. Living part of the year in New York, O'Keeffe spent her summers at ghost ranch, documenting the district formations and symbols of the New Mexico landscape. Her contemporary Agnes Pelton however, focused on the transcendental spirit of the California desert landscape.

The question my work begs of these landscape painters, is what happens to the spirit of landscape of 200 years of industrial and commercial over taking.

²⁹ Parker, Peter. *Paul Nash's Commitment to the English Landscape*. Apollo. Jan 13. 2017 .web.

Geologic time is impossible to grasp in the short span of human time, which is why imagination is vital in re-thinking energy history and geology. In Robert Simmons book *The Alchemy of Stones* he explains that to understand the power of rocks, imagination is essential. He however does not define the imaginative as a means of creation. Instead it is opening up the mind to the possibility of having meaningful exchange with rocks or engaging in panpsychism.

The Imaginative, comes from the word image. In more new age practices, like in *Alchemy of Stones* by Robert Simmons he refers to rock as “Stone Beings” that can induce divine energy through the imaginative. Though a placebo, perhaps the opening of “image” can bring us closer to stone communication. Although there is no solid science around the efficacy of stone healing there is no doubt we are enamored by the power of gems. Virtually all cultures around the world engage in the power of imagination with stones. In Ellen Melloy’s book *The Anthropology of Turquoise*³⁰, she examines how turquoise, both as color and stone, hold immense powers throughout the world.

³⁰ Melloy Ellen. *Anthropology of Turquoise*, “... It is the stone that strengthens the eyes, said the Persian, the desert dwellers equivalent of a bulletproof vest against pain or demonic influences...” pg 322

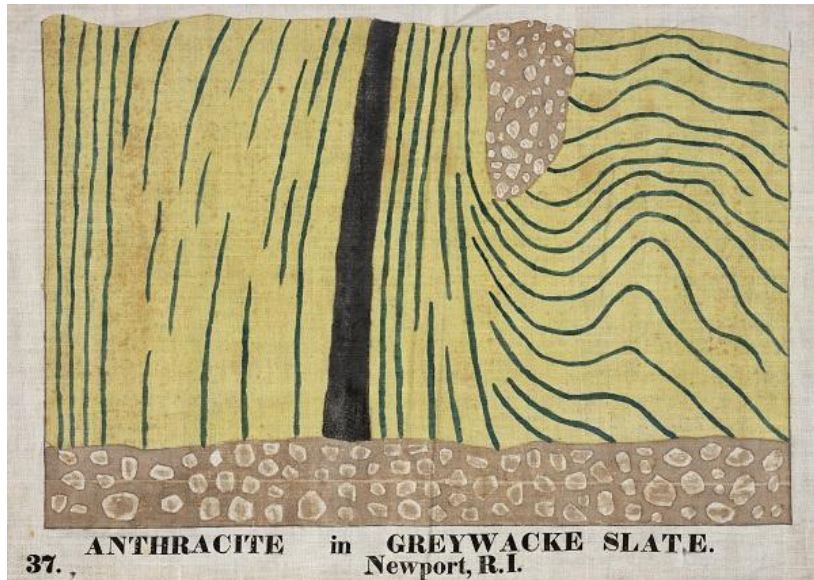


Figure 14
Orra White Hitchcock,
Anthracite in Greywacke Slate Newport Rhode Island
1828-1840
40x61 cm
Pen and Ink on Linen

In many ways, the image is the way in which we understand geology. Had you been the student of the American geologist Edward Hitchcock³¹, you would have seen the many illustrations of Orra White Hitchcock (see figure 14) on your classroom walls. As the first female scientific illustrator, she was extremely apt at math and calculations³² and created illustrations of stones, fossils, and models Earth's crust. Her and Edward shared a love for landscape, and its interconnectedness to time and God. In many ways, her works, though scientific illustrations,

³¹ Solly, Melian, *Art Science and Religion Blend in Exhibition Honoring Illustrator Orra White Hitchcock*
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/art-science-and-religion-exhibition-honoring-illustrator-orra-white-hitchcock-180969778/>

³² Solly, Melian, *Art Science and Religion Blend in Exhibition Honoring Illustrator Orra White Hitchcock*
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/art-science-and-religion-exhibition-honoring-illustrator-orra-white-hitchcock-180969778/>

engage in the imaginative soul. Through the use of exposed rock, she created illustrations that reflected something we cannot see, beneath the ground.

Because much of our geology is unseen, it leaves the perfect opportunity to engage in the unseen. The unseen being physical and metaphysical material, that induces the imagination of time.

Much like the Sufi image my mom brought, and images of amorphous demons rocks, the idea of seeing in image within an image was passed down to me through coffee reading. Turkish coffee reading is has not only been a primary social practice in my household, but I believe taught me how to see imagery within material. It is a way to read imagery within imagery, a means for communicating with ancestors, and the unseen world. Often in fortunes, symbols, numbers, figures, and even signatures of my deceased ancestors appear. Although fortunes talk about the future, they can also clarify past happenings, and allow one to see the grander scope of present happenings. In coffee reading, especially through touching (ie lips touching the mug, flipping of the cup, and mark making with your finger) your energies are transferred to the seemingly inanimate material.

Consciously or unconsciously this way of looking is present in both my drawing practice and co-creations with stone. This tradition for me is practice of looking and searching for visual communication. In spending time with stones, I can investigate them in the way I would inspect a coffee reading, looking for moments of visual communication. As I transfer this information to paper, I can think about positive and negative shapes, constructing an image that is both a reflection of the stone, and a communication with the material. By doing this I am engaging with the cores of drawing, while also seeking the answers to what happens to stone when it is

stumbled upon, cherished, or even abused. My works are only beginning to scratch the surface of a billion year old process. For me, the truth of these landscapes, grounds, and stones, is their ability to cocreate with any number of present moments. Because imagination and co-creation with stone is so unique, possibilities, and understandings of stone are infinite.



Figure 15. Eleanor Mahin Thorp. *A Hell Hole*. Pastel and charcoal on wood panel, 2022, 120”x 204”

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