

DORSKY  
GALLERY  
Curatorial Programs



## THAW

JANET BIGGS, MICHELE BRODY, BLANE DE ST. CROIX, VICKI DASILVA,  
ELISE ENGLER, PHYLLIS EWEN, ANDREA GALVANI, ELIZABETH JORDAN,  
ITTY NEUHAUS, ALEXIS ROCKMAN, AND SCOTT WALDEN

Curated by Jill Conner

January 19 – April 6, 2014  
Opening reception: Sunday, January 19, 2:00–5:00 p.m.

**T**HAW features work by Janet Biggs, Michele Brody, Blane De St. Croix, Vicki DaSilva, Elise Engler, Phyllis Ewen, Andrea Galvani, Elizabeth Jordan, Itty Neuhaus, Alexis Rockman and Scott Walden most of whom have mostly ventured out to locations such as Antarctica, Cape Breton, Haiti, Newfoundland, the Svalbard Islands and the Gobi Desert before returning with depictions gathered from these sites. Collectively, these 11 artists present drawings, paintings, photographs, collage, sculpture and video that each address different aspects of the earth's natural but forced transformation, hinting at the potential scientific and geopolitical effects in the wake of ongoing natural disasters. The earth's landscape is now at a turning point in its continuing evolution. Changes in the composition of our atmosphere and concomitant effects on climate are ubiquitously covered in the news. Less well publicized are the changes occurring before our eyes and beneath our feet. The ever-changing oceanic trenches, plateaus, rock, tectonic plates and continental shelves that comprise our world make the illusion of a stable terrain of land and sea no longer tenable, posing severe challenges to our well-meaning notions of—and efforts toward—"sustainability."



Vicki DaSilva *Anthropocene*, 2012



Elise Engler *Ninety-Degree Draft 1-10*, 2009-11

*Fade to White* (2010) by **Janet Biggs** probes the icebergs of the Arctic and follows an explorer through rain, wind and sun yet never escaping the ice. This twelve-minute video sets the pastoral landscape into real-time motion which opens on the deck of schooner, looking out onto a vast, white and barren landscape. Birds and polar bears appear occasionally. The primary focus is the effect of various textures created by light as it refracts across water and ice while revealing cliffs of dried gray rock which is none other than a dead iceberg. Biggs's video portrays the beautiful but tragic picture of melting ice caps in a remote, quiet setting. A countertenor voice frames this foreboding, ominous moment. The artist's emphasis of dramatic shifts in natural light, as well as terrain, highlights this blue planet's close proximity to the sun.

**Andrea Galvani**'s series of photographs titled *Higgs Ocean* (2009-2010) captures the ice-draped Svalbard Islands that surround the artist who stands with a tripod in a boat that holds a lamp dispensing light powered by solar energy. The ray of light appears as a line that reaches toward the sky, illuminating the blue and white scales of color that emphasize the helpless isolation of this region. These photographs, moreover, elaborate further on the quick-changing spatial effects of icebergs.

Fluorescent light is the pencil of **Vicki DaSilva** whose flat-screen video shows the artist writing the word "Anthropocene" within a cave located in Cape Breton. The artist's choice of site looks back upon past erosion while creating an artwork that references our current geological age.

During the Austral summer of 2009/2010, **Elise Engler** went on a residency to Antarctica and created a vast number of drawings and watercolors that render extensive, orderly representations of every object, every person and every experience she encountered. Her object is another's subjective experience. Inhabiting the conjunction of taxonomy and natural history, Engler's infinitely voluminous



**Itty Neuhaus** *Understory*, 2013

paintings and drawings capture a vast worldview with endless, information-rich content. *Ninety-Degree Draft* (2009-11) consists of ten works on paper that begin with a depiction of the white continent in the middle of a field of blue. Hundreds of detailed drawings of people, places and things as well as text populate the surface of each piece creating a visual timeline of the journey.

**Itty Neuhaus**, on the other hand, imagines the environment lurking below the frozen waste of an ice-cap. Her sculptural installation, *Understory* (2013), appears within the corner of the gallery as a fabric-enclosed cocoon that features a bi-level video installation juxtaposing the depth of the ocean with the sky. "I have had a lifelong fascination with what cannot be seen, the underworld, the underbelly, the beyond," states Neuhaus. "I am drawn to places that can be glimpsed but are somehow remote and hard to reach, both physically and metaphorically." While ice and landscape are two central themes that wind throughout her work, the artist combines the aesthetics of drawing, photography, video and installation to refer to changing states of matter, bringing together both global and personal forms of change.

The collage of **Blane De St. Croix** focuses on the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck the island of Haiti on January 12, 2010. This piece consists of many laser jet copies of the artist's intricate drawings that tear, fold and combine to create a 6-foot by 7-foot surface creating a swirling illusion that positions the viewer in a bird's-eye perspective, looking down upon a devastated forest. Flattened but rumpled across the wall, De St. Croix exposes various tensions that underlie literal and verbal ironies that appear frequently within geopolitical debates. As part of his process, the artist began by making several site visits where he met with educators, scientists, and medical workers. De St. Croix's renditions of landscape are the result of



**Michele Brody** *Drawing Roots: Sidewinder*, 2012

community involvement.

Moreover, the artist's container sculpture, *Nomadic Landscapes* (2012), recreates the genre of pastoral landscape and portrays a fraction of the Gobi Desert in Mongolia. De St. Croix renders different facets of his experience within this removed, exotic site while using a wooden shipping crate as a sculptural pedestal. The artist reaches back to traditional modes of sculptural production to capture a miniature diorama that can be turned inward, to pack for transport, or outward so as to be set against the view of a surrounding landscape. Through this irony of presentation, Blane De St. Croix addresses pointed issues such as the maintenance of memory from distant travel experiences as well as the contrasting developments taking place within the



**Blane De St. Croix** *Nomadic Landscape*, 2012

earth's terrain. *Nomadic Landscapes* was made *in-situ* and elicits a paradox that exists in nature's loyal beauty, which always appears pristine when viewed from the publicly accessible areas.

Experiences within the endless panorama become more local in the work of **Elizabeth Jordan**, Phyllis Ewen and Michele Brody. Jordan's *The Moon Gazing Hare* (2013) wood carved sculptures of rabbits held upside down while wrapped in brown twine and are connected to one another with chain links. In this sculptural assemblage, the artist selects icons of the landscape to address its devolution. As

also seen in *Looking for a Way Out* (2013) the artist aims to address nature as an ephemeral moment. Here a school of fish, made out of claystone, appears on a small wooden plinth and are set behind a border of straight pins. Within this raw aesthetic the artist presents an array of objects that suggest the sacred and totemic.

*Northern Waters* (2013) by **Phyllis Ewen** is a series of three works that consists of puzzle pieces and paint upon vellum paper layered with dissected maps, charts and photographs that further articulate the three-dimensional surface and ripple throughout the composition, alluding to the crumbling world, while coated in either aquatic or earth tones. As sculptural drawings *Northern Waters* highlights the effects of rising waters and parched earth. Darkness gradually rises in this selection which begins with swirls of white and blue ice caps that gradually transform into greens and deep blues as the series progresses, signifying the replacement of ice with new vegetation. Phyllis Ewen tests the viewer by reducing the shifting, physical nature of topography into a series of constructions offering up a solid response to recent environmental events such as hurricanes, tornados, and earthquakes. Together the artist's different combination of motifs, hues and topographic surfaces presents an undulating portrait of the contemporary environment.

**Michele Brody** places these issues on a microcosmic level in her sprout drawings. *Drawing Roots: Turning Field, September, 2011* (2011) is a sheet of handmade paper that has been imbued with sprout seeds. While the mulched paper is wet, the seeds sprout and grow as the paper dries, creating a textured drawing. Ultimately the sprouts fade into the rough-hewn surface and appear as lace-like representation that is independent of the artist's hand. *Drawing Roots: Sidewinder* (2012) consists of a black and white sheet of mulched paper. The arc of blossomed sprouts runs evenly across both surfaces, bringing together juxtaposing opposites. Brody challenges the notion of monumentality and creates sculptures that rely on botanical elements, rendering her work as time-based, ephemeral and performative.

Beyond traveling to and pondering these extreme landscapes, photographer **Scott Walden** has explored the daily lives of those who live



**Phyllis Ewen** *Northern Waters* #3, 2013



**Elizabeth Jordan** *The Moon Gazing Hare*, 2013

in the fishing community around Newfoundland. By turning away from the ocean and landscape while focusing instead on small communities, Walden captures the physical remnants left behind by an economically defunct postwar era and its attempts at social engineering. Less

political than philosophical, Walden's work explores the potential for words and images to represent the loss of place consequent upon such government-instigated programs.

*New Industries* (2005) consists of 16 pairs of juxtaposed image and text panels. Each picture shows large industrial sites and structures built soon after World War II, anticipating an economic boom that never arrived. The texts are collections of personal accounts that reflect on this time period—one filled with dashed hopes, as the post-war manufacturing and commercial boom bypassed Newfoundland. Some locations have been replaced with newer buildings, but the sense of desolation remains. *Informers* (2004) visits three fishermen at their homes who have each recreated the past in a series of handmade dioramas. Their historical observations seen in the text panels bring these small, stoic sculptures to poignant life.



**Alexis Rockman** *South*, 2008

*South* (2008) by **Alexis Rockman** is an expansive, highly detailed portrait of the Antarctic Peninsula that stretches across 30-feet in seven panels painted with oil and wax on gessoed paper. In this colossal piece, Rockman combines the documentation techniques used in Naturalist representations with the process of traditional landscape painting in order to create a document that acknowledges this particular geographic terrain as temporary. The details are the message in this painting as the artist captures a series of anomalies that occur amongst the species native to Antarctica.

Nature has historically served as metaphor for the chaotic, the uncontrolled, as well as a blissful idyll for leisurely escape. It has also functioned as a symbol of human consciousness. Since the Renaissance, the role of landscape in paintings, drawings and prints, has served Western culture's desire to create a monumental, lasting memory of civilization within the narrative of art history. Artists such as Albrecht Altdorfer, Nicolas Poussin and Gustav Courbet captured the illusion of geographic distance and physical space through the use of large-scale canvases and highly detailed renderings of flora and fauna. By reimaging the reality of untouched wilderness, the motif of landscape took on a fierce, hypnotic allure.

As the Modern Era approached in the late 19th-century, the landscapes moved from being a motif to that of a subject. It emphasized human vulnerability as industrial civilization migrated farther away from nature, toward the urban center. Caspar David Friedrich's paintings made



**Scott Walden** *Informers* (detail), 2004

during this time dwarfed the viewer, calling into question the significance of humanity in the face of something as magnificent—but ungovernable—as the grandeur of nature. In our current Information Age, resources from fields such as atmospheric sciences, oceanography, geophysics, ecology and botany have collectively followed the physical changes of the landscape as global temperatures continue to rise. Likewise contemporary artists in America and Canada have turned their attentions away from formalist aesthetics

and back toward the processes of erosion.

*Thaw* presents a series of works that call attention to the scope and significance of environmental changes, including those from some of the most remote sites on the globe. During July 2012, space satellites produced images observing that the thaw of ice was detectable over as short a time-span as several days. NASA stated that the thaw was not a localized phenomenon, but rather was evident over the entirety of Greenland's enormous ice cover. This warming responsible for this thaw may shut down the Gulf Stream, the critical warm current that traverses the Atlantic Ocean and drives the predictable rhythms of most of the earth's climate, to dramatic and perhaps catastrophic effect. The artists in *Thaw* present their own visual predictions based upon the results of their fact-finding expeditions. ■

— Jill Conner,  
November, 2013

## BIOGRAPHY

**Jill Conner** is founder of AS | ARTISTS STUDIOS and Board Member of AICA-USA. She has been a Visiting Critic to Art OMI and the LMCC, and is also the New York Editor of Whitehot Magazine, Editor of *On-Verge* as well as a contributor to *Afterimage*, *Art in America*, *Interview Magazine*, *Performance Art Journal* and *Sculpture Magazine*.

## CHECKLIST

### JANET BIGGS

FADE TO WHITE (video still), 2010  
Single-channel, high definition video with sound, 16:9 format  
12 min 28 sec  
Courtesy of the artist, CONNER-SMITH., and Winkleman Gallery

### MICHELE BRODY

DRAWING ROOTS: TURNING FIELD, SEPTEMBER, 2011, 2011  
Hand-made paper and sprout seeds  
13 x 18 in  
Courtesy of the artist  
  
DRAWING ROOTS: SIDEWINDER, 2012  
Hand-made paper and sprout seeds  
19 x 34 in (unframed)  
Courtesy of the artist

### VICKI DA SILVA

ANTHROPOCENE, 2012  
High definition video with sound  
40 sec loop  
55 in display  
Courtesy of the artist

### BLANE DE ST. CROIX

NOMADIC LANDSCAPE, 2012  
Wooden crate, acrylic paint, dirt and other natural materials from the Gobi desert  
24 x 13 x 15 in  
Courtesy of the artist  
  
HAITI/DOMINICAN REPUBLIC BORDER, 2011  
Tree Ruins: Haiti/Dominican Republic (Haitian Charcoal Field), 2011  
Collage, archival ink jet prints, ink on paper mounted on canvas  
72 x 86 in  
Courtesy of the artist

### ELISE ENGLER

NINETY-DEGREE DRAFT 1-10, 2009-2011  
Gouache, color pencil on paper  
10 drawings each 30 x 42 in  
Courtesy of the artist  
  
NINETY-DEGREE DRAFT #5, 2010  
Gouache and colored pencil on paper  
30 x 42 in  
Courtesy of the artist

### PHYLLIS EWEN

NORTHERN WATERS #1, 2013  
Sculptural drawing on Strathmore vellum paper, paint, puzzle pieces  
25 x 18 x 4 in (framed)  
Courtesy of the artist  
  
NORTHERN WATERS #3, 2013  
Sculptural Drawing on Strathmore vellum paper, paint, puzzle pieces  
25" x 18" x 4" (framed)  
Courtesy of the artist

NORTHERN WATERS #8 - Jokulhlaup, 2013  
Sculptural drawing on Epson Hot Press paper, paint, puzzle piece  
32 x 27 x 2 in  
Courtesy of the artist

### ANDREA GALVANI

HIGGS OCEAN #7, 2009-2010  
Photograph  
59 x 41 in  
Courtesy of the artist and Y Gallery, New York

### ELIZABETH JORDAN

LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT, 2013  
Claystone, india ink, gouache, wood, straight pins  
7 x 12 x 8 in  
Courtesy of the artist

THE MOON GAZING HARE, 2013  
Wire mesh, plaster, joint compound, watercolor, india ink, burlap, twine, chains  
93 x 12 x 10 in  
Photograph by Paul Takeuchi  
Courtesy of the artist

### ITYT NEUHAUS

UNDERSTORY, 2013  
Outside view, three stills from video, inside view at Esther Massry Gallery in Albany, NY, January 2013  
Foam carved icebergs, fishing net woven with hand painted fabric, paper and plastic, braided rug, bean bag chairs, projection above, monitor below  
Excerpts from the musical composition *Completely Embraced By The Beauty Of Emptiness* by Ziboukle Martinaityte  
Courtesy of the artist

### ALEXIS ROCKMAN

SOUTH, 2008  
Oil on gessoed paper  
© Alexis Rockman Photo  
Courtesy of the artist and the Pappas Family, Boston

### SCOTT WALDEN

INFORMERS (detail), 2004  
Text panel, pigmented ink on rag paper  
24 x 24 in  
Courtesy of the artist  
  
INFORMERS (detail), 2004  
Photograph, pigmented ink on rag paper  
24 x 24 in  
Courtesy of the artist

Cover: Janet Biggs *Fade to White* (video still), 2010

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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