

On Land

Chris Kerr, Curator

MarinMOCA's summer exhibition *On Land* presents the work of eleven Northern Californian artists who mine a range of explosive and restorative approaches to the natural world. **Cynthia Brannvall, Victor Cartagena, Ocean Escalanti, Don Hankins, Claudia Huenchuleo Paquien, Hughen/Starkweather, Colter Jacobsen, Vanessa Norton, Rachelle Reichert, and Angelica Trimble-Yanu** make art that in its variety of mediums and vista points on land collectively encourages deepening relations with place and nature and thus fuller acceptance and embrace of each other. The exhibition all but equates resistance to oppressive power structures with experiences of sacred interdependence with the Earth and its earths.

On Land takes place on Coast Miwoks' homeland and sets Indigenous, Feminist, and working-class engagements with nature at its center in honor and emulation of relationships to land that are profoundly more compassionate than the colonial, hypermasculine, and capitalist. As curator Kathy Zarur writes of *Preoccupations*—her exhibition of landscape art by Palestinians—several of the Indigenous artists in *On Land* are “rightly preoccupied with land [. . .], suggesting an abiding need to transform its representation” within the self-proclaimed art world and the artists' own imagistic environments. Hankins' *The Day Before They Came* brings to the present traditional forms of Miwoko? painting with foraged ochre and charcoal pigments and duck fat binder, materials that represent the cultural and natural working in tandem. Note how the half condor/half human figure and its wingspan echoes the lines and points on the seemingly charred earth, perhaps alluding to superior Indigenous stewardship of fire and forest. Reflecting on Kathryn Yusoff's question, “What conditions allow whiteness to levitate as a metaphysical and geophysical force,” Claudia Huenchuleo Paquien notes how her suspended *Indissolable Geographies* “challenges a gravity that imposes

hierarchies in the metaphysical earth by bringing forward the Mapuche relational principle of *itrofilmongen* that conceives life in all kinds of geomorphological forms." Hankins writes that his acrylic painting *Mokiʔ* evokes "a very powerful spirit originating from the sacred geography across areas of northern and central California. The spirit is often depicted as a feathered being, but it may take different forms. The spirit itself draws from creation—the land—to regenerate, create, and spread its energy." *On Land* includes a notable number of images from the sky for a show about earth. These include satellite photography, indicative of control, rendered in Reichhart's graceful hand; Hughen/Starkweather's flights across ab-extraction and other mark-making techniques, which speak to California's cataclysmic wildfires and future water wars; Huenchuleo Paquien's floating, augmented reality foye tree leaves full of Mapuche cultural and spiritual significance; and Brannvall's slipcast masks reminiscent of islands and other land masses seen while we're flying, not unlike the race across time in her faces' DNA data. In the "The Poetics of Wings" chapter of *Air and Dreams*, Gaston Bachelard writes, "Unlike conceptualization, reverie does not create a composite picture consisting of many similar objects [. . .]. The motion of flight [in reverie/dream/poetry/art] produces an immediate and overwhelming abstraction, a dynamic image that is perfect, complete and total." The painting *Mokiʔ* feels similarly immediate, dynamic, and absorbing rather than picturesquely pictorial, the imagining of the image and its gentle grip extending beyond its framing. Similarly, Trimble-Yanu's land-scraped, oil-spilling abstract depictions of the Black Hills of South Dakota emit a stretching and restoratively encircling, numinous sense that might infuse a sacred image or being like the Oglála Lakǰóta's White Buffalo Calf Woman emerging from the dark. "Each brush stroke," Hankins writes of his ethereal *Mokiʔ*, "carries the experiences and knowledges of the ancestors to revitalize what is most necessary and important in this world—the maintenance of reciprocal relationships with nature, its healing power, and our ultimate connection to it." Or as Miwok-Hopi poet Wendy Rose writes in "Turning,"

the song rides down from a star
over burgundy boulders
beneath a dazzling blue sky
to find the old words
buried deep in the earth.

Many of the artworks in the exhibition generate a force on our being like a wide view of imperiled land. Some feel molecularly ecological. Art is one of the best things to do when the fibers of creation are sick and sickened. Escalanti offers poetic and Norton novelistic takes on the drought-addled Sonoran desert, which provides much of the produce for the U.S. in winter. They grapple also with agribusiness's inhumanely toxic New River and what Escalanti's quilt calls "venom viaduct" and "salt lick wound." Hankins and Jacobsen reflect on sun-baked California chromatics and awakened directionality. Huenchuleo Paquien dyes wool and critiques hegemonies with keen interest in her Mapuche heritage. Her suitcase root system is imbued with home ecology and evocative of psychospiritual de- and reforestation.

On Land believes in the intersectionality of form, the elementally yet culturally inflected formal. Striation is a common thread across *On Land's* works. Horizontal lines read as a depiction of earth in *The Day Before They Came*, *Indissoluble Geographies*, Brannvall's *Continents*, and Huguen/Starkweather's *Collective Amnesia (Pipe Dreams)*. Variations on the flat line such as Trimble-Yanu's *You Look To See What The Light Let In 2* look like slices of life from the land. Artworks across the show connect earth to other elements, be it water in Jacobsen's memory drawing/s *River* and Norton's *Eliza, Calxico*, air in Escalanti's *Web Spinner* and Reichert's *In the Air and On the Ground*, and fire in Huguen/Starkweather's *Ash up to My Shins*. Art that crosses elements and/or cultures seems a sound place to address ecology. Robert Smithson writes dualistically against the pastoral that "the gardens of history are being replaced by sites of time," and in *Earthwards*, Gary Shapiro's study of *Spiral Jetty*, he defines sites of time as "those

locations that manifest the forces of growth, change, decay, spoliation, mixture, and drift." Several artworks in *On Land* serve as representations of sites of time in that they bring to mind, heart, and being such elemental, element-focused, and ecological forces and yet they do not strive to escape history or the handmade. For example, Cartagena's *Labor Tea* enacts and imparts growth born of the work and suffering of Salvadoran immigrants. Brannvall's *The Threads That Bind a Divided Nation* convey decay and rupture of our national structure, infrastructure, spirit.

Prominent verticals in *On Land* include the collective gaze filling a room's ascent in *Labor Tea*, those loosely depicting the Black Hills, Brannvall's multiracial columns of DNA infographics, and the gas-pumping woman in Norton's *Piss Arizona*. Diagonals move through the show sparingly, strikingly as in Reichert's deconstructivist shapes from space and her copper and graphite branches, Jacobsen's crazy quilt of roadside found paper, Escalanti's web with its strength in triangulation, and her *Mother's Daughter* poem-quilt's ratio of slant-to-axes, which likely equals that of the exhibition. A visual artwork's deepest-rooted meanings tend to be conveyed by simple and direct formal means. Take the verticality of *Piss Arizona*'s torso and urine stream and how they expand and impart her power to those who stand before her.

The way in which an environment fuses into our biological makeup and conscious identity is perhaps represented by how the show's sculpted and found desert shards mirror woman-made tree branches and genetic graphmasks. Cartagena's assemblages of immigrants' faces and inner resources in *Blood Donor* and their suggestion of violence's epigenetic outcomes can be read in relation to the defacing of the earth in Reichert's drawings of lithium mines and erased forests. Brannvall renders continents subsumed in textile industries and shadism. The hanging gradations of *Indissoluble Geographies* make particular senses in relation to the disappearance of self and remembering of nature in the *River* drawing/s suite masterpiece. Chords are struck by Norton's performance photography of underwear thrown into the perverse ecology of the New River and her crowd-sourced-photo avatar of archetypal Woman Heeding

Nature's Call—an exemplar from her *Piss America* series, a fundraiser for abortion. Such chords resemble a national textile's seismic release.

Our consciousnesses must become as ecological as they essentially are. In "Of the Earth," ecopoet Ed Roberson writes to Luis J. Rodriguez,

I believe you when you say, Luis,
water is the skin of the earth.
The pull thinnest of that water, the air
carries in its sack inside-out our lungs.

So join us *On Land* for a concerted aesthetic experience that aims for a chorus of challenge and comfort that echoes a healthy psychology and ecosystem. The exhibition includes a poetry reading in rounds between Forrest Gander and Lehua Taitano on August 5 as well as the public's stories of land gathered by Huenchuleo Paquien and Hughen/Starkweather on June 25. The artists, guest curator Chris Kerr, and MarinMOCA's hope is that *On Lands'* imagery, materials, and voices help you hear a song of yourself and your homeland.