



that
space,
that
garden

July 2022

WALLSPACE

1624 S 17th St, Lincoln, Nebraska 68502

Leah Koransky

Emily Margarit Mason

Meg Roussos

Meganelizabeth Diamond

Madeline Cass

curated by Madeline Cass



There is a phenomenon that I've come to pay attention to when I am driving home on the freeway at dusk.

You may know it, too, the phenomenon of the Unknowable Blue, a cool cast over a desert (a prairie)(a marsh)(a forest) that is becoming increasingly hot to the touch.

This is an example of a great coming together;

a compression of color and time into a block of blue;
a blue that you can almost touch (that you want to touch¹).

This is where the garden begins, welcome, friend -

1

Gardens, traditionally, have been spaces for invention. Though some are publicly accessible and others are ticketed, most are in private backyards, frontyards, side yards and windowsills; their curation is driven by the same impetus that leads us to collect and display seashells from our trips to the beach or to pick up strange and delicate figurines at the thrift store. Though gardens are literally rooted in topsoil, their emotional origin springs from sentiment, from the desire to be moved; I think about the ornamental blooms that my grandmother and my mother so lovingly attended with the goal of bringing forth something living but also fleeting.

This makes the garden a fitting home for the works of Madeline Cass (NE), Meganelizabeth Diamond (CAN), Leah Koransky (CA), Emily Margarit Mason (NM) and Meg Roussos (WA), all artists engaging with the medium of photography in a way that allows for the image, like a flower, to take root

and then, to expand -

that space, that garden is full of images that stretch long and looming, of representations rendered in spectres and shadows that offer propositions of what could come next²; that ask questions about the lines between things like image / likeness / life (?)



¹ Leah Koransky has, somehow, figured out how to effectively capture this sense of closeness through her contact prints of passing shadows in her domestic environment, creating images that compress time and motion into a single, static object both sensuous in tone and hypnotic in form.

² It is Madeline Cass that offers us a vision of this proposition, of this potential anxiety, as she embraces an intense intimacy through the combination of imagery featuring prescribed burns with the body. This proposes a literal and impossible dichotomy that encourages the examination of fire as a feature of the land, as a tool and as a threat.

2

The genre of “landscape photography” has always toed this particular line, which looks more like a spectrum. On one end, there is ‘life’, which can be summarized as terrestrial sensations taken in through literal experience; on the other end is ‘image’, which is presented as an artifact of an encounter with the landscape. ‘Likeness’ lives in the middle because it is the most honest about its representation³ and we move through it to arrive at something like a photograph, which has a rich (and continuing) history of insidious doctoring⁴.

This middleground of Likeness is where new perspectives and histories begin to find their way to us. Traditional photographs concerned with landscape are often hinged on formal compositional elements, meaning that they are often ascribed to the Modernist school of image-making and are marred with labels like straight photography. They are meant to be taken at face-value as a reliable substitute for the literal view experienced by the image maker. To consider an image of a landscape as a likeness instead of a literal representation complicates this.

To consider these two categories as separate ways of seeing is also to consider where they overlap, here, again, there is the phenomenon of sudden compression, as to link the beginning (life) and the end (image) of a spectrum is to form a circle⁵.

This point of meeting is the entry point to that space, that garden;
where the beginning and the end have already met; where the literal is
suspended,
willingly over a pool that swirls the categories of specimen,
spectacle, and referent into a singular
pulse -

This push and pull that the artists engage in exemplifies that paradox of closeness that their images prop up, encourage, or invent in the first place. This is the same push and pull that the garden, itself, must understand. As an outdoor extension of interior domestic concerns (like beauty as decoration, like a pleasant smell to fill a room), the garden is a contested space⁶

3 Emily Margarit Mason’s studio still lifes exemplify this idea of ‘likeness’ on a spectrum of landscape imagery. She allows us to understand that she is operating on an interpretive plane; she is the machine that is processing and re-presenting a landscape that is experienced not only physically and emotionally as well.

4 Here, I’m referencing everything from AI DeepFake technology, which I find to be personally terrifying, to the basic (and intensive) retouching that has been blamed as the root-cause of womens’ broader self-esteem issues for years

5 This sense of a circular feedback loop is a tool that Meganelizabeth Diamond harnesses effectively in compositions that blur the line between what is found, what is built, and what is responsive. Her work utilizes itself, allowing images to become active, building relationships between themselves as the artist works with them.

6 Meg Roussos’ landscape interventions showcase the ongoing struggle between entities of regulation (the United States Forest Service, weekend warriors, solo dog-walkers) and chaos (or maybe: entropy, or maybe, simply: lack of control). Though a wooden parquet path may be installed (even: embedded) in the midst of a wooded trail, the context of the same material presented in two ways is too great to reconcile. What is there to be done when a child’s outgrown its home? When there is no longer an option for return?



3



4

where only a certain amount of wildness is permitted. There is a tangible frustration with this in the works presented in this show; what is the right amount of wild? Is there a way to reconcile our desire for control with the reality of not knowing?

To be in nature, to engage with nature as a co-conspirator, a collaborator, a confidant or a partner is to surround oneself with a force often labeled as “unknowable” or, “beyond words”. It is worth noting that these qualifiers are reductive in some way because of the way that they categorize nature as sublime⁷, which is a qualifier that flattens the whole thing out.

How are we to know something that is made to feel too large, too expansive, to engage with?

This is an impossible task.

The victory claimed by that space, that garden over all others is the embrace of human interpretation of the landscape as an experience rather than an object. Through perspectives informed by queer and femme identities, this falsely unknowable landscape begins to reveal itself in fragments; there is a larger picture here, as there always is, one that is informed by embracing the impossibility of absolute knowledge and acceptance of the subjective, of the impassioned, of the psychological.

⁷ This is meant in the art-historical sense: the sublime as in ‘so beautiful that it hurts, that I’m brought to my knees...’ etc. etc. etc.



5