

My work can perhaps be described as conceptual ecology, or pragmatist artmaking. My disparate though generally minimalist practice occurs in varied scrap media. In various ways, moreover, I've been thinking in my making life about the relationships between scales, time spans, modesty and bluntness. I build in a simple way, trying to engage with the objects and ideas I find compelling so as to provoke and complicate my own thought processes. I hope that the things I make can command attention without asking for it.

Neither a specialist nor a generalist, I feel free to move between research interests, and to keep my investigations unrestricted. With sea-, rail-, and foot-transport as subjects, I've developed projects, and objects, in proximate relation to cartography, geography and geology. I approach the forest and the library similarly, treating language and visuality as an amalgam. Whatever the object of concern—a blanket, book, rock, or shipping pallet—I have always perceived physical, aesthetic thingness as being simultaneous with and of equal import to intellectual and emotional information. I imagine that my practice might hone how we perceive and order our knowledge of the world.

A natural consequence of my process is that I often find myself pulling ideas conceived elsewhere into another form. I have composed music based on Friedrich Froebel's original kindergarten system; developed indexes that variously transpose books by novelist W.G. Sebald, activist Jane Addams, and Pragmatist philosophers John Dewey and William James; made paintings and sculptures alongside the microscripts of the Swiss-German writer Robert Walser, as a response to them and a way better to perceive their ways of making meaning. In such projects, and in my approach to ideas and to things, I am as much an editor as an author: it is important to me that the given or found should remain evident, even as I make various kinds of decisions—editorial, compositional, or other—upon or with the given.

My various activities in the last decade have come out of my commitment to attend simply and directly to the experience of attending to the world/s of seeing and thinking.

My first solo institutional exhibition was in 2001, at the Renaissance Society in Chicago. I had spent the prior year in Kerala, South India, where I commissioned a weaving cooperative in Tamil Nadu working in the sustainable crafts of vegetable dyeing and non-motorized loom weaving to produce an indigo cloth for me. From this I constructed *Sky-wreck*, a large-scale floor sculpture, at a scale of 1:333, of one eleventh of the sky, if the sky were a geodesic structure.

My next substantial solo exhibition was *Declining Interval Lands*, in the Contemporary Series at the Whitney Museum of American Art. I approached the intertwined subjects of immigration, railroad building, and deforestation through the specific history of the elm tree. The works included a sort of timeline regarding the elm tree and early Quaker environmentalism, a sound piece which traced the geographical borders for the growth of the elm tree, and two sculptures, one in wool and one in wood. The exhibition marked the first time I used reclaimed shipping pallets as a sculptural material, which I chose to do because the pallets are everywhere to be found, and because each one, materially and formally, traces labor, travel, and the forest.

In the autumn of 2002, during a residency at the University of California, Berkeley, I was invited to make an exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum under the auspices of the multi-year multi-museum arts consortium, "Awake: Art, Buddhism, and the

Dimensions of Consciousness.” The resulting exhibition, *65 instants*, materialized out of my attempt to read alongside one another the Pragmatist philosopher C.S. Peirce’s conception of thirdness and the second-century Madhyamaka philosopher Nagarjuna’s proposals regarding perception and emptiness.

I participated in the 2003 Venice Biennale with *Coastline*, a straightforward sculpture made with a stack of green army surplus blankets next to a stack of blue navy blankets. Though I developed the work particularly for the site, it refers to the insidious militarized landscape at large.

In 2004, while I was Artist in Residence at the Center for Book Arts at Mills College, I handset an index for W.G. Sebald’s novel *The Rings of Saturn*, which I had composed while at Berkeley. This was the first of six indexes I have written, in which I attempted to turn that familiar form into poetry. In the Mills College printing studio, multi-instrumentalist, improviser and composer Fred Frith and I enacted a further transformation by playing a public concert for letterpress and guitar, using the print as our score.

While in Berlin as a guest of the DAAD Künstlerprogramm (2005-2006), I worked mainly on sculptures that were made from reclaimed shipping pallets and tuned to the particulars of my studio, which was located on the edge of the city, in a building built in 1939 for Arno Breker. The work from this period was documented in the book *Helen Mirra im Grunewald* (Berlin: DAAD, 2006). A second book relating to my indexing project was published as *Cloud, the, 3* (Zürich: Ringier, 2007) with an afterword by Language poet Lyn Hejinian.

My work on indexing as a poetic intervention led me, in the spring of 2006, to a public art project completed as part of the Mellon-sponsored program “New Perspectives on the Disciplines: Comparative Studies in Higher Education,” which was coordinated by the Franke Institute for the Humanities at the University of Chicago. For this project, I wrote indexes for two books by authors who were closely connected to the histories of the University of Chicago and the City of Chicago: John Dewey’s *Experience and Nature* (1925) and Jane Addams’ *Newer Ideals of Peace* (1907). Colleagues and friends, Dewey and Addams were both motivated by a progressive and political community engagement. Each realized far-reaching experiments in coordinating forms of knowledge, guided therein by a principle of integration, whether in relation to ideas, disciplines, or social groups. *Instance the determination* takes the form of thirty brief segments of text, each a single index entry, painted directly on the wall, and dispersed in locations across the University of Chicago campus. Decontextualized in the liminal spaces of stairwells and hallways, encountered during routine movement through the university, these mined texts behave not as signifiers referring back to their source texts, but instead point outwards to the world at large. The Summer 2009 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, which records the Mellon project, includes photographic documentation of many of the index entries *in situ*, along with related essays by critical theorists Bill Brown and W.J.T. Mitchell.

A more intuitive recent endeavor relates to the late work of Robert Walser, in whom I became interested first through strong visual response and then as a reader. Written or, better, inscribed in pencil, in a very small hand, on scraps of paper, this work (referred to collectively as *die Mikrogramme*, or *aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*) is materially and textually of and about the minor and the itinerant. My interest in Walser led me to travel in January 2007 to the various places where Walser lived in Switzerland, culminating with a week at the Walser archive in Zürich. Upon returning to Cambridge, I made a group of paintings and sculptures, which I first showed in an exhibition titled *Waldau*, after the psychiatric clinic where he lived and walked from 1929 to 1933.

In the summer of 2007 I returned my focus to ecology more narrowly conceived and in so doing found myself moving somewhat outside a familiar lexicon. Taking advantage of an invitation from the Office of Contemporary Art Norway to participate in their International Studio Program, I spent three months working in Oslo, making a group of works related to botany and geology. I started here to think of the rock as a signifier which functions as a synecdoche for the landscape's substance. I traveled far north to Tromsø to investigate the fragile arctic ecosystem, and also spent time in Trondheim studying the tapestries of Hannah Ryggen (1894-1970), an artist whose political thinking is impossible to extricate from her direct material practice. My work brought me into the company of plants and rocks, both in the alpine landscape and at the Oslo Herbarium and Geological Museum. The sculptural work using rocks, plants and lichen that emerged from these encounters seemed to me at first out of step with my more familiarly conceptual practice, but in time I came to connect the sensibility and scale of the sculptures with the decisiveness that drew me to Walser's work and with the directness of Ryggen's encounter with her environment.

During this time, commissioned by the General Services Administration (GSA), I began work on an Art-in-Architecture project in the U.S., for a border station at Warroad, Minnesota. In response to the specificity of the landscape and ecosystem of the site, I proposed a pair of complementary works, indexing the different colors of the stark landscape through the seasons, and drawing attention to the birds which migrate, disregarding border controls, through the area. A group of five differently monochromatic 'signs' are set in the context of a stand of tamaracks, each indexing a color of those trees during a particular time of year. Depending on the season, certain signs will stand out from the landscape, while others will camouflage themselves. The signs are minimalist by design, and are intended to draw attention most to the landscape that, as given, goes unperceived. Within the public space of the building, a text painting made directly on the wall harmonizes with the outdoor work. From among the birds that migrate through Roseau County, the text selects thirty-six whose names all include a characterizing color (e.g., ruby-throated hummingbird, yellow warbler, purple finch). The names of the birds are organized following the color spectrum, and the resulting composition offers a visual rhythm akin to a treeline.

In 2008-09, during a residency in Switzerland, my investigations of the sciences and the poetics of the local ecology became both less specific and more compelling. I spent a lot of time in the mountains, hiking and collecting rocks, occupied by the idea of one's perceiving a transference of one's experiences and feelings onto an environment, onto the world of things. As I collected each rock, I marked its location on the trail map, and, placing a camera on the ground in what had been the rock's spot, took a photograph, ostensibly of what the rock 'saw' from that place. Back in the studio, I placed the rocks on folded Swiss military blankets as staging grounds, noting that the size of the folded blanket was the same size as an unfolded trail map. Through this process I found a way to join together the activities of walking and artmaking.

My interest in the experience of walking as central to my art practice continues. At present, the literal field has displaced the studio. I am in the planning stages of a project with the working title, *Umherwandern: 750,000 Schritte in Berlin, 500 Kilometer um Bonn, 30 Tage nah an Zürich*. Out of these walks, I will make exhibitions in 2011 and 2012 at institutions in the three cities: Kunstwerke (Berlin), Bonner Kunstverein, and Haus Konstruktiv (Zürich). My preliminary plan is to map the walking, at various scales (30 cm: 3 km, length of arm: 1000 steps, etc.) making inked prints of paradigmatic materials encountered en route. The project thus picks up a thread from earlier works in which I made latitude lines in various media and at various scales: as hand-painted 16mm films (at a scale of one foot to one degree), as 16mm cotton banding (at one inch to one degree), and as sound (at a scale of ten seconds to one degree).