

**Art, Ecology and the Politics of Land Use<sup>1</sup>**

Proposal for the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program Assistantship   Fall 2015

Department of Art and Art History

Applicant: XXXXXXXX majoring in Painting and Drawing and Art History

Faculty Advisor: XXXXXXXX, Associate Professor of Painting and Drawing

Co Faculty Advisor: XXXXXXXX, Associate Professor of Art History

Sample

1. The title, "Art, Ecology and the Politics of Land Use" is credited to Paul Monty Paret. "The Altered Landscape: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use." Seminar, University of Utah, UT. Spring 2015

**Statement of the topic of research or creative work:**

Since the 1990's the politics of land use have become a major theme in contemporary art and theory. As we acknowledge an "age in which humans began to systematically shape the earth's surface on a planetary scale, and [in which] political and economic forces began to have geological consequences,"<sup>2</sup> artworks have set out to address the enduring impact of humanity's practices on the earth.

In Utah alone, economic, political and social conflicts have determined the irradiation of land, as the Great Basin has become home to military and toxic industry, and the severe pollution of our air quality. The structure of our landscape illustrates conflicts, histories, and ideologies that can be investigated as a cultural artifact and that also often are overlooked as seemingly natural aspects of our everyday lives.

I propose to create a body of artwork that engages with changing ideas about nature, land, ecology, industry and human history within the great basin and that focuses on Salt Lake City. The goal of this creative work is to offer a viable questioning of our land use practices and the sustainability of these practices by coupling objective documentation in photographs, maps, and site visits with subjective creations in painting, drawing, photography, mapping and installation. This body of work would be interdisciplinary between artistic practice, geography, history, ecology, geology, and cartography.

By approaching this research as a creative practice I hope to engage viewers with these issues by making them visible and approachable as artworks. I want to question our perception

of a seemingly natural landscape so that we can simply be aware of our surroundings. To do this it is necessary to look carefully at the ecology of the Salt Lake Valley; to look closer into industries that are hidden in our deserts; and to try and understand how we shape and frame our perceptions of nature and environmentalism.

2. Trevor Paglen. "Geographies of Time." The Last Pictures. Berkeley ; Los Angeles ; Berkley; Los Angeles ; London: University of California Press and Creative Time Books, 2012.

Guiding research Questions:

- How do we affect our landscape and ecology?
- What is the extent of our vision into the social, political, and economic practices that surround us?
- How does the landscape reflect political, economic, and social practices?
  - How has human intervention caused ecological crisis?
  - What are our environmental practices?
  - How and why are military and toxic industries present in Utah?
  - How are social structures apparent in our landscape and geography?
  - What is the ideological identity associated with this landscape?
  - What symbolic and cultural meaning is carried in this landscape?
  - How does ownership of property and territory define a place?
  - What boundaries and borders delineate this landscape and what is their significance?
- How has nature been depicted in artwork?
  - How has environmentalism been visualized in art in the past?
  - What is the theory surrounding environmentalist art and land art?
  - What is our perception of the desert and how does this affect what we use the desert for.
  - How are these land practices, especially toxic industry and pollution, normalized?
  - How can we engage and think about viable solutions to environmental problems?

- What is the history of the Great basin and of Salt Lake City.
  - Retrace the history of the structuring of our landscape, how and why was this city structured the way it is?
  - What are the historical facets of a seemingly natural landscape?
  - How has the geography of Salt Lake been structured around Mormonism?
  - How has this landscape been mapped?
  - What artifacts does it contain? And what does this tell us about history?

### **Relevant Background/ Literature Review:**

The movement of land-based and geopolitical art practice in contemporary art has been the basis for an extensive body of scholarship that originates with historical land artists in the 1960's and 70's and has culminated in many texts discussing theory and contemporary artists.

The following sources are selected influential scholarship in this field of theory.

1. Paul Monty Paret. "The Altered Landscape: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Land Use." Seminar, University of Utah UT. Spring 2015.
2. Kelly Baum. *Nobody's Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010.
3. Yates Mckee. "Land Art in Parallax: Media, Violence, and Political Ecology". Printed in Kelly Baum's. *Nobody's Property: Art, Land, Space, 2000-2010*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010. P. 55.
4. Robert Smithson. "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Dialectical Landscape," 1973. In *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Robert Smithson edited by Jack Flam. Berkley: University of California Press, 1996.
5. T.J. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Art and Ecology," in *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a changing Planet, 1969-2009*, ed. Jonathan Porritt [Cologne: Walther Köning; London; Barbican Art Gallery, 2009],17-30.
6. Emily Eliza Scott and Kristen Swenson, ed. *Critical Landscapes: Art and the Politics of Land Use*. Oakland, CA. University of California Press. 2015.

7. "The Center for Land Use Interpretation." The Center for Land Use Interpretation.  
<http://clui.org/section/about-center>.

### **Specific Activities to be Undertaken and Plan of Action:**

The timeline for this work will start in late August and end in late November.

The creative work to be undertaken will include:

1. Research of maps/cartographic history of specific sites. (Semester Long)
2. Site visits, Documentation of sites: (Semester Long)
  - a. Skull Valley Indian Reservation
  - b. Orbital ATK's Rocket Garden Display
  - c. Dugway Proving Grounds
  - d. NSA USA Data Center
  - e. Magchorn Magnesium Chloride Plant
  - f. Kennecott Copper Smelter
  - g. The Golden Spike National Historic Monument
  - h. The Spiral Jetty
  - i. The Great Saltair
  - j. Salt Lake Valley, a cartographic history
  - k. Park City, a cartographic history
  - l. Photographs of the Salt Lake Valley throughout the semester
3. 2-3 Artworks of photograph and map series
  - a. Compilation of photographs, (Semester long)
    - i. Professional prints of photographs
  - b. Compilation of maps found through research. (Semester long)
    - i. Printing/ copying/ drawing of maps
4. 3-5 large artworks
  - a. Preparatory Drawings (Charcoal on Paper)
  - b. Paintings (2-3 week time period) 30"x40" oil and acrylic
    - i. Building wooden supports and stretching canvas
  - c. Drawing (2-3 week time period)
5. Document and compile the artworks online. (1 week)

Possibility to exhibit the work Spring 2016 at the Annual Student Art Exhibition and the BFA/ Alt Student Show, or in a local gallery.

**Relationship of the proposed work to the expertise of the faculty mentor:**

My creative work is first and foremost an artistic expression of landscape on the topic of land use, and a painting and drawing professor will be best able to guide me in this process. My mentor's current work focuses on landscape imagery in painting and drawing that uses a form of artistic cartography. Her use of untraditional depictions of landscape invokes environmental issues in a way that is closely related to the concepts that I am interested in, and I hope to use some of the visual devices and painting techniques in my mentor's work to progress as an artist.

**Relationship of the proposed work to future goals:**

I have completed an independent study in this field where I worked on semester long research projects with leading scholars. I contributed this research to the National Toxic/Land and Labor Conservation Service which exhibited my work at the Cooper Union, NYC in October 2014 as part of the "National Cold War Monuments and Heritage Trail," and as a photography exhibition series, "Show Up Show Down: No-nonsense Encounters with World-changing Contemporary Art" at Central Features in Albuquerque, NM in February 2015, and which will be installed at the Wende Museum, Los Angeles, in 2017. I hope to continue my research in this field as part of my artistic practice so that I can further contribute to this field of contemporary art, continue to exhibit artwork at local galleries, and develop a body of work for graduate school.