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The Nothing

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The Nothing

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Fine Arts

By

Hettie Haudenschild

B.F.A. The Museum School, 2003

May, 2011

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Abstract

This thesis is a description and analysis of work that I produced during my Graduate studies at The University of New Orleans. The central theme of these work is the end of the world. Through prints, sculpture and painting I explore this idea.

Key words: Environment, prints, fear, interactive, sculpture, anger, painting.

Introduction:

“A strange sort of nothing is destroying everything.” -The Neverending Story

I am paranoid, sad and frightened that the world is ending due to how disconnected humans have become towards the environment. There are so many of us now on the planet, and we have learned how to efficiently take from the earth and seas what we want, but there is not enough for all of us. Wars have already begun over oil and a doomsday vault for the world's seeds has been created in Norway.

My work addresses the idea of the world ending and the modern relationship between humans and nature through printmaking, sculpture, and painting.

Printmaking.

I imagine what the end of the world looks like. In my head it is a place that is desolate of life, there is nothing left because humans have used it all up. The world is hot because of the escalation of the greenhouse effect, and fires and smoke fill the air. Everything was destroyed in the last war. A war where everyone fought each other because there was not enough to sustain life and people became full of panic. They fought each other and destroyed everything on their hunt for food and water. The water was toxic, acid rains, and acid oceans. The crops did not grow because the smog was so thick that the light could not get through. Everything in my end of the world just started to die and there was no stopping it.

In the screen-print/ monoprint series titled "The End of The World" and "The Stones That Were Left" I tried to depict a world that is bare and lifeless. There is a lot of white paper space in both of these pieces. I want this space to signify the emptiness,. There are a few cut branches that are red hot and smoldering in a fire. In "The End of The World" the smoke from the fire is rising up into a blue sky. The sky seems blue and healthy except for a spattering of hot pink. Pink in both of these screenprints/monoprints represents the artificial and toxic. I wanted to use colors that were representational and while hot pink can be found in nature it is not yet found as a gas haze drifting across the landscape or in the sky.



Figure 1. The End of the World. 2009



Figure 2. The Stones That Were Left, 2009.

Both of these pieces were created using a screenprint/ monoprint process. Screenprint paint is applied by running a squeegee across the paper. This gives the print a wash of horizontal color and sets the stage for a landscape. Then the piece is put through the press as a monoprint and finally stencils of objects are printed on top of the monoprint. This process is important to these pieces because the inks lay on top of each other but also remains translucent, creating atmosphere and depth. I used a larger sized paper for these pieces so that the visual effect of space has its optimal effect.

On September 2nd, 2010 an oilrig exploded killing 11 men and sending millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The damage was devastating. Fish and birds washed ashore along with tar balls. To make matters worse BP couldn't seem to cap the leak, so more and more oil leaked out into the Gulf. They lit the oil on fire in attempt to stop it from seeping into the vulnerable wetlands. The fumes drifted over the city of New Orleans and of southern Louisiana.

From the French Quarter to New Orleans East, people here have been complaining about a tinge to the air that is unsettling even by local standards.

Many suspect that it has something to do with the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, which has already leaked millions of gallons of crude about 50 miles

of the Louisiana coast. The authorities involved in the cleanup of the fallen Deepwater Horizon oilrig have been burning oil on the surface of the gulf and using chemical dispersants around the leak. ¹

The piece “Oil Fish” is in direct response to this event. It is important for me on a personal level to address the devastating environmental current events that I have no control over or that I can in no way help to rectify. Creating art about these atrocities at least creates a dialogue. “Oil Fish” is an intaglio collage. The fish are piled on top of each other, with mouths open and eyes blank. The fish are dead. The collage is mounted on two black scratchy monotypes that were printed side by side. This side printing creates a narrative that is read from left to right like a storyboard. The rectangle monoprints are broken up by the collage.

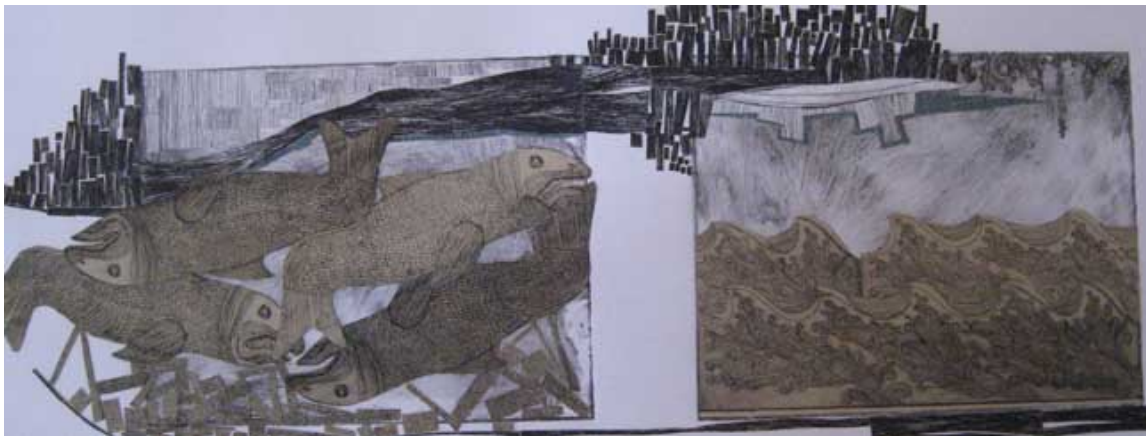


Figure 3. Oil Fish. 2010

¹ Saulny, Susan. “ Odd Smell in New Orleans, Thoughts of the Gulf” The New York Times- Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. 14 May 2010. Web. 01 Mar. 2011 <<http://www.nytimes.com/>

The Intaglios were made using black oil based ink. The plates were not properly wiped so the oil ink residue lays on the image of the fish. Each fish was individually printed so that each plate could be rubbed in a different way. I imagined with this piece that a school of fish swam into an oil slick. The school is uniform but the suffering and attack of oil is individual.

Sculpture.

Fur is a charged material. It is sensual and beautiful and alludes to the status of the wealthy. It is also the hide of an animal, usually that of an animal that was raised in a cage for its fur. This human relationship with nature has become removed to the point that the fur is seen as its own object; not the fur of an animal that was killed solely for its fur. I wanted to address this removal, because this removal has been happening on a grander scale with the whole of the natural world. It is allowing us to treat nature as a commodity.

I created the wolf close to the proportions of a grown male wolf. The wolf stands 26 inches tall and five feet long. The teeth are exaggerated, consuming half of its face and cast in aluminum. The teeth are pitted except for the tips that are polished and shinny. They are bound to a celluclay skull by thick rusty wire. The fur of the wolf is made from three different fur coats that have been roughly cut up. The intention is for the fur coats to remain identifiable and so bits of satin and tags have been left on and left visible. It is also important that this piece be made with fur coats that were bought second hand, because buying new fur coats for the project would be hypocritical. The entire wolf is then wrapped in chicken wire. The chicken wire is bound tightly around the animal. The wolf seems to be growing inside a

cage, its fur pushing against the wire. Wire is also bound around the sculpture, binding it and tying it to the structure.

The wolf is a creature that is traditionally feared by humans, so feared in fact that it has been nearly whipped out in the continental United States and in western Europe. Cautionary stories of wolves in folklore and in fairytales are told to children still: such as the story of Peter and the Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood. In little Red Riding Hood a girl and her grandmother are tricked by a clever wolf and gobbled up. A woodsman comes to their rescue and slices open the belly of the wolf, releasing the girl and her grandmother.

“All the better to eat you with”

And scarcely had the wolf said this, when with one bound he was out of bed and swallowed up Red Riding Hood.²

The piece “Wolf” intends to trigger a primal fear by conjuring up the imagery of the beast of childhood lore. We are told as children what to fear, and the deep dark forest is a place that is constantly warned against. If we are told to fear something over and over again then of course we will fear it and of course we want to destroy that fear. The “Wolf” is a sad and scary piece, it is a Frankenstein of fur

² Hyman, Trina Schart., Jacob Grimm, and Wilhelm Grimm. *Little Red Riding Hood*. New York: Holiday House, 1983. Print. Pg. 15

coats, it represents a time when there were predators in woods, it stands trapped in a chicken wire cage and bound with wire reminding us that the only wolves that we can find in America today are the ones that live their lives in cages till they are ready to be skinned for their hides.



Figure 4. The Wolf. 2009

The first piece I saw of Damien Hirst's was at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York titled *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. The piece is a tiger shark suspended in a glass tank full of formaldehyde. It is a simple and shocking piece. It is effective because it addresses our fear and our curiosity. The shark, like many predatory animals, has its myths and lore's surrounding its existence in the human world such as the sensational shark film of the 80's, JAWS. We want to examine what we are afraid of; we want it behind glass, stuffed. We want to remind ourselves that we can kill it and we do kill it to near extinction. Humans don't realize that they are tampering with the food chain and ultimately we create an unbalance that affects us.

In my sculpture titled "The Decision" I wanted to explore the individual response to nature. I wanted to address the fear and control. In "The Decision" fifteen rabbit like creatures stand on pointed feet in a semi circle. Their mouths are open. Each rabbit is unique but together they seem uniform. There are no identifying characteristics on these creatures, other than their shape. They have no eyes, no teeth, no fur, and no claws. They are made of celluclay and are painted a matte white. The celluclay gives the rabbits a deceiving quality; it makes them appear as though they are heavier and stronger than they are.



Figure 5. The Decision, 2008.

This piece is an interactive installation piece. A person must stand in front of the rabbits in order for the piece to activate as art. When the viewer steps in front of the piece I hope for there to be a confrontation of ideas. I want the viewer to be confronted about how they feel in front of these rabbit creatures. The rabbits have their mouths open, are they speaking to the viewer, about to eat the viewer, laughing at the viewer? Their pointed feet could be depicted as delicate or as weapons. I wanted this piece to speak about the relationship that humans have with the natural animal world and how that relationship is a highly personalized one.

Painting

Animals and humans have a complicated modern relationship. There can be a cruelty in how we treat animals that we consider food. We maximize profits by squeezing desirable edible animals into small cages and pumping them full of antibiotics so they don't die in the hazardous environment that we have created for them. They have a life of hell. An animal as a commodity is a reoccurring theme in my work. In the paintings "Rabbit Tied to a Stone" and "Goose Tied To a Stone" I try to address the cruelty that humans inflict on animals. These painting/ drawings are of animals tied to stones by wire. . The animals are under three black stars referring to the saying "born under a dark star" which refers to a person having a life filled with bad luck. Kiki Smith was an influential force to these paintings. Smith creates a solid world with her nature based drawings and paintings and has a confidence in creating her own interpretation of animals. She also creates an atmosphere for her pieces by using the space of her paper and giving her drawing and painting room to breathe.

These paintings have simple strong lines and the color pallet is a muted, black, white and gray. The animals have distressed expressions on their faces, showing their pain and fear. The animals have been drawn from memory.



Figure 6. Rabbit Tied To A Stone, 2010.

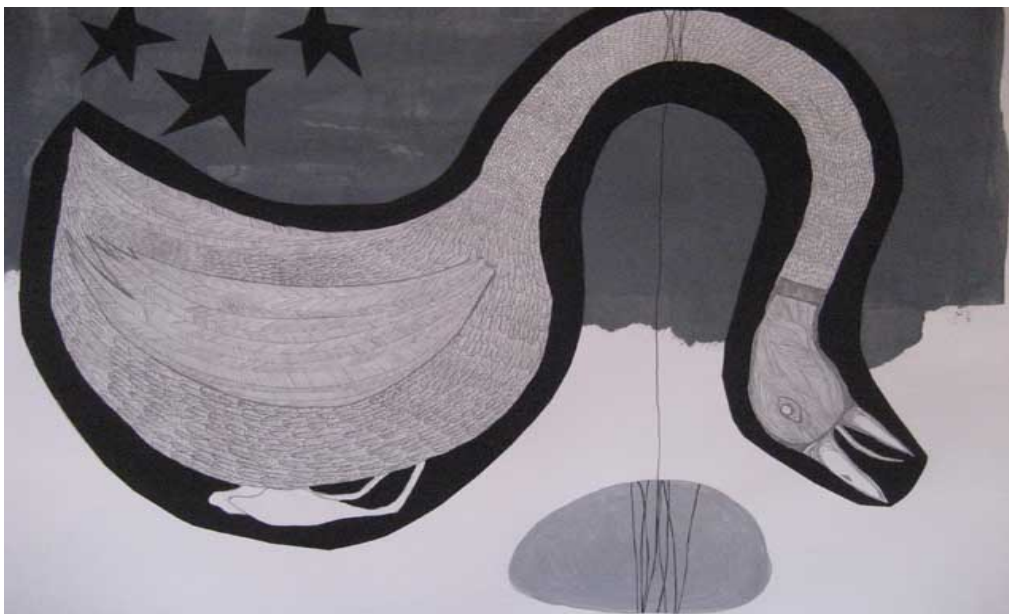


Figure 7. Goose Tied To A Stone, 2010.

My paintings are created from memory. I don't look at a reference because I believe that there is something unique in how a person remembers the world. I was born in Steuben, Maine and my father was a lobsterman. I spent a lot of time as a child staring at the ocean and going out with my father on his boat. The sea is an atmospheric environment that I am constantly trying to depict. The Sea is the last frontier; it is still a place where a person can get lost for months at a time without seeing another human being. There are places in the ocean that have not yet been explored by humans, and sea creatures that have not been discovered. Many people across the world depend on the oceans for food, and to make a living. The Seas are changing though. There are huge islands of garbage that drift through the currents, and all the plastic that is being dumped into the ocean is breaking down into dangerous chemicals.

“The So Called Great Pacific Garbage Patch between California and Hawaii is one such expanse, which is thought to be twice the size of Texas. Most attention has focused on dangers that visible items of plastic waste pose to seabird and other wildlife.”

Dr. Saido, a chemist at Nihon University in Chiba, Japan, said his team found that when some plastics decompose they release the chemicals bisphenol A (BPA) and PS oligomers into the water.

Previous studies in animals suggest that, at a particular doses; exposure to BPA can disrupt hormone systems.³

The ocean is becoming a hostile environment. In “Seascape 1” and “Seascape 2” I wanted to address the ocean as a dangerous place, a place that is environmentally angry. “Seascape 1” is a watercolor, charcoal and ink drawing. The ink has been applied with a quill pen, leading to drips and uneven lines.

The charcoal lines become gestural in the sky. The lines are heavy, dark and messy suggesting an angry storm. The waves rise up out of the sea as a sharp form. The water is multicolored and artificial, as though the water is full of gasoline. Again, as in other pieces, I am using colors to represent a toxic element. There are no people, land or animals in this painting, only water.



Figure 8. Seascape 1. 2010

³ "BBC NEWS | Science & Environment | Plastics Break down Fast in Ocean." *BBC News - Home*. Web. 23 Mar. 2011. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8210725.stm>>.



Figure 9. Seascape 2. 2010

In "Seascape 2" the anger and aggression is a little more subtle. There is a light water color gestural painting that is slightly hidden behind a wash of vertical ink drawn lines. This gestural painting is of a turbulent sea. The sky is dark and menacing in this painting and yet again the waves appear sharp and dangerous. In my end of the world, the seas are rising because the ice caps have melted and the erratic change in weather has created huge hurricanes and storms. The water in these seascapes are illustrative of a time that I imagine will happen.

Conclusion:

My work tells the story of human violence and insensitivity to animals and the environment. It is raw and aggressive work and it shows how helpless and angry I feel about the destruction. I believe that the inertia of this destruction is unstoppable because our populations are too large and because we have grown used to a certain standard of living. We will use up everything on this earth until it is gone. This work is not about social change, or blaming, or judging how we got to this point. It is about being a mirror to current events and to the predictions of a grim future.

My thesis exhibition brought all of my work together and a certain narrative became complete. My prints and painting hung to the wall one after another by metal tac's, and my sculptures occupied the white room like relics. My show allowed for a person to enter into my "end of the world" scenario where people represent evil, death, and danger and nature represents life, innocence and vulnerability.

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Vita

Hettie Haudenschild was born in Bar Harbor, Maine in 1978. She received her BFA from The Museum School in 2002. She joined the Fine Arts Graduate Department at The University of New Orleans in 2008. After completing her graduate degree she plans to move to Vermont, make art, raise a son, and live off the land.