

Jennifer Vanderpool  
Re-Imagining Landscapes  
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## Traversing Boundaries

One of the wonders of art is how it can connect disparate issues. For example, from different perspectives, we can savor the notion of "nature." We experience a painting that wraps itself around us. We enter a new world. Eugène Delacroix said that great artworks are "closer to the human heart for seeming to be more material." The current installation by Jane Callister and Jennifer Vanderpool marks a second collaboration for these artists. In this lushly playful project, memories and feelings about nature suggestively surround us in highly charged, cultural circumstances.

Installation art exemplifies the post-medium-specific art that emerged only forty years ago. But the installation as a form is well suited to evoke references to the natural world. Stepping along the floor sculptures, we adjust our color expectations when we encounter the islands of intense orange Astro-turf. The scale of installation, the way it envelops the viewer, the diversity of forms, colors, textures, materials, sounds all develop a sensory experience closer to a walk in the woods than to worship at the alter of a single art object (as delightful as that may be). In this way, the boundary between artifice (human invention) and nature (evolved life) are blurred.

Correspondences begin to emerge across domains of thought that are traditionally separate. How do the drips as culturally crafted objects become flowers for us? How is our body reacting to the soft, intermittent bird sounds that we know must be recordings? Robert Smithson, who pioneered earth works, was well aware of correspondences in art and experience. He wrote of the connections set up from his famous earthwork:

The Spiral Jetty could be considered one layer within the spiraling crystal lattice, magnified trillions of times ... Chemically speaking, our blood is analogous in composition to the primordial seas. Following the spiral steps we return to our origins, back to some pulpy protoplasm, floating eye adrift in an antediluvian ocean.

Installation art broke boundaries as it emerged from the periphery of the art world to

become an accepted form by institutions. The installation pioneers were protesting conventions long cherished by Modernism. The art historian and critic Michael Fried would defend Modernism against minimalist tendencies because of Minimalism's implicit focus on the setting and the viewer - a negative quality he referred to as "theatricality." However, installation art seizes on this very quality of theatricality as a core strength. We feel the installation is not complete unless it is entered and the viewer has performed some circuit with the work.

The immersive experience requires something from the viewer though - a form of surrender. In placing ourselves within the work, we accept our vulnerability to it and accept our partnership with it. And then, for other viewers, we have become a component of the work.

What happens after this surrender? In this sensory-driven installation by Callister and Vanderpool, we experience a freedom to make correspondences between this new "world" and our past experiences. In a sense, the art is asking us an open-ended question.

Historians of science often observe that asking the right question is more important than producing the right answer. The right answer to a trivial question is also trivial, but the right question, even when insoluble in exact form, is a guide to major discovery. And so it will ever be in the future excursions of science and imaginative flights of the arts.

Note that this freedom of association shows precisely how the best art differs from commerce: advertising is persuasion. Art, however, is open-ended; an invitation for the viewer's mind to safely wander.

But open-ended is not arbitrary. The bridges that art builds do not create a random circuit for us but rather offers ways for us to condense disparate notions into a new, synthetic whole. Art has resonance precisely when we sense a "rightness" - which certain elements are new and fresh - yet they belong with each other. And we are seeing what we've always expected we would see. This is when the work feels "natural." This is when the natural world and culture become one.

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