

# weathered

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“If you want to destroy a barn,’ a farmer once told me, ‘cut an eighteen-inch-square hole in the roof. Then stand back.’” - architect Chris Riddle.

I have always been interested in how the objects around me are transformed by nature once they become discarded. Everything that is created goes through a life cycle; objects decay because of rain and rot, but they also grow into new forms by merging with plants and mold that transform their surfaces. By exploring many photographic processes, my work in this exhibition represents different aspects of decay. Like the farmer, I am able to stand back and watch nature take its course. By documenting and decaying the object, I am able to make connections between my own idealized view of representation, and how I am able to shift my perception of these places and my perception of them as images. I want a tension within the image that is created between the preciousness of the surface and the depreciated aesthetic of its source. I am interested in finding visually compelling aspects of these decayed objects; finding beauty where we wouldn't normally go looking for it.

Damián Ortega is a contemporary artist who works with found objects-- everything from Volkswagen Beetles to bricks. In his artwork *Resting Matter (Brazil)*, Ortega documents found bricks piles, a common practice in Brazil, in various forms relating to the architecture around them. Each of these forms are photographed and displayed next to each other. His work looks at both the social and cultural situations that are imbedded in certain objects. Through their transformation, Ortega's work tells us something different about our relationship to them as objects. In my own work, I document buildings that are ready-made objects. I am interested in the interaction

between the buildings and the natural elements that overtake each structure.

Abandoned buildings hold a sense of nostalgia because within them there are untold histories. The image *after I* documents the last remaining wall of a structure that I found while exploring the surrounding fields and forest of my childhood home. While I remember this building as it once stood—an old house or barn—, now all that remains is only a fragment of its memory, held up by vines and an old tree. I wondered who might have lived there or what it could have been used for, but also why and where did the people that inhabited this space go? These kinds of questions become inherent in the use of photography because of its ability to frame a subject and ask us the question of what the image conveys and why we are looking at it.

I found that looking at William Christenberry's photographs of his hometown in Alabama were a big help in trying to think about the way a photograph can tell a story similar to the one I try to tell through my photographs. His photographic series, *Building with False Brick Siding*, documents a single structure's disappearance into the landscape over the period of 35 years. Christenberry continually revisited and photographed the natural growth that was taking place over this structure as kudzu and new growth forest over took it. His photographs not only document the passage of time, but they also show how the surface of these buildings is drastically changed by nature reclaiming itself. These were situations that I was trying to express in my own photographs. Similar to Christenberry's photographs, I took advantage of the frame that my camera created to isolate each structure, looking at the buildings straight on. Each photograph is a portrait of the structures I've documented for the viewer to interact with.

In exploring different spaces to find subjects to photograph, I consistently found myself coming back to structures that I had grown up with. Many of these buildings were abandoned houses, barns, and shacks. Growing up, there was an old house next to the post office on my road that friends and I would explore during middle school. At the time the house was still standing, however, it had still long since been abandoned. Vandals had come through and cleared the place out, leaving behind their presence through graffiti and other forms of damage. What I remember most about this house, though, is not the destruction that others had left, but how much the earth had taken a toll on this building. Much of the façade was covered in ivy and other vines that had begun to strip the paint and twist the wood sides. In the interior, water had leaked through holes in the roof, causing the wood floors to rot, and mold to grow throughout many of the rooms. Nature was slowly taking this building over and reclaiming the land.

I revisited this house a few times over the past year, and found how much had changed from my view of this structure over the past 10 years. Today it is almost invisible. The vines and ivy have completely taken over all 4 sides of the house and even the roof, which has now collapsed. The plant life is so dense that you cannot get through the door, and with the roof in its present state, there probably isn't much left of the interior of the building. The form of the building had become a ghost, outlined in intrusive plants. The wood sides and shingled roof had swelled and buckled. These elements created a beautiful reimagining of this place, which no longer belonged to man, but now belonged to nature.

After reflecting on my history with these different abandoned buildings (from houses to outhouses) that I grew up exploring, I felt there was much more that I was interested in besides them as architectural forms. I was fascinated in the process of decay, and how I could utilize it as part of my practice in making art objects. By using the transformative qualities of decay, I began to allow the images in my photographs to change; parts of the image would disappear, but new colors, forms, and textures were added. Throughout making this body of work, I not only work with photography, but rather a wide range of media that allows layers to build in the work, which transform the photographs into a ambiguous realm of visual aesthetics.

Before I began decaying photographs, the tension that I saw in Roxy Paine's work was one I hoped to achieve in my own. In his body of work *Replicants*, Paine meticulously recreates mold, fungi, and invasive species with fiberglass, resin, lacquer, and oil. Each sculpture sits in a moment of silence, stuck in time, but is still activated by the lifelikeness that he represents. Paine also uses scale to shift our perception of the objects he is sculpting. Paine's work *Dry Rot* transforms something that is inherently ugly when it takes place in our homes into something beautiful when displayed against the equalizing white wall of the gallery. There is a tension between the perceived ugliness or un-wanted qualities of rot, and the beauty and desirability that is found in Paine's objects through the use of synthetic materials.

As I began to look at my decaying photographs, I found I was able to achieve this needed tension. That tension was evident because instead of just displaying the physically damaged photograph, I re-photographed it as if it were an object to attain a

flat and clean surface that appeared moldy and soiled. By presenting the objects in this way, the illusion of texture and surface appears through the flatness of the paper. Re-photographing the original object also allows me to play with scale; they start as small objects--around eight to ten inches--but are then scaled as large as 5 ½ feet tall. In *oct 23 jan 8*, scale adds to the obscurity of the image by changing our relationship to the mold and tears, which appear much larger than their source. There are also instances in this piece where the surface of the silver-gelatin print lifted off, and through re-photographing it, these parts appear to pop off of the surface of the smooth paper, creating another sense of illusion. Similarly, works from the series *weathered* have this tension even though their scale shift is not as drastic, only doubling in size. The decaying elements from the original photographs in this series come only through color and mild texture changes. This adds to the deception of them appearing to be the original object. Rather than being decayed and simply mounted, the surfaces are instead clean and the viewer engages with the artwork. This tension between what one thinks he or she sees and what really exists causes the viewer to question what they are really looking at.

With this new body of work I am able to use photographic and sculptural elements to create a final work of art. By laying the photographs in different processes, adding and subtracting information from the image along the way, the end result of each artwork is not only grounded in the documentation of the buildings, but also the documentation of the decaying photographs as subject matter.

This final body of work did not come easy. There was a lot of trial and error,

exploring and then pulling back. At times I deviated so far from my original intentions and how I really felt about my surroundings that I wasn't sure how I could bring my ideas to fruition. However, the thoughts and ideas that I began with in my SMP experience came full circle. I wanted to explore my personal relationship with nature and find through art making how I could reflect my own personal ideals and interests to the viewer. I sought to explore abandoned spaces, both in architecture and in the landscape, and use their qualities to influence my artwork and artistic process. This is only the beginning of my process in exploring spaces through the lens of photography and also in exploring the qualities of decay and what both have to say about the world we live in.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

**Adcock, Craig E. *James Turrell the art of light and space*. Berkeley: University of California, 1990. Print.**

James Turrell is a contemporary artist who uses space and light in a dynamic way to play with viewer's moods and perception. In his early works, he used light through projection to create shapes in space, later to use light to create mood in space. His longest standing work, *Roden Crater*, implements his use of skylscapes and the earth's natural phenomena to create a naked-eye observatory. The book carefully looks at Turrell's early life as an artist, accounts of working with NASA technology to create work, and details his upcoming work *Roden Crater*.

**Ann Hamilton. Seattle: Henry Gallery Association, 1992. Print.**

This short book on Ann Hamilton documents two of her installations, *parallel lines* and *accountings*. The book documents the process of making the works, installation, and the final images of the spaces. It also includes a selection of writings on the works, along with images and writings of Hamilton's influences and references. This book details Hamilton's incredible process as she installs collections of materials and background that make her works so intriguing.

**Bruggen, Coosje van. *John Baldessari*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992. Print.**

This book on Baldessari examines his work from the start of his career, up until the 1990's. The body of work consists of a variety of mediums from photography to video, but is still centered on his interest in the everyday and changing or shifting our assumptions of that moment or object. Many of his earlier works also looked towards conceptualist theory as a means of identity but also to raise an awareness of the issues it dealt with. His outlook towards the marginal aspects of life is important in my own work as a means of thinking about my own experiences and places that have encountered, and how even the littlest moment can be important.

**Calder, Julian. *35mm photographer's handbook*. New York: Crown, 1979. Print.**

This book has been my guide on all things 35mm. Since I have had limited photographic experience either on my own or in the classroom, I had to quickly become self-taught in this medium. This book outlines the basics of how cameras and film work, but also give incite into methods of approaching different photographic genres such as portraiture, landscape, even nudes. There is a chapter dedicated to the kinds of visual tricks that you can do using simple techniques such as double exposure and tinting of images. It even has some corny information of how to hold the camera and what kind of shoes to



wear when talking photographs.

**Cranston, Meg, Diedrich Diederichsen, and Thomas Weski. *Baldessari*. Hannover: Schaferart, 2000. Print.**

This book on John Baldessari focuses on his works between 1988 and 1999. This is the period of his work that I am most interested in as it pertains to my own work. This work deals with text and image posed next to each other as a means to drawing connections between two very distant forces. Many of the images that he uses are seemingly unrelated, but through his process, he forces them together and draws upon the audience to ponder the importance of their pairing. Along with images, the book provides interviews and writings that tap into specific works and also his process as a whole.

**Christo. *Christo the Reichstag and urban projects*. Munich: Prestel, Distributed in the USA and Canada by te Neues Pub. Co., 1993. Print.**

Christo and Jeanne-Claude have created incredible public installations over the past 40 years. This book looks at their preliminary work for *Wrapped Reichstag*, and their other works up until that time. The documentation for *Wrapped Reichstag* includes Christo's detailed works on paper that carefully document for him and his viewers a sense of scale, form, color, and presence that the work proposes. The book also highlights the artist's other realized works including *Wrapped Coast*, *Sourounded Islands*, and even Christo's earlier sculptural work. The pair offers a refreshing approach to art making, creating temporary artworks based on the desire to show the world something beautiful. Their process allows them to have complete artistic freedom in creating, funding their projects only through the sale of Christo's early works and preliminary works on paper.

**Gonzalez-Torres, Felix. *Felix Gonzalez-Torres*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Cantz, Distribution in the US, Distributed Art, 1997. Print.**

Though Felix Gonzalez-Torres's work is a complete tangent from my own artwork in terms of content, his methodology is very much related to what I hope to accomplish. In some of his works, all untitled, he uses multiplicity as a means of allowing the viewer to take away part of the artwork, whether it is candy or an image on paper. Through this process he allows the viewer to take away something physical from the work that allows them to think about it beyond the gallery, where his intention is to have them think about the affects of Aids. The taking away and spreading of these objects correlates to the ideas of spreading disease and death. The two books includes text and images of the life and work of the artist.

**Heartney, Eleanor. *Roxy Paine*. New York: Prestel, 2009. Print.**

Roxy Paine is an American sculptor who directly influences my work by the way he looks at the relationship between the natural world and technology. This book documents his early encounters with suburbia, and how that had a profound impact on the way he looked at nature. In places where plants were carefully manicured, Paine was interested in the spot where resilient weeds might spring to life obstructing the order of a manicured space. His gallery works bring that kind of message inside, where he presents mold, mushrooms, and weeds as a means of looking at the ugly side of nature. Though looking completely alive, these *Replicants*, as he calls them, are made out of synthetic materials, making them frozen in time and helping the viewer react to their relationship to our idea of the natural world. His outdoor works, Dendriods, bring the synthetic outdoors much more unabashed where he creates life size trees bade out of stainless-steel. The trees show the skill again of the artist, but also the skill of the tree and its growth, and how technologies might impact the natural world in the future.

**Hobbs, Robert Carleton. *Robert Smithson--sculpture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981. Print.**

This book documents Robert Smithson's complex approach to his sculptural works. The book breaks down seventy-four sculptures and discusses the process of making each work, while also including images of the process and final works. The text offers both a subjective and objective view of the work, and looks at it in context of modern art and other artists.

**John, Chamberlain,., *John Chamberlain [Kunsthalle Baden-Baden 11.Mai bis 21.Juli 1991, Staatliche Kunstsammlung Dresden, Albertinum, 25. August bis 3. November 1991. Stuttgart-Bad-Cannstatt: Edition Cantz, 1991. Print.***

John Chamberlain's is well known for his abstract expressionistic sculptures made of recycled car metal. However, he is not really known for a series of photographic work, which is just as captivating as his sculptural work. The photographs deal with movement and time in space, and direct attention away from the forms that make up images. The photos neither attempt to represent or document their subjects, but rather the artist's movements and 'gaze' in a particular space.

**Kruger, Barbara. *Barbara Kruger*. New York: The MIT, 1999. Print.**

Barabara Kruger's images have always stuck with me because of the direct language that she uses as a means to engage her with viewer. The perfect synthesis between text and image represents her deep attention to the issues she faces the audience with. This book is collects images of her work, also displaying some of her sculpture and architectural work. It also has a number of writings and interviews that assist with the understanding of her work, though it hardly needs an explanation.

***On Kawara*. New York: Phaidon Limited, 2002. Print.**

This book on the artist On Kawara gives a comprehensive look at the artist's works over the past fifty years. The majority of Kawara's work deals with date paintings, simple paintings with the date painted on a monotone color background. These paintings each painted on and of the day, make aware the significance of a specific place in time, but also that time is inexorable. His works also deal with the perceived eternity of the earth, such as in his work *One Million Years (Past.)* His works relate to my own in the way they begin to slow down your thinking of time, and reflect on the many issues of memory and life.

**Ortega, Damián. *Do It Yourself, Damián Ortega*. New York: Rizzoli. Print.**

*Do It Yourself*, is a book on the artist Damián Ortega's sculpture that deals heavily with culture and politics. The book includes the artist's own words about his artwork, describing his process, but also the meaning behind the works. This kind of in-depth look at specific works is sometimes hard to find, and offers a way of connecting with the artist and everything that goes into an object. The text helps explain some of the underlying messages in Ortega's work, such as his *Cosmic Thing*, a disassembled 1989 Volkswagen Beetle. The work has the visual impact of an automotive handbook, but also is a telling look at a car commissioned by Adolf Hitler and how that has now become of part Mexico City's history

**Weisman, Alan. *The World Without Us*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007. Print.**

*The World Without Us* is a non-fiction writing by Alan Weisman that discusses what would happen to the earth if humans, for some unpronounced reason, disappeared today. The book describes how the resilience of nature stands up to even human's strongest materials. One chapter meticulously explains the deterioration of a house left to the elements, taking into account every material used in the building, and how within a very short period of time, nature reclaims its space of the map. All of the speculation in the book is backed up with scientific and real-life accounts that help shape our understanding of a world without us.

**Ward, Frazer. *Vito Acconci*. London: Phaidon, 2002. Print.**

This book on Vito Acconci serves as a retrospective of his work from the past few decades. It includes accounts of his artworks, detailing meaning and affects of the work, along with interviews and the artist's writings. His work spans a great distance of medium and interests, ranging between video pieces to performance to his latest architectural endeavors, all of which help deal with issues that arise in the discourse between public and private space. Acconci's work helps inform my own in his use of the audience as a means to an end, by which he often invites the viewer to become part of the work or engage with it to have a awareness of public/private affairs.