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My art making is an extensive process that is saturated in time and ritual. While it is easy to assume that my work is about oysters, it is actually about ideas of place and nature, specifically St. Mary's. My connection to the landscape has led me to consider how I develop a personal relationship with nature—moments of time and place—through collection. Collecting is a habit I find to be a natural human reaction. We as humans have an internal ache to understand objects and connect to the tangible. In many ways I believe that is a foundation for making art; to make emotions, relationships, thoughts and concepts concrete. That sense of concreteness is important in my own work; it allows me to make apparent how I am connecting to the world and understanding my own relationship with St. Mary's. People and places are both impressionable; not only have I left indentations upon the shoreline of the river here, but the shoreline has indented upon me. To remember this importance, I collect oyster shells. At other important places I have visited in my lifetime, I have also collected—rocks, coral, shells, leaves—all have found their way from their natural, original location and accumulated in my hands, pockets, and shelves.

The ideas of accumulation and subtraction have become important concepts within my work that develop both conceptually and formally through my process and/or use of multiples. It is important that I am repeating actions as I make my art work. Tedium has become a friend that I have learned to welcome during my extensive process for completing an artwork. As I recreate the oyster shell, I am rediscovering my connection to a place and experience of walking alone along a shoreline, meditating on place. Perhaps I am frustratingly attempting to re-immense myself in the eternal sensation of time that is present along the river, the process of geology. With each new

drawing, print, and embossing, I might be arriving a little closer to understanding the oyster shell and its importance.

Scale has become important in my work as I focus so narrowly on the shell. Robert Smithson, an American earthwork artist from the late 1960s and the 1970s relates my attitude on scale in writing about his most famous artwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970). Smithson writes, “size determines an object, but scale determines art. A crack in the wall if viewed in terms of scale, not size, could be called the Grand Canyon. A room could be made to take on the immensity of the solar system. Scale depends on one’s capacity to be conscious of the actualities of perception.”¹ I am using this understanding in my art-making every time I turn to the oyster shell. I am asking it to be not just a dismissive shell, but a world in itself, a connection to the transient, a history of natural processes of creation and death, a bit of ephemeral data, a romantic link to emotion, and evidence to a relationship between body and land or and water. I know this may seem like a lot to ask from an oyster shell, but I have learned that the complexities and layers within these valves have been worthwhile in understanding and discovering.

For that reason it was important for me to learn about the structure of the oyster shell, the formation of the shell and its relation to being part of the anatomy of a living creature. The shell itself is formed through the secretion of crystals and the shell grows through an incremental thickening that occurs over the lifespan of an oyster.² Once the oyster dies, the shell no longer grows but is subjected entirely to the forces of erosion and weathering. I already knew that oysters grow upon each other, clustered together, forming a collection of sorts (the nature of collection is already an inherent part of the culture of oysters). Some of my information on the shell was researched formally and other information came from talking with others or from my own

¹ Smithson, Robert, *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 147.

² Victor S. Kennedy, Roger I. E. Newell, and Albert F. Eble, ed., *The Eastern Oyster: *Crassostrea virginica**, (College Park: Maryland Sea Grant Books, 1996), 122.

observation. For some things, I did not require a scientific understanding. For instance, I had no need for a biological assumption for why the inside of the shell is smooth as opposed to the rough, flaky, layered outside of the shell, but I did need a textural understanding of this just through touching and interacting with the shells. It was important that I use the information I gathered in my process of making my art because that infuses my work with more meaning, conceptually impregnates the work with an understanding of the object it was recreating.

For this reason, Tara Donovan a Brooklyn-based sculptor became one of my formal sources. Her artwork is material based and it is through her choices of material that her work develops meaning and aesthetic viability. The ephemeral is a consideration in her artwork and it is a concept I consider in my own work. While I am thinking of how the oyster shell degrades and erodes with time and is the remnant of a living thing and how this informs my choices of material, Donovan is thinking of the ephemeral through different means. Her artwork generates a feeling of the passage of time, of halted growth or a transient moment, yet it is comprised of purely human made materials; plastics that won't actually fade away but will remain. While her work appears to illustrate transience with formal qualities of lightness and simulations of growth or passing natural moments such as fog in the artwork *Haze* (2003), it is actually contradicting itself. I do think that this contradiction can exist within my own work at times because I am making my own construction of nature, but I actually attempt to avoid this. I sought to work with water-based materials like ink wash, acrylic paint, and soy-based block printing ink. Water was even necessary when creating my embossed oyster shells to moisten the paper to prepare the fibers for their new shape before pressing it into my carved block. The sense of lightness that Donovan uses was important to me on a formal level. I wanted to take advantage of the connection of light and shadow in my own artwork as they work as signifiers to passing time, and fragility. The oyster shell is full of subtleties of ridges and shadow and I wanted to be able to express this in my artwork by incorporating actual shadows.

These come into play through my embossed work and my wax shell sculpture. These works become three-dimensional and provide a surface for light to play off of my work, just as it would against an actual shell.

I also took note of the use of accumulation in Donovan's artwork. As previously mentioned, accumulation is a concept and formal quality I have turned to regularly in my art making. For Donovan, multiples are used to transform single objects into an entirely new entity. In her work *Untitled (toothpicks)* (2004) appears to be a minimalist sculpture, a wooden cube set upon the gallery floor. In this sculpture however, are millions of small wooden toothpicks that are holding their own form and changing their meaning. They are not the simple disregarded toothpick sitting next to an after dinner mint, but instead have culminated into something of magnitude and presence. There is power in numbers, of many working as one, and I have begun to make use of that power in my own work. There is presence in my own translations of the oyster shell, both single works, and the collection of the works together.

A large difference between Donovan and me is that she did not create each toothpick within her sculpture I use objects in my work that I created myself; I rubbed every embossed paper, I printed every block, I painted and drew every line, I molded every shell. The time taken for every work is important. We come back together however, in relation to time and process through installation. Donovan spends days in the gallery preparing her shows, placing each toothpick, straw, and Styrofoam cup into just the right place. My process is methodical and it is unsurprising that my conceptual sources have careful processes that focus on the making of their artwork and the time required to make them. Repetition of movements, the development of muscle memory and the mechanization of my body have become characteristics of my work habits. Roxy Paine, a contemporary sculptor who grapples with technology versus nature, made the statement, "I think

humans are both machine and nature.”³ This viewpoint is evident in his own work as he understands natural processes in conjunction with processes of industrial manufacturing; His art production is handled like a factory, especially in works made by his art making machines such as *SCUMAK 2* (2001) and *Paint Dipper* (1997). In my own art, I am interested in the running of my own body to produce work, but I am not interested in the coding and running of machines to produce work like Paine; I create a repeated output, allowing my body to become mechanized as I translate the natural object in my own human way. Paine also works to recreate natural objects, working on making what he refers to as “replicants.”⁴ Paine’s artwork highlights the struggle that humans have in relating to nature, the disjunction between our desire for the sublime in the outdoors and technology. He often riffs on the suburban landscape, carefully maintained, because that’s how most people like nature served best. My own artwork is not about technology in any way. I have no desire to compare trees to androids as Paine does with his dendroid works, in which he creates artificial trees. I do think that there is an understanding I have developed about how we as humans interact with and separately from nature. I believe that we have a desire to be among natural things, but that we also are concerned by it. We are subjected to natural instincts and yet forget them through our adaptations. Paine’s statement of humans being both machine and nature sidles with ideas that there is a purity or truth to nature and that humans are potentially corrupted. This is why I am constantly attempting to connect with an experience in a landscape, as though there is more meaning and potential within it than I can understand. Despite my best efforts, I will always be digesting nature through my human consciousness. I continue to dig into this with every reiteration of the shell seeking a truth that I am part of and left out of.

Every work begins somewhere and mine starts with a pilgrimage to the shoreline. It is a meditative moment that I experience alone. I kick away my shoes and walk along the tide line, one

³ Eleanor Heartley, *Roxy Paine* (New York: Prestel, 2009), 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

foot in water one foot on wet sand. I become a part of the landscape, sinking physically and mentally into the place. The act of collecting comes without thought or planning. Instinctively I search the ground for objects that are pleasing, selecting those that are the correct size to fit into my hand and slip into a pocket. Once I have walked the entire length of the available shore or the wind has chapped my lips enough, I return to where I came from. So much of my work is about that moment, the occurrence of it, my continuing memory of it, my longing for it. The moment becomes a history, a past moment that sets up the rest of my artwork.

The British artist Richard Long's work is also developed through past moments in nature. His artwork, which began in the late 1960s, takes place mostly outside of the gallery. Instead, Long creates his artwork by walking outdoors for hours or days at a time. He provides a set of rules or parameters to follow on the walk, such as a distance, a perimeter or an objective (to place a rock at every new mile for instance). Much of the artwork is just in the performance of walking in the land; Long documents this, such as his first walking piece, *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), in which Long is using his body as a medium to draw in the landscape. The place is revered in Long's artwork and his materials are taken straight from the source that he is immersed in; for example, the driftwood in *A Circle In Alaska (Bering Strait Driftwood on the Arctic Circle)* (1977) is reassembled to become a sculpture. Long must then photograph the work so that we know of its occurrence and presents it this way in the gallery space. He does sometimes bring materials from his journey into the space such as the work *Stone Line* (1980) where Long presented a rectilinear collection of stone in London's Hayward Gallery. By bringing natural materials into the gallery, Long is transcending the constructed, artificial space of the gallery. Unlike Long, I do not bring actual oyster shells into the gallery space because, I do not focus entirely on my collecting the oysters, but I continue with my recreating them through different means and mediums. In this way I am hoping to make my own understandings of the shells for others instead of allowing them to come up with their own

connections to the objects.

My work has become personal; it is about my own relationship to the landscape and the shells I have collected. This focus on the personal has been largely influenced by my study of the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone who began creating artwork in the late 1960s as part of the Arte Povera movement in which artists experimented and redefined the human relationship with the natural world. Penone's work is partly about the human body and the understanding that comes from the touch. He uses the subtle notes of altering that people apply to nature and his work is dependent upon the process of time. His artwork is visual poetry, an example of which is *Alpi Marittime, Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quell punto* (Maritime Alps, It will continue to grow except at that point, 1969), a sculpture in which a steel cast of Penone's hand was attached to a tree trunk, gripping it and forever altering the way that the tree will grow at that point of contact. This touch is important and Penone remarks, "the notion of touching is something basic in the conception of reality for a person and especially in sculpture. As I said, for example, for the hand touching a tree there is a relationship between two materials, the human material of the hand and in this case the tree," he continues:

The act of touching is an act that helps understanding the reality of things, the strength of materials, the peculiarities that are missed by the glance. We learn to see, for example, if you see the space of a room to measure the size of it you can use your eyes. But to have a more precise idea of its dimensions it should be better to walk. Therefore it is the body that gives us more precise information in comparison to the visual perception."⁵

⁵ Ikon Gallery, *Giuseppe Penone Documentary*, http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/programme/current/gallery/299/giuseppe_penone/.

The body is used in many of Penone's works as a tool for measurement and further understanding. Penone considers the body to be larger than its physical self but is extended through what we see that is reflected in our minds and also our breath that emerges from our lungs as a natural sculpture. In the artwork *Soffio di Foglie* (Breath of Leaves, 1979), a pile of leaves is placed within the gallery and the artist lies on top of it, carving out an imprint of his body, but also of his breath as his exhalations carves an impression into the leaves as an extension of his body. In another work, *Alpi Marittime, La mia altezza, la lunghezza delle mie braccia, il mio spessore in un ruscello* (Maritime Alps, My height, my length of my arms, my breadth in a stream, 1968), the artist created a frame following the title measurements, that had impressions of his face, hands, and feet on each side respectively to their parts, and filled it with water from the stream it was placed in. The specificity of the measurements and impressions make Penone's artwork about him and his occurrence in a space. I have also begun considering how I personally relate to shells I have collected. In my embossed work I am using the reach of my arms to form the final artwork. This relates to the reaching for the oyster shells on the beach and makes the hanging of the work a performance similarly to that of *Soffio di Foglie*. My body determines the final artwork and cannot be recreated by another in the same way it is by me. It is same to the idea that no one will have the same experience on the shoreline as I had.

There is a harmony between Penone's work and my own in terms of our need to rediscover and redefine places through making. My continual re-creation of the shells serves as a way for me to constantly reconnect and to understand their original formation, the buildup of layers over time. With my wax shells I slowly rocked the melted wax back and forth in the mold I let the wax cool layer by layer, slowly accumulating the object into a replica not just of shape but also the process the original oyster followed in the production of its own shell. The same is done with my prints; new layers are slowly added with each new inked block. I find this returning to a process of growth

similar to Penone's tree carvings, an example of which is *Albero di 11 metri* (Tree of 11 meters, 1975), where he took an eleven meter long block of wood and carved it back into the shape of a tree by following the grain lines. He searched for the beginning of the trees existence, which is what I am reimagining for my oyster shell with each molding.

While I find there are many similarities of understanding within the work of Penone and myself, I recognize that his objects are based more in the gradual change in the future than my own. His work often requires decades or centuries of tree growth to ever come close to a finished product such as *Alpi Marittime*, *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quell punto* or *Scrivi, legge, ricorda* (1969). My sense of time in my work comes from the length of a process; the length of real time spent fabricating the piece and therefore exists mostly in the past in the way that I have connected to Richard Long's art process.

It is a different sense of time that is used in the works of Mark Dion a contemporary artist who has concerned himself with the history of the museum display. While Dion is one of my source artists, he lies on the periphery. I look to Dion in consideration to collection because at the heart of my artwork is this understanding that humans desire to collect and display that which they have claimed ownership of. Most often, Dion is going through the collections of others—institutions vast ownership of objects deemed worthy of enlightening others through study. Dion arranges these objects in a way that is familiar and comfortable to observers because we have come to understand it as normal by museum standards. Dion is bringing attention to the constructed way in which we view objects and is speaking to the didactic way in which we look at collections. I have considered how Dion uses collection in his work but I am disconnected from his scholastic concepts and have based my art work on more of an emotional aspect to collecting. However, I do find him valuable when looking at my work because, though we both deal directly with collections, we also serve as a foil to each others' work.

All of my sources have struggled with nature influencing our ideas and art-making in their own personal way. Tara Donovan pushes against the tension of human-made materials creating beauty similar to that seen in nature; re-creating experiences found in the natural world similar to how I re-create my own personal connections to nature. The work of Roxy Paine exploits the tension of the human, the factory, versus ideas of nature and natural formation. He and I both turn towards the repetition of making as a way to produce artwork and understand our distances and connections to what we make. Richard Long and I both begin our processes by entering the landscape and finding ways for this to enter into the gallery space. The artwork of Giuseppe Penone influenced my artwork into becoming personal, a relation of my body to nature. Through Penone's artwork I also became aware of time in my art-making, understanding it as gradual and slow, a component to nature itself.

My artwork has developed a process of slow accumulation, dealing with personal relationships to nature and the ephemeral, the mechanization of repetition and the importance of place. On first glance, the work seems obsessively focused on the oyster shell. In that shell however is an entire concept of the world and the self. Just as the oyster requires no instructions to form and live and die and disintegrate into the river, I need no instructions to collect and reaffirm in my artwork my connection to St. Mary's. The landscape has inspired me and my sources have helped guide me. In the end I am left with a collection and an urge to continue making.

Bibliography

Baume, Nicholas, Jen Mergel, and Lawrence Weschler. *Tara Donovan*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2008.

This book does not focus strictly on a single exhibit of Tara Donovan's work, but presents her current oeuvre. Prior to reading this book, I had personally never seen Donovan's sculptures. This book is filled with large color images of installation shots of her artwork, as well as close-up details that visually describe the accumulation of material that is so prevalent in her work. There is also an essay by Jen Mergel and Nicholas Baume that describes key points of Donovan's work, her process, and use of materials. An interview with the artist by Lawrence Weschler is also included and it allows for the artist to speak for herself on her ideas and also the evolution of her work to what is seen within these pages. This book was my single source on this artist as it gave a critical analysis of her work as well as the artist's own perspective.

Beardsley, John. *Earthworks and Beyond: Contemporary Art in the Landscape*. 3rd ed. New York: Abbeville Press, 1998.

This book looks at earthworks from their beginnings in the 1960s and 70s moving into the 1990s. This source was not a main source for my St. Mary's Project, but I did look to it to consider how landscape affected artists and how they connected to it through "non-traditional" means. It was through this book that I considered looking into Robert Smithson as a source artist. I also discovered that I was not interested in the earthworks themselves as much as I was in their conceptual importance to the artists.

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

Eleanor Heartney filled this book with essays on Roxy Paine's work that focus on several different themes of his artwork. The essays I found most helpful in my research were "Modernism, Materials, and Mycology," and "The Machine and The Garden," which focused extensively on Paine's tension between machine and nature and his use of reproducing plants within his artwork. Photographs of Paine's artwork is featured prominently throughout the text; displaying the diversity in his works, processes, and concepts, but also upholding the main ideas expressed in the first essay, "The Machine and The Garden." This was my singular source for Roxy Paine, and while it did not have an interview with the artist, I felt that the analysis of his work was well based in visual evidence and quotes from the artist.

Ikon Gallery. *Giuseppe Penone Documentary*. http://www.ikon-gallery.co.uk/programme/current/gallery/299/giuseppe_penone/.

I found this source online when looking for supplemental sources to the texts I had on Giuseppe Penone. This is a documentary video made by Ikon Gallery in England that features the artist talking about his work and main conceptual themes in his artwork such as the use of the body as measurement or the extension of the body through sight and breath. The video also served to document some of his more performative installations, such as *Soffio di Foglie*, as the show of Penone's work was installed at Ikon. This source was vital to my understanding of Penone's artwork because of its direct translation of his dialogue from Italian to English, something that I struggled with in deciphering my print sources. The curator and director of the gallery also talks in the documentary, providing his own analysis outside of Penone's self reflection. The video was also

interesting as a source to view an artist installing their own work within a gallery space, another aspect to my St. Mary's Project that usually went unseen as I looked at other sources.

Kennedy, Victor S., Roger I. E. Newell, and Albert F. Eble, ed. *The Eastern Oyster: Crassostrea virginica*. College Park: Maryland Sea Grant Books, 1996.

This was a non-art source for my project. The text is actually a science textbook devoted to the Eastern Oyster, which is the oyster whose shells I had been collecting along the St. Mary's River. This source was used to help me understand the formation and the function of the shells in relation to the actual animal of the oyster, which isn't present in the shells along the shoreline. By understanding the anatomy that was relevant to my work, I was able to develop processes that functioned to mirror the processes of the oyster. Most of the textbook reached further than was necessary for my own understanding, but chapter 2, "General Anatomy" by Albert F. Eble and Robert Scro, and Chapter 3, "The Shell and Ligament" by Melbourne R. Carriker, were the most helpful in providing the information I was searching for.

Morley, Simon, ed. *The Sublime: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010.

The Sublime is an anthology that is part of a book series called "Documents of Contemporary Art," which focuses on broad ideas and major themes found within contemporary art. The book features collections of quotations and writings from artists, philosophers, and critics and features an introduction by Simon Morley to the main ideas of sublimity and its presence in historical writings and philosophy. This book was helpful as I further considered my personal connection to the landscape and how I use it as a starting point. By reading excerpts from artists like Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, Hiroshi Sugimoto, and John Berger, I was able to begin to grasp at what the sensation I was receiving from the landscape was and how it could become translated through artwork.

Penone, Giuseppe. *Giuseppe Penone: sculture di linfa*. Milan: Electa, 2007.

This book on Penone's artwork has carefully captured photographs of his artwork and I used this source as a visual aid in understanding Penone's work. I also used it to find works I was interested in and be able to search for them for more understanding. While there is accompanying texts and quotes within this text, it is in Italian and was therefore unhelpful to me as a written source. This allowed me to respond to Penone's work visually first before learning his conceptual importance to me as a source; I responded to his work as a connection between him in nature in which it was made clear visually to be personal. This was the only text I found that was dedicated to Penone's work outside of a collection of Arte Povera artists.

Sheehy, Colleen J., ed. *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

This text focuses on a project that took place as a collaboration between Mark Dion and the University of Minnesota. I used this source more towards the beginning of the semester when I was still considering a scientific and potentially didactical approach to my artwork and only beginning to play with the idea of collection. This book works to explain through the words of the collaborators with Dion the process and development of the Cabinet of Curiosities by arranging objects that had already been collected by their institution. I was interested in this source as it focused on ideas of

collection and display, though Dion himself became a less direct source as time progressed on my St. Mary's Project.

Smithson, Robert. *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. Edited by Jack Flam. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

As the title states, this book is a collection of Robert Smithson's writings on his artwork, but also artist statements, and interviews. Smithson develops his own philosophy on the landscape and our lack of acknowledgement towards degraded or used-up sites that we have created. Smithson writes on many ideas, most of which were not directly relevant to my St. Mary's Project (for instance the idea of entropy). I was most drawn to Smithson's writing on his artwork *Spiral Jetty*. His writing of the same title helped me to develop my understanding of scale in relation to my artwork and subject of the oyster shell.

Wallis, Clarrie. *Richard Long: Heaven and Earth*. London: Tate Pub., 2009.

Photographs of Richard Long's artworks are prominent throughout the book and are placed besides his poems referring to the journeys he has taken. There were several essays throughout the book as well that focused on the main objectives of Long's artwork, his early career and education, and his books. There was also a collection of artist statements and an interview with the artist. This source was a thorough examination of Long's work from the beginning of his career in the early 1960s all the way into contemporary times, which recent installations in the 2000s. I focused mainly on Long's connection to the land through his journey through it and how he used his time spent walking as a starting point and connection for the rest of his artwork.