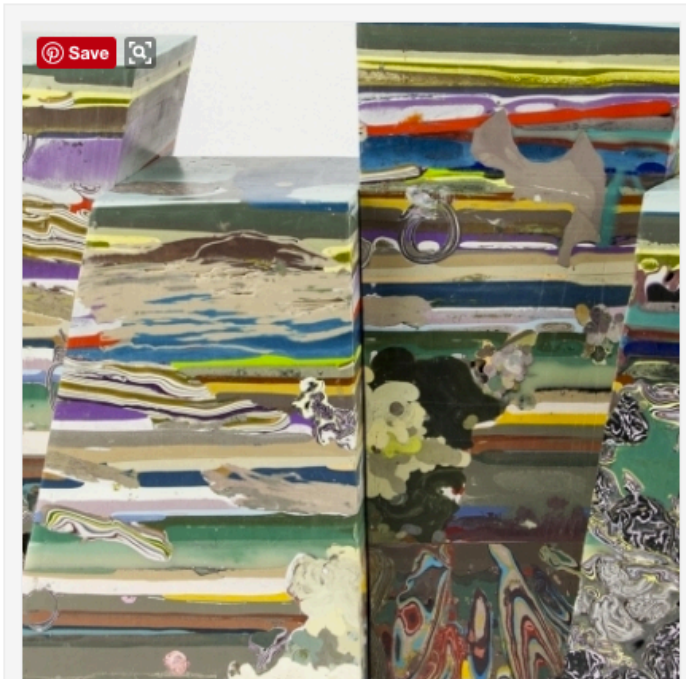


The Anthropocene becomes art: Digging the future out of the present

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*Laura Moriarty's 'Normal Faults,' made of pigmented beeswax. ©
Laura Moriarty, 2015*

How do we define "now"? How do we place it in a cultural, political, social, and especially geological context? And how do we portray it in art? That was the challenge facing Ginny Kollak, curator of exhibitions at the **Berman Museum** at Ursinus College in Collegeville, PA. These questions led to **Stratigraphic Fiction: Ten Artists Imagine the Anthropocene**, an exhibition to inspire discussion and workshops throughout the coming year.

Kollak focuses on the Anthropocene, a term for the present era in geologic time: a time in which human activities are determining the future of the earth.

"It's a way of explaining the present moment," says Kollak, and it carries within it a sense of our own demise. "Fossil records," Kollak points out, "show when things go extinct." Since we are living in the Anthropocene now, it offers a way of looking at and predicting our own future extinction.

"Intoxicated landscapes"

Kollak selected “work that spoke to me,” and then reached out to ten artists whose work related to this concept. She describes Julian Charrière, a Swiss artist living in Berlin, as “a 19th-century explorer,” taking the rare metals used in modern technology and speeding up the process of returning them to the earth. Meanwhile, Brooklyn-based Nick van Woert creates geologic strata out of synthetic elements like Tang orange drink powder.

“We don’t think of humans as natural,” she says, which creates a tension between us and nature. She refers to the artists’s “intoxicated landscapes,” a phrase that evokes both the toxicity of pollution and the joyousness of intoxication.

Kollak, who has degrees in Art History, a BA from Williams College, and an MA from Bard College, also studied theology and sees a spiritual dimension to the concept. “This moment marks a time which goes in the opposite direction. Instead of looking at rocks and deducing what the atmosphere was like in the past, we look at the atmosphere now and predict the rocks of the future.”



Dystopian beauty

It is, she admits, a dystopian vision, and yet she says it can also be quite beautiful. “The exhibit draws attention to how humans interact with their environment in a joyful way.”

Instead of the usual exhibit that changes with each semester, this exhibit will run until mid-March 2017 so that students and faculty will have time to engage with the works through classroom projects, talks, and workshops. There will also be public programs of conversations between the artists and Ursinus faculty.

Artists include: Julian Charrière (Berlin, Germany); Nadja Frank (Brooklyn, NY), Kelly Jazvac (London, Ontario, Canada); Mary Anne Kluth (Oakland, CA); Laura Moriarty (Rosendale, NY); Elise Rasmussen (Brooklyn, N.Y.); Robert Smithson (deceased); Nick van Woert (Brooklyn, NY); Julius von Bismarck (Berlin, Germany); and Jennifer West (Los Angeles, CA.).

A Stratigraphic Fiction: Ten Artists Imagine the Anthropocene is on display August 18, 2016-March 19, 2017 at The Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College, 610 E. Main Street, Collegetown, PA. The Berman Museum is open from Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 4pm. It is closed Mondays. Admission is free. For more information, call 610-409-3500 or visit [online](#).

At right: Nick van Woert's 'Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains — Albert Bierstadt 1868.' Mixed media sculpture. © Nick van Woert, 2014

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