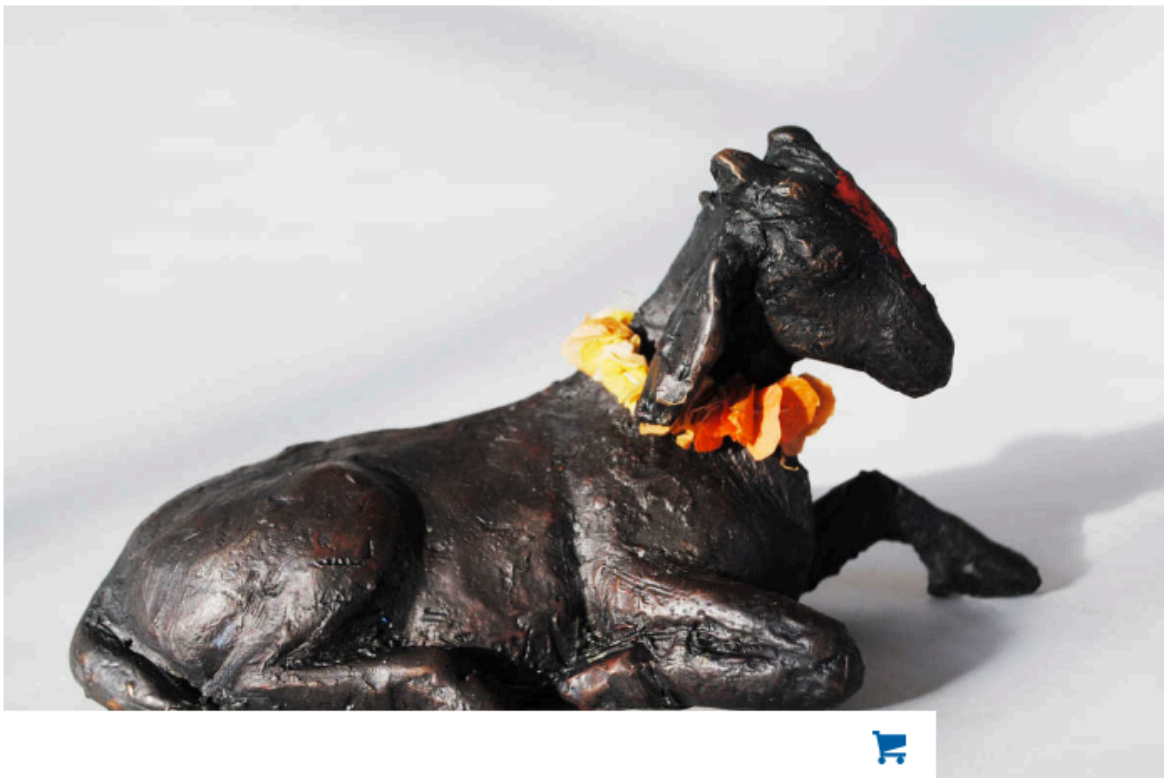


Entertainment

Art galleries: Anthropocene art; Works from the PAFA foundry

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Elisabeth Nickles' "Bhairav Festival Sacrifice, Nepal" (2016), bronze and paper, at PAFA.



by **Edith Newhall**, Contributing Art Writer

The debate continues between geologists and environmentalists: Have we exited the Holocene Epoch, which began after the last major ice age (more than 11,700 years ago), or entered the Anthropocene, defined by humankind's interactions with the earth's environment?

Meanwhile, artists have taken matters into their own hands, making works that ask us to face up to the nasty environmental effects of human tampering with our planet. The Berman Museum's 10-artist exhibition, "A Stratigraphic Fiction," organized by Ginny Kollak, the museum's curator of exhibitions, offers the diverse works of 10 contemporary artists who have been imagining a future determined by human beings.

Surprisingly, perhaps, some of this work is quite beautiful - albeit in the way smog can soften the colors of a brilliant sunset or genetic modification can produce an unblemished ear of corn.



"Normal Faults" (2015), by Laura Moriarty, formed with layers of pigmented beeswax poured into casts, at Ursinus College's Berman Museum.

Laura Moriarty's sculptures, formed from layers of pigmented wax poured into casts, look like strata samples excavated from Candy Land, with their stripes of turquoise, pink, yellow, and green. (Her encaustic monotypes, made by pouring colored wax onto paper and then manipulating the paper over a hot plate, have more blended, homogenous hues, like strata samples we've seen before.)

The classic Western landscapes - think Carleton Watkins and Ansel Adams - that Mary Anne Kluth assembles from pieces of cut-up photographs (color, unlike Watkins or Adams) are as tantalizingly pretty and unreal as the Land of Oz. They suggest metaphors for both the fragility of the environment and the human urge to deny it.

Creepy, charming, and painted in pop colors, Nick Van Woert's sculpture *Haruspex*, *Haruspex* is a play on the haruspex of ancient Rome, an official who could determine the health and fate of a region by studying the innards of its local animals. It's shaped like E.T., composed of Van Woert's own shirts, pants, and shoes set in a binder of coal slag and urethane, and supported by a steel armature. Its message is simple and direct: We current tenants of the earth will be remembered by our trash. It's also as good an argument as any for recycling.

The show's other artists could be said to be following in the footsteps of Robert Smithson (1938-73), the sculptor best known for his monumental earthwork *Spiral Jetty* in Great Salt Lake, Utah. Smithson's poetic film of said earthwork, also titled *Spiral Jetty*, is here, along with *Strata: A Geophotographic Fiction*, a printed sheet/essay Smith made for the magazine *Aspen* in 1970.

For *Fragments of an Imagined Place*, a project involving histories relating to Atlantis, Elise Rasmussen photographed the site of an unrealized earthwork by Smithson on an uninhabited islet off the coast of Vancouver Island. This piece that never was, *The Glass Island*, which would have been Smithson's first earthwork, was derailed when environmentalists got word that he would be dropping 100 tons of glass shards on the island. They pressured the government of British Columbia to withdraw its loan of the island. Rasmussen's color photographs capture the islet's glimmering, beckoning beauty and allow you to imagine how it might have looked in the sun covered with broken glass.

Also in the vein of Smithson, and to me the most remarkable - and certainly most hard-bitten - piece in this show is Jennifer West's *44 Mile Film*. To create this fragmented "travelogue," West collaged 35 and 70 mm analog film with digital images from Google Maps, phone videos, Instagram posts, computer screen grabs, and animations, all of which were then scanned, recombined, and rephotographed. At some point in her process, West also dragged her film strips along a rock face and pressed them into mud, leaving sprocket-hole prints to fossilize alongside the pawprints of a cougar.

Now doesn't that cover it all?

"A Stratographic Fiction" also includes works by Julian Charrière, Nadja Frank, Kelly Jazvac, and Julius von Bismarck.

Through March 19 at Berman Museum, Ursinus College, 601 E. Main St., Collegeville.
Hours: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays. Information: 610-409-3500 or www.ursinus.edu/berman.

A cast of character

Considering the school's advanced age, and the number of sculptors it has produced over the decades, you might have assumed the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts had a foundry on its premises at some point. Apparently not. Artists who wanted their works cast in metal went to foundries elsewhere - at great expense, too - until a foundry was finally added to the school's sculpture studio in 1986.

"From the PAFA Foundry: 30 Years of Casting" offers an impressive selection of cast-metal works by 17 sculptors, most of them working in the figurative tradition, including sculptures by recent graduates and by PAFA instructors Gary Weisman, who instituted PAFA's foundry, and Joshua Koffman and John Grieg Jr.

Through Feb. 5 at PAFA Alumni Gallery, 118-128 N. Broad St. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesdays; and 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Information: 215-972-7600 or www.pafa.org.