

On exhibit: 'Second Nature' at Albany Aiport Gallery

Exhibit explores responses to a world modified by impact of human activity

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Laura Moriarty, Fossil River, pigmented beeswax and paper, 2008-2013, on exhibition in "Second Nature" at Albany Airport Gallery through March 9 (Courtesy Albany Airport Gallery)

Words like "natural" and "organic" imply goodness by association. But the more they've become marketing buzzwords, the murkier their definitions have become. The exhibition statement for "Second Nature," now on display at the **Albany International Airport Gallery**, identifies the problem with such terms: they once signified things we humans "haven't manufactured or meddled with." Now, humans affect almost every aspect of nature through such things as global warming and genetic modification. The show's artists deal with nature, and the loaded terms we use to talk about it, in a multitude of ways.

The artist dealing most directly with this concept is Karin Stack. Her photographs first appear to be landscapes — a green rolling hillside, a nighttime ocean scene. Looking closer, it's clear these were photos created inside a studio, not on location. Using man-made materials to create a representation of nature, she turns landscape photography on its head. Her sculpture, "Reflecting Pool," is a whimsical, if a little nightmarishly futuristic, take on nature. A video screen on the floor displays blue sky with animated puffy white clouds. AstroTurf surrounds the whole thing as the cord for the monitor snakes conspicuously out from under it.

Whimsy is the province of Roberly Bell, as well. Her brightly colored fiberglass forms resemble something out of a Dr. Seuss book. Bulging and bulbous, these figures sprout fake flowers or found objects in mutated still life vignettes. The objects she chooses — a china bird, a ceramic dog — underscore our fascination with manufactured representations of nature.

A mediated experience of nature is at the heart of **Adam Frelin's** work in the show. His video, "Terranauts," follows two teens as they drag a cardboard box around Los Angeles and view scenes through a rectangular, landscape-oriented hole cut into one end of the box. While working on another project, "White Line (Tokyo)," a still from which is also on view, he learned that Japanese gardens are often designed to be viewed only through buildings — serene views of nature framed by architecture. The box the couple in the video finds allows them (and viewers) to view the world through an artificially altered perspective.

Both **Jason Middlebrook** and **Laura Moriarty** go right to nature for their materials. Middlebrook paints directly on wood planks in patterns that are at odds with the natural pattern of the wood. Although in the push and pull between man and nature, Middlebrook's patterns dominate, the slices of wood hold their own and retain their original shapes and the beauty of the natural wood comes through.

Moriarty creates what are essentially giant, multicolored crayons. Using pigmented beeswax, she builds up layers of color, resulting in beautiful little sculptures resembling unearthed geologic formations. The pieces are like solid paintings, forming a fossil record of her studio practice, one that seems environmentally sustainable. She then uses the sculptures themselves to draw on reams of paper that ripple across the gallery walls.

Katie de Groot's anthropomorphized renderings give new life to once-living twigs and branches. In "Family Relations," a series of four watercolor works on paper is simultaneously a study of two twigs and a portrayal of a couple in disagreement.

In a similar vein, **Jill Parisi** takes inspiration from botanical illustrations to create detailed drawings of otherworldly and imaginary plant life. Some of her cut paper flowers resemble intricate origami. Fragile cell-like, hand-cut etchings, selections from the "Arcane Synusiae" series, overspread a display case like fungus.

The inclusion of **Jenny Kemp** in this group was an inspired choice. Her appealing abstract works are not explicitly of nature but with their bright colors, deep spaces, and organic forms, they definitely appear inspired by it. Accompanying her paintings is a stop-motion video of her works in progress. Animation works perfectly for her work, because the undulating forms and vibrating lines already suggest movement and video injects a sense of playfulness.

The diverse collection of compelling works in this show illustrates that, just as the definitions of "natural" and "organic" are mutable, so too are the ways artists approach the subject of nature.

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