

NASSR Graduate Student Caucus

ARTISTIC PRODUCTION, CREATIVE PRACTICES, REVIEWS

LAURA MORIARTY AND GEOLOGIC MOTIONS

AUGUST 7, 2014 | NICOLE GEARY | 1 COMMENT

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Art.Science.Gallery – a fresh and inventive place that is nestled in Austin’s Canopy Studios of artists, musicians, galleries and other creative spaces. Hayley Gillespie, Ph.D., the founder of the gallery, is an ecologist and artist with a specialization in endangered salamanders. Though the mission for the gallery is to exhibit art merged with science, Gillespie and her team incorporate events and lectures that help to promote science literacy and increase communication between other scientists, artists, and the public. It’s hard not to be smitten with a gallery that also has a Laboratory for classes – but not a typical art class listing. This summer at [Art.Science.Gallery](#), you can register for Climate Science 101.

The show that I came to see was titled “GEO_____”, and featured four artists working in response to topics of general earth related sciences, but in quite unique ways from one another in content and in form. For the purposes of this review, I want to focus on [Laura Moriarty](#)’s work, as I have several immediate responses to her body of work and have been interested in seeing her sculptural pieces for a long time. This exhibit featured 6 of her small three-dimensional paintings that capture the immediate feeling of something being rent asunder, but in the most beautiful way.



I Can See for Miles and Miles #3

Laura Moriarty

2014

layers of solid, pigmented beeswax

Photograph by Nicole Geary

Each one of Moriarty's *I Can See For Miles and Miles* sculptures, which the artist calls three-dimensional paintings, appears as an obelisk that is evidence. Revealed to you in slices and dips, colors spill out and pulse from deep in the stack of layered, pigmented wax. To reveal how the earth's violent and mysterious tectonics work, she reproduces its methods in small scale and in false-color. Viewed as a series or separately, these paintings hint at the geologic motion that shapes the surface we walk upon. Pockets of curiosity into the unknown are exposed, like a textbook diagram, only to be folded in again. Looking down from the top of each piece gives one a sense of temporary peace as observable pigments may peek out from beneath the layers below, hinting at the constant forces of earth's creation and consumption. These are paintings that are not only about surface or image, but the complete construction of them wrapped into one object.

I Can See For Miles and Miles puts in mind Moriarty's encaustic on panel works. These sculptures function less like an object and more like a lesson, reading as colorful and representative models – pages taken right out of the geology textbook – though certainly not a familiar text. Through the repeated application of heating and cooling, building and erosion, each panel takes on its own kind of rock-like form. Using encaustic medium, Moriarty collapses her built structures into new forms, mimicking the processes of the earth, and in doing so creates formations rich with the aesthetic of the geologic. Though her work isn't a teaching tool, it certainly resonates with the voice of science.

One such intriguing example, *Erosion Mountain*, kindles the imagination by just looking closely at its interesting features. Some lovely dark and fluid pattern seems to run through the surface and into the layers below, possibly indicating a flow of water through this mountaintop. The red zone

is mixed up inside, almost as if it is forming breccia near the banks of a river, eroding mountaintop into smaller bits. The strata are easy to correlate, but contain attractive interfingering of large, boulder-like bits of encaustic ephemera from other places. Perhaps the viewer need know nothing about geological workings to enjoy the view of *Erosion Mountain*, but it sure makes for a good story.



Erosion Mountain

Laura Moriarty

2009

Pigmented beeswax on panel

9 x 12 x 4

Image courtesy of <http://www.lauramoriarty.com>

Complementing the three-dimensional paintings, Moriarty also presented a new set of work entitled *Agates*. Several large format paintings composed of layered and pigmented encaustic make up the series, with varying depth and transparency throughout the images. They are quite striking, at once realistic but without a point of tangible reference to some real rock, they conjure the impression of that familiar semi-precious stone. Formed from the tiers of siliceous coating that percolate out of water and line the fine walls of caves or small vesicles, banding in agates represent years of geological layering. The *Agates* delve into those reaches of deep time. The pieces are large (21.25 x 31 inches) and push all edges of the paper, giving a sense that they are not contained by this format. There are no small hand samples here, just large expanses of study of movement and color in the flow of banded encaustic.



Agates
Laura Moriarty
2014
pigmented beeswax on paper
Photograph by Nicole Geary

Laura Moriarty's work is at its most exciting when viewed in three dimensions, however these terrestrial studies hint at what the artist knows. Manipulation of the medium in order to mimic earth's own fiery and sometimes inexplicable motions is the artist's truest skill. Moriarty peels back the layers and hints at the complexities and profundity concerning deep time. She allows us to ponder what goes on beneath the surface, whether it is geologically inspired or more subtly induced.

◀ ROMANTICISM AND SCIENCE

ONE THOUGHT ON "LAURA MORIARTY AND GEOLOGIC MOTIONS"

Pamela

JUNE 1, 2015 AT 3:36 AM

Is there a folded landscape 2. Can find 1, 3 & 4, but not 2.

Love them.

Pamela

