

***and soon the tree which moves the branch\****

*Trail*, the first exhibition to focus exclusively on Melissa Oresky's collages, is designed in response to the hallway space of Hyde Park Art Center's Gallery 5; visitors traverse a path filled with the artist's painted collages before entering a separate room to view the eponymous video. The word "trail" infers a direction, and by extension, both presence and absence. Like the iridescent slime that slowly accumulates behind a slug or the breadcrumbs left as markers in a fairytale forest, a being's passage leaves an imprint on the landscape. With this imprint in mind, Oresky provides a perceptual experience that ties together the genres of abstraction, landscape, and the body. Her conflation of the corporeal and the terrestrial in the process of renewal and decay is territory trodden by many poets, including Laura Solomon, whose poem is excerpted here.

Oresky unabashedly enjoys the process of making. Deftly playing with flatness and depth, representation and abstraction, she takes pleasure in inventing spaces and color relationships that evince a weird beauty. She is devoted to exploring within the formal parameters that she sets at the inception of each project—whether constructing self-contradictory spaces through her placement of cut paper within painted *Lattice* (2012) grids, manipulating movements as she animates individual collages in response to collaborator Zak Boerger's sound for her *Trail* (2012) video, or composing bits of not-quite-detritus in her *Studio Landscape* (2009-2012). She dissects the pieces of paper and paint that surround her, cutting, gluing, and combining them into new forms that evidence the artist's hand in their making.

The history of collage is rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century movements of Cubism, Dada, and Surrealism, but Oresky is one of many contemporary artists—including Mark Bradford and Arturo Herrera—to utilize its transformative potential in response to a vicious onslaught of images in a media-saturated world. A subtle politic of ecology is implicit in both Oresky's subject matter and her reuse of discarded materials. Her points of departure range from an examination of man's imposition of a geometric structure to control nature in *Green Garden* (2008) and her *Lattice* series, to an integration of her studio detritus with fragments of photographs of trash piles in *Landfill* (2007), to a meditation on one's experience of passing through a natural environment in *Trail*.

The notion of an embodied experience particularly interests Oresky; she thinks of the works in the exhibition as human, rather than natural, landscapes. For example, *Studio Landscape* points to the studio as an embodied site of production (without locating the artist's practice by reconfiguring her studio in an institutional space) and identifies it as a physical terrain all its own. Functioning as an archive of references to Oresky's works from the past three years, one can forensically search through the artist's obsessive amalgamations of fragments of drawings, slices of photographs and diagrams, chunks of paint, photocopies of books, and even pulp made from her earlier drawings. On a formal level, she pushes the relationships among solids, voids and gravity—the dynamism of the composition recalls Giacomo Balla's paintings—resulting in a volumetric composition that holds together but is just on the verge of falling apart. The composition is also of primary importance in a viewer's physical experience of Oresky's *Double Jointed Landscape* (2010). Structured along two points of symmetry—along the center folds and at the meeting points between the pages' edges—the cinematic sequence of impossible landscapes propels a viewer along the panorama. The configuration recalls a series of Rorschach tests and reinforces how often one reads a face—whether human, monstrous, or divine—in a symmetrical composition.

Oresky shifts from a physical to a digital space in her video, *Trail*, in which a body's movement through the landscape is implied though the body itself is absent. She hopes to expand one's direct perceptual experiences of the body outward to an awareness of temporal and physical shifts in the landscape. One may initially imagine the flickering shadow play among leaves and sun while walking or running through a wooded area, but that turns to a combination of fantasy and memory as the depicted space becomes less recognizable. Anthropomorphized "tree branches" shape-shift between twisted, dense tentacles and ornate, slender bundles against a background that fluctuates between gray, violet, and cerulean colors. Segments of the trees twinkle, waver, and grow; two clouds, or perhaps satellites, pass through the space in a synchronized dance; the trail is represented as an exaggerated, though elegant, one-point perspective drawing. One can surmise a passage of time in the changing speed and color of the visual elements and the shifting tempo of the sound. At the end of the video, only the trail extends ahead of the viewer, an apt metaphor for lived experience.

and soon the roots  
and soon the earth the real earth  
too soon the earth\*

—Kendra Paitz, Curator of Exhibitions at University Galleries of Illinois State University

\*Laura Solomon, "the dream is often of a nest," in *Poets on Painters*, ed. Katie Geha and Travis Nichols (Wichita, KS: Wichita State University Press, 2007), 34.

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