

Interview with Artist Laurie Snyder

Christophe Casamassima: In your artist's statement for the 4X4 exhibit at the Towson ARTS Collective, you write, "As photography becomes more and more complex, I find myself drawn to the simplest and oldest processes." Describe how, and why, this shift away from the camera, that which manipulates and distorts light, toward more protean elements like photosensitive chemicals and paper, is essential to our understanding of the relationship between technology and aesthetics.

Laurie Snyder: We are inundated with camera/lens images: photographs, TV, movies, internet. I feel as a society we are oversaturated with images and thus, those images become more and more suspect as "truth". By simplifying my process, going back to the origins of the understanding of light sensitivity, I feel I refresh myself, and hopefully my viewers.

My pieces for the Towson exhibit are long wall hangings. They fold up in an accordion book form, and thus they also relate to historic Asian ways of depicting the landscape. The accordion is similar to the scroll, but with folds. I use a Japanese natural fiber paper that is both strong and thin. The covers are a sturdy handmade paper.

One might call this looking to the past for inspiration, or rather I think of it as using traditional methodology in a contemporary mode. I am also fascinated by the way the plant materials, all grown in my garden, "draw themselves". I make the arrangements, but I am always surprised by the way the sun and the plants interact. This gives me the surprise element that I so enjoy in art making.



CC: The art of surprise is well understood in your art-making. It suggests that the outcome is not so much understood as the processes surmised by chance methods, i.e., that the outcome is not so much expected as enacted. It's quite interesting that you equate this surprise with chance methods. Is this true for this project? That the outcome is more of a surprise as it is an intentional act of art-making?

LS: The paradox with surprise and chance as a methodology is that as soon as one has achieved something that one likes, it becomes more predictable. Nonetheless we keep at it, hoping for that spark.

CC: What about the eye of the viewer, who is used to seeing images on film, whose only reference is the traditional snapshot? Are the experiments you're currently working on, the long wall hangings, an attempt to de-center the viewers' traditional point of view (reference) of/to the prescribed notion of photography?

LS: I think my concerns are both personal and educational. I want people to understand photography in the broadest context.

CC: Is your artwork, in this sense, didactic, as well as pragmatic?

LS: I think of my artwork as lyrical, poetic, and reference history. Is that didactic and pragmatic?