

Galerie Gisela Clement

The World We Live In
Matthew Northridge

Your series “The World We Live In” is a constant in your work since 2006. In your sculptural work you often incorporate national symbols, flags, maps or other objects that are related to geography. How are your collages maybe related to your sculptures?

Broadly speaking, the collages engage another element of geography, though they come about through a different process than my three-dimensional work. With the sculpture, I can chart what is involved in terms of production, materials, and time. They are more controlled. Progress occurs over a longer timeframe. With the collages, they come together (or don't) in a much quicker, more mysterious way. They have all the risk and messiness of building a complete picture from nothing.

The series is named after a row of special issues, published by LIFE Magazine in the 1950's, that covered everything about planet earth. In the magazine the different articles were illustrated by photographs and artists drawings, which created an image of nature somewhere between reality and fiction. How do you refer to that series in your collages?

“The World We Live In” is not only the namesake, but was among my earlier sources for landscape photos. I appreciated how the title so confidently over-reached, much in the fashion of 1950's American optimism. “The World We Live In” never truly existed in any real way. It was a concept presented as concrete reality, but in fact was part true, part what was desired to be true. Its universal, all-encompassing title is also its beautifully failed mission. By adopting the title, I've recognized the same dynamic in my work.

In your collages you bring together two different levels: photographs of nature are serving as a background for abstract forms. How are they reacting to each other in the process of making them?

There are two distinct elements: the landscape represented by a pre-existing photo and a construction, pieced together from found material. The construction occupies the surface of the photo as well as the immediate foreground within the picture space. As the series evolved, the construction has pushed the edges of the composition, crowding out what little view we have of the landscape and challenging our ability to read it.

“The World We Live In” rather creates new places than giving away hints about the place in the background. What kind of world are you imagining in your collages?

The world I'm depicting is not defined by place, whether actual or imagined. Any specific location remains to be intuited by the viewer. I'm primarily interested in the interplay between the natural and manmade, real and representational space.

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When we received the new collages for the exhibition, the first thing we noticed is a slight difference from the ones we still had from the show back in 2014. The new ones seem a bit brighter in color and the forms in the foreground more present. They are not as playfully integrated into the background as they used to be, which makes them more independent. Is this just a very personal interpretation from us, or did you transfer this change from your surroundings?

The evolution is not so much slight as gradual. The series actually began many years ago as a way to catalog source material, and was more collected than assembled. Over time, an effort has been made to fully “buy in” to the picture space and build something within it. These first efforts were partly a reaction to the photo. Now, the construction wills itself on the landscape.

We obviously live in a strange world right now. The Coronavirus has a very big impact on everyone’s personal life, but also very much on cultural life, institutions and everyone involved. Do you think this will impact your collages, or maybe it does already?

My work is impacted by much less significant events, so I’d have to say yes. There is a strange duplicity to the whole thing- on one hand we’ve been granted a compulsory, ad hoc artist residency (i.e. shelter-in-place) and on the other hand- the deep, dark unknown. This arrangement is only unfamiliar in its gravity.