

Wild Yonder

By

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Abstract

Wild Yonder is a body of large mixed media, collage wall hangings made from scrape fabric, textiles, prints, drawings, and rubbings. All these elements come together to form a post apocalyptic world in each piece, populated by scooters, beer cans, satellites, and wild people called *wildings*. The artwork deals with themes of environmentalism, and legacy by way of a science fiction narrative.

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Wild Yonder

I. Intro

Prophetic visions of our world reverted to a wilder and chaotic place have often been depicted in film, literature, and art. This provides a means of escape from our everyday lives of mundane order. These visions also serve as warnings against corporate greed, environmental negligence, over-population, devices that can scourge the earth, and other such things that will eventually bring about the fall of civilization. It seems that most don't heed such warnings. That type of eventuality where humans must revert to their baser instincts or don't exist at all is far into the future. The next generation can deal with it. Anyway, that is the attitude we often have, and it seems to be the attitude of the many generations before ours. These issues of environment, history, and the future are what I address in my art work. My thesis exhibition, *Wild Yonder*, is a body of textile collages that illustrates a day in the life of humans existing in a world after severe global environmental disasters, centuries after the fall of earth's modern civilization. When and how this event occurred I leave open to the viewer's interpretation. The disaster could be looming in the near future or millennia from now. The landscape is drastic and harsh yet oddly colorful, populated by beasts and insects that have evolved to survive in this new environment. The following is an excerpt from artist statement for *Wild Yonder*. It provides the viewer with the narrative background to compliment the artwork:

"Humanity was wiped out, save for those who watched from the heavens, who saw their brethren die and could do nothing. They were the astronauts who lived in the orbiting space stations. They have lived for years in the station after witnessing the fall of

earth, and when they finally arrived to the surface, they could no longer recognize the lands they left. Nor could they recognize their former selves, for their minds had turned to madness through prolonged isolation and radiation exposure. Their generations of offspring evolved into hermaphrodites in order to increase their chances of breeding, and they develop hairy bodies to protect from the now brighter sun due to a thinner sky.”ⁱ



fig. 1
Future Scooter Parts

II. Themes

The narrative and these art works are a glimpse into my vision of a world born from the actions of today. The wild and hairy hermaphrodites, who I call the *wildings*, are left with the consequences of those who came before them. They have had to adapt and evolve to survive. In our own history, I often think about how each generation is left in the wake of the actions of their fathers and mothers. We gnash our teeth; we howl and wail at what we are born into. Decades of excess and negligence has left our earth’s ecosystem in a disastrous state. Yet we still cherish many of the things they have left behind for us, such as music, style, literature, and technology.

We embrace them, expand upon them and make them our own. It seems as though we may be stuck in a spiral of creating a harsher world for the next generation to live in, but still leaving them cool stuff to distract from the inevitable destruction.

In *Wild Yonder*, I illustrate these ideas through the characters living in a harsh and almost alien ecosystem, one created from greed and ignorance. The *wildings* in this fiction cherish the artifacts left behind for them. The scooter and the satellite become key players in this mythology. They represent the past, present and future all existing in the same time and place. The *wildings* take and break down these objects and use them to make sense of the world and themselves.

III. Process

My artistic process reiterates these ideas by the way I use and manipulate my materials (fabric, textiles, prints, drawings, and paper) to suit a narrative. I am forever at odds with the world I have found myself in, surrounded by the leftovers of those who came before me. I always worry what will be left after me. Still, I cherish the artifacts from the previous generations and the nostalgia they provide. Perhaps they are just a distraction from the reality that surrounds me, an attempt to make the best of what is left to me. I must adapt myself and the objects at my disposal in order to understand my place and time.

I find myself strongly pulled to collage as my means of building this narrative of adapting to what is left for us. As I tell this story, I search for fabric that I can manipulate and mold into landscapes. I go to fabric stores and antique malls for fabric scraps, old clothing, and bedding. I amass a large supply to pull from. I find inspiration in the pieces of fabric I come across, and my

work begins to take shape through the act of combining fabric scraps with elements of drawings and prints. When I approach drawing or printmaking, I start with a blank page, or plate and a loose image in my mind. It feels as if I must create this visionary fiction out of thin air. But with collage, I have the physical pieces in front of me; I can touch them and see them. I react to the texture and color, and I can see the forms they can take. They are already the mountains and the sky. The world is there, I just need to piece it together. I leave myself open to adapt to the materials and in turn, the materials can more easily adapt to my creative impulse. This allows for a more fluid experience during the art making process.

The textiles I choose are due to the nostalgic impact they have on me, such as the fabrics that I may have had as a child. A military sleeping bag as well as, a duffle bag my dad may have camped with, and that his dad, my grandfather, used in WW2. The table cloths and runners my mother and grandmother used to decorate a house. When I was told stories as a child, they would stick with me throughout a day, and take on a new life as I projected them from my mind onto the fabric and patterns I saw around the house. The textures and patterns provided a place for me to imagine a landscape with alternative stories. The fabrics also became a three-dimensional world for my action figures to climb, roam, battle, get lost, and live within.

In my work, each found fabric comes with its own history, in both tradition and function. I am able to obscure some of their history by deconstructing the fabrics to a point where their original purpose may become hidden. In the piece, *Hitchin' A Stinger* (fig. 2), the brown fabric that the mountains and figures are set against is the inside of an old military sleeping bag. That may not be immediately apparent to the viewer, because it has been cut up and flattened out.

However, it still holds onto a few clues of its original form and purpose; the brown felt wool, and the zipper on both ends. I don't want the textiles to become devoid of their former intended purpose and inherent usefulness. For my purposes, the textiles should still hold some of their history and take on the roles of father, mother, and child. As the fabric becomes more ambiguous I can form a deeper relationship with it, and impose my own nostalgia and narrative on to the fabric. Bedsheets and curtains form the sky. A yellow table cloth becomes the sun. The mountains are created using random fabric scraps with pastel rubbings, cut up quilts, military sleeping bag, and old sweaters. The cloth becomes the landscape for the story to unfold.



fig. 2
Hitching' A Stinger



fig. 3
Still Wild

In the piece *Still Wild* (fig.3) we see the landscape is set. The backdrop is created, and ready for the players to inhabit it; beasts, bugs, *wildings*, satellites and scooters. However, in this particular piece the landscape remains empty. This barren landscape suggests to the viewer that even these inhabitants are temporary. In *A Whoopin' & A Rompin'* (fig.4) the land is teeming with life again. The apocalyptic cast is the drawing and printmaking elements I bring into these pieces. The beasts and bugs are much like the landscape, changed and shaped into a more extreme version of what they once were, evolved into a form more suitable for its time and place. The scooter is what the wildings have dug up; repaired and seen as a worthy object of the past to keep around due to the fact that its small size is perfect for mountain riding. The loud engine

noise the scooter emits is also pleasing to the wildings ears. The satellite is still on an orbital path though much closer to the earth's surface. There is nothing on land to send data to and nothing to receive data from; they have become the silent observers. The satellites are brought down by the wildings to be taken apart, studied, and scraped for parts, much in the same way as I treat the fabrics I find.



fig. 4
A Whoopin' & A Rompin'

I am the *wildings*, and they are aspects of my personality. I have an obsession with scooters, working on them and riding them. The *wilding* is a hermaphrodite because I recognize the masculine and feminine aspects of myself. Their fascination with satellites is my interest in humanities exploration of space and our primal need to expand and explore. The *wildings* also encapsulate how I see humanity. Our civilization lives on this planet that has been polluted

almost to a point of no return, and as we continue to do so it leads us to look beyond to find a new planet as a means of escape to survive and do it all over again. We misuse the materials around us by continuing to use up the fossil fuels that our forefathers saw as a fitting way of progressing human kind, but in faster and more reckless ways. We ignore the ways in which we have evolved in knowledge and recourse. We perpetuate the myth of progress by acting as though we move forward, but in reality we are standing still and maybe slipping backwards.

IV. Inspiration

When confronting the problems that plague the human race today, whether social, political, environmental, or economical, it usually seems a bit clearer through the science fiction lens. By taking the issues of today and placing them within a fictional time and place, it allows the viewer or reader to see the issues that surround them from an outsider's point of view. Science fiction that focuses its lens on a world drastically changed by natural or manmade events is a great source of inspiration for me; *The Children of Time*ⁱⁱ by Stephen Baxter, *The Postman* by David Brin, *A Boy and His Dog*ⁱⁱⁱ by Harlan Ellison, *The Wrenchies*^{iv} by Farel Dalrymple, and any of the *Mad Max* movies. These are stories in which the absurdity of human nature is as exaggerated as the landscapes they inhabit. Stories about the human need advance technology and to search the galaxy for new homes is also a huge inspiration; *The Crystal Spheres*^v by David Brin, as well as writings by Orson Scott Card and Isaac Asimov. Both types of stories deal with the inspiration, hilarity, and folly of humanities hubris, something that is a key element in my own work.

I find inspiration and also encouragement seeing other artists wrestling with the issues of a changing ecosystem. Prophetic visions of our planet's landscape whether brought on by human interference or natural occurrence allow artist and viewer to think more about the consequences brought on by the actions of today. There is a group of artists in the Pacific Northwest that become known as the Natural Catastrophes School, they are a mix of painters and sculptors and they focus on the ever shrinking and changing natural landscape. Mary Iverson paints images of abandoned or crashed cargo ships with their containers over found photographs of state parks to symbolize capitalism encroaching into and destroying our natural world. Ryan Molenkamp paints volcanic landscapes in a style of cubistic abstraction that resembles geological survey maps. His landscapes are devoid of any life due to constant lava flow. These artists, much like the science fiction authors I read, offer the viewer a glimpse into potential outcomes of our world's future, and without being too heavy handed they give us warnings that things will not stay as they are; change will come whether brought on by man or nature.

Along with the narrative and environmental ideas behind my work, material and process is a strong driving force in my art making. I repurpose scraps of fabric, drawings, and prints as the building blocks of my visual narrative. I look to other artists who employ similar methods to their art. Aaron Johnson's Sock Paintings show how material can strongly influence the composition of a piece. He assembles old used socks to create a tactile three-dimensional painting surface. Johnson says about his work, "The sweat-soaked, toe-nail-torn, holey socks create a painterly surface punctuated with orifices, phallic bulges, and a swirling seductive physicality." The act of using these socks that come with their own history adds another layer of interest to a piece beyond what is being illustrated visually. Reuse is evident in Nick Cave's

elaborate and fantastical Soundsuits made with everyday found objects, such as buttons, sticks, textiles, and even an abacus. In these suits, these everyday objects find new life and allow for the artist and viewer to think about them in unintended ways. When worn by the artist they take on strange forms and movements that give the suits a unique and fictional history.

When artists take everyday objects and remold and re-purpose them into something new and unintended, it allows the viewer to look past the original history of the object and give it a new one. Artists who reuse their own artwork create their own history or mythology in their work by developing an iconography that continually builds upon itself through narrative. This practice is not only for the viewers' benefit, but for the artist's as well. By recycling imagery for new work, the artist develops a codex to pull from—a language of imagery that is the foundation of a story becoming more real through repetition.

Printmaking lends itself to recycling imagery allowing for several possibilities of art making. The artist Dennis McNett uses printmaking to create a living mythology. Using carved woodblocks as his matrix, McNett creates imagery of wolves, birds, snakes, and other beasts. He then cuts up those prints and assembles them over structures to create large masks and large boats. He also prints blocks onto fabric creating ceremonial garb. McNett draws his influence from Norse mythology. He expands upon those old stories to make them his own and the visual language he creates through repetition and reuse is easily recognized as belonging in the same world. These artists and I are fueled by the act of reuse, not only in a rehashing of imagery or subject matter, but of material and practice to transcend our art making and storytelling across media.

V. Conclusion

This act of reusing materials goes hand in hand with my narrative themes of environment and history, as well as my approach to art-making. The scraps of fabric from our collective history allow me to deal with objects passed down, reusing the prints I have made in the past give me a lexicon of imagery to build upon and allow me to adapt them into new works. The acts I play out in my practice mirror the actions of the *wilding* in my narrative. We are both adapting and evolving to exist in the world we find ourselves. When I first began this graduate program I thought I was content in my role as printmaker, never truly being comfortable with the title of artist. But I felt restless, there was more I wanted to say in my artwork and I was limiting myself by sticking to one medium. I had to turn to my past and looked at long forgotten art journals where each page was littered with mixed media collage. My past allowed me to evolve the way I see and make art, giving me the momentum to push my artwork farther. I will continue to make, destroy, evolve, adapt, and survive.



fig. 4
Forebears



fig. 5
Brumbler



fig. 6
Death Ahead



fig. 7

Fool For Motion



fig. 8
Yer Time Come

ⁱ Excerpt from *Wild Yonder* artist statement.

ⁱⁱ *The Children of Time*- The reader is given glimpses into different eras in our planets distant future, each era separated by thousands of years. In each time frame the reader is shown how the land has changed and what types of creatures have evolved to survive. This writing had a large influence on me when thinking about humans and nature through the passage of time, and being able to look past my own mortality.

ⁱⁱⁱ *A Boy And His Dog*- The titles name sakes communicate telepathically to each other and must survive a post-apocalyptic world by being just as savage as the world around them. This writing impacted the way I see how quickly and savegly humans return to their baser instincts.

^{iv} *The Wrenchies*- Gangs of children hopped up on drugs rule the wasteland in a violent world that straddles the line between technology, magic and mysticism.

^v *The Crystal Spheres*- Humanity spans the galaxy for centuries looking for a new home. They finally find planets with ruins of passed civilizations only to be blocked by invisible barriers impeding them from landing. Here is where I find humanities need to survive, and a need for home.

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