Conversation With Nature

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In nature there is no same moment. Nature constantly changes. Everything in it deals with the changes. We also deal with the changes. My works are the results of dealing with and responding to the changes through the process, which I call “conversation with nature.”

Figure 1, left. Sunset, Sep 27; 2010; digital photography
Figure 2, center. Rainbow; Oct 14, 2007; digital photography
Figure 3, right. Tulip, April 1; 2009; digital photography

Today, I would like to share my process Conversation with Nature especially in the context of the TSA Biennial Session, Slow Art, of which this presentation was a part.

I have been dealing with nature in my work, while using it as my conceptual inspiration as well as materials.

Figure 4, left. Dusk (first tapestry); 1983; hand dyed wool & cotton, and mixed yarn; 8” x 5 1/2”
Figure 5, center. Picture Taken By Myself; 1985; silk, Plexiglas, parts from film canister - actual film size
Figure 6, right. Slides and Box; 1988; silk, cotton - actual size

I love taking photos capturing the moment around me. Taking photos has started a while back for me. These days, I have a camera with me almost all the time, capturing the moment of new discovery during my daily activities. I have been documenting my works by myself. So I have been benefitted with Photography in that way. But photography has become more than just documenting finished works for me. It has become a fast sketching tool, idea data bank and journal, capturing things and moments to help me remember later. As the digital technology develops more, my camera has made it more possible for me to easily capture things from far away, things that are very small, things in a poor lighting situation and so on.
While I am dealing with Nature I also deal with issue of recycling and thriftiness. That attitude of recycling and thriftiness is rooted in Fibers practices, which we can see from the history of Quilt and Basketry for example.

During my graduate study at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, I started to examine trees more closely and even started to utilize them as materials. My close Conversation with Nature was started then. Gathering and collecting objects and materials are essential parts in my creative process. I respectfully approach this environmental processing in my work. From the moment of collecting, the collaboration between these objects, materials and me begins. In this process trees have been a close subject matter as well as materials.
While I was working on a project dealing with “Architecture” as a concept, first thing came up to my mind was “blanket/ quilt.” A blanket is used to wrap a baby, so it is sort of our first dwelling/ protection. A grandmother would put scrap fabric together to make a quilt, which would be handed down to generations carrying her love and warmth. A tree sheds the leaves in the fall, blanketing the ground nurturing and protecting the seedlings for the winter…. All these thoughts were going through my mind. In this process I was able to find a room to explore the connection between nature and quilt-making, dealing with the physical format of quilt-making as well as the quilt as a metaphor. This happened quite naturally.

Figure 14, left. Aged; covered by wisdom; 1996; wood, waxed linen cord, fabric, thread; 108 x 108”
Figure 15, right. Aged; covered by wisdom, 1996 (detail); wood, waxed linen cord, fabric, thread; 108 x 108”

I also was able to deal with the idea, how information gets preserved and handed down to generation to generation, while also dealing with transformation to deal with ever-changing world.

Figure 16, left. Path; 1999; wood, thread, fabric; 16” x 22’ (variable)
Figure 17, right. Path; 1999 (detail); wood, thread, fabric; 16” x 22’ (variable)

Figure 18. Scroll II; 2000; fir needles, thread, silk organza, wood; 9” x 11’ 10” (variable)
Figure 19, left. SageLand; 1998; wild sage bushes; 7” x 20’ x 12’; Installation at the Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA

Figure 20, right. 100 Sage Flavored Cubes; 2007; recycled wild sage leaves (from SageLand, 1998), wood, gesso; 100 of 3.5” each (overall: approx. 60 x 60 x 3.5”)

About a year ago, one of my friends in NYC dragged me into an internet game called FarmVille. She was trying to convince me that as a New Yorker living in concrete environment with busy schedule, this virtual farming almost gave her similar pleasure and relaxation she would get from the real gardening. I told her that it was a wasting time and suggested her to get small potted plants for her small apartment instead. Anyway, as you can tell from my presentation I am also playing this game now. In this virtual garden, things can go really fast. I can plant and harvest many plants within a day and I can move things around easily, such as houses, trees, ponds and so on. But as you know it is not like that in this real world.

Figure 21. Kyoung Ae’s Lawn Trimmed with Scissors; 2001

About 10 years ago I moved into my house, which has a decent size lot in the back yard. Over the past years it has been slowly shaping up. As a person who had the first own garden I decided to plant corns, just because I loved eating corns and I never grew my own corn before. I made something out of cornhusks before but I didn’t plant it for materials. I mainly planted it to eat. And it grew very nicely. I ate about 20 corns and squirrels or other rodents visited my backyard ate about 20 as well. So the first year of corn planting was pretty successful.
But the main bonus came in the fall of that year after done with harvesting corns. I have seen the corn leaves before but I never looked at them carefully and this closely. I had a chance to rediscover their beauty. Growing corn was sort of slow but trying to harvest leaves in the right time was pretty crazy. Leaves were changing the colors so fast and it was very hard to keep up with them. After harvesting and getting done with preparation, actual putting together came slowly. In the corn leaf work series I have been trying to capture the moment when I rediscover the beauty of these leaves, by using actual leaves with silk organza and endless hand stitches.
In my Conversation with Nature process, not only I get inspiration from Nature I also get to collaborate with nature. As most of you might be aware that snails love hosta leaves. I have lots of snails in my garden. They enjoy my hosta leaves also. Usually this could be regarded as nuisances but I see it as a part of beautiful natural process. Also as a person, who loves left-over food, I thought I would utilize snail’s left-over food, hosta leaves eaten by snails. In this “Remains” series, I wanted to celebrate nature, dealing with both fragility and endurance of nature.

Figure 28, left. Hostas leaves (eaten by slugs); photo
Figure 29, center. Remains-IV; 2002; hosta leaf (eaten by slugs), silk organza, thread; 32 x 24”
Figure 30, right. Remains-IV; 2002 (detail); hosta leaf (eaten by slugs), silk organza, thread; 32 x 24”

As all gardeners would do, I also weed. Most of time I have a hard time deciding what to pull out. If they are not really any big problem I usually let them grow and bloom at least that year, while getting to know and learning more about it. Many ended up staying permanently even with their own designated area, with my encouragement. Like my artwork, my garden has become a place where I collaborate with nature as well. So what is weed? I once heard that anything you didn’t plant and come by itself is “weed”. According to that definition most of my flowers in my garden would be weeds. The weeds that I would pull without considering too much are most of the viny stuff and a kind that would become a big tree, such as maple, poplar, fir and so on. So they are unwanted and regarded as weeds in my garden as well. But they all could have become handsome trees if they would come up in a desirable spot… I go on to my philosophical moment relating this to our life, situation, opportunity, environment, and so on. While pulling these baby trees with beautiful roots I am thinking of the potential and possibility that these plants could have become.

Figure 31, left. Unwanted Tree- weeding
Figure 32, right. Unwanted Tree- weeded tree
We cover our body to protect and also to decorate with clothing. Plants do that as well with leaves and flowers. After harsh winter, spring always comes, and so as Summer, Fall and then Winter comes back again. While changing our clothing we all get aged and matured. Time flows. As you may know, Wisconsin where I live has a pretty long winter and it is always surprising to see how things survive after that long deadly winter. This piece, *Remains VIII-I*, was conceived after discovering the leaf skeleton in this early spring in front of my house. It was delicate, yet strong at the same time.

Between my home and school there are many Barberry Bushes on the way. I have been passing these bushes many years. For whatever reason, these bushes caught my eyes more last year. The brilliant red leaves were so standing out against the concrete building and walkway. The leaves on the branches were beautiful, but also the leaves fallen to the ground were beautiful and energetic. I immediately set down and started to collect them. The piece, *Fallen*, was my attempt to capture that moment.
Figure 38, left. Barberry Bushes; photo
Figure 39 center. Fallen; 2010 (detail): leaves, silk organza, thread; 42 x 42”
Figure 40, right. Fallen; 2010; leaves, silk organza, thread; 42 x 42”

I will continue my conversation with Nature, slowly responding to and collaborating with its ever changing nature.

Figure 41, left. Spider and spider web; July 1, 2009; photo
Figure 42, right. Kyoung Ae working on the piece, Fallen