



Deep time and the unsettling bite of impermanence

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From an early age, I have been both captivated and unnerved by the complexity and scope of our natural world. This fascination has shaped my artistic practice, which centers around the perception of time, space, and scale, and our ability to abstractly place ourselves within the larger universe around us.

I am drawn to how our relatively short life spans affect the way we perceive time, and how the context of the present shapes how we interpret the past and predict the future. Environmentalism, ecology, and the natural sciences are a constant in my work, and fields such as geology, taxonomy, paleontology, and evolutionary biology are commonly employed as catalysts in my practice. My artwork (*Figures 1-5*) weaves between science-fact and science-fiction, alluding to the more elusive qualities of our environment, and our own uncertain future on this planet. In *Figures 3,5*, I created landscapes and paleolithic structures out of petroleum-based materials such as reclaimed asphalt and color-shifting automotive paint.

My installations explore labor, impermanence, and fragility. Site - responsiveness and architectural-integration are vital to my practice, appropriating the pre-existing structure of the site as part of the artwork. I strategically focus on the physical boundaries of my artwork, challenging the lines between where the art ends and the exhibition space begins. The act of building is central to both the final work and my creative process, and much of my artistic practice is dedicated to methodical material manipulation. In *Figure 1*, I created a geological formation that appears to have physically erupted out of the exhibition space. This false floor was built over the existing gallery floor, which the viewer may walk directly onto. The physical integration into the exhibition space heightens both the geological

qualities of the artwork as well as the viewers' acute spatial awareness within the installation.

Although my artwork requires a large physical presence in its construction, conceptually, the works hinge on fragility and impermanence. The life cycles of my individual works have become crucial to my practice. The art exists for the duration of its exhibition, and then it does not. This is particularly evident in *Figures 2,4*. *Figure 2* is a memorial to the recently extinct Baiji river dolphin. This work is created from personally gathered freshwater driftwood, which was then bleached and hand-carved into 12 distinct Baiji skeletons of varying completeness. The installation depicts these skeletons emerging out into the air from a pile of driftwood in one corner of the gallery, soaring through the exhibition space, and then dissolving into a glowing dome at the opposite end of the gallery. *Figure 4* is created largely from evaporated salt and depicts a crystalline structure that appeared to be both fixed and sweeping. All figures referenced were created specifically for the spaces they were exhibited in. After the run of each exhibition, the artworks were meticulously disassembled, and their materials were recycled back into my studio practice. There is an unsettling bite to that impermanence, but also intense weight and beauty.

About the artist

Jonathan Latiano (born 1982) received his BA in Studio Art from Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania and his MFA from the Mount Royal School of Interdisciplinary Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Jonathan's artistic practice is rooted in the study of time, the natural sciences, and the viewer's own spatial



Figure 1 “Points of Contention”. Year: 2011. Materials: wood, plastic, acrylic, styrofoam, glass, plexiglass, and salt. Dimensions: height 10 ft., width 30 ft., length 30 ft., Medium: installation. Description: site-responsive, architecturally integrated installation about time, emerging ecosystems, and human’s long-term impact on the geological record. Photo Credit: Lloyd Lowe Jr.



Figure 2 “Flight of the Baiji”. Year: 2014. Materials: driftwood, bleach, plexiglass, halogen light, and steel. Dimensions: height 14 ft., width 17 ft., length 50 ft. Medium: installation. Description: memorial to the functionally-extinct Baiji River Dolphin created for the Baltimore Museum of Art. Photo Credit: Kim Llerena.



Figure 3 “Existence and Properties are Inferred”. Year: 2016. Material: asphalt, river stones, foam, joint compound, and color-shifting automotive paint. Dimensions: height 12 ft., width 35 ft., depth 22 ft. Medium: installation. Description: site-responsive installation sculpture about the new geological record being left by human’s infatuation with petroleum. Photo Credit: Kim Llerena.



Figure 4 “Skimming the Riff”. Year: 2015. Materials: clear acrylic and evaporated salt. Dimensions: height 9 ft., width 15 ft., length 15 ft. Medium: installation. Description: site-responsive installation focusing on the aesthetics, fragility, and varying speeds of crystalline forms. Photo Credit: Jaime Alvarez.



Figure 5 “Monument and Memorials”. Year: 2018. Materials: asphalt, river stone, color-shifting automotive paint. Dimensions: height 5 ft., width 8 ft., length 8 ft. Medium: sculpture. Description: sculpture comprised of reclaimed asphalt towers topped with color-shifting river stones; serves as both monument and memorial to the new geological epoch created by human beings. Photo Credit: Nancy Daly.

awareness within the immersive installations he creates. His artwork has been exhibited in numerous solo and group public art exhibitions in cities including New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington DC, and London, and his work has been featured in local, national, and international art publications. Jonathan was the recipient of the 2013 Mary Sawyers Baker Prize in Art, Moravian College’s Outstanding Young Alumni Award, and the Bunting Teaching Fellowship in Fine Arts at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Jonathan resides and works in Boston, Massachusetts and serves as the Director of the Visual Arts Program at Merrimack College.

Jonathan Latiano’s full portfolio can be found at www.jonathanlatiano.com.

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None.

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The author has completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form (available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/cdt.2020.01.05>).

[org/10.21037/cdt.2020.01.05](http://dx.doi.org/10.21037/cdt.2020.01.05)). The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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