

FALL 2014
KERRI REID: SOUVENIRS



Leave No Trace: A Review of Kerri Reid's *Souvenirs*

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Kerri Reid's *Souvenirs* (2012) was exhibited at Dunlop Art Gallery's Central Gallery as a part of the exhibition, *From What Remains* which ran from September 19th to November 13th, 2014. Reid assembles found rocks from locations across the world and creates their exact replica, made using stoneware, underglazes, acrylic, and gouache. In *Souvenir Return*, she has presented the stoneware rocks next to pictures of the original rocks, which have been placed back in the environment where they were found. Each rock and its replica vary in size from approximately 1 cm to 8 cm.

Collecting and replicating are things that Reid has much experience with. In the past, she has collected found items such as broken wicker baskets and smashed mugs, then replicated them in their broken form before attempting their repair. Reid is also known for replicating found objects, much like this project, but *Souvenirs* stands out from the rest. This piece addresses modern environmental issues, yet it is not quite activism. Treading carefully, Reid politely reminds viewers to consider how actions such as taking a rock home as a vacation souvenir would be altering the natural state of its surroundings. Restoring what has been removed, Reid enacts the souvenir



Kerri Reid, *Souvenirs (California)*, 2010, rocks from California in rows on left, with ceramic copies in rows on right. Photo: University of Regina Photography Department.

return: “like the process of creating a perfect copy, this act attempts another impossible replication – to return a landscape, imperceptibly altered, to its pre-alteration state.”¹ Initially, while performing the *Souvenir Return* part of this project, Reid would place the ceramic copy back into nature, while keeping the original for herself. She reconsidered this method after considering that the beached whales who wriggle about the sand and rocks might irritate themselves on a ceramic impostor.

Reid's *Souvenirs* are exhibited as rows in display cases, much like scientific specimens. The collection contains around 200 pieces, including the replicas. Mimicking its exact placement, the replica is arranged beside the original, appearing as miraculously identical rocks. Upon closer inspection, the differences between the natural rock and the stoneware become apparent. Depending on the rock, the stoneware can appear totally smooth, layered and jagged, grainy, or have a unique recess. Hundreds of years of corrosion, pollutants, water pressure, and weather change give a rock its natural characteristics, so for a person to try to replicate these features is challenging. After the shaping of the stoneware, Reid carefully applies a combination of acrylic and gouache paints to each stone copy, reproducing each rock's individual features as accurately as possible. Some rocks are a solid colour and have more emphasis on the body shape, while others are smooth with a plethora of colours. This faithful reproduction of her geological mementos marks Reid's journeys throughout the world and creates a bond with nature as she returns the authentic stone to its rightful place, ultimately restoring balance to those environments. It is obvious that human's impact on our planet

has been incredible, and each of us has done our part in creating an ecological footprint. Is Reid's gentle process of replicating and replacing enough to make viewers consider a leave-no-trace policy? We will discover the answer to this question as we dive deeper into the meaning behind this piece.

During an artist's residency in Iceland, Reid learned of a particular superstitious practice involving the volcanic stones found in the area: "[this] project came about when I learned of tourists to Iceland taking lava rocks home with them, and then proceeding to have bad luck; evidently some tourists mail their rocks back to Iceland in an effort to change their luck." Could it be the spirits of nature cursing those who disturb the harmony of the land?

Souvenirs is similar to other environmental works of art, such as Andy Goldsworthy's nature rearrangements, or Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks*, where he planted 7000 oak trees in Kassel, Germany to promote reverse urbanization. The act of imitating real objects with art is formally restricting – there is not a lot of independent decision-making for the artist. With the goal of being faithful to the originals in her reproductions, Reid has to utilize materials that will best imitate the "naturalness" of the stones, using ceramic stoneware and a mix of acrylic and gouache paints. Other 3D building materials such as polymer, paper mâché, or 3D printing would not look as natural as stoneware. Using more than one medium to colour the copies allows Reid to create the vast, unique qualities of each stone. The size of each rock is also considered – the smaller the rock, the less noticeable errors are. The artist has chosen a variety of types

of rocks, which is refreshing to the viewer, as we get to ponder the different formal techniques used by the artist and experience a different story with each pair. Some pieces are replicated superbly, while in other pieces, broad paint application or slightly off-colour underglazing makes the copies obvious. It is extremely hard to perfectly imitate nature. Plato's *Theory of Forms* states that all existing things in our world are imperfect copies of a perfect form or idea, and by this theory, even the original rocks are lack the sought-after perfection of the Platonic ideal. Keeping this in mind, attempting to replicate the true form would be painstakingly impossible; and therefore, Reid's replications are far from true imitation.

The *Souvenirs* and *Souvenir Return* processes are sweet, thoughtful ways of reminding viewers to pay more attention to our impact on nature, but as activism, they do not quite drive the point home. Reid's past works reveal that she is not an activist artist. Removing rocks from their environments as souvenirs could not possibly have a detrimental effect on the environment, and I found the concept of the works to be a little over-sensitive. Her work does not quite get the gears in my head rolling to change our ways for the benefit of the environment. It is possible that the artist may have a more personal connection to these rocks than the viewers can understand.

1 Reid, Kerri. "Broken Peacock Chair." Artist's website, 2008, accessed December 05 2014 <www.kerrireid.com/kerrireid/Broken_Peacock_Chair.html>

2 Blair Formwald, *From What Remains* curatorial statement (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2014)

3 Elizabeth Gerrod, "Stone Consolidation Halts Decay and Prolongs Life." *Building Conservation Directory*. 2001, accessed November 14 2014 <www.buildingconservation.com/articles/stoneconsol/stoneconsol.htm>

4 Reid, "As The Dusts Settle." Artist's website, 2012, accessed October 17 2014 <www.kerrireid.com/kerrireid/As_the_Dusts_Settle.html>

5 David Banach, "Plato's Theory of Forms." Saint Anselm College website, 2006, accessed November 14, 2014 <www.wanselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/platofrm.htm>



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Cover Image

Kerri Reid, *Souvenir Return (Sointula)* (detail), 2013-2014, ceramic copies of rocks originally found in Sointula, British Columbia in rows on left with photo documentation of rocks left where they were found in rows on right. Photo courtesy of the artist.