



FALL 2015

DAGMARA GENDA: BEATING THE BUSH

EXHIBITIONS | SHERWOOD GALLERY

Dagmara Genda: Beating the Bush

Curated by Jennifer Matotek, Director/Curator

SEPTEMBER 5 TO NOVEMBER 4, 2015

Artist talk: Saturday, September 5, 1:00 pm, reception to follow

An Artificial Escape

by Jennifer Matotek

In his essay *The Trouble with Wilderness*, writer William Cronon boldly states: “*THE TIME HAS COME TO RETHINK WILDERNESS.*”¹ Cronon contends that the wilderness we idealize is as profoundly a “human creation” as the industrial landscape.² Wilderness, he says, “hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural” and that we project upon wilderness “our own unexamined longings and desires.”³

Characterizing the untamed landscape as orderly and good by virtue of its natural state could not happen until the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, or arguably, without the efforts of landscape painters of the modern era. The garden and the public park, in the industrial period, became an escape for city people, a place to relax and to participate in recreational activities. Yet the manner in which public gardens and parks, particularly English gardens, were (and



are) cared for often to exhibit the same trappings of control as the society that modern industrialists supposedly sought to escape. “English gardening” as we understand it now, came into prominence during the Victorian era, coincident with Great Britain’s position as the largest imperial power in the world. Parks, as tended landscapes, can be evaluated similarly to W.J.T. Mitchell’s perspective on landscape, as “a natural scene mediated by culture.” Gardens, as a kind of landscape, are a wildness potentially representing a compromise between nature and domestic life.

The works in Dagmara Genda’s *Beating the Bush* result from the artist’s consideration of a number of issues about nature, public space, photography, colour perception, architecture, and the Modern era. Her photographs of the common laurel hedges in Regent’s Park, taken during a Canada Council Residency in London in 2014, are as meticulously shaped and re-articulated as the well-kept foliage that is her subject. By isolating and rearranging the hedge’s leaves, culled from nearly a thousand of her photographs and transforming the laurel into architectural forms, Genda creates works that fix her ownership, as an artist, over a natural growth cultivated by technology and industry. In referencing the geometric and experimental qualities of Constructivism and Cubism, Genda draws parallels between the utopian aspirations of these 20th century art movements and their pursuit of capturing time and space, with the utopian aspirations of gardens.

The geometric pieces that comprise the collages of Genda’s garden laurel photographs are framed and situated throughout the gallery’s white spaces. Some lie on the ground, some sit upright and lean against the wall, and others hang traditionally on the wall. The collages depict forms that seem to exist in three



dimensions – in part because of the way they have been cut and articulated, and in part because of their colours, which capture photographic exposures of the laurel at various times of day under different light conditions. These suggested constructions exist in real time and space through the unbroken stretch of digitally-collaged laurel that wraps around the gallery's walls and floor, encircling the viewer and shaping and dividing the gallery space.

In this body of work, Genda does, in some way, what gardens do. She tames something wild and brings something outside indoors to create a more civilized, potentially utopian space, where we can get lost, and yet, find ourselves. In doing this, her work could be seen to invite a particular question: if gardens are an indication of a particular Modernist or utopian impulse, is the desire to enjoy cultivated nature something negative? Or is it constructive? The answer to this question, like quantifying the beauty of a landscape painting, may be in the eye of the beholder, or better yet – found in our unexamined longings and desires.

¹ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, Vol. 1, No. 1. (Jan., 1996), 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cronon, 8.

Artist Biography

Dagmara Genda is an artist and writer whose work has been presented throughout Canada and the USA. She has participated residencies in Canada, China, the USA, and the UK. Genda's writing has been published in *Border Crossings*, *Canadian Art Online*, *Momus* and *C Magazine*, and by numerous galleries and artist-run centres.





CREDITS

DAGMARA GENDA *Beating the Bush* installation views, 2015. Photos: Don Hall



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