

SOFT SCIENCE:

“The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious—the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.” -Albert Einstein

Soft Science explores the intimate relationship between science and art. Pursuing moments of invention and methods by which we understand the world, the artists participating in the exhibition re-imagine phenomena and systems of information, creating altered perceptions and landscapes. By constructing new models of understanding – using visual taxonomy, remembered maps, or the arrangement and re-arrangement of ideas and objects – these artists locate us in relation to the world we inhabit. Their interpretations challenge our awareness of our surroundings and our knowledge of the present.

Soft Science looks at a world that can be rationalized through intuition by envisioning alternate readings of information to create new models of understanding. Each artist’s personal relationship to their work is present in their projects.

Mary Stewart uses visual epistemology as a primary source to express a personal vision and inspiration. Based on photographs of the cloud forests of Costa Rica, Stewart’s drawings, *Cloutowers*, combine tropical vegetation with zip line platforms to evoke the pulsating power of a magical place.

Barb Bondy’s drawings bridge science and art to explore questions about functions of the human mind and how, through various modes of perception and states of consciousness, the brain forms an individual’s experience of the world.

Jill Parisi’s artistic focus is the creation of invented botanical and zoological species. The individual elements that she creates are used as components for large installations that react to viewer proximity, fluttering in response to the air currents within an interior space, the outdoors, or the movements of passers by. Mirroring an ecosystem, these imaginary worlds echo the richness and beauty that diversity affords all communities, and the importance of each individual within their surroundings.

Ian van Coller’s work, *Natural History*, utilized the African dioramas in the Museum of Natural History in New York as a source for his photographs. His fascination with these aestheticized and idealized constructions of the African landscape embody a foreigner’s perception of “natural Africa.” Ian van Coller’s photographic montage reorganizes our understanding of visual information to alter our sense of reality.

Michelle Samour’s interest in taxonomy and systems of organizations reflects the transient and concrete in our surroundings. Her work displays forms, proportions and patterns that are constant and shared in nature, art, science and geometry, from the Fibonacci numbers in flowers to those in our DNA.

David Shannon-Lier's work, *Every Plant: Species at The Museum School*, catalogues and classifies the plant life at the courtyard of the Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston. Inspired by the wonders of 18th and 19th century science and the movement of when curiosity brought a sense of enlightenment to men and women with no scientific training, David's work reflects the notion of the tinkerer and observer. It was, as Richard Holmes puts it, an "age of wonder," one in which the public gained a new appreciation for the "beauty and terror of science." Botany is of particular interest to him because it was a discipline, which was at the time considered a hobby for those with enough free time. For that reason many untrained men and women made contributions to the science of botany. To David there is, nowadays, a much greater gulf between the everyday man or woman and the forefront of science than in centuries past, which has created a loss of a sense of wonder about the world around us. In *Every Plant: Species at the Museum School*, David embodies the curiosity and diligence of a romantic scientist in a contemporary urban setting.

With an underlying sense of humanity, Chuck Hemard's work considers how we interact with one another and the natural world. In his new photographic project, Hemard has been researching and documenting the areas where first generation long leaf pine trees are still in existence. The longleaf pine and grassland forest of the southern Coastal Plain is among the most endangered ecosystems in North America. His research has brought him to observe and reflect on the natural landscape within the borders of Alabama, Georgia, and Florida. Putting our attention to our environment, Hemard's images of the Southern landscape seem to intensify and purify our understanding of the psychological experience of natural beauty as well as address issues of climate and environmental change.

Nina Katchadourian reconfigures systems that already exist in our world and reconstructs them to find a new purpose. In her work, entitled *World Maps*, Katchadourian systemically displaces land formations. The outcome shows changes and displacements of land formations based on historical or geopolitical factors, such as by having Western Europe inserted into West Africa, for example. Other displacements were based on formal correspondences or the quirks of the map itself. Australia and Alaska had the same green border color, for example, and fit perfectly together due to the distortion of scale that occurs towards the poles.

In 2002, as a project for the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, NY, Nina Katchadourian exhibited *Natural Car Alarms* consisting of three cars rigged with modified car alarms whose typical six-tone siren has been replaced with a similar one made only of bird calls. The idea for the project was a result of an observation that the artist experienced while residing in the jungles of Trinidad where she mistook the birdcalls for a car alarm. The video shows the project during the public art commission in 2002.

Hannah Burr's work, entitled *Empty Full: Bumpkin Island Art Encampment*, 2009, presents the documentation of a project installed and performed on Bumpkin Island in Massachusetts' Boston Harbor. She built a rubberized structure in the volume equivalent

of everything she owns. The structure stood empty and open at both ends, and along a pathway of honeysuckle branches she placed a fourteen-foot long by five-inch list of all of her belongings on its floor. The structure was installed for five days, and on the final day of the encampment she read the entire inventory list to the island and onlookers. *Empty Full* contrasts the extent and burden of what we own and carry with us, with the open and vulnerable aspects of our existence.

For centuries artists have been using art and science to explore, to recreate, and to reinvent the possibilities of phenomena in nature as a form of visual language. The artists in this exhibition investigate the latter and form a visual conclusion through observation, research, and experiments. They set their own parameters and question the world around them. It's through new definitions that a new phenomena and systems of information are created which challenge our present.