



# EMINENT TERRAIN

An Historical Relationship with the Natural World: Our Intentions, Successes, and Failures

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It can be simple to take for granted how much land there is around us. There are fewer places now that are unseen and unpossessed, but, on the other hand, we also easily overlook the places we have already been. My works are objects that aid in a discussion on our historic relationship with the natural world, our intentions, successes, and failures.

“What do we think of when we think of America’s National Parks” (Grusin, 1)? By now, we are all aware of these areas that are marked as sacred lands, but their formation was anything but smooth and the intent of their designation has, in some ways worked against itself. At the beginning, there was a fissure between the ideas of conservation and preservation of land. Conservationists advocated for the wise use of land, securing natural resources for future generations. On the other side of the conversation were those that sided with the preservation of these areas. This would save the land for its own sake, keeping the terrain pristine, naturally changing over time. Accessible to those who wished to tackle the environments imposed obstacles.

The ultimate formation of the parks was based on a combined view that leaned more towards conservationism and universal access. The management goal set in place by the National Park Service in 1963 secures that “the biotic associations within each park be maintained, or where necessary recreated, as nearly as possible in the condition that prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man” (Grusin, 1). Now, while the intent of this goal is right and honorable, it has now left marks so distinct and unnatural in these areas. They are additions that would have never “prevailed when the area was first visited by the white man.” There are fences and ropes securing a safe distance between

us and the forest giants. There is a grandstand and a to-the-minute schedule next to Old Faithful, preventing anyone from missing what once was a natural phenomenon. Now, one could argue, it borderlines on sideshow. “It is now almost taken for granted that “the nineteenth-century American romantic representation of the West was built on an ideology of conquest” (Grusin, 2). When we began to commodify the natural environment the landscapes became regulated to the point where visitors were unwelcome guests in the environment.

*Ridge Crossing, Bridged Terrain, and Forceful Veil* highlight the man-made additions that have been forced upon some of our nation’s most intriguing areas. At what point do the additions mask the landscape itself, becoming the first thing you notice and the last you see?



*Ridge Crossing, Bridged Terrain, Forceful Veil*: Lithography and silk monotype on Rives paper, laser-cut chipboard, LED light, and poplar, 2015

It takes thousands of years for a sequoia to reach its peak. So tall you can barely hear the rustle of its branches, but they are always stable. Their forests are set afire each year and although they are scorched they slowly heal themselves. A timberland once free now scheduled and reconstructed. When you look at Old Faithful it is simply nothing, but

for two minutes each hour it soars. In those moments, the force and spray of water is silencing. Then, through a mist, the tower dissipates. Very little can withstand the pressures of time and use; the chalky, brittle clay monoliths still tower over the miles of wide open plains in the Badlands. The world evaporates as you look past the ridges. An anomaly, this delicate material has not eroded. These natural phenomenon's have created areas we have deemed worth saving. We delineate, build around it, and move with their flux. Places now designated for all, forever, but their change is heightened by our enforced presence and touch.

To create this suite of works a variety of printmaking techniques were used. Each technique has its strengths and achievable qualities. Most often a brush is used to apply ink and watercolor pigments in the monotype process. The surface of the Plexiglas plate is coated in gum arabic, once dry this surface holds the watercolor in place and when a dampened paper is used to print it activates the watercolor and transfers with the ink to the paper.

While monotype evokes painterly qualities, the process of lithography's strength lies in drawing. To create a print you draw your image or layers, using grease based materials onto a variety of materials. You can use specialized limestone blocks, aluminum plates, polyester sheets or even paper. Each surface uses different chemical processes and achieves different crispness in line. Stone lithography creates a soft glow with its marks. The natural texture of the stone slightly blurs the drawn lines. Aluminum plates, a much finer surface texture, allow for thin, high contrast line work. Polyester plates and paper are simpler processes while also allow for greater layering and color variety.



*Taku*, Lithography on washi paper, stainless steel, enamel, and walnut, 2015 (detail image)

Although there is a variety of chemical steps to process your image for each of these materials, ultimately, by keeping the surface wet while rolling up your image with ink, the dampness repels the ink, allowing it to only catch on your marks.

An interaction, a chance to create, can only strengthen the bond between a person and the piece. Allowing for the ability to make a profound connection to a place they may never have laid eyes on, but now understand its impact. My prints not only live in the two-dimensional space, but within a variety of three-dimensional structures. The use of book, wooden, and three-dimensional printed structures allow the paper print to become more tangible and a physical object. The books allowed for the layering of prints, as the pages turn more is revealed. The books are hardcover bound, using dark leather. The washi papers used were chosen for their delicateness and transparency. *East/West Drift* utilizes a variety of printing techniques and papers to allow the landscape to slowly be revealed throughout the course of the book. As the pages are turned the imagery becomes more vibrant, then again slowly vanishes, becoming a distant view.



*East/West Drift*, Lithography, monotype, and relief on washi papers, leather, copper, and linen, 2015

While not traditional in structure, *Adjust*, *Shift*, and *Transform* are leather clamshell boxes that house printed landscape strips. The curling and movement of the paper reveals only glimpses of the land, showing a dissection and allows the viewers to continually recreate the environment.



*Adjust*, *Shift*, *Transform*, Lithography on washi paper, leather, and poplar

In a continued investigation of achievable layering and transparency, glass became a material used in the creation of my prints. Printing on glass and its ultimate kiln firing

allows for the creation of fully permanent prints. Paper prints can, over time, degrade while glass remains crisp and clear. Glass that is printed is fired in a glass kiln to 1500 degrees will fuse the enamel and glass additions to the base sheet glass. The enamel can be drawn or printed directly onto the glass panel. When fired, the lines stay crisp and sink into the glass below. Chipped glass, referred to as frit, and powdered glass not only can add color to pieces, but can create raised, physical texture to a panel.



*Strata*, Lithography on washi paper, glass, enamel, and poplar, 2015 (detail image)

It can also mimic the physical characteristics of river rocks. To achieve this sediment effect French Vanilla frit of various sizes is covered in a Sunset Coral powdered glass. Under kiln heat, the sulfur-bearing frits react with the lead-bearing powder to create a grey discoloration which imitates the look of stone.

Another unique quality of glass is its ability to be morphed and hold shapes. A piece of glass can be cut into a disk and the print is silkscreened into the center of the glass. When it is ready to be fired the disc is set onto a drop out mold. The drop out mold allows for glass, when elevated in the kiln, to slowly slump, through a center hole. The longer the piece is fired the further a dome will form. As the glass slumps the image that

was added stretches and distorts. When a hairline fracture is made to the disk before firing the dome opens up, splitting the glass and the landscape.



*Biomes*, Glass, enamel, bronze, LED light, and 3D printed sandstone, 2015

This not only allows for some uncontrollable outcomes, but also adds an uneasy, imperfection to the image. There is nothing natural about wilderness anymore, so much has been constructed and adjusted, and it is hard not notice that things are just slightly off.

The glass domes, in *Biomes*, needed a vehicle for their display and something to illuminate them physically and conceptually. When seen lit, the domes take on an ethereal atmosphere, highlighting lands lost. To achieve this quality, holders were created using 3D-printed sandstone. The material references the landscape while the way they were made harnesses technology. To balance the strong visual quality of the illuminated domes, a suite of prints, *Ridge Crossing*, *Bridged Terrain*, and *Forceful Veil* were created. The illuminated stairways in these prints were created with the use of a piece of laser cut chipboard sitting directly behind the print. When lit from within the frame the cutouts glow

through the print bringing focus to the embellishments to the landscape. Additions which are not natural and disguise the terrain they rest upon.



*Biomes, Ridge Crossing*, display and illumination view, 2015

All of the imagery that informs my prints is taken from my personal experiences in these landscapes. Many of the physical elements come from my own photographs. From these photographs I create line drawings that are directly recreated into prints or become the layers of more complex projects. I have traveled all over the country and am a seasoned and educated outdoorsman. Now the irony of commenting on man's intrusion into the landscape, while regularly venturing in myself, is not lost on me. However, you can follow nature's lines and leave no trace of your visit, respect and live within its intentions. It is the man made interference and the unnatural additions that have undermined the intent of the National Parks, not the ventures into the landscape. Alfred Runte comments on the idea of the National Parks and their legacy in the preface of his book, *National Parks: The American Experience*,

...there has been a tendency among historians to put the national parks on a pedestal, to interpret the park idea as evidence of an unqualified revulsion against disruption of the environment. It would be comforting to believe that the national park idea originated in a deep and uncompromising love of the land for its own sake...but in fact, that national park idea evolved to fulfill cultural rather than environmental needs (Runte, xxii).

While the imagery is derived from natural experiences the structures that house them are meant to add restraint. Their smooth, clean lines detract from the traditional tendencies of the printed image. Boxing landscapes in view finders limits the view, forcing the viewer to see the landscape from a specific point, much like the paths and fences that inhibit visitors in the parks to see exactly what they wish. The movable panels of *Advance-Recede* disjoint the landscape, giving it continual change.

The exhibition is comprised of seventeen pieces. Several of the pieces are wooden structures, each consisting of a series of prints. The woods chosen are poplar and walnut. The two woods, one light and one dark, add variety while still remaining cohesive. Several structures are interactive and call for viewer involvement. These structures take the form of a book and view finders, as well as a wall installation that is two sided.



*Advance – Recede*, Lithography and monotype on washi paper, bronze, and walnut, 2014

*Advance, Recede*, consists of four panels that hang perpendicular to the wall. The panels are connected so the viewer can transition the piece between the front and back of the print. The wooden structures not only support paper pieces, but also glass. Colored glass and prints on tengucho paper are supported by six handmade poplar frames in *Strata*.



*Strata*, Lithography on washi paper, glass, enamel, and poplar, 2015



*Views Found I - IV*: Glass, enamel, bronze, and birch, 2014

The four wooden boxes in *Views – Found I – IV*, all hold four glass tiles that are only visible when looking through the small, bronze opening in the front of the viewfinder.

*Timberland*, *Taku*, and *Mammoth* all utilize deep, walnut frames to hold ten-layer, polyester plate lithographs. These prints are cut into pieces and then reassembled in the frame using etymology pins. The pins, allow for the prints to have physical depth added to them, by placing certain pieces further from the back than others.



*Timberland*, Lithography on washi paper, stainless steel, enamel, and walnut, 2015



*Taku*, *Mammoth*, Lithography on washi paper, stainless steel, enamel, and walnut, 2015

While the pieces themselves vary greatly, the materials and color palette are what unify the exhibition. White papers, transparent glass, wood, stone, and leather elements all connect in a muted palette with strategic use of color.

My research led me to explore in depth the history of the creation of our National Parks and the conflict that began its discussion. The National Park Service publishes countless articles on this topic. The original battle between John Muir and Gifford Pinchot over the intents of conservation and preservation informed much of the view the work in this exhibition expresses. In the book, *The Great New Wilderness Debate*, Michael P. Nelson discussed the view of preservation of the landscape.

We could, then, view wilderness preservation as a symbolic gesture of love and respect for our evolutionary ontogeny and perhaps as a defense of our evolutionary future...The love of wilderness..., he wrote, is...an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need – if only we had the eyes to see (Callicott, Nelson, 174).

Richard Grusin wrote on the topic of the commodifying of the environment in *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America's National Parks*. This research led to deeper exploration into the intent of my prints.



*Eminent Terrain, 2015, exhibition view (left)*



*Eminent Terrain, 2015, exhibition view (right)*

An influence of my work is printmaker Vija Celmins. She works with natural imagery and landscapes. She also bridges the print into three dimensional space, creating multiples. Her work has a very refined palette and she uses a lack of color to remove her work from becoming too romanticized and traditional. She does not have a direct connection to the images in her prints, using them more as exercises in perfecting her craft. While my work directly relates to my imagery, I find that I strive for clarity in my technique. Soledad Salamé, another printmaker, created a series of prints with a focus on mapping and layering. Her contemporary view of topography gave me insight into how I could achieve a more abstract viewpoint in my pieces. These works also continued my exploration into the successful layering of paper and print.

We have covered a great deal of treasured ground and we have seen and experienced some of the natural beauties of our land. Yet we treat them all the same. The experience could be interchangeable. We draw lines as to where nature begins and ends. This restrains something that is not meant to be boxed in, allowing it to only change at our will and only to a certain extent. “American identity was being redefined around

private acts of acquisition and possession” (5 Grusin). With so much interference, often you are an outsider looking in, not fully immersed in the landscapes, but a bystander, relegated to pavement, the roads that bisect the National Parks. Viewing landscapes zoomed in, through a camera lens.

In defense of this scenery, the view, it simply being should have been enough.

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Callicott, J. Baird, and Michael P. Nelson. *The Great New Wilderness Debate: An Expansive Collection of Writings Defining Wilderness, from John Muir to Gary Snyder*. N.p.: n.p., n.d. Print.

Grusin, Richard A. *Culture, Technology, and the Creation of America's National Parks*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2004. Print.

United States. National Park Service. "National Park Service." National Parks Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, 12 May 2015. Web. 13 May 2015.

Runte, Alfred. *National Parks: The American Experience*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska, 1979. Print.

Salamé, Soledad. "Soledad Salamé." Soledad Salamé. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 Apr. 2015.

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## SHOW CARD



Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art  
State University of New York at New Paltz  
Alice and Horace Chandler & North Galleries  
1 Hawk Drive, New Paltz, New York 12561

## EMINENT TERRAIN

Kate Gesel

Master of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition

May 8 - May 12, 2015

Opening Reception:  
Friday, May 8, 2015  
From 5 to 7 pm

Gallery Hours: Wednesday- Sunday  
11am - 5pm

[www.kategesel.com](http://www.kategesel.com) . [kgesel@gmail.com](mailto:kgesel@gmail.com)

# Kaitlyn Gesel

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## Education

State University of New York at New Paltz

Master of Fine Arts concentration in Printmaking  
Masters Degree: May 2015  
GPA:3.96/4.0

State University of New York College at Potsdam

Art Education Program with St. Lawrence University  
Bachelor of Arts Degree: May 2011  
Major: Art Studio concentration Art Education  
Minors: Art History, Wilderness Education  
GPA: 3.58/4.0

## Honors and Awards

### 2016

Artist in Residence, The Arctic Circle Residency, Svalbard, Norway

### 2015

David Lavallee Travel Fund Awardee, SUNY New Paltz

### 2014

Southern Graphics Council International Graduate Fellow  
Research and Creative Projects Awards Recipient, SUNY New Paltz  
David Lavallee Travel Fund Awardee, SUNY New Paltz  
Best in Show, SUNY Student Fall Exhibition, Albany, New York  
Curator's Pick, ArtPrize, Grand Rapids, Michigan

### 2013

Research and Creative Projects Awards Recipient, SUNY New Paltz  
Honorable Mention, FibreArts Initiative IV, Buffalo, New York

### 2012

Top 100 Finalist, Self 2012, See.Me  
Honorable Mention, National Women's Spring Exhibition, Buffalo, New York

### 2011

Member of the Kappa Pi Art Honor Society, SUNY Potsdam

### 2010

Charles R. Fowler Art Scholarship Recipient, SUNY Potsdam

## Work Experience

Monotype Instructor, Workshop, SUNY Potsdam, April 2015  
Silkscreen Instructor, Workshop, SUNY Potsdam, April 2015  
Printmaking Teaching Assistant, Monotype, SUNY New Paltz, Spring 2015  
Assistant Studio Technician, Printmaking Department, SUNY New Paltz, September 2014 to Present  
President, Printmaking Club, SUNY New Paltz, 2014-2015  
Instructor of Record, Introduction to Printmaking, SUNY New Paltz, Spring 2014  
Printmaking Teaching Assistant, Basic Printmaking, SUNY New Paltz, Fall 2013  
Art History Teaching Assistant, Art History Survey, SUNY Potsdam, Fall 2010  
Printmaking Teaching Assistant, Printmaking 1, SUNY Potsdam, Fall 2010

## Solo Exhibitions

2016

**Territory** Biscayne National Park, Dante Fascell Visitor Center Gallery, Homestead, Florida

2015

**Eminent Terrain**, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, New York

**Territory** Southern Graphics Council International Conference, Knoxville, Tennessee

## Group Exhibitions

2015

**Best in Show SUNY Student Exhibition** New York State Museum, Albany, New York

**Improper Articles** The Greenpoint Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

**Practicum** ARTBAR, Kingston, New York

2014

**SUNY Student Art Fall Exhibition** SUNY Plaza, Albany, New York

**Reflexion** ArtPrize, (106) Gallery Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan

**Comfort |Chaos** Athens Cultural Center, Athens, New York

**The Untold** Team Love RavenHouse Gallery, New Paltz, New York

2013

**Darkness and Light: The 2013 Diorama Show** Team Love RavenHouse Gallery, New Paltz, New York

**SUNY Student Art Fall Exhibition** SUNY Plaza, Albany, New York

**FibreArts Initiative IV** Impact Artist Gallery, Buffalo, New York

**The Print Show** Sinclair Gallery, Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

**Small Works Show** Upstream Gallery, Dobbs Ferry, New York

2012

**Regional Juried Small Works Show** State of the Art Gallery, Ithaca, New York

**Fiber Exhibition** Carnegie Art Center, North Tonawanda, New York

**National Women's Spring Exhibition** Impact Artist Gallery, Buffalo, New York

**Art Takes Time Square** See.me, Chashama, Times Square Alliance, New York, New York

**On and Off The Wall** Columbia County Council on the Arts, Hudson, New York

**Boundless: New Works in Contemporary Printmaking** Creative Arts Workshop, New Haven, Connecticut

**Collector's Pride, Member's Show** Athens Cultural Center, Athens, New York

**FibreArts Initiative III** Impact Artist Gallery, Buffalo, New York

2011

**Art Attack!** Gibson Art Gallery, Potsdam, New York

## Collaborative Projects

**Indiscrete Circulations/Common Currents**, Poughkeepsie City Center, DEC sponsored event, collaboration between SPURSE, Clearwater, SUNY New Paltz MFA program, Children's Media Project and Poughkeepsie High School

**The Life of The Hudson River, Indiscrete Circulations/Common Currents**, DEC sponsored event, collaboration between SPURSE, Clearwater, SUNY New Paltz MFA program, Children's Media Project and Poughkeepsie High School

## Online Publications

Stryker, Mark, "10 highlights from ArtPrize 2014", Detroit Free Press, October 3, 2014. <http://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/arts/mark-stryker/2014/10/03/artprize-highlights/16612629/>

Stryker, Mark, "Grand Rapids' ArtPrize steps up its game", Detroit Free Press, October 3, 2014. <http://www.freep.com/story/entertainment/arts/mark-stryker/2014/10/03/artprize-grand-rapids-overview/16613777/>

Cooke, Aj, "Reflexion", Points of View, October, 1, 2014. <http://www.kcad.edu/blog/points-of-view-reflexion/>