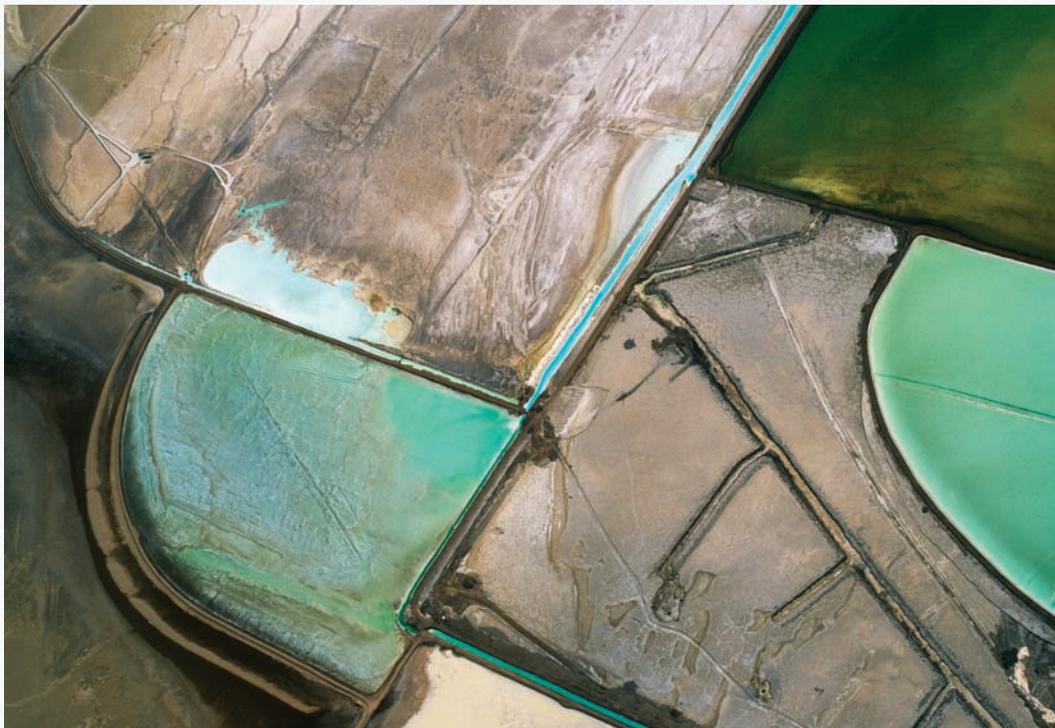


499parkavenue

THE LOBBY GALLERY AT 499 PARK AVENUE

THE ALTERED LANDSCAPE

RANDY BOLTON. JAY HART. KIM KEEVER.
STEPHANIE LEMPERT. DAVID MAISEL



David Maisel, *Terminal Mirage 25*, 2005 C-print, courtesy Von Lintel Gallery



Kim Keever, *Last of All I Knew*, 2004, C-print, courtesy of Kinz & Tillou Fine Art

Acknowledgements

499 Park Avenue and Hines, through their exhibition program, actively contribute to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture.

Contributors

Randy Bolton, courtesy of Littltejoh Contemporary
Kim Keever, courtesy of Kinz & Tillou Fine Art
Jay Hart, courtesy of the artist
David Meisel, courtesy of Von Lintel Gallery
Stephanie Lempert, courtesy of Claire Oliver Gallery

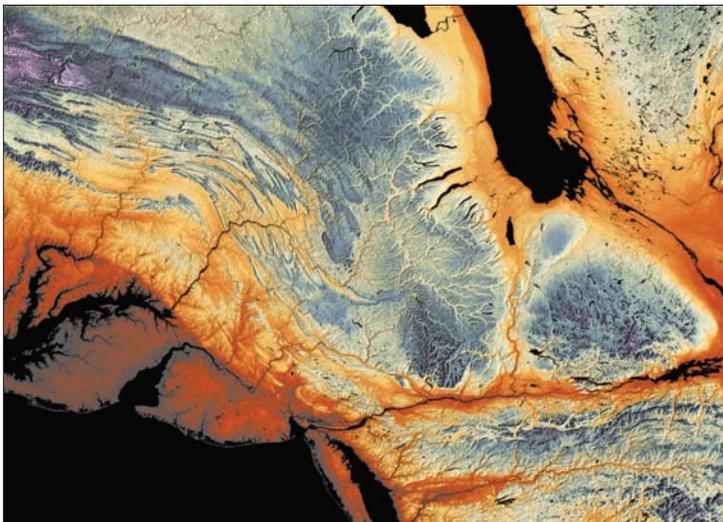
Curator: Dorothy Solomon, DSA Fine Arts **Graphic design:** Lenore Goldberg, Hines
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I'm seeing a psychiatrist, my shrink. We're trying to save the future by looking at the past, she tells me. So things can be different, so the future won't be just like the past...so far things look like they're going to turn out pretty much the same. Vernon Fisher, *Future Tense*

In primal cultures, the psychological well being of the tribe depended on its ability to live in total integration with the natural environment, to achieve a sustained balance between give and take, and an acceptance of the inherent uncertainty of its existence. It was the job of the shaman, the tribal shrink, to constantly monitor that balance, to preserve ancestral knowledge, to be able to penetrate the veneer of day-to-day reality to discern relations and disintegrations that were invisible or inaccessible to the other members of the society. Using ritual devices including images, movement and incantations, the shamans created embodiments of natural forces that helped their people achieve a deeper sense of their place as an integral part of the whole, and to live in accordance with that realization.

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Jay Hart, *Susquehanna*.
Archival digital print, courtesy the artist



It is safe to say that this was not an easy job, as human psychology has proven to be fundamentally unable to embrace the vast uncertainty of natural flux. Indeed the entire history of humanity might be seen as an epic existential struggle — a constant battle to overcome our vulnerability by gaining dominance over elements that ultimately sustain us, supplanting natural systems with technological “improvements” while ignoring the slippages that point to the possibility that our dominance might be a finite illusion.

This exhibition brings together a diverse group of contemporary artists who share a deep understanding of the precariousness of our relationship to the natural world. Like their tribal forebears, they use art as leverage to address the pervasive inability of humanity to integrate with the rest of nature. But unlike primeval shamans, these artists have the added experience and hindsight of millennia of human mischief, which, along with a current sense of dire urgency, instills much of their work with a strange combination of nostalgia, futility and hope. Common to all is an assumption that human psychology may not be equipped to fully accommodate the symbiosis of natural systems, or even to learn from our own history, but that art has, built into its matrix, the ability to embody natural processes and relations, to make visible essential aspects of

the world and our relation to it that otherwise go unnoticed.

Trained as a cartographer, **Jay Hart** makes highly detailed digital images of extraordinary natural landforms that reveal the history of geologic processes. By showing us astounding enhanced distant views of these landscapes, he allows us to discern the congruent patterns of the earth’s natural development. His images give us the ability to literally rise above the clutter of surface detail, to examine the structure of the whole, and to get a palpable sense of the planet as a living organism.

A paradoxical situation is explored by **David Maisel** in his aerial photographs that feature exquisite cropped compositions and astonishing color. At first appearing like lyrical abstract paintings, these intersecting geometries and fluid color fields are scenes of deep visual richness with mysterious origin. Are these gorgeous colors the product of natural chemical interactions, or (we assume) some sort of manmade toxic sludge? Embracing the inevitability of entropic transformation as fundamental, Maisel creates a dynamic and breathtaking tension between the visual beauty of his images and the staggering environmental devastation they suggest.

The expansive atmospheric landscapes in the

Stephanie Lempert, *Flushing Meadows - Corona Park*.
Archival digital print, courtesy Claire Oliver Gallery



photographs of **Kim Keever** are strictly imaginary constructs, existing only long enough to be captured by his camera, in a fish tank in his studio. Elaborating on the tradition of romantic landscape painting, Keever’s images recall embedded notions of nature as the embodiment of the sublime, while at the same time, asserting the artificiality of that ideal. Like dreamscapes, these hazy vistas are remote but inviting, exotic but strangely familiar. They present nature as a place of otherworldly ethereal beauty — a place ultimately accessible only through the imagination.

Adapting the visual vocabulary of children’s book illustration to large-scale works, **Randy Bolton** uses wry humor and irony to explore relations between humans and our world. Employing succinct narrative scenarios, Bolton’s work presents human psychology in a perpetual state of contradiction, ambiguity and missed connections, where hope of integration with the natural world may indeed elude us, doomed to be lost in the simple bumbling of our day-to-day existence. In these images we see humans, portrayed in the form of benign animals, as comic/tragic characters who, try as they may, can never seem to get it right.

In her text-infused photographs of reclaimed landfill sites, **Stephanie Lempert** documents a few success stories, where people have begun to take

Randy Bolton, *Never Take More Than You Need (detail)*.
Archival digital print on canvas, courtesy Littlejohn Contemporary



some measure of responsibility for past actions in relation to the natural environment. Lempert presents picturesque images of public parks that have been built upon waste sites and overlays these photographs with text that describes various details of the conversion process. These works exude optimism, asserting a re-conception of nature from the ashes of our misdeeds, and proposing the possibility that, if put to the right ends, human ingenuity might find an antidote to human excess.

Each of these artists, in his or her own way, is like the primal shaman, attempting to direct our attention toward a reality that is larger than ourselves. Indeed, we can say that in the vastness of nature the only certainty is that nothing is certain, but we sense it is really human nature, collective human psychology that is at issue here. Like a good shrink, these artists do not offer solutions, but simply point to questions, open portals to a broader view. The next step is ours, to consider how individual and collective action interacts with that larger reality — so the altered landscape of the future won’t be just like that of the past.

Steven Alexander, 2009
Steven Alexander publishes the *Steven Alexander Journal*, a weblog about contemporary art, and is Associate Professor of Art at Marywood University.