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To Name A Place: Contemporary Landscape

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Alexander Gray Associates presents *To Name a Place: Contemporary Landscape*, a group exhibition organized by independent New York-based curator Anna Stothart. Through its title, which references the poetic practice of marking, remembering, claiming, and identifying place through naming, the exhibition offers a more expansive depiction of what landscape is, and how history, culture, identity, labor, and community indelibly inform our changing sense of place. Bringing together the work of an international group of artists—Miya Ando, Luis Camnitzer, Mel Chin, Justine Fisher, Coco Fusco, Valeska Soares, Ryan Trecartin, and Arnie Zimmerman—*To Name a Place* responds to locations across the globe—Japan, Cuba, Congo, America, and Canada—engaging with the social and historical specificity of each artist’s chosen landscape.

Featuring painting, sculpture, photography, and video, *To Name a Place* presents a multigenerational group of artists whose work is deeply invested in the complex entanglement between physical and cultural geographies. Miya Ando, Luis Camnitzer, and Valeska Soares each examine the politics of landscape and geography through conceptual and poetic gestures. In the diptych *Canales* (1980), Camnitzer places a collaged world map alongside a self-composed text that imagines a future where cross-continental canals allow for the equitable distribution of land and goods. Camnitzer’s rebalancing of the current social, economic and political realities across the globe envisions a world where the dominant geopolitical forces (United States and Europe) are displaced and egalitarianism is achieved. In Ando’s *Ugetsu (Rainy Moon / Waxing Gibbous) September 1 2020 Day 169 Lockdown* (2020), the artist depicts an ethereal image of the moon with natural indigo and micronized pure silver on Kozo paper. This familiar image is made distinct in the title that tethers the night sky to a specific date—Day 169 of the Covid-19 lockdown. This series of nightscapes, created during the global pandemic, perfectly reflects both the monotony and subtle shifts in daily existence experienced by people around the globe. Soares’s *Sea / Sea* (2007) depicts a simple yet elegant line drawing that connects two porcelain plates, one featuring a figure holding a line that travels across space and becomes the sea upon which a boat sails. For Soares, there is always a close correlation between what people try to do physically in constructing a landscape and philosophy.

Mel Chin and Coco Fusco make work rooted in the specificity and significance of time and place. In Fusco’s *The Empty Plaza / La Plaza Vacía I* (2012), the desolated Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, Cuba becomes the protagonist in the artist’s meditation on public space, revolutionary promise, and memory. Inspired by the organized protests that began in the Middle East in 2011, Fusco took note of the communal spaces around the world being activated for protests and those, in contrast, that were left empty. As the artist recalls, “the absence of the public in some plazas seemed just as resonant and provocative as the presence in others. Cuba’s Plaza of the Revolution is one such place. . . I decided to create a piece about that legendary site—an empty stage filled with memories, through which every foreigner visitor

passes, while nowadays many, if not most, Cubans flee.” Safe (2005) is Chin’s lamentation on the continuing violence experienced by the Congolese people at the hand of colonizers. The work is composed of a pacified image of the Congo River rendered in oil paint on Belgian linen, surrounded by an overly ornate and ostentatious gilded frame. The painting is almost entirely obscured by weathered boards that are propped on the floor and lean against the wall. In a rectangular shape that mirrors the dimensions of the painting behind it, thousands of rusted nails are densely embedded into the surface of the wood in an unsuccessful attempt to puncture the painting behind them. Each of the materials holds symbolic significance—the Belgian linen refers to King Leopold II who mercilessly ruled over Congo for his own personal gain, while the dense application of nails refer to the sacred *nkisi nkondi* (power figures) of the Congolese people. Chin drives thousands of nails deep into the weathered board as a symbol of the violence inflicted on the Congolese at the hands of King Leopold II.

Ryan Trecartin draws from pop culture to create work that embraces and reorders the visual and linguistic clutter of technology and media to create a frenzied meditation on the changing nature of narrative, language, and the human condition. Trecartin’s videos in particular explore technology’s impact on the hybrid nature of identity through characters not bound by common beliefs about gender, race, or sexuality. *Mark Trade* (2016), best described as a postapocalyptic remake of *Easy Rider*, follows the title character—a scraggly-bearded, rubber-limbed redneck emcee who alludes frequently to a long-past “human era”—as he and a film crew travel through the American West.

Both Justine Fisher and Arnie Zimmerman are interested in the transformative capacity of landscape. *space* (2022) is part of Fisher’s most recent series, where each painting depicts a dense landscape marked by a path, archway, doorway, that leads to a mysterious place. The incongruousness present in her compositions gives Fisher’s paintings a slightly jarring undertone to capture the discomfort that comes with meaningful change. For Zimmerman, “clay is the mother of all physical art materials. Humans used it first for utilitarian objects and to express the mysterious connections to the spirit world. They processed it with water, shaped it by hand, dried it in air and made it permanent with fire.” In *The Quarry* (2003), the artist depicts figures laboring to erect an architectural structure made of brick. Zimmerman’s lifelong commitment to clay was his continued endeavor to “walk in the truth of the infinite ways humans have used this material” that comes directly from the land. *To Name a Place* presents the ways in which artists are engaged with landscape today and how each grapples with overlooked histories, our uncertain future, and precarious present.