

In conversation, Jennifer Lord and Christine Burke

Christine: I've had a chance to look at *Bigger View(s): Earth, Anthropocene, Beauty*, in the hall a few times now. It looks amazing and I'm looking forward to learning more about the pieces and your process. Tell me a little bit about yourself – what's your background? How long have you been painting and creating art?

Jennifer: As cliché as it sounds, I've known I was an artist since childhood. I drew all the time as a kid. In high school I was always in the art room. I studied Visual Art in undergrad both right after high school, and then I finished my BA as a nontraditional student at Naropa University. That's how I ended up in Boulder. I started painting landscapes in the style of *Bigger View(s)* in 2010.

Christine: Tell me about this exhibit. Maybe you could describe one or two pieces in particular if you want to highlight any? I'm curious about each of them, but two that really caught my eye are "Every Extinct Bird" and "Blanket Bog."

Jennifer: Painting is research. Each painting in the exhibition involves thinking and making. One of my painting teachers, Joan Anderson, called the physical act of applying paint manual labor. It involves time and the body. That teacher would also say that the hand is usually ahead of the mind. The hand will make marks that may offend the thinking mind. Rather than being quick to cover these up, the painter needs to be relaxed, open and spacious in order to see and to follow the lead of the hand. For me, a successful painting is patient and reciprocal. I make gestures and follow the painting to a final composition. I keep the subject matter of the painting in heart-mind while working. The process is more emergent than descriptive.

"Every Extinct Bird" has a strong horizon line. An event horizon is a point of no return, aka extinction. The center is a condensed group of colors, marks and textures, the birds. The gestures below the horizon line reflect those above the horizon. There is a smeared, shimmering, dragged effect across the painting with many soft edges. I started this painting with a mono-print, then enhanced, layered, and embellished. Paired with the collage "aftermaths (augury)" by Noah Travis Phillips, which continues the extinction, rainbow and bird themes.

Extinction is permanent and irreversible. 187 bird species have gone extinct in the last 500 years, a span of time during which—in the absence of cataclysm—just three or four birds would normally disappear. Extinctions are not written in stone. Humanity can still prevent them. We just need to expand our field of view. When we devote energy and resources to saving species, it often works. A study published in 2019 found that conservation efforts have [reduced bird extinction rates by 40 percent](#).

This piece is shown with two pieces from the "Existence Tissue" series by David D'Agostino. He writes:

Landscape as the tissue that stitches your skin with the skin of your grandmother, of Jupiter, of Covid. You can't really paint it. All landscape painting is a delusion. A vanishing trace of cosmic twists and turns and relentless vitality.

“Blanket Bog” started as a texture, with the two delineated rectangles, and with the dark shape in the lower left corner. Initially I didn’t know what I was painting, but it felt like a bog or swamp. Researching bogs, I was fascinated to learn about these unique ecosystems. [Blanket bog](#) is a type of peatland found in only a few parts of the world with cool, wet and, usually, oceanic climates primarily in the northern hemisphere. “[Bogs](#) have distinctive assemblages of animal, fungal and plant species, and are of high importance for biodiversity, particularly in landscapes that are otherwise settled and farmed.” “In many places, [the development of blanket bog was aided by deforestation carried out by prehistoric humans](#).” The peat formed in bogs is used as a [fossil fuel](#) either in electricity generation or for heating. Although the area of blanket bog in the UK is substantial, a significant amount has been degraded or lost due to industrial peat extraction, overgrazing, and repeated burning. Bogs are important for local biodiversity and are also carbon sinks. There are many highly specialized animals, fungi, and plants associated with bog habitat.

In the upper left of the painting is a demarcated rectangle. The marks within this mirror the composition of the whole painting, like a map. The red rectangle at the top of the piece is like an entrance or exit for the picture. The colors and textures help move the viewer’s eye through the landscape. I think of the upper left as a night sky.

Christine: How did this collaboration come about among the three artists? What did you do to support each other through the process of creating this exhibit?

Jennifer: I curated this group of artists based both on aesthetic relationships and subject matter. David D’Agostino is a painter based in New Mexico. “His work is primarily informed by ecological crises and the various, often cryptic stories that arise as collapsing utterances from the natural world.” His work is beautiful, environmental, and contemplative with Zen and place as rich sources. Noah Travis Phillips is primarily a new media artist. Using appropriation, collage, and digital/analog remix strategies, their creative research cultivates personal mythologies in dialogue with the posthuman and anthropocene. And myself, Jennifer Lord, I am primarily a painter, but also a Sogetsu ikebana artist, and taijiquan teacher in the Yang family lineage. Each artist worked independently to create these works. The exhibition’s cohesiveness is due to the sequencing and selection of work.

Christine: These themes of humanity / extractive practices / climate crisis are all so heavy – what was the process like for you in developing these pieces --emotionally, physically, spiritually working through these concepts in your art?

Jennifer: When I am making work about climate change and environmental disasters, I want the final painting to amplify the beauty and harmony present in the natural world. This is not a gesture meant to assuage the viewer that ‘everything is going to be okay,’ rather, my goal is to prompt reflection on these catastrophes and to open feelings and ultimately actions of care. Our extractive paradigm is destroying our home at a rate faster than can be naturally replenished. We are literally eating the future. Facing the climate crisis is heavy, it is also empowering. The way out is through. Let’s consider “All we can save,” change our priorities, and get to work.

Christine: The presence of your work at the library is powerful. So many different members of our community will get a chance to interact with your art that may not otherwise. What do you hope folks will get from seeing this exhibit? How do you see the role of the library with your art?

Jennifer: *Bigger View(s): Earth, Anthropocene, Beauty* has meta goals. Each piece of the title is meaningful. *Bigger View(s)* is about expanding one's/the viewers scope of awareness, while also referencing the tradition of landscape painting. *Earth* is not an abstract concept, rather Earth is a collection of beings in relationship. Earth is all the plants, animals, insects, humans, water, air, land systems, and the 4 billion year history of how these beings evolved together. Humanity is causing immense and irreversible damage to our only home, the planet Earth. The incredible shaping power of humanity is geological and gives our current era the title of *Anthropocene*. *Beauty*, is a powerful motivator for justice, equity, and positive change. As an artist I am aligned with beauty. Beauty tends to be regarded as frivolous, but if we investigate beauty deeply, we find that it is life sustaining and moreover a key component of justice and equality. In the book *On Beauty and Being Just*, Elaine Scarry writes, "At the moment we see something beautiful, we undergo a radical decentering." (111). Scarry describes the moment that we are touched by something beautiful as one that negates the self. We become more than ourselves in an encounter with a field of blooming flowers dotted with butterflies or when attending to the sunset. One's perception shifts outward and one's capacity for and desire to care extends. Care is a quality deeply needed in our current world. Care is powerful and has the ability to heal the many ills of our current paradigm, from racial injustice to the climate emergency.

I believe that artists and libraries have a special role in helping to address human caused climate change. Artists see and can show connections between seemingly disparate events. Libraries are community connectors. Art, artists and the library are powerful allies for social good.

Christine: What else would you like to share?

Jennifer: Our website created by Noah Travis Phillips can be found at bit.ly/biggerviews. It includes our reading list as well as the 2020 archived version with fullmoon online event.

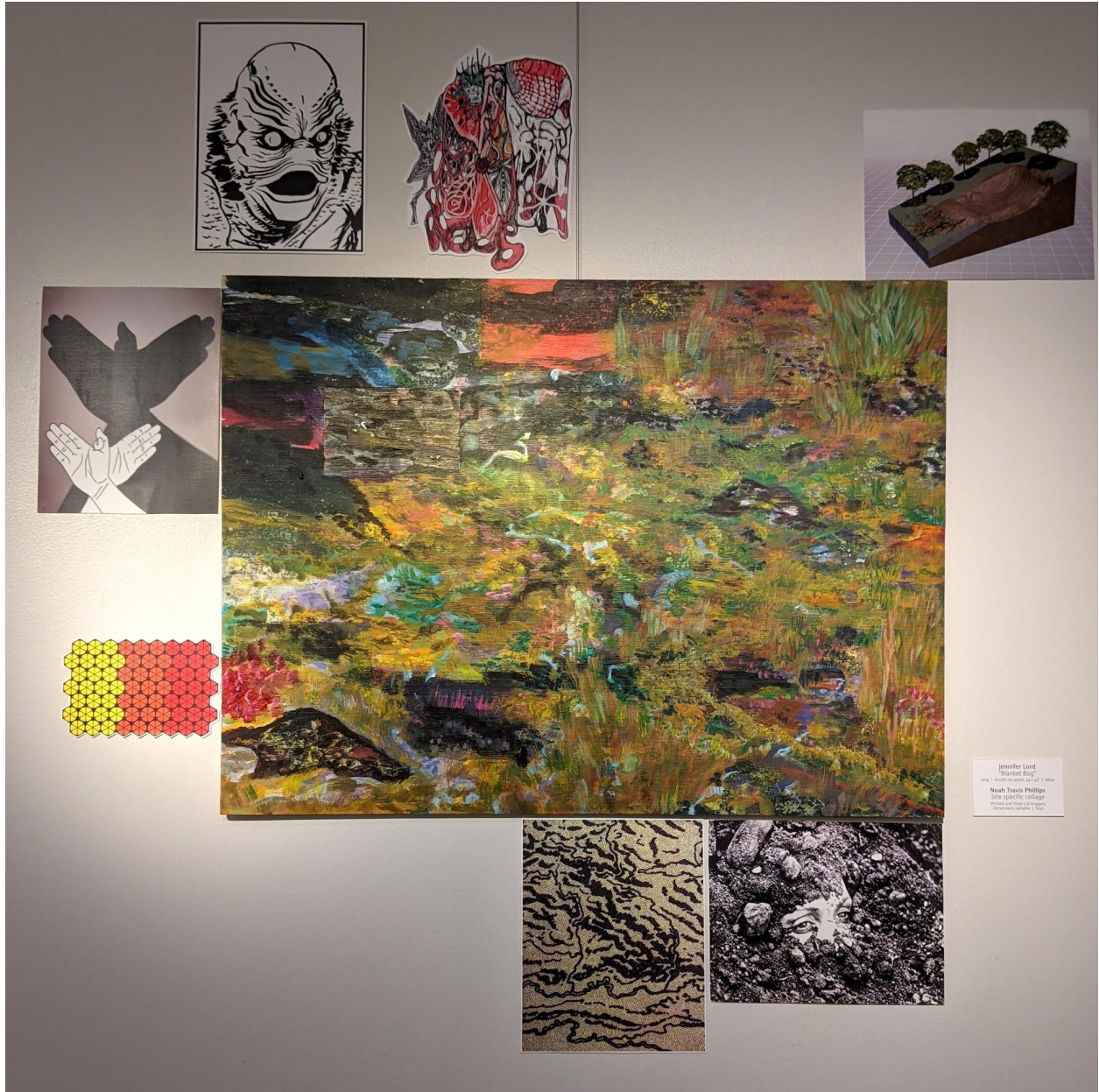


Jennifer Lord, *Every Extinct Bird*, 2017, Acrylic on panel, 24 x 32"

Noah Travis Phillips, *aftermaths (augury)*, Printed imagery, Dimensions variable

David D'Agostino, *Existence Tissue Series: Methane Gas Meltdown, Front Range, Colorado, Nature's*

Creep, 2021, Mixed media collage on wood panels, 6 x 6" & 4 x 4"



Jennifer Lord, *Blanket Bog*, 2019, Acrylic on panel, 24 x 32"

Noah Travis Phillips, *true crime(s) landslide*, Printed imagery, Dimensions variable