



Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison: The Lagoon Cycle

Collection CAE1209

Introduction / Abstract

The Book of the Lagoons is a handmade book comprised of 45 hand-colored photographs depicting the story of the seven lagoons, which is based upon the project and exhibition *The Lagoon Cycle*. The project interpreted the large-scale ecosystem of the Pacific Rim, in particular interactions among food production and watersheds.

Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison

The Harrisons, often referred to as the “Grandparents of Ecological Art”, create works that transcend human-created boundaries to encompass large bioregions. Their work, which starts as conceptual maps and texts before manifesting as built projects, uses poetry and visual imagery to create metaphors focused on solving ecological issues posed by the tensions between human land use and ecological needs.

Newton Harrison was trained as a sculptor, Helen Mayer Harrison as a psychologist. They taught at the University of California San Diego, where Newton chaired the Art Department. They retired as Research professors emeriti in the early 2000s and moved to Santa Cruz, where they established the Center for the Study of Force Majeure at the University of California Santa Cruz. The majority of their work since Documenta 8 in 1987 has been in Europe. These works include large scale projects and proposals made for cities and city areas such as Sudra, Leipzig and Cergy-Pontoise, rivers such as the Sava in the former Yugoslavia, and regions such as the Transpennine area of England. In Europe, they have exhibited in museums, galleries and exhibition halls such as the Ludwig Forum in Aachen, the Neue Berliner Kunstverein in Berlin, the Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool, the Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle, BRD in Bonn or La Villette in Paris. The Harrisons have worked with institutions such as Bauhaus Dessau or the Cultural Council of South Holland. They have had a D.A.A.D. in Berlin in 1988-89 and have exhibited there at the Neue Berliner Kunstverein, and in Denken und Denkmal at the Martin Gropiusbau. They exhibited in Art and Technology at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1991, Projekt74 in Köln, the Venice Biennale(1976 &1980) and the Sao Paulo Biennale(1985)as well as Artecí 91 - the Nagoya Biennale in Japan. Newton Harrison had a work in the American Pavillion at Expo70 in Osaka.

Scope and Content

The Lagoon Cycle was the Harrisons' first large-scale system project, and it is now considered one of the foundational works not just of their careers, but of an entire art movement. The project interpreted the large-scale ecosystem of the Pacific Rim, in particular interactions among food production and watersheds and was first manifested in a 350-foot-long mural, photographs, maps, collages, performances, and poetry, later recreated as a complex, 45-page handmade book titled *The Book of the Lagoons*. Although an edition of 31 was planned, only a few copies were bound, and a handful resides in public collections around the world. Each copy is unique, as it is comprised of hand-colored photographs depicting the story of the seven lagoons. *The Lagoon Cycle* is the cornerstone of the Harrisons' works. It spans the forty-year arc of their career; it also completes a journey between the Sierra Nevada work that they created in the 1980s for the Museum's permanent collection and the current and ongoing Sierra Nevada project *Sierra Nevada: An Adaptation*. The original artwork resides in Paris at the Centre Pompidou.

Dates

1974 - 1986

**Quantity / Extent**

.5 cubic feet

Language

English

Arrangement

This is a single object archive.

Related Publications

Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison, *Lagoon Cycle Diary. Part II, Book 1: The Book of the Crab*. (Santa Barbara, Calif., Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1979.)

Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison, *The Lagoon Cycle*. (Ithaca, NY, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, 1985.)

Container Listing:**CAE S-Box 6**

1 The Book of the Lagoons, 1984