

Clairissa Stephens: Land-Based Art Collection CAE1709

Introduction/Abstract

This archive contains materials from three bodies of work by artist Clairissa Stephens: *Desert Waterlines*, *Field of View*, and *Horizons | Lines*. Materials include sketches and drawings, maps, and photographs.

Biographical Note: Clairissa Stephens

Clairissa Stephens graduated from the University of Nevada Reno's MFA program in 2014. While earning her degree, she began a series of works with her husband, fellow student Colby Stephens, about horizon lines in the Great Basin, and then shortly thereafter a separate body of work on the field of view of the human eye.

Scope and Content

Clairissa Stephens graduated from the University of Nevada Reno's MFA program in 2014. While earning her degree, she began a series of works with her husband, fellow student Colby Stephens, about horizon lines in the Great Basin, and then shortly thereafter a separate body of work on the field of view of the human eye. Taking as a starting point 360° panoramic photographs of horizon lines in the deserts of Nevada and Oregon, her investigations manifested in silverpoint drawings, box sculptures, collages, and salt/playa crust paintings.

In 2015, she attended a residency at Playa at Summer Lake in Oregon, where she developed her project called *Desert Waterlines*. In 2016, She continued this work through a residency at Playa on Summer Lake in south central Oregon in 2016 for the *Horizons | Lines* series. She describes the bodies of work and their interrelationship as follows:

Desert Waterlines: Walking along the edge of Summer Lake I surveyed the expansive space and the daily changes in color and weather. With drought inflicting the west, these artworks involve the visualization of hydrology and its relationship to the high desert climate. *Desert Waterlines* responds to the ephemeral quality weather and precipitation have on the temporary lake edge. The silver leafing references the reflective quality of the lake and its value as a precious resource.

The *Field of View* drawings are silverpoint drawings combined with Black Rock Desert playa crust painted on panels. The field of view refers to the 120° of vision that is typical to the human eye, and looks at topographical mapping of the site from which the photograph, *Horizons | Lines*, was made. Together, the three artworks refer to the complex ways in which we understand three-dimensional space: From the voluminous mountains, to the line delineating their end and the sky's beginning, to the topo-maps that help us to interpret this information in the eye of our imagination, to the type of root-lines the plants utilize to survive in this landscape, and to the real texture of the space applied to the panel with the playa crust.

The collages combine a cut out horizon line with a distorted view of the Nevada sky. Here, the horizon line is a boundary that limits the range of the cosmos to be experienced from a particular point. Further, like old 19th century maps of Nevada and the West, the white space denotes the visually unknown and unexplored. The line becomes the demarcation of what can be immediately experienced and known.

Again, like the collages, the horizon lines are denoted with paper cutouts in the box sculptures. The boxes are filled with diatomaceous earth, a material that is commonly mined in the Great Basin and which refers to a

history of topographic change in the region. The sculptures function as the inverse of the collages: they use the horizon line to denote the boundary of one's terrestrial visual experience from a given point.

The silverpoint drawings refer to cartographic modes of understanding space. The straight lines drawn from the origin to the peaks and valleys of the surrounding horizon line refer not only to one's line of sight at the given point, but also to modes of topographic illustration. Where lines more densely populate the plane, the topography is more abrupt and rugged, while less densely lined areas refer to more gentle sloping terrain. These drawings present the landscape with subtle and nuanced information that speaks to the complexity of the high desert landscape.”

This archive is currently in process.