

FOLLY

by
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Batchelor of Fine Arts - 2009, Savannah College of Art and Design

Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master's of Fine Arts



Spring Term
2022

Approval

FOLLY

by
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Acknowledgments

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To my fellow classmates who politely tolerated my ghostly apparitions.

To my Husband, Parents, and Friends, who helped me work through all my bad ideas.

You all taught me how to grow.

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INTRODUCTION

In my final exhibition at TCU, I explored my experience working in a garden. As an escape and an obsession, The Garden provided me with a unique point of view that helped me understand sculptures and the spaces around them. What came to fruition from my research into the history of gardening and artists who gardened was a folly. This became the title of my thesis exhibition. Using elements repeated throughout gardened spaces, I repeated the formality of these elements to highlight the separation between where our society occupies and where Nature inhabits. In this boundary between the two spaces, I created a space that was devoid of the typical greenery that defines a garden—yet, still adhered to the elements of Nature. In the absence of color and artificial light, the resulting installation resembled a mausoleum. Throughout this paper, I will expand on the path that led me to create this sterile space while also elaborating on the research that influenced my decisions which made *FOLLY*.

THE GARDEN AS A FOCAL POINT

In my initial semester of graduate school at TCU, I became hyper fixated on the idea of *Forest As Sculpture*. The idea stemmed from looking at the land from the vantage point of a plane. The higher in elevation the plane climbed, the more you could see the unending reach of humanity's ability to sculpt the land. Even on the massive scale of the Earth, you couldn't travel anywhere by plane without seeing our sculpture. I came to wonder if we could sculpt the Earth into something less parasitic (perhaps even something mutually beneficial). Like a sculptor defines space, I was curious about these outdoor spaces humanity sculpted.

Often where we sculpted the land for efficient use, an infertile space was created. Yet in a few communities, there was a fundamental need to work with the land while also treating the resources as sacred. Since these communities were able to resist the urge to deplete the resources entirely, their culture's practices were protected and passed down to future generations.¹

Although the mediums changed with different communities (directly dependent on available resources), the act was intentional and surprisingly beautiful. Unfortunately, the scale on which these landscape sculptures were created was not an achievable goal in the three years I had in the MFA program at TCU. This was made obvious through research into large-scale ecological restoration projects² and artists who used the ecology as a canvas.³ I needed to scale back my research into something more tangible and more achievable within the scope of the semester. This research into meddled wilderness⁴ guided me on the path of gardening. To me, gardening came to resemble a similar yet smaller space that humanity sculpted which Nature was invited into. The more I read about gardening design principles⁵ and ecological ethos⁶, the more it was obvious that The Garden was becoming my muse.

THE GARDEN AS A MUSE

In order to understand how to capture the complexity of my new muse, I went through very extensive (and perhaps unnecessary) research into the history of gardens. One of the core principles I learned about gardening was that you should use sustainable methods and materials.⁷

¹ Watson, Julia. *Lo-TEK: Design by Radical Indigenism*. (N.p.: Taschen. 2019), 61.

² Shintani, Midori, and Dan Pearson. *Tokachi Millennium Forest: Pioneering a New Way of Gardening with Nature*. (N.p.: Filbert Press, 2020), 241.

³ Momin, Shamim. *Wildflowering L.A.* Edited by Samantha Frank and Maryam Hosseinzadeh. (N.p.: LAND Los Angeles Nomadic Division, 2015), 36.

⁴ Jacobs, Naomi, and Annette Giesecke, eds. 2015. *The Good Gardener? Nature, Humanity and the Garden*. N.p.: Artifice Books on Architecture, 2015), 256.

⁵ Burle Marx, Roberto. *Roberto Burle Marx Lectures: Landscape as Art and Urbanism*. Edited by Gareth Doherty. (Zurich, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2020), 92.

⁶ Albers, John J. *The Northwest Garden Manifesto: Create, Restore, and Maintain a Sustainable Yard*. (N.p.: Skipstone, 2018), 19-21.

⁷ Albers, *The Northwest Garden Manifesto: Create, Restore, and Maintain a Sustainable Yard*, 20.

This forced me to look at the materials which I had been using for sculptures. In contemplation, I began to question the long-held concept of archival quality. What is gained by making art which lasts forever? Will there even be a place to store all these forever artworks? If an artwork were able to decay, what would emerge from the decay? Would that new form still be the artwork or a new one? If an artwork decayed, was the slow transformation merely a part of a performance? Was this seemingly endless cycle of transmigratory artwork, not the more archival stance? The simplest form of continuous rebirth is composting. I began to apply these new ideas to my sculpting materials. My materials needed to be as natural as possible in order to break down into the soil.

DEVELOPMENT OF FOLLY

In the development stages of my thesis, a systemic doubt began to creep into my work. A kernel of a question became a fully grown exploration of, “what is the point?”. Looking to The Garden as my muse, I began to look at structures and forms that raised similar questions of pointlessness. In the historical sense, follies were garden structures that, were foolish monuments to greatness.⁸ From a literary sense:

Folly, *noun*, fol·ly

1. Lack of good sense, understanding, or foresight.⁹
2. An act or instance of foolishness.
3. A costly undertaking having an absurd or ruinous outcome.
4. An excessively costly or unprofitable undertaking¹⁰

The absurdity of making and displaying art is often a costly undertaking. However, from the vantage point of a plane’s view, so much of life was also a beautiful folly. Eventually, I came to think of my thesis as another garden folly. I wanted to explore the concept and beauty of folly

⁸ Howley, James. 1993. *The Follies and Garden Buildings of Ireland*. (N.p.: Yale University Press, 1993), 2.

⁹ “folly - definition and meaning.” n.d. Wordnik. (<https://www.wordnik.com/words/folly>), Accessed April 26, 2022

¹⁰ “Folly Definition & Meaning.” n.d. Merriam-Webster. (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/folly>), Accessed April 26, 2022.

with site-specific installations, both indoors and outdoors.¹¹ According to an article written on the show, “Land’s ideas are still appropriate to the theme of man and nature, but the materials and aesthetics are completely different, said Cravens. Those conversations for him have evolved and turned into a more direct conversation outdoors, she said.”¹²

A GARDEN WITHOUT GREENERY

Understanding the limitations of the space is one of the first challenges in creating a garden. Our indoor climates are designed for human comfort. Nature is on view through a pane of glass, in a distilled effect referred to as “Borrowed Landscape”¹³ Using limitations of the gallery space, I was forced to confront a truth: The Garden was never designed to fill our interiors. In this understanding, I had to reappoint the elements of Nature¹⁴ towards functional roles available in the gallery space. One of the hallmarks of sacred places¹⁵ is a path whose end is obscured.

CARVED SHOW TITLE

In *FOLLY* (Figure 1) I created no checklist, no explanatory wall text, and no wall labels. In fact, the only artwork on the wall was the exhibition title, carved into the wall¹⁶:

FOLLY
DOUG LAND.
3/14 - 3/19

¹¹ Fig. 10 charred fence built outside the gallery

¹² Crispi, Sarah. “MFA student's thesis exhibition explored humans' codependent relationship with nature.” TCU 360. (<https://www.tcu360.com/2022/03/mfa-students-thesis-exhibition-explored-humans-codependent-relationship-with-nature/>), 2022.

¹³ Ketchell, Robert, and Yuichi Yokoyama. “Borrowed Landscapes | new-empiricisms.” Andrew S. Yang. (<https://www.andrewyang.net/terraforma-borrowed-landscapes>), Accessed April 20, 2022.

¹⁴ Wind, the visitor passing through the space; Water, precarious fountain; Fire, neon birds illumination; Earth, soot (coal chunks, burned wood, soot mixed with wax in mud birds)

¹⁵ Greenberg, David.. “New Report | The Power of Sacred Places.” Nature Sacred. (<https://naturesacred.org/new-report-the-power-of-sacred-places/>) 2021.

¹⁶ Bowman-Cravens, Lynne. 2022. “Exhibition Tour of “FOLLY” by Doug Land.” (YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhZ4eWIA4t0>), 2022.

The act of carving the title into the drywall, was done so to infer a monument's inscription or a crypt's inhabitant. Yet it felt more like elegant vandalism. In an exhibition where impermanence was the goal, I couldn't help but leave a permanent mark. Like a name carved into a tree, I wanted to leave a portrait of my memory. To my surprise, the act of carving into layers of paint and gypsum revealed a different memoir than that of the beige wall currently on view. Through this act, I was able to see the memories of previous exhibitions. Like a layer of time, this carving was like layers in the soil. Without a preconceived notion of the space, the viewer sees a dark interior space and the show title, *FOLLY* carved into the wall. The removal of text from the space was an intentional act. The desired sensation was akin to wandering into nature without a map. Without the expectations set by unnecessary text, the viewer's senses were heightened as they entered the space.

LIGHT AND COLOR

Albeit this installation was a self-portrait in many materials, my first cleave into the form was to remove all of the gallery's lighting from space. The distracting temperatures of the artificial light created new colors upon the materials that conflicted with the gallery's natural lighting. This mingling of light sources was contradictory to my experiences working in a garden. In a garden, you work with the available lighting. Through the seasons, you learn where the shadows fall, where they walk, and when the golden hour highlights forms. As said by Roberto Burle Marx "Light never repeats itself."¹⁷ Within the chaos of color that bombards our "most sensitive organ"¹⁸, the glare of competing light sources is often visually too much information. Artificial light sources create an operating theater for critics, while the static shadows draw a mood, frozen

¹⁷ Burle Marx, Roberto. 2020. *Roberto Burle Marx Lectures: Landscape as Art and Urbanism*, 108.

¹⁸ Santino, Nael. 2021. "Alan Watts - The Eyes." (YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyre0K8xaFM>), 2021

in time, yet unattached to reality. Without the use of overhead lighting, the space appeared much darker at the entrance (Figure 2). What I didn't expect was the significant physical temperature difference between the gallery and the rest of the building. This created a more cave-like sensation in the space. In the darkness, there was not a need for color, only contrast. The serenity of a controlled palette in white, black, and the tones in between. By using such a limited range, I left an opening for other colors to creep in, like wax, wood, stone, and the color of a flame.

NEON BIRDS

The one color that I wanted to sneak into the installation was in the form of an electrically ignited noble gas. An illumination that was as insignificant as a light on the end of a surge protector. Inside the cavity of a wax bird, the gas is ignited with two jumper clips attached to a wall outlet. As the gas ignites, it created a sensation of life undulating with fiery vermilion brilliance (Figure 3). Throughout the installation, the viewer is confronted by thirteen birds posed in a way to resemble dead birds found on the sidewalk. As the Fine Arts building is surrounded by an untextured glass surface, it was easy to find reliable models for the wax molds. Somewhere in the mystery of fireflies becoming extinct¹⁹, and the dwindling songbird population²⁰ my inspiration seems to arrive unexpectedly on wings out of thin air.²¹ Seeing an outlet strip at night, murmuring like a heartbeat, was the glow of a neon bulb. The electronic components that create the soul-like flicker inside the birds are not compostable. Neither is the beeswax with a drop of soot mixed in, that creates the bird's form. Thinking about the materials as meltable and reusable, I secretly hoped the birds would turn into wax puddles by the end of

¹⁹ Lewis, Sara. 2016. *Silent Sparks: The Wondrous World of Fireflies*. (N.p.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 119.

²⁰ Leahy, Stephen. "Huge decline in songbirds linked to neonicotinoids." (National Geographic. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/widely-used-pesticide-makes-birds-lose-weight/>), 2019

²¹ Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism. *The Book of Symbols*. Edited by Kathleen Martin and Ami Ronnberg. N.p.: Taschen, 2010), 240.

the exhibition. Placing the neon birds throughout the space (Figure 3), tethered to the wall with unavoidably long black cords, the blinking, undulating and flickering circuits, further reinforced the heightened state of the viewer.

FABRIC ARCHES

In the desire to control the light in the space, one of Moudy Gallery's walls is a bay of windows that faces a tree-filled courtyard. Expanding across the gallery were fifteen muslin sheets.

(Figure 4) The viewer follows a trail of neon dead birds through the passages of white luminous fabric. The placement of the sheets in the space prevents you from seeing the whole space at once. As mentioned earlier, this installation was a self-portrait in a myriad of materials. Cut from the center in ten of the sheets, a classical arch shape (6'2" x 22")²² is removed. Hung like bedsheets on a breeze from childhood memories, these 8'x8'²³ curtains drift silently in the breeze generated by viewers walking through the space. As the viewer transects the unevenly spaced archways, the inner edges of the arches are gradually unwoven. A purposeful state of claustrophobia forced the viewer into garden-like navigation, finding open pathways that lead to the sound of water.

EPHEMERAL SPRING

In the months spent planning the layout of *FOLLY*, I struggled with the narrow space between two structural columns, a suite of windows, and the last row of floating fabric arches. In short, I struggled to create "a destination".²⁴ From the earliest stages of this installation, I wanted to include a body of water in the space. I have a long complex history with water and wildlife. In

²² This is the dimensions of my silhouette.

²³ This is the length of my arm's reach above my head.

²⁴ Greenberg, "The Power of Sacred Places", 13.

my advocacy for the use of both, I ultimately compromised with a flimsy-built fountain built from charred bits of pallets, rotting drywall, and painter's plastic to contain the recirculating water. (Figure 5) The fountain was always built with a sense of planned destruction. In this sacred-looking carnival funhouse of an installation was a repeating element. Our false sense of security within all our structures often meets the unpredictability of nature. While assembling the fountain, I was pulled to memories of hiking in the Spring. After a rainstorm ephemeral springs would appear across the landscape, highlighting hidden attributes in a landscape often burnt during droughts.

Beyond the memories, this fountain was another self-portrait. The burnt wood surface was a rectilinear profile similar in size²⁵ to the fabric archways, yet their opposite. The horizontal²⁶ water mixing surface was as tall as my waist and comprised of thirty-six²⁷ water-emitting ribs (Figure 6), whose burnt wood scent mixed with the water and evaporation to create a distinct aroma throughout the installation. Carrying the motif of classical garden architecture, on the side of the fountain, the viewer would notice the profile of an ionic column (Figure 7). This was merely a distraction to draw the viewers' gaze to the debris field at the base of the fountain: twenty-three wax birds mixed with the charred soot and trimmings from my garden.

MUD BIRDS

In previous burnt wood artworks. I soak the charred surface in beeswax. Then I heat the excess wax into another melting pot. Over time the pigment of the soot has mixed with the wax to create a muddy brown color similar to the color of the soil in the Blackland Prairie where I live.

²⁵ 6'2" L x 22" W

²⁶ As opposed to the verticality of the fabric arches.

²⁷ My age at the construction of *FOLLY*

Repeating numbers through the space, there were thirty-six wax birds. Thirteen were illuminated, while twenty-three birds would never flutter with neon. These Mud Birds, with feet made of clippings from my garden, were the symbolic opposite of the previous birds seen in the space. Their fragile legs represented to me the parts of nature we had sacrificed to create our human comfortable spaces. These Mus Birds rested, clumped amongst the piles of coal (Figure 8), looking upwards towards the window which is framed by magnolia trees and a suburban privacy fence.

PRIVACY FENCE

As a child from the endless sprawl of suburbia, privacy fences are the backdrop for the American Dream. The privacy fence is one of the last boundaries I crossed before I entered the wilds of Nature across the street. There always existed this strange notion amongst the suburbs that these flimsy wooden panels would keep at bay the possible horrors beyond its edge. Yet there was always this little gap between the boards. No matter how tight the boards were set next to one another, time and weather would widen the gap, revealing slivers of the wild that waited beyond the fence. In *FOLLY* the privacy fence blocked most of the view of the tree-filled courtyard. The gaps between the panels were slightly exaggerated to allow ribbons of light into the installation (Figure 10), while still obstructing the view. My decision to burn the fence halfway up from the ground was in part an aesthetic decision but also tied to a memory of my own house fire. Placing the half-charred fence outside the gallery space created a point of interest for viewers who wouldn't normally find themselves in the gallery setting. These curious spectators found themselves wandering toward the fence to see what existed on the other side.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The act of gardening is a humble endeavor. I have quite frequently been reminded that it is better to work with the space around me than to assume that I can control every aspect. *FOLLY* was no exception. As much as I planned and rendered every aspect of the space (the lighting, the time of year, the scale of all the objects, and the architecture), I still found myself surprised by the moments outside of my grand plan. The transition between the darkness of the entrance, through the ethereal light of the interior, towards the destination of the fountain—was the biggest surprise. The light changed subtly every single day. From the morning to noon, and the display of evening colors, to the final illumination of the courtyard's artificial washing. Each moment was different enough to be captured by the objects and elements in the installation yet still remain distinctly memorable. Neon birds caught in the ribbons of afternoon light were washed of their neon flicker. The Ephemeral Spring's temporary flooding reflected the sunlight across the ceiling. While the subtle movements of the fabric arches softened the harshest glare. In the end, the exhibition's title carved into the drywall was a persistent challenge to “repair” for the next thesis exhibition. *FOLLY* reminded me that a compromise must be created between the materials of life I can control and the elements of Nature I had no sway over. The gardening of art is a humbling endeavor indeed.

APPENDIX

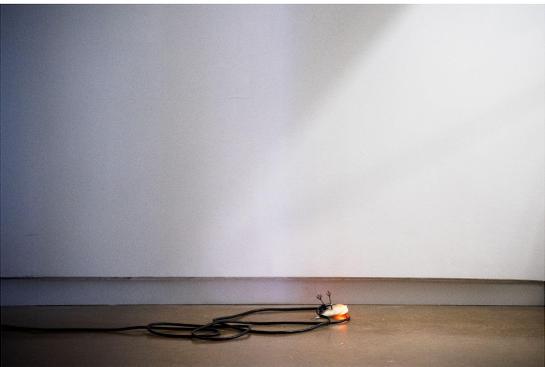
<p>Figure 1</p> <p>Carved Exhibition Title</p>	 A photograph of a light-colored wall with the word "FOLLY" carved into it in a serif font. The letter "O" is a dark, circular object. Below the word, the text "DOUG LAND." and "3/14 - 3/19" is also carved into the wall.
<p>Figure 2</p> <p>Neon Bird, end of hallway</p>	 A photograph of a small, glowing neon bird sculpture on a dark floor. The bird is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. It is positioned at the end of a hallway with white walls and a dark floor.
<p>Figure 3</p> <p>Neon Bird, under curtain</p>	 A photograph of a small, glowing neon bird sculpture on a dark floor. The bird is illuminated from within, casting a warm glow. It is positioned under a white curtain, which is partially open, revealing a bright light source in the background.

Figure 4

Fabric Arches



Figure 5

Ephemeral Spring, recirculating



Figure 6

Ephemeral Spring, Surface



Figure 7
Ephemeral Spring, Ionic column side



Figure 8
Mud Birds, fountain base



Figure 9
Mud Birds, example



Figure 10

Privacy Fence, inside view



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VITA

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Texas Christian University (TCU), Fort Worth Texas, MFA Studio Art, Sculpture – expected graduation 2022

Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), Savannah, Georgia US Bachelor of Fine Arts – 2009

List of exhibitions while at TCU (including the student gallery)

- 2022** *Folly* (Thesis), Texas Christian University, Ft Worth TX, solo
Playground, University of Dallas, Irving TX, group
- 2021** *Folly, Act 1 & 2*, Student Gallery, Texas Christian University, Ft Worth TX, solo
Wild, Erin Cluley Projects, Dallas TX, group
Plant Sale, Student Gallery, Texas Christian University, Ft Worth TX, group
Human / Nature, Fort Worth Community Arts Center, curator Narong Tintamusic, group,
- 2020** *This is Not the End*, Student Gallery, Texas Christian University, Ft Worth TX, solo
Softer Fields, TCU Graduate Candidacy show, group
Front Yard Museum, installation, curator Iris Bechtol, solo
- 2019** *In Good Taste*, Fabrication Studios, Dallas, Texas, group
Forest as a Sculpture: Step One, Clover Dimes Bags, Student Gallery, Texas Christian University, Ft Worth TX, solo

ABSTRACT

FOLLY

by, Douglas Eric Landrith

Batchelors of Fine Arts, Savannah College of Art and Design, 2009

Major Professor, Cameron Schoepp (Sculpture)

This paper will explore the creation of FOLLY, a sculpture exhibition that was completed in 2022 as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture. The paper will begin with an introduction to the exhibition, followed by a discussion of the relationship between The Garden and sculpture. The paper will then move on to the development of FOLLY, a space devoid of greenery and artificial light.