

LETHA WILSON: *Lost Horizons*

April 4 - May 22, 2009

Letha Wilson is a Brooklyn-based multimedia artist whose works combine imagery from the natural environment with architectural and sculptural elements to explore the relationships between indoor and outdoor spaces. In *Lost Horizons*, through the employment of a range of materials and techniques, “issues related to travel, conservation, natural materials, and modern architecture and design are touched upon in works that invite the viewer to participate in the journey.”

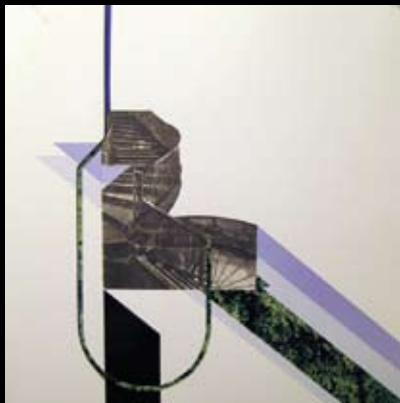
One such work, an interactive site-specific installation titled *Scenic Overlook*, was inspired by Wilson’s recent trip to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Darwin Martin House in Buffalo. There she observed the horizontal lines and cantilevers incorporated into Wright’s structural design to direct visitors’ attention to the outdoors, blurring the boundaries between architecture and the natural world. By cutting a long, rectangular peephole in the gallery wall and inviting viewers to climb a staircase to peer through, Wilson similarly transforms the archetypal white box to create a panoramic vista of the adjacent galleries, guiding visitors’ line of vision to architectural elements that may otherwise have gone unnoticed. Through the framing of these details, such as painted yellow lines on the concrete floors, she provides clues to the building’s fascinating industrial history.

In keeping with Wright’s concept of organic architecture, a practice which emphasizes the relationship between site and building, *Scenic Overlook* was constructed entirely from reclaimed wood collected from demolished houses by local organization Buffalo ReUse. Wilson also recalls Wright’s attention to detail and propensity for custom-designed furniture with her inclusion of a handmade beanbag chair made from salvaged thrift store t-shirts and filled with sawdust, from which viewers can comfortably experience her video projection, *Double Buffalo Western*.

In this work, Wilson juxtaposes video captured during walks through Buffalo Arts Studio’s galleries and Wright’s Martin House with footage of hikes taken in rural New Mexico. First, the architectural layouts of the closed interior spaces were utilized to guide walks in the vast and seemingly unharnessable American West. By then tracing the geography of the wilderness and historic cliff dwellings back into the gallery space, Wilson exposes the uncanny parallels that exist between the architect’s ordered, calculated plans and nature’s unruliness.



The Last Words of John Muir / Occam’s Razor, 2007. C-print, wood, paint, 45” x 27.5” x 38”.



Frank's Staircase, 2009. Xerox transfer, C-prints, graphite on paper, 25" x 25" (framed).

Likewise, *Compass Rose* ironically succeeds in disorienting not only one's sense of direction, but of time, place, and season, as well. Featuring imagery shot in Niagara Falls, the stark whiteness and thrashing wind of an Upstate New York winter is paired almost seamlessly with the vibrant red rock of the serene Southwest, affording viewers the unique time-travel experience of *déjà vu* and simultaneously knowing what will happen next.

In her photo-sculptures, Wilson integrates the modern technology of photography with found natural materials to create extended landscapes which envelop the viewer by breaking through the two-dimensional plane, emerging into and invading the gallery space. Ecological notions of disintegration, erosion, debris, and decay, as well as humans' increasingly harmful impact on the natural world, are suggested through the bending and cutting of the photograph, whereby its preciousness is destroyed. Inversely, the sublime, pristine aspects of nature are conserved through the quiet placement of added rocks and tree limbs, producing a calming, meditative effect. In other works, environmental elements such as horizons and tree trunks are reduced to abstract geometric architectural forms which, at first glance, seem as natural as the objects collected directly from the outdoors.

These evocative works, along with Wilson's collages, illustrate the subtle connections between our self-imposed urban confines and the outwardly limitless possibilities of the rural environment. They depict an American wilderness at once tamed, cultivated, preserved, and abused by civilization—one that is constantly changing for better or worse, yet nevertheless symbolizing our diversity and shaping our identity.

- Cori Wolff, Exhibition Curator



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