



Art Practical

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## 2.7 / Production and Value

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### EcoArchive: Meditations on Time and Nature

GROUP SHOW

NOV 03 - JAN 22

INTERSECTION FOR THE ARTS

by Aimee Le Duc

*EcoArchive: Meditations on Time and Nature*, currently on view at Intersection for the Arts, is a group exhibition that highlights certain narratives detailing human effects on the environment. By depicting farming on the massive and small scale, light and sound's influence on the changing landscape, and even glimpses into animals in their own living spaces, *EcoArchive* shows the exquisite ways in which artists can bear witness to the land on which we live.

All of the included work presents static views of how we use, consume, try to protect, and also destroy the environment. Co-curated with Pamela Watts, founder and West Coast director of ecoartspace, a web-based organization dedicated to addressing environmental issues through visual art since 1997, *EcoArchive* brings together work that is visually arresting, quiet, and open-ended in its meaning. This is not a show documenting activist and political work, as in *Let's Talk of a System*, Intersection's first exhibition in its new gallery space downtown. This is a more delicate approach to the subject of the environment, emphasizing visual narratives over a call to arms to expose exploitation. It carries the message that art making and its aesthetic results can be as illuminating as the subject matter of the work itself. This exhibition seems to posit that the beauty we experience in the world and how we articulate that beauty are powerful incentives for inspiring activism and change.

Cynthia Hooper's videos serve as useful entry points into *EcoArchive*. Each is an exploration of a dividing line. In both *CESPT* (2009), a static image of major waterways bordering Tijuana and the United States, and *Jefferson's Monuments* (2010), a depiction of the dismantling of dams on Oregon's Klamath River, Hooper fixes her gaze on what moves or doesn't move in front of the camera. Water simply flows. Grass moves in the wind. Trucks drive from one end of the screen to the other. Add in the hushing, whirling, or humming of the ambient noises of water, birds, and machinery, and Hooper's work becomes a testament to the both metaphorical and omnipresent lines that separate what we need from the methods and quantities of materials extracted from the land. Although the subject matter changes, the position of the view does not, suggesting that although the scenes shift and change, we will perpetually exploit the land and water. No matter how we aestheticize the acts of doing so, these actions will not stop.

Hooper's video *Exportadora de Sal* (2007) documents the daily operations of an evaporative-based salt mine in Mexico. The scenes jump from the salt hills to the water sources lining the mine's borders. Bulldozers slowly creep over mountains of salt with a calming pace. Twitchy bunches of foam from the mine's pumps jump from the shore into the windy water. The massive mine seems as harmless and innocuous as plants growing on a farm, as the details of the impact on the surrounding area are left unnoted.



Cynthia Hooper. *Exportadora de Sal*, 2007 (still); video. Courtesy of the Artist and Intersection for the Arts, San Francisco.

Consequences are not only absent from Hooper's work; they are not explicitly revealed in any of the work of the show.

In *Cypress* (2007), Mark Baugh-Sasaki has printed a cross-section of a tree trunk on glass plates and attached them to a beam, which allows a viewer to see the top and bottom of each plate. Each slice of a tree as a specimen conjures up outdated natural history museum displays or a curiosity to examine. Baugh-Sasaki's other piece, *Portrait of a Forest* (2007), is an actual cabinet of curiosities—a collection of glass test tubes displayed in rows and filled with “materials collected from a forest.” Trash and waste are on view next to leaves, water, and various plants in states of decay. A stale statement about the evils of littering or the threat that trees may someday only exist as rare specimens on display if humans don't change their behavior does not accompany the work, but those ideas are certainly implied. Instead, the work is calmly present between the heavy-handedness of “save the trees” tropes and the private narratives we create (or possibly ignore) as we wander through nature.

*EcoArchive* is an exhibition of marking points and of witnessing, not of meaning making. The show presents a highly palatable site of dialogue about the role visual art can play in the documentation of what happens when we not only notice the environment around us but also when we create images and objects depicting *how* we notice. The absence of direct strategies of action is not a negation of action or a statement of hopelessness. Instead, it is a moment of pause, a call to stand still while present within the very environments we affect in countless ways. *EcoArchive* is an exhibition about aesthetic processes and how those processes are as crucial to the social and political movements of environmentalism as any form of activism. The work offers a persuasive argument to viewers to become activated without defining what the resulting change might look like. The task of moving our gaze beyond the beautiful imagery toward action belongs entirely to each of us.

*EcoArchive: Meditations on Time and Nature* is on view at Intersection for the Arts in their annex space, Intersection 5M, in San Francisco, through January 22, 2011. The gallery will be closed between December 24, 2010, and January 3, 2011, re-opening January 4, 2011.