

Vantage Points

Letha Wilson, Sonia Almeida, Heidi Norton, and Claudia Peña Salinas

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A group show with a real purpose, *Vantage Points* brings together artists who recombine in original ways elements of painting, sculpture, photography, and installation. Individually, the artworks by Letha Wilson, Sonia Almeida, Heidi Norton, and Claudia Peña Salinas offer much to appreciate. Collectively, they enjoy lively correlations of color, texture, materials, techniques, and imagery. They also raise questions about the relationship between nature and artifice, a pairing that has only become more complicated with the climate crisis. Sussing out how these artists connect and at times diverge on that topic is the real pleasure of *Vantage Points*.

Letha Wilson has made a reputation pioneering techniques for fixing photo prints onto the novel substrates of steel and concrete. *Death Valley of Fire Concrete Bend* (2020) is a two-dimensional wall piece that includes concrete, aluminum, and photographic prints. The prints include images of rock strata crushed and folded into formations that take millions of years to develop. Wilson mimics the folding of the rock by introducing actual folds in the surface of the work. Molded chunks of concrete intersect with the creases in the surface and the imagery of the rock at key points to suggest a quasi-cubist composition of crossing planes. Across the room from *Death Valley of Fire Concrete Bend*, *Mosaic Canyon Wall Cut* (2020) also includes a photograph of rock strata. Wilson's installation is cut into the sheetrock at the base of the wall dividing the space's two rooms. Time and natural processes, architecture, and materials versus image all figure in Wilson's pieces.

Heidi Norton's *Ellipse with Nitrogen Fixers* (2014) sits across from Wilson's *Death Valley* piece. A glass ellipse, propped up by a sizable chunk of beeswax, has a number of dried plants—the nitrogen fixers—glued onto its surface. Strata also come into play here, as the beeswax consists of multiple layers pressed together into a block that holds the glass slab, a kind of gigantic microscope slide, at a right angle to its layers. In the other room, *The Museum Archive (dedicated to Edward Steichen's Delphiniums), MOMA 1936, Version 3* (2020), lines up in an array of five glass panels, again resembling gigantic microscope slides, with plants living and dead, photographs, and other materials attached. Playing off of *The Museum Archive*, which addresses plants and their life cycles, Wilson's wall sculpture in the same room, *Double Palms Steel Fold* (2020) features a photograph of palm fronds reproduced in tight formation on pieces of steel bent into two right angles.

Sonia Almeida's hanging cloth installations *Reverse Timeline* and *Reverse Timeline Stretched* (both 2019) add a new wrinkle to the layering metaphor that extends through Wilson's and Norton's pieces by attaching to the bottom edge of both her works clothing patterns designed to layer the human body. At the pieces' upper edges, she includes patterns based on computer graphics, addressing sequences based on the metronomic rhythms of information processing. Almeida brings in the human figure, but in the form of a stylized letter Z, a cipher representing just another data point in the rigid timeline she represents as a series of vertical bands. The only relief, or perhaps site of resistance, in this relentless march are the occasional gaps, or glitches, in the striped patterns, but otherwise, in Almeida's art, technology has superseded even the human body.

Claudia Peña Salinas rounds out the extended conversation on time, layers, and natural vs. artificial processes by introducing the traditional cultures of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Her "El Castillo" series (2020) is a group of paintings in beeswax over photocopies of the Mayan temple at Chichen Itza, known as El Castillo, dedicated to the feathered serpent deity Kukulcan. The paintings are all various hues of green or blue, crisscrossed with lines that refer to the pyramid's sacred geometry. Peña Salinas' *Tezcatli* (2020) is an installation of evenly spaced poles leaned up against the wall, wrapped with string dyed in hues of blue and green, from which hang small chunks of obsidian, a material vital to Mesoamerican culture. The title refers to the paradise Tlalocán, the realm of the Aztec water deity Tláloc, hence the palette of

blues and greens. The mythopoetic layer of human culture that Peña Salinas adds to the group show stands in contrast with the Western materialism that informs the other artworks. Traditional cultures often saw themselves as one with, rather than apart from, nature, despite its unpredictable and even hostile actions. Industrialized cultures have become only more alienated from nature, even as they understand their fate is inseparable from forces that threaten to overwhelm them. That (dis)connection, threading its way through *Vantage Points*, makes it a show that sticks in the imagination.