

Cynthia Daignault

Light Atlas

November 1, 2015 – January 10, 2016

At North Farm

*Somewhere someone is traveling furiously toward you,
At incredible speed, traveling day and night,
Through blizzards and desert heat, across torrents, through narrow passes.
But will he know where to find you,
Recognize you when he sees you,
Give you the thing he has for you?*

*Hardly anything grows here,
Yet the granaries are bursting with meal,
The sacks of meal piled to the rafters.
The streams run with sweetness, fattening fish;
Birds darken the sky. Is it enough
That the dish of milk is set out at night,
That we think of him sometimes,
Sometimes and always, with mixed feelings?
- John Ashbery*

Lisa Cooley is proud to present Cynthia Daignault's third solo exhibition with the gallery, *Light Atlas*. In 2014, Daignault embarked on a yearlong exploration of America. This road trip and the resulting paintings form her most ambitious and epic work to date, *Light Atlas*. Consisting of 360 paintings, one for each degree of the circle she traveled, *Light Atlas* chronicles the view every 25 miles around the country. A grand portrait of America, the work stands as the centerpiece of the exhibition, filling the entire main gallery and spanning over 300 linear feet.

Light Atlas originated from an offhand conversation in which Daignault realized she could name 100 men who roamed the country to create the canonical works that depict and define America: Catlin, Cole, Twain, Guthrie, Dylan, Kerouac, Ginsberg, Evans, Frank, Eggleston, Shore, Smithson, Ruscha, and so on. Yet she could not name one such woman. At a moment when inequity is at the center of the American public discourse, Daignault wanted to assert her own rights to agency and opinion—to move freely through the country and to voice a comprehensive thesis on its identity. “Not just a room of one’s own anymore,” she explains, “but a whole world.” *Light Atlas* began as a drawing. Daignault traced the route she would take on a road map, snaking a thin pencil along the outside border of the continental United States. Then she drove the loop, on blue highways and back roads, avoiding interstates and stopping every few miles to get out of the car—look, paint, walk, or just sit. Traveling over 30,000 miles, across forests, deserts, mountains, and fields, she followed the road for a year.

The resulting document of the journey, the paintings, depicts the breadth of American light and land. Installed in the gallery, edge-to-edge, the canvases align by a shared center horizon, tracing the circumference of America. *Light Atlas* expands into a metaphorical filmstrip. A zoetrope. A cyclorama. Daignault defines its structure as long-form painting, akin to a novel, film, or epic poem. Often using serial forms, Daignault forges meaning across groups of images, opposing the nihilism ever-present in randomized picture streams of contemporary life. Humanist and non-hierarchical, no single canvas stands above any other and significance rises only from the meaningful whole. At a distance, *Light Atlas* paints a holistic portrait of America, revealing slow shifts in hue, atmosphere, typology, and topography—a color wheel mapping verdancy to desert, and forest to farm. Its images construct an index of American

Lisa Cooley

107 Norfolk Street
New York, New York 10002

212-680-0564
212-680-0565 fax
frontdesk@lisa-cooley.com
lisa-cooley.com

memes: plant and animal, architecture and industry, wealth and poverty, depth and proximity, wildness and domesticity. Yet up close, as the viewer glides down the row of paintings, as if trailing the long white line of a highway, the frames animate a more intimate, temporal, and filmic account. Daignault weaves a dense narrative, intercutting parallel stories of the journey, the creation of the work, and the grander fiction of America itself, all recounted with an unmistakable love of painting and place.

Light Atlas reads as an odyssey whose protagonist is America. Born of the American desire to go west and understand the meaning of the country through the meaning of its land, the piece explores the changing role and significance of landscape. In a time of rapid climate shift and resource depletion, when lives are lived increasingly inside and online, the meaning of physical land is changing, altering the identity of America itself. Gone like the wild buffalo is the romantic sublime of Manifest Destiny. Now, when all landscapes appear in a state of flux and fragility, exactly what destiny will manifest is no longer so certain. Daignault posits that today, the sublime emerges from the vernacular aggregate and the meaning of the country from the populist assemblage of the everyday: late light on the side of a white house, diffuse fog in a stand of redwoods, and stout cows before a lone red barn. Here, America appears as an unpeopled land, abandoned and vulnerable. The country subsists more in commemoration than live action, as in a dream, memory, or monument, or as after the hypothetical apocalypse. There is only one consciousness in the work: the witness. The eyes in the mind, the driver inside the car, ever absorb the unceasing imagist string of moments, each as meaningful and meaningless as the last—life—as the view through a moving window, prosaic and fleeting, then gone.

The exhibition also contains Daignault's first collaborative work with photographer Curran Hatleberg, ***Somewhere someone is traveling furiously toward you***. During the monumental road trip Daignault undertook to make *Light Atlas*, she was gripped by the idea of the individual in a car as a metaphor for the individual consciousness inside the body. Thus, two cars passing on a road might parallel two friends, lovers, or strangers, each with a unique and irreconcilable subjectivity. Two drivers on the same road, might see all the same places and landmarks, yet they will never see the exact same sights since light, weather, position, direction and time will never overlap.

Daignault and Hatleberg conceived a multi-stage work to articulate this concept. Beginning on opposite coasts and driving the same route between New York and Los Angeles, each artist spent one week documenting their personal experience on the road. Drawing the shortest non-interstate path through the geographic center of the United States—Lebanon, Kansas—they embarked from opposite points at the exact same time to eventually pass each other in Lebanon, and then keep driving. They stayed in the same motels, used matching photographic equipment, and did not correspond until their brief meeting.

The resulting work is an immersive slideshow that stands as a document of a single event, recounted by two views that are at once parallel and subjective, redundant and variable. The artists commissioned William Morisey Slater to write a unique score for the work. Improvised without any direct knowledge of the subject of the slideshow, Slater's score contains three disparate musical sections, each of which cycles with its visual counterpart, evoking the kinetic fascination, haunted displacement, and cogitative isolation of travel on the road. The work stands as a manifestation of parallax, the displacement of objects when viewed from different positions, as between two eyes. Even between lovers, content, narrative, and decisive moments are entirely subjective. We may spend years together, but we will begin life alone and die alone; the moments where we overlap or pass are inevitably fleeting.

Cynthia Daignault was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and lives and works in New York and Los Angeles, California. She attended Stanford University, was a MacDowell Colony Fellow, and received a Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant. Notable solo exhibitions include shows at White Columns, Lisa Cooley, and Rowhouse Project. She has been included in exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art

Lisa Cooley

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212-680-0564
212-680-0565 fax
frontdesk@lisa-cooley.com
lisa-cooley.com

Denver, the Fort Worth Modern, and the Brooklyn Museum, where in 2014 she exhibited the massive installation *I love you more than one more day*, featuring 365 paintings of the sky. Daignault is an active writer. She founded the publication *A-Z*, edited Sean Landers's monograph, *Improbable History*, and is a former associate director of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. She publishes regularly and has participated in readings at MoMA PS1, the Seque series, and New York University. She has published two limited edition artist books, titled *CCTV* (2012) and *I love you more than one more day* (2013).

Curran Hatleberg received his MFA from Yale University. He currently teaches photography at Yale University and Cooper Union. He is the recipient of the 2015 Magnum Emergency Fund, the 2014 Aaron Siskind Foundation Individual Photographer's Fellowship Grant, and the Richard Benson Prize for Excellence in Photography. He won the 2013 Annual Juried Competition at the Camera Club of New York. His photographs are included in private and public collections, including the Center for Contemporary Photography, Yale University Museum of Art, Williams College Museum of Art, and the Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University. His work has been published in *Harpers*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Vice*, and *The Paris Review*, as well as the book, *The United States (2003-2013)* from Mossless Publishing. His monograph, *Lost Coast*, will be released by TBW Books in early 2016.

William Morisey Slater is a composer and multi-instrumentalist who lives and works in Portland, Oregon. He has performed on countless records and in numerous bands, including Grails, Denver, Paolo Zappoli & the Break, Rebel Drones, and Modest Mouse. His next solo project will be released in 2016.

Road Dreams accompanied by Gary Lucas

Saturday, November 14, 2015, 6pm

Renowned guitarist Gary Lucas will provide musical accompaniment to Elliott Bristow's legendary Super 8 film diary documenting his 500,000-mile road trip around America from 1968-1980, a film archive which has achieved legendary cult status. Gary Lucas will accompany a selection of this footage in multi-panel projection. Gary Lucas leads the supergroup Gods and Monsters, whose alumni include Jeff Buckley, Jerry Harrison (Talking Heads), Billy Ficca (Television), and Ernie Brooks (Modern Lovers). He has performed or recorded with Captain Beefheart, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Nick Cave, and many others.

Waiting for the Man: a tragicomedy in two acts

Thursday, November 19, 2015, 6pm

Two people, Cynthia Daignault and Mark Loiacono, sit in a room talking about America while they await the late arrival of their friend, Andy Warhol: a tragicomedy in two acts.

Further Down the Line: a panel discussion featuring Curran Hatleberg, Justine Kurland, Kristine Potter, and Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa

Wednesday, December 9, 2015, 7pm

Join us at the gallery for a live slide viewing of Robert Frank's seminal book *The Americans*, followed by an informal discussion among a group of contemporary artists whose work relates in various ways to *The Americans*. This panel discussion, focusing loosely on contemporary photography, will explore the significance of the road in cultural and artistic life.

The gallery is located at 107 Norfolk Street, one block east of Essex Street between Rivington and Delancey. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Sunday, from 10 am to 6 pm, and always by appointment. The closest subways are the F/J/M at the Delancey/Essex stop and the D at Grand Street. For more information, contact Nichole Caruso at nichole@lisa-cooley.com or (212) 680-0564.

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