

REGAN GOLDEN

We Walked Into and Out of the Forest

September 11, 2009 – January 10, 2010

“I once did an experiment to see what happened when I looked long and hard at something obvious in the landscape.”—Paul Shepard¹

For some time, Regan Golden has meandered through a forested plot of land in New England owned by her grandmother. She is intrigued by the idea of an authentic wilderness, in contrast to natural environments that have been groomed or prepared for visitors, such as at a state park. Golden is free to wander with no paths to guide her, no scenic or popular views indicated by sign, and no other visitors. For her 3rd Floor Emerging Artist Exhibition *We Walked Into and Out of the Forest*, Golden presents multiple altered photographs and drawings depicting this landscape, which invite consideration of documentation, representation, site, and the relationship between viewer and environment. She is not content with merely documenting the untouched beauty of this location but, instead, is interested in sharing a more conceptual experience of landscape and site. By cutting the photographs and utilizing alternative methods in her drawings, she modifies images in a way that invites further interaction and interpretation. To Golden, these altered images more accurately elicit the experience of the place than a simple two-dimensional photograph.

In this series, the process of the artist moving through a particular location was a primary concern for Golden, whereas capturing an idealized image or result was not. Consequently, her emphasis on process and experience impacts the way she alters and presents her work and differentiates her from contemporary photographers working with landscape or traditional landscape artists. In his series “Paradise,” acclaimed contemporary photographer Thomas Struth presents large-scale color photographs taken of tangled vegetation from jungles and woods across the globe. In his work *Paradise 31, Peru* (1995), the sheer size of the print and dense layers of plant life that obscure the ground and the sky have a dislocating effect for the viewer. In terms of subject of the photograph, this work could be compared to Golden’s work in this exhibition. The woods are dense and raw, and the perceptual impact of the wild, lush greenery is notable. However, rather than presenting her images in very large two-dimensional format as does Struth, Golden explains her attempt to “defy photography by not emphasizing the beautiful document and instead trying to place emphasis on the experience, both in the process of the creation of the work and for the viewer in the gallery.”

A new integration of photography into Golden’s artistic practice becomes increasingly primary within this body of work. She recognizes that by producing photographs, she must confront the conventions and expectations associated with photography. Although this medium has often been thought of as reflecting an accurate, truthful representation of a scene or occurrence, photographs have often been altered to represent a desired or changed reality. In the past, a more analog means of modification was used to achieve the desired result—the manual removal of an individual from a group, as an example. Now, of course, there are powerful digital technologies available to transform the captured image into the desired image. Golden is not intent upon this type of alteration. Her work is grounded in perception and experience, and her modifications act to elicit this in the viewer. By cutting her work she is physically altering a photograph, for example, thereby changing the view of the place rather than relying on the image as documentary evidence of the place. Through this process she is attempting to expand her understanding of the environment. When thinking about authenticity and accuracy as related to her photographs and drawings, she states, “The works are so descriptive in some ways, that they do describe the landscape and they do provide documents of the wilderness that is there, but I do not want interpretations of the works to be limited to that. For that reason I cut them apart, turn them upside down, and alter them. In the altering process there is an attempt to better represent what is truly there.”

As an example of this process, after printing a photograph of the wooded landscape, Golden meticulously cuts around leaves, branches, and other details contained in the image. This action has multiple effects both physically and materially, but also in our perception of the photograph itself. Modern photographic paper has a plastic or resin-coated top layer, while the substrate is essentially paper-based. In the cutting through

of the plastic-coated top layer, surface tension is created that begins to lift this portion of the photograph, creating something that has subtle dimension and begins to be removed from its previously exclusive two-dimensional status. This is essentially creating a more sculptural object out of paper. In one of these works, a specific hanging system is employed to accommodate viewing of the work from both the “front” and the “back.” In this way, Golden again questions traditional reading of two-dimensional work. Further, these exacting cuts made to the face of the photograph create a “new” work on the reverse side of the image. This method then, in effect, produces a line drawing—a simplified and less detailed version of the primary image. In another alteration method, Golden uses a graphite transfer process in the creation of a drawing, which allows for the action of the knife tracing the foliage in a photographic image to press upon a sheet of paper covered in graphite, which was sandwiched between the photograph and a blank sheet of paper. The cuts then “draw” the image as the graphite transfers from the graphite-colored page to the blank page. This emphasis on process and evolution within her work, beginning rather than ending with the photographic image, exemplifies Golden’s intentions for these works. KD

Kris Douglas is Chief Curator at the Rochester Art Center.

¹ Paul Shepard, *The Cultivated Wilderness, Or, What is Landscape*, 1997 (pg 11), The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA

artist biography

Regan Golden received a B.A. in Studio Art and American History from Grinnell College in 2000, a M.A. from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee in 2004, and an M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee in 2006. She has received fellowships from institutions including the Stone Summer Theory Institute at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Blacklock Nature Sanctuary, and will participate in the CORE Program at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston in 2009-2010. She has also received grants and scholarships from The Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York, NY, and The Jerome Foundation, Minneapolis MN. Selected exhibitions include NEXT with Heaven Gallery, Art Chicago, Chicago IL; Decorative Directive, Walker’s Point Center for the Arts, Milwaukee WI; Case-by-Case Basis, Lloyd Dobbler Gallery, Chicago, IL; Walker on the Green, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Pathogeographies, Gallery 400, University of Illinois-Chicago, Chicago, IL; What Is Yours Is Mine Is Yours, INOVA, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, and Hidden Treasures, Ohio University School of Art, Athens OH, among others.

rochester art center 3rd floor emerging artist series

The Rochester Art Center continually strives to engage the community members of all ages in the creation, contemplation, and appreciation of the visual arts. As a non-collecting institution, the Art Center focuses its efforts on presenting temporary exhibitions throughout the year featuring established local, national, and international artists, as well as “emerging” artists from diverse backgrounds working in a variety of media.

In 2004, the Rochester Art Center initiated the 3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series—an exhibition program dedicated to promising young artists working in the state of Minnesota. Since its inception, the series has reflected shifting trends in contemporary artistic practice and production and has helped to facilitate the creation of new bodies of work in a variety of media including photography, installation, sound, painting, drawing, sculpture, and film. Now in our sixth year, the 3rd Floor Emerging Artist Series continues to support emerging artists and to provide a dedicated forum for the exhibition of exciting new work.

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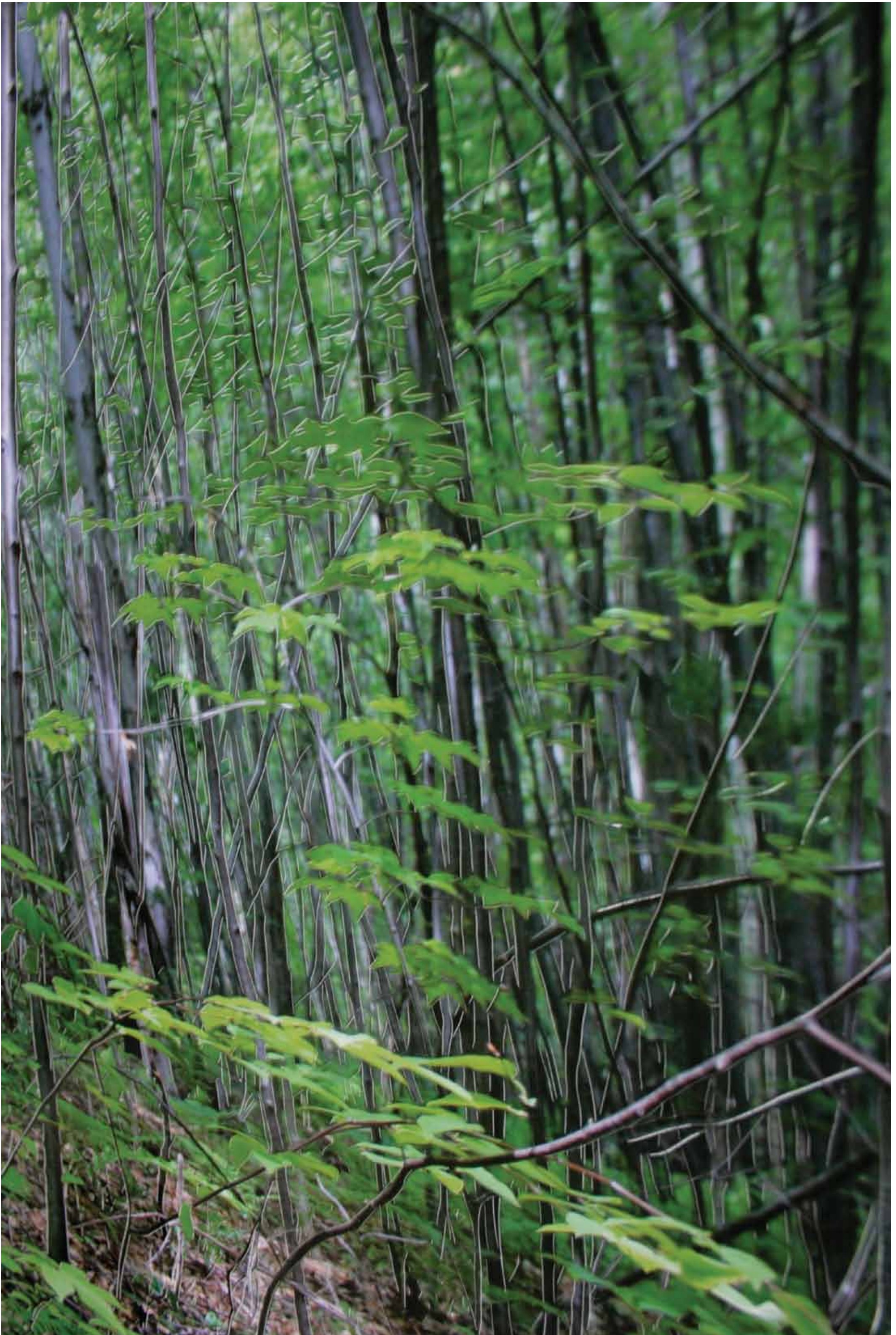
Minnechoag Mountain: *View from Right of Way*, 2009, handcut digital C print, 4 x 6 inches.



Minnechoag Mountain: *Sapling Grove*, 2008, handcut digital C print, 20 x 30 inches.

cover image

Detail. Minnechoag Mountain: *Sapling Grove*, 2008, hand cut digital C print, 20 x 30 inches.



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