

MARTHA GANNON

WISTFUL INTENTIONS



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 4 - NOVEMBER 10, 2001
AUSTIN, TEXAS



Pinto Canyon Road #2, 2001.
Mixed media. 22" x 60" x 6"

MARTHA GANNON
WISTFUL INTENTIONS

If our time in the world is lost to us but for memory, then the records we devise contain that threat of loss and an equal measure of yearning. Because the past is physically irretrievable, the memorial traces we leave behind us are at once familiar and strangely distant, whatever form they take. This is the essential nature of Martha Gannon's *Wistful Intentions*. As if reflecting distorted fragments from a parallel universe, Gannon's sculptural works are mirror-like portals where evanescent perceptions collide with the physical world. Like memory itself, they compel the viewer to ask, "Is this how it looked? Did it really happen like that? Have I remembered correctly?" And who can answer such questions definitively, given the lapses and variations that distinguish one memory

from another. Gannon's art lays bare the tension between the mind's struggle for accuracy and its ineluctable desire to construct a separate world of imagination.

This frank acknowledgement of the artist's subjective eye is Gannon's point of departure. Though she culls reminiscent images from a childhood on the Gulf Coast and in West Texas, Gannon's approach emphasizes the more universal subjectivity of the human consciousness, which operates in the physical world from the remove of memory. With a broad repertoire of materials, the artist expands this view of the separate mind to also suggest the many cultural forms human consciousness inhabits, such as architecture, the museum and popular cinema. Paradoxically, the highly constructed works in *Wistful Intentions* are "metaphysical" in the most literal sense. They identify the artful (and artificial) gateways where mind and nature meet,

and the problems that result in that narrow juncture.

In the *Pinto Canyon Road* and *From Study Butte* series, Gannon starts with photographic documentation of specific West Texas landscapes and subtly shifts the frame of reference further and further away from nature. This results in radically altered West Texas friezes that, although recognizable, bear little relation to actual place. It's a place in the mind's eye, informed by emotion, memory and cultural markers. Digitally cropped and stretched, the color images recall romantic, Cinemascope notions of the West – it's blue sky, bone-dry terrain and relentless horizontality. Printed on Duratrans and backlit with fluorescent lighting, these manipulated images are presented in industrial strength boxes constructed from brightly colored anodized aluminum. Far from natural, these intensely synthetic objects make

passing reference to commercial signage and movie theater marquees, but their intent is to push the mind/nature divide even further.

Pressed wildflowers are foregrounded in clusters across the front of each frieze. Native to a cooler, wetter climate, these preserved artifacts give a directional cast to the image, as if gazing West from a more hospitable, eastern vantage point. Lurking among the actual flowers are black and white photographs of flowers and cacti which subtly upset this romantic idyll of nature, a contentious point made even more piquant by the aluminum, fountain-like troughs suspended below. Part stock tank, part suburban swimming pool, these gurgling sources of water hold a fluid potential for intervention, but they do not touch the arid landscapes above nor can they sustain them. It's a bittersweet metaphor for humanity's best intentions, which in these disturbing works link John Ford's Hollywood myth of the West with Lady Bird Johnson's beautification projects.

The three-piece series *Access Road #3* also contains specific references to nature, in this case the Gulf of Mexico viewed from the Texas coast. Gannon begins with color photographs of roiling surf and storm clouds, which she digitally stretches into tall, slim vistas lit from behind. This is the first of several metaphysical distortions that transform objective documentation into something entirely symbolic. Encased in steel and just large enough to step through, the three works activate an even stronger sensation of "portal". But, it's a narrow doorway, giving some access to the scene while also limiting it. The vignettes are more for peering than traveling, inviting the mind to move into them rather than the body.

This close identification and human scale are figurative qualities, an impression made concrete by the ball-and-claw foot elements supporting the three panels. Cast in bronze from a human hand, these "feet" upend the works into surreal handsprings and are counterpoints to the images of foreboding thunderheads. Balancing on their hands, the three contemplative "figures" allude to the Christian symbolism of the artist's Catholic upbringing. Historically magical, the number three is also potent in alchemy lore, as well as Jung's theories of psychological transformation.

In additional works, Gannon evokes the honorific and playful aspects of human consciousness. *Ramon, La Margherita, Lila,* and *Sanprix* display the mind's special ability to commemorate what it records. Constructed from zinc-plated steel, these four gentle arches contain photographs of clouds from West and South Texas. These expansive settings are the backdrop for bronze casts of sage and seaweed, which are suspended in front of the images on curving, slender rods. The graceful pairings are harmonious, a promise of reconciliation between the natural environment and the human will that reflects it. Conversely, *In a Minute There is Time...#2* is pure, playful observation. The simple pleasures of color and form activate this photo-mosaic of tropical fish, set off by a field of lighted, blue tiles. Mounted with metal pins and springs, the entire wall installation is held together with a bouncing tension.

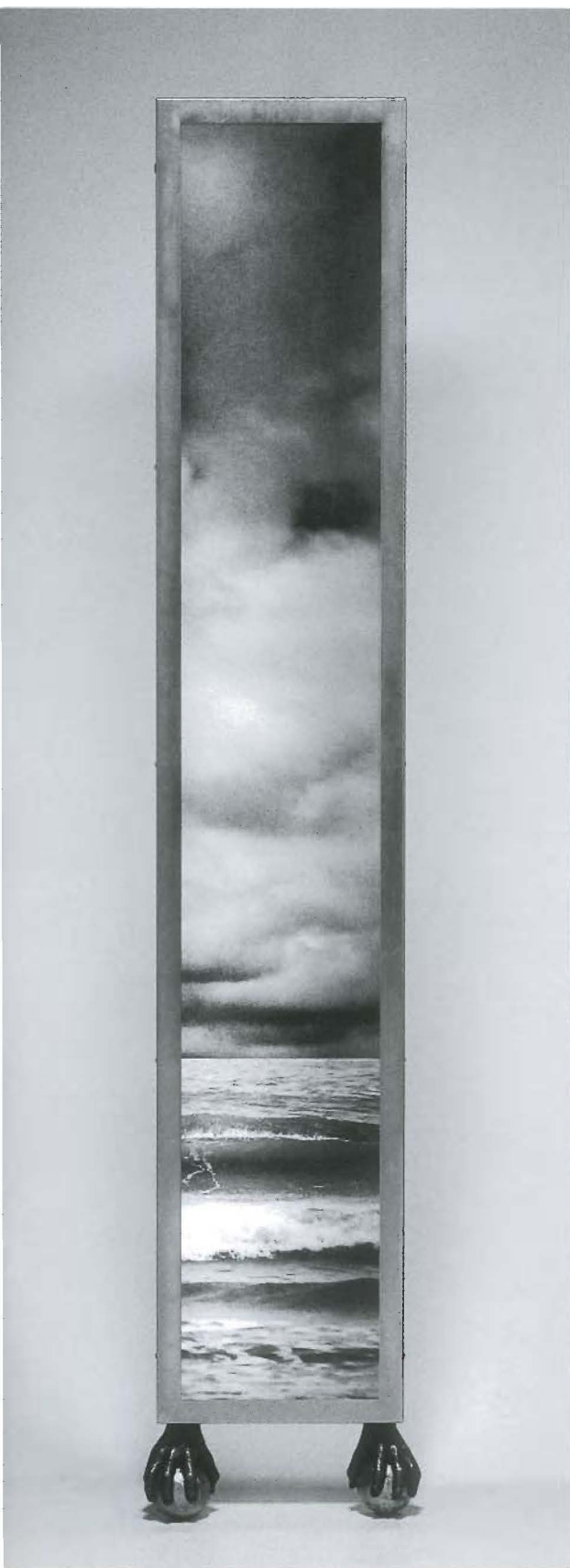
This dynamism is what most characterizes Gannon's art. Her mastery of diverse materials, keen sense of environment, and a desire to plumb the intricacies of perception inform an eclectic practice that transcends genres. Her 1995 Museum Series employed this combinative zeal

to create visual odes to famous cultural institutions. Photographs of museums, images of art masterworks, and natural objects are whimsically arranged in lighted, steel triptychs. These architecturally elaborate shadowboxes celebrate the innately human desire to archive, an act that focuses and isolates the mind from the surrounding environment.

Such concerns suggest other artists who have similarly worked against arbitrary boundaries. From "odds and ends" and wooden boxes, Joseph Cornell's mid-century "constructions" gathered entire symbolic universes into the tiniest of domains. Cornell's extensive written correspondence with Marcel Duchamp has noted the American artist's affinity with the French surrealist's mechanistic representations of human perception.¹ Language and the mind further link us to the preeminent Surrealist, René Magritte, whose perceptual tricks and interior skies bring us back to Gannon's arches, doorways and imaginative panoramas. If memory can transcend time and space, then the artists' record may ultimately be the most reliable.

John Ewing
San Antonio, Texas
August, 2001

¹ Collected and documented in the 1999 exhibition "Joseph Cornell/Marcel Duchamp... in resonance" and accompanying catalogue; The Menil Collection, Houston, Texas.



Access Road #3, Part 3, 2001.
Mixed media. 85.5" x 16" x 9"

MARTHA GANNON

Resides in Austin, TX

EDUCATION

- 1990 Master of Fine Arts, University of Texas,
Austin, TX
1983 Bachelor of Fine Arts,
Southwest Texas State University,
San Marcos, TX

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 1999 *1/4 Hora Project Space*, Elgin, TX
1998 *Tidbit Gallery*, Portland, OR
1996 *Spectrum Gallery*, Zaragoza, Spain
1996 *Galleria Punto*, Valencia, Spain
1996 *Balassi Gallery*, Budapest, Hungary
1996 *N.A.M.E.*, Chicago, IL
1995 *Scinhaz Gallery*, Zalaegerszeg,
Hungary
1995 *Indiana University Northwest*,
Gary, IN
1995 *Park Art 95*, Chicago, IL
1994 *Perkinson Gallery*, Millikin University,
Decatur, IL
1993 *Hyde Park Art Center*, Chicago, IL
1992 *Artemisia Gallery*, Chicago, IL

REVIEWS/PUBLICATIONS

- 1998 *Willamette Week*, Portland, OR
1996 *Catalogue*, Tarazona Foto,
Zaragoza, Spain
1996 *Catalogue*, Galeria Punto, Valencia, Spain
1995 *Zalai Hirlap*, Zalaegerszeg, Hungary
1995 *Northwest News*, Gary, IN
1992 *Catalogue*, The Forum Gallery,
Jamestown, NY
1992 *The Austin American Statesman*,
Austin, TX
1990 *The Austin Chronicle*, Austin, TX
1990 *Austin American Statesman*, Austin, TX

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

School of the Art Institute of Chicago,
Department of Sculpture, Chicago, IL
Visiting Artist – 1991-1999

Universitat Politècnica de València,
Department of Sculpture, Valencia, Spain
Visiting Artist – 1995

University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX
Assistant Instructor – 1990

LECTURES

- 2001 *Austin Museum of Art*, Austin, TX
2001 *Artpace*, San Antonio, TX
2001 *Umlauf Sculpture Gardens*, Austin, TX
1996 *Indiana University Northwest*, Gary, IN
1996 *The Slade School of Fine Art*,
University College London,
London, England (*visiting artist*)
1995 *Chelsea College of Art and Design*,
London, England
1995 *School of the Art Institute of Chicago*,
Chicago, IL
1994 *Millikin University*, Decatur, IL

GRANTS/AWARDS

- 1996 *Chicago Artists International Program*,
City of Chicago, Department of Cultural
Affairs, Chicago, IL
1996 *Faculty Enrichment Grant*,
School of the Art Institute of Chicago,
Chicago, IL
1995, 1994, 1992 *Community Arts Assistance*
Program Grant, *City of Chicago*,
Department of Cultural Affairs,
Chicago, IL
1991, 1990 *Cultural Arts Commission Grant*,
City of Austin, Austin, TX

SELECTED COLLECTIONS/ COMMISSIONS

- Terri Bentz, Chicago, IL
Susan Beilstein, Chicago, IL
Carrie Bills, Austin, TX
DLK Architecture, Inc., Chicago, IL
Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, IL
Christi Fox, Columbus, OH
Melissa Bargar-Hughes, Chicago, IL
Francés Jones, Austin, TX
Kirkland Fine Arts Center, Millikin University
Kozan Studios, Chicago, IL
Robave, Inc., Chicago, IL
John Robertson, Austin, TX
Michael Straaton, Chicago, IL
Michael Tracy, San Ygnacio, TX
Sandra Webster, Geneva, IL
Schroeder Murchie Laya Associates, Ltd.,
Chicago, IL



Cover Panel: *Lila*, 2001. Mixed media. 32" x 14" x 12"

This Panel: *Pinto Canyon Road #3*, 2001. Mixed media. 22" x 60" x 6"

Back Panel: *Pinto Canyon Road #2, (detail)* 2000. Mixed media. 22" x 60" x 6"



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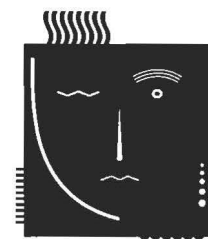
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Now celebrating its 23rd anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,636 artists in 204 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 19 literary readings, and 214 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the

National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



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