

VIRGINIA YOUNT

Unsustainable Attainment



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

OCTOBER 2 - NOVEMBER 12, 2010

AUSTIN, TEXAS

VIRGINIA YOUNT

The Gatherer

1. As the Gatherer walked through the woods, the trees fell away to a cliff and the moon reflected on the water, a night sun. The day was upside down and the world was inside out, its guts everywhere, an eruption of innards. Candy wrappers and cracked plastic cups had replaced fallen leaves. Deflated air mattresses and those pool toys called noodles were as many as the rocks and branches on the ground. Plastic gallon jugs lay hollow and crushed upon the earth. Their cousins, the bags that once held them, were now themselves lifted by the wind. Some hung empty, clinging to a tree branch for fear the Gatherer might find them and tear them to shreds.



Nest (for Technophiles), 2010, gouache and mixed media on paper 22" x 30"

Whatever. She had plenty of shredded plastic. What she could really use was some good thick string. Or better yet, some steel wire.

She slid down the embankment, digging her heels into the cascade of glass bottles as

they gave way, tumbling down to the beach to meet bloated diapers and rusted cans. The lake was an oily rainbow, broken only by humps of black plastic something, a shadowy Loch Ness monster.

Behind her was a cave. In it was a video game chair, the kind with panels and plugs down the sides. It was blue, vaguely Japanese, and had no armrests. She sat in it. The bottom was curved so she rocked back and forth for a while before deciding it would do. She hoisted the chair over her shoulder and the pleated vinyl seat hugged her body like the stomach of a giant caterpillar.

She clinked and clattered her way back up the cliff. A bottle popped and she cursed, thinking the glass might work its way through the worn rubber of her soles and into the flesh of her foot. It didn't, and she felt grateful. So she put down the chair, turned around, and skidded to the bottom again where she turned around and headed back up to the top and skidded back down. She did this again and again, crunching her way up and down, doing what she could to help the bottles return to sand.

Back at her pile, the floor shifted as clumps of wires and stacks of magazines settled beneath her weight in the chair. Through her hole, she could see the palms scraping against the sky. The magazines fluttered as a brambled mass of old television antennas rolled past. The wind was blowing hard that day. Huffing and puffing and blowing her house in.

If only a wolf would come.

2. The artist sits on a couch in her home, staring at some wooden bookshelves. They are beautifully crafted, built into the wall and crammed with books. *Crime and Punishment*, *The Bell Jar*, *Pale Fire*; she had read none. "I don't really read books anymore," she realized. "They might as well be bricks in my house." Then she went into her studio to paint.

3. Virginia Yount's paintings capture the zeitgeist of consumption and turn it into something that is at once beautiful and scary, innocent and sad. To look at the two large oil paintings, *L.A. Skyscrapers* and *Pile*, is to bury oneself in a landfill, while the smaller drawings and collages are sparser, their landscapes spooky or brittle. Though the color palette tends toward the deep and the neon, the message is as dark as any fairy tale and serves a similar purpose: to offer escape and to serve as a warning.

It's easy to politicize the images, but that doesn't seem to do the work justice. As in *Electric Beach House (for Car Salesmen)*, where Yount attached bits of holographic paper to the gouache drawing: Pennants that once flapped over a booming car lot are now thatched in the roof of a sparkling hobo's camp, or maybe it's a child's secret fort, or simply a lucky snarl of debris. All that's left after... what? There's no telling. The world could have ended, or an economic stimulus program could have failed. One already happened; one might. It makes no difference.

Or in *Emotional Outpouring (for Facebook)*, where security cameras look on as trees, carved with initials and words like "stud," puke a black substance down a wooden chute. The recent BP oil catastrophe comes to mind: how powerless we all were as we watched, via a live feed from an underwater camera, 4.9 million barrels of crude oil explode slowly into the sea. But the artist wasn't thinking about oil when she painted this; the work was completed before Deepwater Horizon went bust. No, the black stuff was inspired, in part, by the maple syrup extraction process she witnessed while at a residency in Vermont. Never before has the process seemed so painful.

Talk about a zeitgeist: hoarders. There are enough of them in this country to warrant an interventionist TV show called, unsurprisingly, *Hoarders*. It shows us what it looks

like when our stuff becomes our home: family members cover their mouths and cry as they step into their loved one's kitchen for the first time in years; the loved one, though ashamed of the condition in which he or she has been living, acts as though their guts are being ripped out and tossed in the trash as professional cleaning crews throw out empty cat food cans. What began as a compulsion, born from the basic human need for comfort, seems to always end up in solitary confinement. These people are all alone with their stuff. It defines them. It's all they have.

It looks so lonely.

In *One More for the Road (for Collectors)*, a covered wagon is made from a patchwork of shelves holding trinkets. The wagon is bright and exciting, each shelf happy in its color and contents – toothbrushes lined up neatly, strings of hanging necklaces, a row of spinning globes – nothing sinister there. Even the spokes of the front wheels are beaded, as one would a child's bike. But take a closer look and you'll see that those front wheels are the only ones this wagon's got. Held up on one end by two stacks of cinderblocks, the wagon is heavy, immobile, stranded in the desert with a couple prickly cacti. Its loneliness, like its weight, is heavy.

There are no people in any of these paintings. Is there anyone out there? Or are they all long gone, tossed to the bottom of a deep, dark quarry like the sad old televisions in *Monument Valley (for Extraterrestrials)*? There were people here once; you can see them in what they longed for, collected, ignored, and left behind. And in many of the works, there is language. Desperate acts of communication. In *Fortress of Solitude (for Twitter)*, words are hidden in the delicate metal work that surrounds the building. Surely, Twitter is long since dead in this time of loneliness and isolation; but like the Romans and the



Fortress of Solitude (for Twitter), 2010,
gouache on paper, 22" x 30"

Masons, people are communicating secret messages in their architecture that the rest of us can't understand.

Who is it that lives in that radical house made from solar panels floating on hot lava in *Climate Control (for Shut-ins)*? Someone who tried – or is trying – really hard to make it right by harnessing the power of the sun? But how sad it is that they didn't see that all the while the heat of the earth beneath them could have been enough. The power was there at their feet as they were focused on the sky.

Unsustainable attainment.
Misguided yearning.

There are no homes yet on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, but just wait. Yount's sculpture *Throw Cash to the Wind* is an ecosystem made of foam rocks recycled from a movie set. Globes of dried-up paint from the floor of

the artist's studio act as trees, and ornate castles made from discarded scratch-off lottery tickets loom above while a sprawling shantytown made from the same stuff is nestled below. There is language here, too. Secret messages from whom, we aren't sure, but someone writes those crossword puzzles, carefully choosing the words for the dreamers scratching for cash. And what of those dreamers, real-life people whose hopes were left unfulfilled and tossed in the trash? They speak here, too; some scratched furiously, others in meticulous patterns. One person used a marker to play. The never-ending quest may be for truth, but Yount knows we'd all settle for a little money. All the while, garbage oozes from the cracks in the rocks, and there are those nets of trash, too, hanging full as udders.

Oh, we've ruined it. But, hey, we did our best. We recycled all our bleach bottles and buried all our trash. Out of sight, out of mind, as the saying goes. Into the earth; into the sea is more like it, though. Lucky for us, Yount sees creation in the devastation.

You'll notice each painting is a gift to someone or something; to the collectors and the believers, to the packrats and the artists. None of us are without blame here in this era of the pre-apocalypse, but we all deserve a place in this world. And while Yount shows us the darkness of these times, she also offers us a place where there is beauty in all this ugliness and hope in all this ruination.

Diana Welch
is a writer living in Austin.
You can see more of her work at
dianawelchisawriter.com

VIRGINIA YOUNT

EDUCATION

- 2000 B.F.A. Studio Art, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
2008 M.F.A. Studio Art, University of Texas at Austin

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *Hobo Jungle*, Domy Books, Austin, TX
Everything Must Go, Subtext Projects,
Fort Worth Contemporary Arts, Fort Worth, TX
2008 *Texpose*, Urban Culture Project, Kansas City, MO
XIII, MFA thesis show, VAC Austin, TX
2007 *Interchange*, Creative Research Lab, Austin, TX
Existence is Elsewhere, Else Madsen Gallery, Austin, TX
Popular Hallucinations for the Home, Mass Gallery, Austin, TX
2006 *Making It Alone*, Creative Research Laboratory, Austin, TX
Nohegan, Mass Gallery, Austin, TX
Baker's Dozen, UTSA Satellite Space, San Antonio, TX
Grid, Creative Research Laboratory, Austin, TX
Related, MASS Gallery, Austin, TX
2000-01 *Art Frenzy*, Crane Street Studios, Long Island City, NY
Wreath, UBS Bard College Exhibition Space, Red Hook, NY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2007 Edwin Stirman, "Virginia Yount,"
in *Interchange* (Austin, TX:
Creative Research Laboratory).
2006 Salvador Castillo, "Making it
Alone at Creative Research
Laboratory," *...might be good*
(Austin, TX) 73, July 14.
2006 Melissa Warak, "Virginia Yount,"
catalog essay for *Making it Alone*
(Austin, TX: Creative
Research Laboratory).
2006 Rachel Koper, "Grid," *The Austin
Chronicle*, February 10.

PUBLICATIONS

- 2008 *Captioning for the Blind*, illustrations for a short story
written by Rebecca Bengal
2007 *Popular Hallucinations for the Home* (Austin, TX:
Mass Gallery).
2006 *American Short Fiction*, vol. 9, no. 35 (Fall).

HONORS & AWARDS/FELLOWSHIPS

- 2009 Vermont Studio Center Residency Artist's Fellowship
2007 Continuing Fellowship, University of Texas, Austin, TX
2005 Carol Chiles Ballard Presidential Fellowship, University of Texas
John Guerin Fellowship, University of Texas, Austin, TX
Michael Frary Fellowship, University of Texas, Austin, TX



Throw Cash into the Wind, 2010, Lottery tickets and mixed media, 41" x 49" x 72"



Monument Valley (for Extraterrestrials), 2010, gouache and mixed media on paper, 22" x 30"

Cover Panel: *Miracle Mine (for Non-Believers)*, 2010, gouache on paper, 22" x 30"



Electric Beachhouse (for Car Salesmen), 2010, gouache and mixed media on paper, 22" x 30"

Women & Their Work

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Known for its pioneering spirit, embrace of artistic innovation, and commitment to Texas audiences and artists, Women & Their Work is now celebrating its 32nd anniversary. Presenting 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 1,849 artists in 266 visual art exhibitions, 113 music dance and theater events 14 film festivals, 23 literary readings and 437 workshops in programming that reflects the broad diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in Art in America, ArtForum and on 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 1,800 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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1710 Lavaca St.
 Austin, Texas 78701
 (512) 477-1064
 info@womenandtheirwork.org
 www.womenandtheirwork.org
 Mon. - Fri. 10-6 & Sat. 12-5

