

Charles Moffett

Genius Loci

An Essay by Katherine Pratt-Thompson

Upon first glance, the sinuous tethers of steel fixed to the canvas of Saskia Krafft's work, *Archaeology of Rootedness*, appear to act as if biological matter under a microscope. Extending from a pseudo-nucleus these tendrils of metal challenge the viewer to hypothesize both the work's perspective and subject. Inspired by a visit to the archaeological site of Alto da Vigia in Portugal, which the Romans had dedicated to the Sun, Moon, and Ocean, Krafft reflected on her visit saying, "that is truly how I felt when being there - connected with all these forces." The idea of rootedness, as captured in the title of her work, takes on a complex role as the plasma-cut roots come to reflect an intense connectivity to place while simultaneously collapsing time and memory into a single plane.

Krafft's work highlights the multi-faceted approach curator José Chavez-Verduzco takes in his group exhibition *Genius Loci*. Defined as the pervading spirit of a place, genius loci permeates throughout the work of the eighteen artists included in Chavez-Verduzco's show. In its rich and nuanced perspectives, the exhibition complicates the action of observance as it relates to conceptions, perceptions, and experiences of place. To observe is generally thought to be synonymous with the act of looking; i.e. to visually capture an object, a person, or a place through the eye. However, the artists represented in *Genius Loci* engage with the practice of art in a way that asks the viewer to observe beyond the intake of the eye, and to instead consider the role of observation in feeling, identity, memory, and time. In challenging the notion of observation, *Genius Loci* calls attention to the depth and insight to which artists hold the ability to translate the many strata of individual and collective place-making.

Observations of interaction shape many of the works in the exhibition. French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote in 1986, "we do not live in a kind of void...we live inside a set of relations."¹ Organized into the thematic groups of Kinship, Biotic + Abiotic, and Reconstructions, the artists of *Genius Loci* highlight the intimate, tactile, and fragmented relations that become unearthed when considering the significance of place. The abstracted notion of place in the form of memory infuses the works of Dominic Chambers, Roksana Pirouzmand, Lizette Hernández, Esteban Ramón Pérez, and Calvin Kim with both beautiful intimacy and fragmented remembrance. Many of the artists in the exhibition ask us to observe the role of identity and occupancy in our considerations of place. Danielle De Jesus, Naomi Nakazato, José de Jesús Rodríguez, Melissa Joseph, and Jonathan Herrera Soto shepherd this task with thoughtful exercise and probing discernment. A dialogue on the temporality of place is

¹ Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" *Architecture / Movement / Continuité*, October 1984; Translated from French by Jay Miskowiec, 3.

ignited in the works of Ragini Bhow, Emma Safir, Alfredo Diaz, Azza El Siddique, and Lulu Varona. Traversing the spiritual, environmental, altered and unconscious, these artists reconcile the complexities of the ephemeral and the transitory. Michael Assiff and Kevin Brisco Jr. bring the viewer into what can be described as a place of encounter. Reframing how to consider the role of nature and the human relationship therein, these two artists creatively approach subjects of anthropocentric impact, migration, and ownership.

Taken holistically, the artists presented in *Genius Loci* bring forth an ingenuity of critical and diverse perspectives. The creative process of José Chavez-Verduzco has guided the exhibition in a manner that dispels unilateral approaches to the close observation of place.

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