as well as the difficulty in asking scientific questions not easily answered (Chervinsky). His photograph The Analysis depicts a cut white calla lily clamped within a white grid, providing a framework for examination and experimentation. Emblematic of the gift of Mother Nature, the white calla lily also symbolizes purity, ephemeral life and beauty, as well as female fertility (Impelluso 74, 83). These attributes revere fragility in human nature and directly oppose our inorganic industrial achievements. However, as environmental concerns escalate, many of us look to the research and innovations of the sciences for solutions.

Just as modern-day innovations can cause feelings of disconnect between humans and the natural world, these technologies may also offer advancements that allow us to live in harmony with nature. Lucas Foglia’s series A Natural Order documents people throughout the southeastern United States who live off the grid, divorcing themselves from traditional public utility services, including water supplies, sewers, natural gas, and electrical power grids. Motivated by environmental concerns, some of the individuals in Foglia’s photographs have left cities and suburbs in order to live more sustainable lifestyles. They build with local materials, utilize nearby springs for water, and obtain their food by hunting, gathering, and farming. While living a seemingly archaic lifestyle, these people remain integrated within contemporary society through solar panels, batteries, cell phones, and computers (Foglia). These technologies provide them with modernized conveniences while still allowing them to live off the land and create a smaller ecological footprint. Alex’s Magnolia Leaf Rain Hat, North Carolina depicts a young man with long hair nonchalantly standing with several leaves atop his head, which obscure his face from the viewer. The man appears one with the natural world, standing shirtless with his arms crossed and dirt caked under his fingernails. He is adorned only with his hat of leaves to ward off the impending rain, and his ease may cause us to wonder if there are advantages to this more environmentally sustainable lifestyle he has chosen. Perhaps we have surrounded ourselves with so many conveniences of modern technology that we overlook the simple pleasures the natural world has to offer us.

Photographers’ inspiration derived from nature manifests through many artistic forms. As humans, we are physically dependent on the earth but our understanding and connection to nature are intellectual, spiritual, and in constant progression. Artists find themselves creating images as mediators for these complex ideas. Ranging from landscape and wildlife to tableaux and documentary, the photographic motifs included in Nature display a variety of means to express concepts regarding the natural world. The exhibition demonstrates our admiration of, concern for, and wonder at the earth and serves as a testament to our need to continually reaffirm our place within the realm of nature in an ever-advancing world.

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Curator Lecture: Twyla Bloxham

Artist Lecture: “A Natural Order” by Lucas Foglia, Photographer

Tuesday, March 31 at 7:30 pm
JSOM Davidson Auditorium, 1.118

Reception: 6 – 7 pm, O’Donnell ATEC Building, Gallery

Curator Lecture: Twyla Bloxham

Thursday, April 2 at 2 pm
JSOM Davidson Auditorium, 1.118

Reception: 3:30 – 4:30 pm, O’Donnell ATEC Building, Gallery
an ongoing aesthetic movement portraying humanity and nature as separate (Hirsch 294-298). With the expansion of the West and rise of industrialization, many image-makers turned toward the landscape as a means to express reverence for endangered ecosystems (Rosenblum 144). Photographers such as Ansel Adams presented wilderness without humans or even evidence of their encroachment, to encourage the preservation of the natural world. These photographs portray untainted and unpopulated scenery that so many of us have come to associate with the term landscape (Hirsch 294-298). William Neill’s work depicts the pristine beauty of untouched wilderness, relying on our emotional response and perception of the image to remind us of what we must value and conserve. His images glorify the awe-inspiring natural world seemingly untouched by humankind. Neill is aware of the danger of portraying separation between nature and humanity. He stated: 

Photographing wild landscapes, depicting an image of pristine beauty, absent of the intrusions of man, is a dangerous proposition bordering on creating a false mythology. Yet wild places do still exist. What little is left will be lost if we don’t develop a new and enlightened stewardship of our earth where Nature and Man are not considered separately. (Neill)

His image Rock formations and twilight surf, Garapatta State Beach, Big Sur, California exemplifies the aesthetic pursuit of a transcendental depiction of nature. The subject of the landscape includes three dark monumental rocks in the ocean surf at twilight with smaller rocks lining the foreground. Neill’s use of long exposure to blur the motion of the sky and water creates a seductive melting of magenta, violet, and blue hues surrounding the rocks. The majestic quality of the photograph communicates Neill’s spiritual experience in nature. He stated: “Perhaps the only way the world will change is for people to go through some kind of a profound aesthetic experience that makes us aware that we are personally accountable for our actions and how we affect the environment” (Neill). His images offer a glimpse of how wondrous the natural world can be while also reminding us of the importance of preserving these seemingly untouched areas.

In contrast to the established tradition of landscape photographs representing wilderness as untouched by humans, John Pfahl’s images are a reminder that our presence inevitably reshapes the natural landscape (Brower 83, Johnson 262). Pfahl has dedicated his photographic career to creating pictures that comment on human intervention in the natural world, which started with his series Altered Landscapes during his career to creating pictures that comment on human intervention in the natural world, which started with his series An Experiment in Perspective.

While contemporary artists often explore environmental concerns through tableau images, other artists represent the natural world by photographing Earth’s flora and fauna out of their usual context, thus creating a visual comparison that inspires an emotional connection to the subjects. Kate Breakey’s photograph Cyanocitta Cristoia, from the series Small Deaths, depicts a deceased fledgling blue jay, its beak wide open as if crying out. Breakey attempts to understand and reveal the natural world’s simultaneous cruelty and beauty, which marks all life on earth. She considers these images of perished creatures a final kindness to them. Through her photographic “shrines” she examines these mysterious creatures and creates fantasies where these animals exist in an “imaginary afterlife” (Breakey). These images are testaments to the deep human desire many of us feel to nurture and protect the animal kingdom.

Like the work of Breakey, Camille Solyagga’s photographs eloquently capture her subjects as specimens, isolating them in order to celebrate their beauty (Sobieszek 7). Solyagga’s image Flying Bird #15 from the series Birds represents her manifestation of a visual narrative that contemplates the delicate, intertwined, and complex phenomena of the natural world (Solyagga). The slow shutter speed creates a blurred motion against the open sky, which accentuates the beauty of the bird’s flight. The photograph offers a perspective of the bird unachievable by the human eye and serves as a reminder of the temporal qualities of life.

Wildlife photographs often depict animals that we would not normally see in our daily routines, providing a substitution for an authentic experience in nature (Brower 89). Laszlo Layton’s reproductions of taxidermic forms emulate zoology and natural history illustrations, thus becoming unusual tributes to the natural world, as they are farther removed from wildlife than a straightforward photograph. Layton’s image Untitled from his series Pictorial Zoology depicts a deceased mammal, now a taxidermal specimen, set against a white background and experienced as a photographic illustration. He photographed using a view camera and produces contact prints using the cyanotype process, which he then hand-painted to emulate the look of 19th-century natural history drawings (Layton). The painted cyanotypes serve no scientific function, but they encompass elements of art and science. His photographs of mounted animals, some of which are already extinct, remind us of the importance of protecting and preserving vulnerable life forms. As the number of endangered species increases, all that may remain of many of these creatures is inauthentic versions in the form of photographs and taxidermic specimens.

Science facilitates our understanding and appreciation of the natural world and has had ties with photography since the emergence of the process. Since its invention, photography has prevailed as a tool of both the arts and the sciences and often both simultaneously (Wild 8). In the early 1800s botanist, Anna Atkins used the camera-less photographic printing process known as the cyanotype to render the likeness of flora specimens she collected for her reference book British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions. Science can seek and explain questions as well as challenge our beliefs regarding the natural world. The sciences utilize photography to document specimens, to record experiments, and to detect and measure phenomena not visible to the human eye; such photography in turn inspires the imagery of many artists.

John Chervinsky is both a scientist and an artist, working as an engineer in the field of physics and creating photographs inspired by his technical background. His series An Experiment in Perspective is a collection of whimsical science demonstrations and physics experiments. Although not intended to be factual or instructional representations, the images reference the “ongoing philosophical debates” of the sciences.

Tom Chambers, Prom Gown #3, 2005/2007, archival pigment print, 10”x10”

John Pfahl, Bethlehem #25, 1988, chromogenic print, 10”x10”

Camille Solyagga, Flying Birds #15, 1992, gelatin silver, 3.5”x6”

Neill, William, 1991/2000, Rock formations and twilight surf, Garapatta State Beach, Big Sur, California, Lightjet Crystal Archive color print, 7”x9”