

EXHIBITION ESSAY

That Mountain Over There (now I see her)

I returned to my family home in Belén, New Mexico, in the summer of 2017 to care for my elderly mother. After her death, I stayed to care for my father and help him run a small sand and gravel quarry located south of Belen on the east side of the Rio Grande. This body of work was produced during this two-year sojourn. These sculptures and installations continue my previous explorations of systems with a specific focus on a re-examination of origin.

The visual stimulus for these pieces began with the Ladrón Peak, located in the heart of the Sierra Ladrones Wilderness Study Area, 29 miles from Veguita: “His inquest everywhere” (Dickinson 1924). Ladrón, an isolated and highly visible sky island, can be seen from almost anywhere in central New Mexico. I watched this peak daily while working at the gravel quarry and was astonished that while growing up here I really had never noticed her before. She is so striking and distinct; I could not comprehend how I had never seen her. Thus, the concept of ‘now seeing’ began as a metaphor for an inquiry into origins.



Ladrón Peak, 29 miles from Veguita, New Mexico

Although my previous solo shows are often described as a narrative in nature, this ambitious grouping of sculptures is more a drama of human consciousness. I see this work as episodic and sprawling. Once the installation was completed, I imagined that the body of work could be evaluated for symbolic patterns. While I believe that no reasonable explanation can ever really substitute for the object it explains, I also do not agree with the Morris perspective that objects offer no extrinsic suggestions. To that effect, sometimes practical context helps guide an audience beyond the primary physical reaction to a piece.

One example is “No Infinity.” This graphic work, measuring 141.5” x 39.5” x 2,” is constructed out of water jet cut two thick pieces of plate steel welded together to create a slight 3-D capacity. I designed this piece using FormZ, a high powered 3D software.

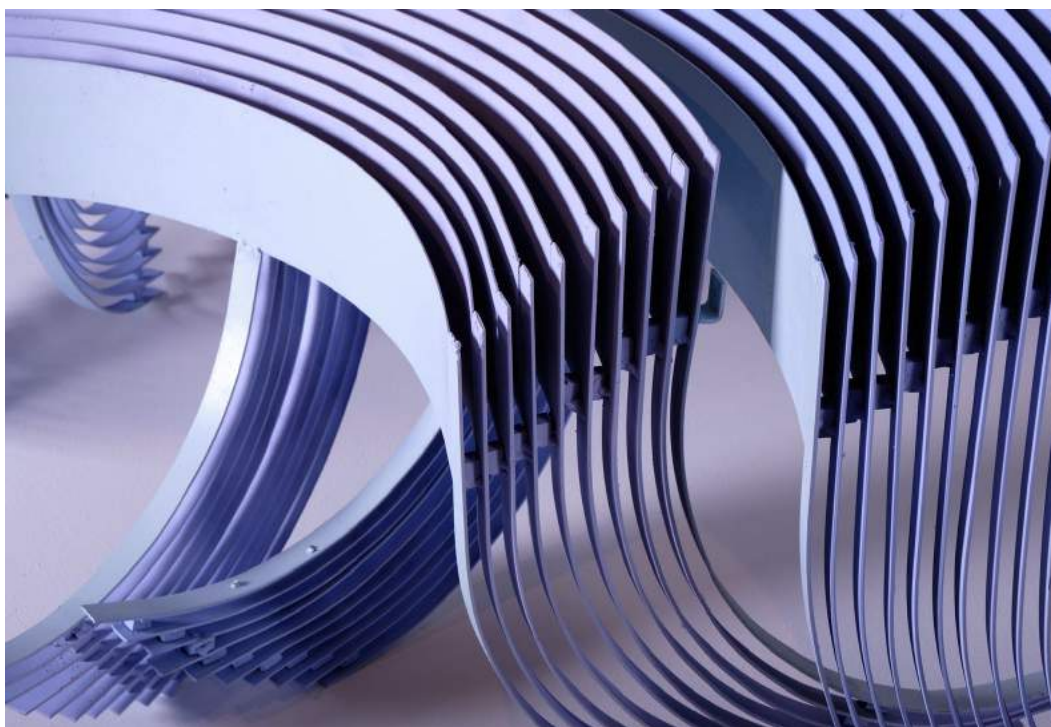


There is No Infinity, 141.5” x 39.5” x 2, mild industrial steel plate, 2019

One impetus for “There Is No Infinity,” was to create a portrait of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad tracks as they enter Belen from the north. My five siblings and I grew up here less than twenty yards from this rail line, and so I see the tracks to be significant in my symbolic development. A

rail line can take you to the edge of the earth especially if you are driving south on I-25 past Albuquerque and the Los Lunas turn off before entering the community of Belen. From the highway, one can often see the whole length of the train in the distance pointing west towards Los Angeles and the Pacific Ocean, and out into the expanse of the curvature of the earth's horizon. Like cell towers looking towards the remains of the dim cosmos, a train track can aid in seeing that the territories between the local and the global, maybe even the universe, do not exist. I wanted to use an economical gesture to capture the illusion of the scaling of the tracks towards the infinite. Yet my titling, "There is No Infinity," suggests the opposite of expansion. Here the idea of origin links the notion of finiteness with the possibility of infinity.

Like most of my other work, this body of sculptures was developed as I worked. Yet, as I progressed, I could see categories of patterns emerge. These patterns seem to generally fall into three groupings: works that are about Reminiscence (see "The Roof," "The Sidewalk," and "Silver Seeds"), Progression (see "Esas Lomas" and "Como Una Novia"), and Projection (see "Nicho Aplanado," "Somewhere," and "Moon Pie"). Each group may reflect stages towards understanding the provenance of family, home, and town in the context of exile and rejection of origin myths.



The Roof, Sidewalk, and Silver Seeds, 3' x 5' x 8', mild industrial steel plate, 2019

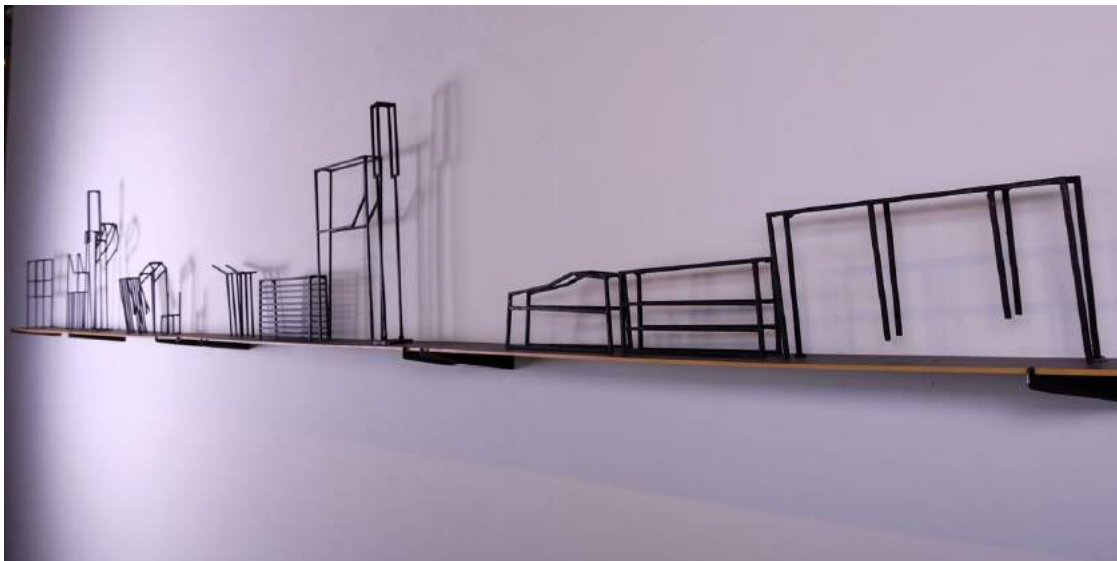
In the Reminiscence category, "The Roof," "The Sidewalk," and "Silver Seeds," is a floor triptych of composed of variations of topographic curves and fabricated by molding 18 gauge plate steel into arcs of

increasing length. These pieces are an attempt to decipher an abstract reaction to revisiting sites from my very young childhood. Such as an elementary school, or a bosque near my family home where deposits of cottonwood seeds would land in the late spring.

The next series, Progression, includes "Esas Lomas," (those hills). This piece, measuring 22" x 5" x 29', is installed on a horizontal plane that tapers towards the right where the graphic symbol of a boat emerges as the last letter in this alphabet. This work is constructed out of water jet cut steel again with the aid of CAD software.



Esas Lomas (detail shot), 22" x 5" x 29', mild industrial, steel plate, 2019



Esas Lomas, 22" x 5" x 29', mild industrial, steel plate, 2019

These pieces seem to be inspired by my work at the quarry and include the pragmatics of business. They each encompass an understanding of quarry related machinery that handle aggregate like crushers and

screening plants. This piece is also a portrait of two employees, both immigrants from Mexico, who worked this pit for over twenty-five years since their arrival in the United States at seventeen years old.

In this same pattern, "Como Una Novia," inspired by a line from Mary Oliver's poem, "When Death Comes" Poem, reflects on another aspect of the business of life.



Como una Novia, 41" x 24" x 24," mild industrial, steel plate, 2019

Specifically, this piece references the tremendous pull of love in the face of complete eradication of familial and social illusions. Novia, also constructed out of water jet cut 22 gauge steel, and painted in variations of blue, is bundled together in zoetrope of the same pattern over and over like a fully leafed weeping fig. This piece is an attempt to express Oliver's line: "When it's over, I want to say all my life. I was a bride married to amazement." Thus, Novia is a totem to agape - that is, love beyond the nobleness

of loyalty. This piece represents the love we give freely to others—regardless of our relationship to them, but inspired by this extraordinary world.

The last series of work, Projection, begins with “Somewhere,” the only piece in this body of work not constructed from metal. This installation is made out of polystyrene, or expanded styrofoam, cut and shaped with a hot knife. “Somewhere” developed from months of research of centuries-long movement of entities along the border between the United States and Mexico, and especially between New Mexico and Mexico. I began by taking screen-shots of every mile between the U.S and Mexican border using the Google Earth application. From there, I selected several as guides for sketching and then worked this imagery further using photo software.

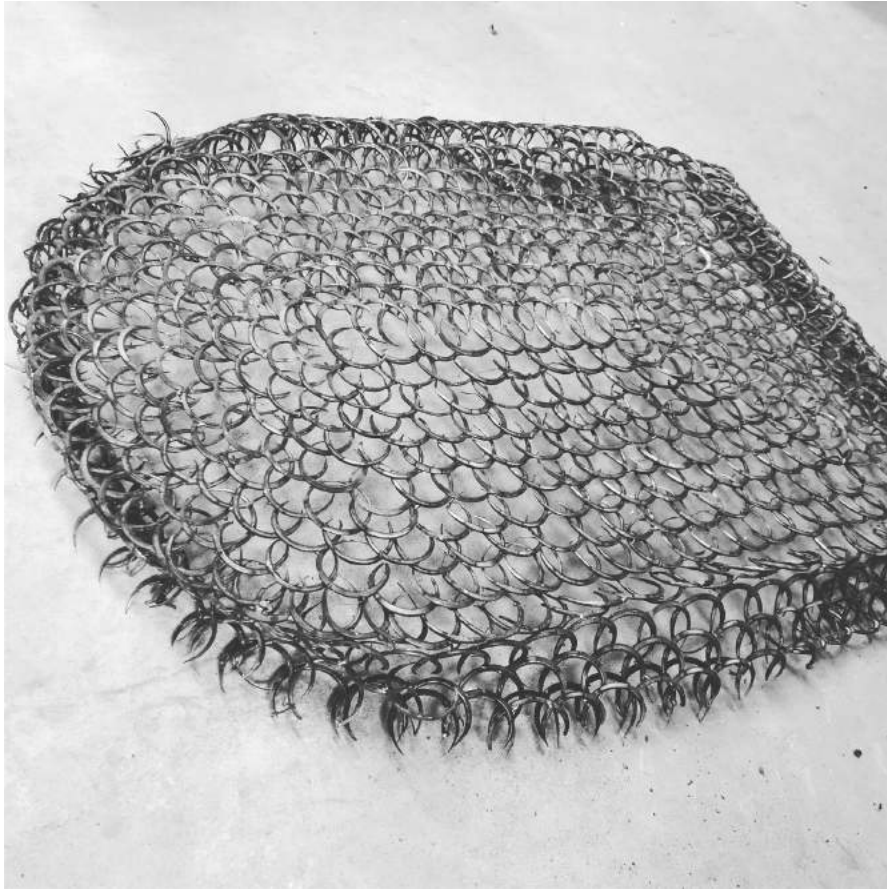
Using Google Earth was necessary because of the contradictions inherent in using a global surveillance tool. On the one hand, it references the ‘panopticon,’ or the ideal prison, which allows for total surveillance of inmates imagined at the beginning of the 19th century by Jeremy Bentham. On the other hand, Google Earth allows the curious to take a step back from immediate horizontal territories through a bird’s eye and scaled back view of the planet. By paying attention to the discrete places along the border, it felt like the topography became localized rather than linked to some overarching power.

This piece feels like the imaginings of the adventurous complexity involved for any being. Like an abstracted swarming of flora, fauna, humans, and even pockets of aggregate as they move like chambers of wind from one latitude to another. In this way, for me, it questions the static and supposed linear nature of identity. This installation may also point to the joyfulness of anonymity in exile, that is, the freedom inherent in an inability to return to the illusory place that promised identity and purpose.



Somewhere, 22' x 11' x 1" polyurethane coated polystyrene, 2019.

The next piece in this category, "Nicho Aplanado," directly translates as flattened *nicho*. In Hispano Catholic imagery a *nicho* is a reverential space for a Santo, or replica of a saint. This conceptual sculpture is fabricated out of welding pipe shavings together in this flattened *nicho* form. For me, it connects a lifelong quest to find a savior- be it a parent, or the image of a saint or other spiritual guide who can be a symbol of strength and wisdom. In the Wolfian sense, the return to the original home can represent the end of the search for a symbolic spiritual guide. One may come to see that there exists no magical being who can help save or ease the burden for us. This piece intended to simultaneously communicate the sense of attraction, enlightenment, and ultimate severance from this need.



Nicho Aplanado, 2" x 23" x 18", welded cut steel pipe, 2019

And then Moon Pie¹? Who knows, but it is the piece that was worked on for the entire length of the show. Measuring 111" x 38" x 111" and weighing about 600 pounds, Moon Pie was construction out of mesh steel flat bar and over 9000 individually welded steel landscape ties. This piece is a study of contrasting concepts, and as such, annexes a minimalist form and reinscribes it with a quietly schizophrenic division between the hyper-organized desire to dissolve into the world and the need to bolster margins.

This sculpture also illustrates a common trope in my work: structural and surface anomalies as an intentional process in construction. Imperfections are an analogy for age-derived beauty when the life of the object and its impermanence are evidenced. For me, these imperfections add uniqueness and elegance to the object. More importantly, they serve as a metaphor for an interruption of a perfection-oriented culture. These interruptions allow for an imagined world where diverse and small microclimates emerge and unfold to foster more charming imperfections down the road. Like little 'ah-hah' moments...these

¹ Note: Moon Pie, like the graham cracker marshmallow dessert, also indirectly commemorates the transcendent experience of the Apollo 11 moonwalk that took place fifty years ago on July 20, 1969.

imperfections are not big and universal, but beautiful and human-scaled. “Moon Pie” is big, beautiful, and intense. Is it a nimbus? Is it the purpose the protagonist so earnestly desires? I believe so- it is entirely itself, simply being.



Moon Pie, 111" x 38" x 111", mesh, flat steel bar and steel landscape ties, 2019