



Phenomenon of Territory, 2016
Inkjet print
20 x 24 inches



The Means to Experience Change, 2016
Inkjet print
20 x 24 inches

Records of Consequence

Kristine Thompson



Texaco Oil Channel, 2016
Silver gelatin lumen photograph
20 x 24 inches

*With antecedents;
With my fathers and mothers, and the accumulations of
past ages;
With all which, had it not been, I would not now be here,
as I am:
.....
In the name of These States, and in your and my name,
the Past,
And in the name of These States, and in your and my name,
the Present time.

I know that the past was great, and the future will be great,
And I know that both curiously conjoint in the present time
—Walt Whitman*

As I look at Julie Shafer's work, I have been thinking about Walt Whitman's notion of antecedents and how the past continues to be felt in the present. For several years Shafer's work has centered on American landscapes and how our desire to conquer new territories and accumulate resources has scarred those spaces. This began with her project *Conquest of the Vertical* (2013), which utilized a six-foot-tall pinhole camera to document California sites ravaged by gold and silver mining; it continued in *Wait 'til You See the Devil's Punchbowl* (2015), which explored the effects of deep oil drilling off the coast of Louisiana; and it is evident in her newest body of work, *The Parting of the Ways* (2018), which acknowledges individuals who forged westward on the Oregon Trail in the mid- to late 1800s.

The Parting of the Ways focuses on a location in Wyoming where the Oregon Trail forked and travelers faced a choice: proceed on a shorter route west without a reliable source of water or follow the water on a longer, more perilous path. It was at this particular split that people carved their names or other messages into the hillside. Shafer's visits to these "Registers of the Desert" over the past year have resulted in a series of graphite rubbings of some of the names. The drawings reveal that some carvings are deeper than others, perhaps pointing to the strength and determination of the traveler (or the engraver hired by those who were wealthier) or evidence of how the environment and weather may have worn down the inscriptions over time.

In looking at Shafer's impressions, I can't help but compare them to gravestones and epitaphs. In the drawings that are part of the COLA exhibition, J. Bauder, B W Kelley, J W Watkins, B Snow, J. S. Warran, and John Beck—travelers whose stories we begin to imagine—are memorialized. We learn that some hail from Ohio, others from Iowa and New York. Another message proclaims, "Hurrah for Old Abe the Union and Salmon River," revealing the time period, political leaning, and perhaps a reference to home. The practice of frottage has historical precedents in many countries, as rubbings were a transportable way of sharing historical data, art, and scholarly texts from locations where such inscriptions might not hold up over time.

The project also includes several black-and-white photographs that allow us to contemplate the vastness of the Wyoming landscape in order to better contextualize those migrants. Wagon ruts are still visible in the ground, the blazing sun appears both majestic and overpowering, and the names etched in the hillside could be missed if we aren't looking carefully.

It's helpful to remember that westward expansion paralleled the development of photography. The federal government and its various photographic surveys set out to visualize the mining, railroad, and agricultural opportunities of the West. The awe-inspiring photographs likely persuaded many to leave home in search of the new possibilities and abundance depicted. And as those pioneers mined the land for gold and silver, photography—a medium that relies on silver for its very existence—became even more accessible.

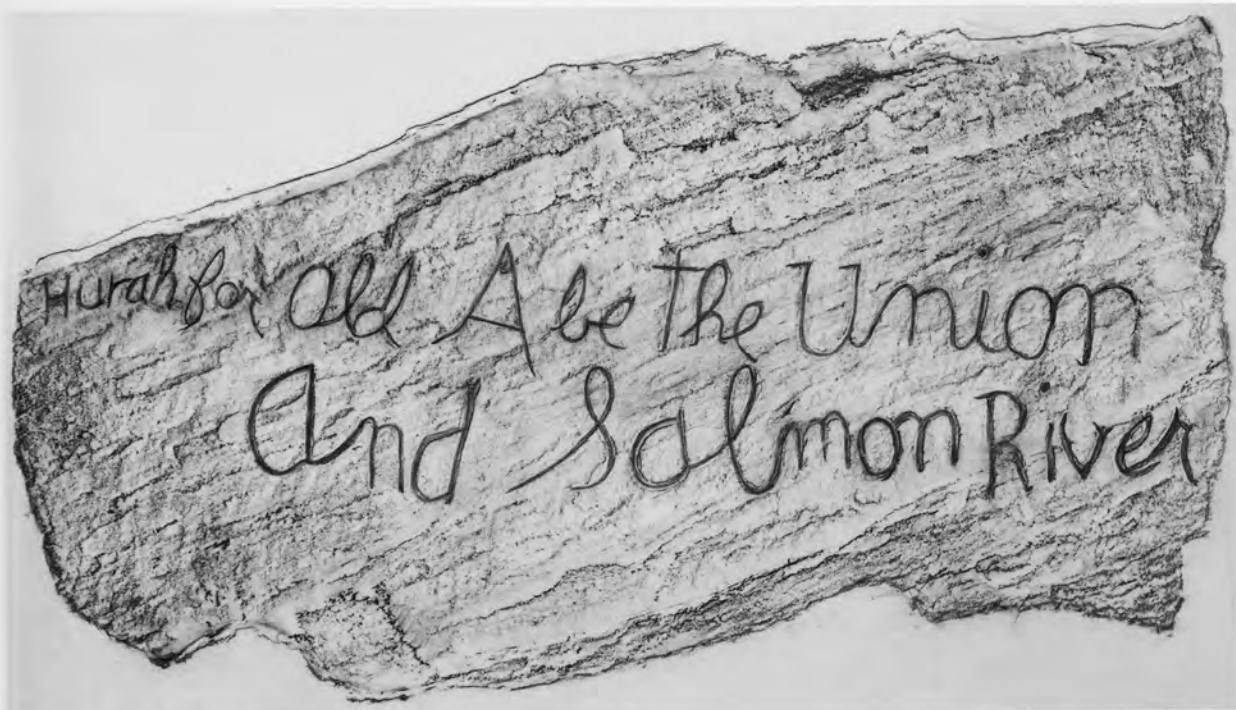
Photography allowed for a new kind of record making and, with it, a culture that desired to be remembered. To carve one's name in stone on a monumental journey and declare, "I was here!" is an impulse similar to having a photographic portrait made that could serve as a kind of evidence. I am grateful that Shafer has taken up the task of remembrance. Her photographs and rubbings pay homage to some of these individuals while simultaneously pointing to the larger consequences of the journey, the risk involved in difficult decisions, and the particular confluence of hope and loss embodied in this landscape. ●



Conquest of the Vertical: 300 miles from Eureka! (n.1), 2012
Silver gelatin pinhole negative
71 x 42 inches

Right: *Conquest of the Vertical: 600 miles from Eureka! (n.3)*, 2012
Silver gelatin pinhole negative
68 x 42 inches





Parting of the Ways: Abe, 2018
Graphite, wax, paper
27 x 36 inches



Parting of the Ways: Guernsey, 2018
Inkjet print
24 x 36 inches



Julie Shafer.

ART is a gesture: of humility, of grace, of rage, of beauty, of absurdity, of distortion, of proof that we are of this world, affected by this world, and, in turn, affect.

Born 1978, Covina, CA; lives and works in Los Angeles

EDUCATION

MFA, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2005
BA, studio art, University of California, Irvine, 2000

EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *Wait 'til You See the Devil's Punchbowl*, Edouard de Merlier Photography Gallery, Cypress College, CA (solo)
Conduction, Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (group)
- 2016 *iDiga me!*, Casa Colonial, Oaxaca, Mexico (group)
Altered Land, Ruth Foster Art Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire (group)
The Guildless Age, Torrance Art Museum, CA (group)
- 2014 *Fireside Lounge to 41.296111, -105.515000*, 2A Gallery, Los Angeles (solo)
- 2011 *Twisted Selves*, California Museum of Photography, Riverside (group)

PUBLICATIONS

- 2017 Ennis, Ciara. "Julie Shafer: Conquest of the Vertical," *Exposure Photographic Journal* 50 (Spring 2017): 34–37.
- 2015 Shafer, Julie. "A Pinhole Story with Ants." *Albertini 2014 the Kite* (blog), published by Rosanna Albertini, April 13, 2015, <https://albertini2014.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/a-pinhole-story-with-ants/>.

LECTURES

- 2013 "Finding Your Voice," TEDx conference, lecture on *Conquest of the Vertical*, a series of six-foot-tall pinhole photographs of remote California mining sites.