

MAYSEY CRADDOCK

Born 1971 in Memphis, TN
Currently lives and works in Memphis, TN



Vanishing Lands, 2022

Ephemerality, the passage of time, unfolding cycles of regeneration and reclamation, growth and decay. The eternal cycles of death and rebirth, and the inevitability of entropy and change. These themes have grounded and guided my work for years and continue to lead me to new understandings of landscape, its inherent resilience and, now, its vulnerability in this age of human consumption.

I've been thinking a lot about diminishing wildernesses and the fragmentation of the landscape: trapezoids of forest between agricultural fields, tangled banks along creeks and rivers winding through development, even the small pockets of wild overgrowth on the edges of neighborhoods. All over the world, natural habitat, whether land or sea, is shrinking. Edges press in, and every day natural systems are consumed by development, extraction and encroachment. As an artist, I struggle with how to respond to this in my work. But where my art doesn't overtly address these issues, my own questions and deep concern are woven into imagery that is deeply personal for me. I have been coming to the woods and marshes of the Alabama Gulf Coast my whole life, and it is this landscape, increasingly populated and storm-ravaged, that informs most of my work and which provides the subject matter for grappling with these concerns and questions about the environment.

I work from imagery based on my own photographs of these ephemeral and fractured landscapes, from which abstracted drawings are rendered and then transferred onto a substrate of sewn-together fragments of found paper bags. Once I select a photograph from which to work, I begin by digitally erasing and disintegrating the image, distilling it into, for example, one intricate tree form or a ruptured field of fragments of vegetation - an image of ambiguity and with its own motion and currents. I then trace this linear distillation onto tracing paper and transfer it onto the sewn paper bag substrate with carbon paper. This laborious process of drawing and re-drawing removes me from the literal photograph and gives me time to enter the image as a meditative space with its own rhythms and patterns. Layers of gouache are laid over the terrain of the paper, conveying atmosphere and a recollection of the story of these spaces. This process of making and unmaking multiplies in materiality and image, mirroring the natural and geological processes that inform my work.

Altogether, these works chase captured moments in the ecological life cycles of this estuarine landscape and the diversity of life that supports it. These are places of persistence, tenacity and beauty, providing rare and precious habitat in a landscape that is being rapidly consumed and altered for human use. My paintings offer a visual back and forth, echoing wild spaces as ever-shifting repositories for impermanence, disintegration and the inevitability of change. Forming and unforming, these spaces unfold and regenerate ceaselessly, fragmenting into reflection and continually settling into new iterations of themselves. As an artist working in this era of terrifying climactic disruption, I create to offer a kind of song about these vanishing lands: an elegy for natural systems, their vulnerability and the beauty that I hope inspires us to see the essential and vital splendor of this world.