

Datura, the scientific name for moonflower. Datura, the modern Latin derived from the ancient Latin, meaning to give, but also to play as in a game, as in the root dice. This datura was pulled up from the roots in San Joaquin Valley and cast onto chemically treated rawhide. No trials or test strips, the outcome uncertain. We know this game was played no later than midmorning, the aperture of the flowers still open from their night time bloom, perhaps just beginning to shut their eyes while having their picture taken by the sun. Viewed here in layered, flickering, aquamarine afterimage, this particular species, *Datura wrightii* commemorates botanist Charles Wright in name. Long before this taxonomy, and long before Robert Burton cataloged datura as a cure for melancholy, it was known by many American Indian names as a healing plant, an offering to the sun and sky, and a ceremonial hallucinogen for vision quests.

However, the collection of cyanotypes in *Byways* makes little use of studied nomenclature or rhizomatic history, nor does Christy Gast fit the heroic role of shamanistic artist vis-a-vis Pollock's documented dance around the canvas on his studio floor. Each piece is named primarily after the site where it was laid on the land, her nomadic studio outdoors, sometimes paired matter-of-factly with the objects it depicts. *Byways* is a departure, or perhaps a transitional moment from Gast's typically researched work. Here she operated spontaneously and through an improvised process during her drive across country and back. Aside from the hanging, there was no subsequent return to the indoors to digest and reconstitute what she found into new materials, nor an established or startled discourse. Though Gast often happens upon or seeks out her referents in the field, from there site and artifact are usually either engaged through a follow-up planned performance imaged in video, or a retreat to the studio where sculptures are fabricated from memory, photographs, collected matter, or data. Sometimes her body pragmatically appears in work past. Never one for self-aggrandizing mythologies and gestures, she chose to repress her documents of the process from this exhibition. While striking, the figure in the landscape remains in private snapshots and home videos on her computer.

Whether it be the grey burlap phantoms of earthy, well-worn utilitarian objects divested of their colors and textures, or her 1:1 scale model of a Nike Missile housed in a hanger in the Everglades, sewn in a vibrant green pattern of invasive species, she has often employed textiles for her material transformations. Her support for the cyanotypes in *Byways* is also fabric—rawhide, canvas, a found quilt, and woven silk. Fabric is a soft, malleable medium that can be easily transported, rolled, folded up, and thrown into blackout bags in the back of the car. If in former work, Gast made images in the field—digital video and photography—whereas the studio is the location for making objects, the cyanotypes marry these two aspects of her practice into one immediate instant.

The cyanotype, a rudimentary form of photography was first put into the service of science. Famously, the first photographically illustrated book, amateur botanist Anna Atkins' *Photographs of British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions* (1843), paired nomenclature with image. In search of an accuracy that could not be attained through drawing, the early progenitors of photography sought to get closer to an objective truth in images. On the graphic end of the spectrum of Gast's images, she chooses unlikely specimens. She renders familiar wagon

wheels (Three Rivers, New Mexico) and swimsuits (LA Carwash) into a roadside pop art. We are reminded of the scalability of fabric with her towering cornstalk from a backyard in Ohio, the canvas pulled taught and smooth with family assistance to create a clear silhouette against a deep blue background. While the cornstalk is Gast's most premeditated, Atkins-like image in that the canvas was cut to size in anticipation of accommodating her singular sample, the picture does not identify a mystery from the deep, but something incredibly familiar and terrestrially abundant, an arbitrary choice of cornstalk from endless miles of cornstalk. Whereas Rosalind Krauss asserted, "everything that one photographs is in fact 'flattened to fit' paper," in this process it is the fabric which is flattened to fit the cornstalk, yet still, perhaps more so, "under, within, permeating, every [paper] support, there is a body." We encounter this ghost as though discovering the phenomenon of a cornstalk, or the scale of our bodies, anew.

Atkin's specimens were no larger than the glass on which she composed them: the uniform scale determined by the size of pages that comprised her book, a vehicle through which to circulate empirical knowledge. The silhouettes of her subjects would be crisp 1:1 images with her handwritten script below. Gast's cyanotypes are records of sorts, but a travelogue that is deeply personal, a kind of slippery truth that glides in and out of focus in rapturous moments of adventure and time spent with loved ones on the road. While perhaps a privileged position, hers is a tourism without the murmurs of empire, nor self-pointing to nature as other in the service of knowledge and mastery. Many of the cyanotypes take on the form of flags printed with different images recto-verso, as in *The Well*, Brushcreek, CO, which pictures cloudy tumbleweeds on one side, and debris, including a wavy grid of tossed-out metal grills on the other. Rather than a proclamation or manifestation of destiny, these flags evoke a dreamy wandering through which a traveler both plays, and is played by the chance offerings of the road and the elements.

For Atkins, clarity was key. Aberrations were considered aberrations, not beauty marks, moments of painterly expression, or evidence of alchemical chance operation. That's not to say that the beauty of cyanotypes had not been admired, or that aesthetics were divorced from Atkins' compositional concerns. Some found the saturated blues gaudy, while for others the cyanotypes contained the depth of the clear sky that holds the ultimate developing light source above, and below, the abyss of oceans from which the lacey delicacy of their subjects derived. Many of Gast's pieces also evoke water and with that a transitory and provisional point of view rendered in the image of movement—a fixed ripple of shadow and light, or a white stippling where a spray or drip of water has stopped the chemical process, appear as starbursts. These more fluid pieces carry their own materiality and mutated history inscribed in the printed folds of their former arrangement exposed to the sun. A record of changing form.

1 Rosalind Krauss 'Problem Sets' in Francesca Woodman, *Photographic Work* (New York: Hunter College Art Gallery/Wellesley: Wellesley College Museum: 1986)



































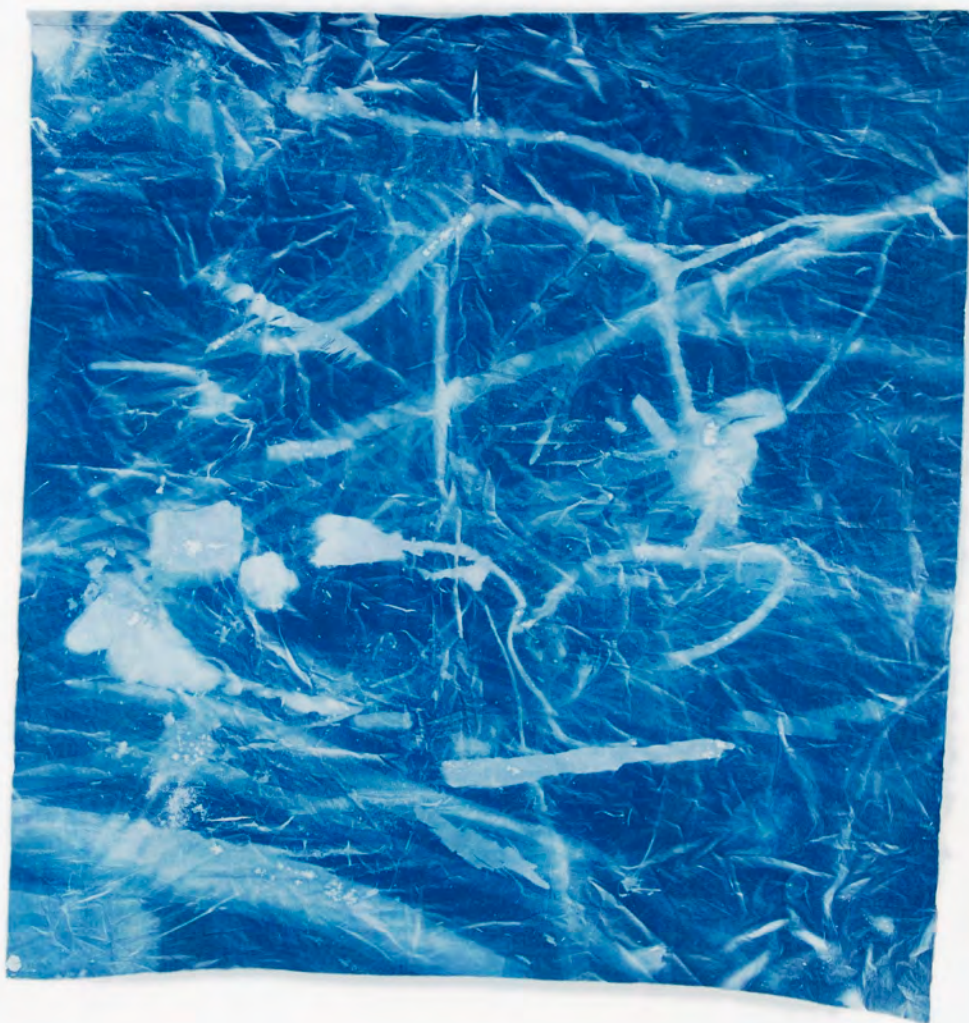


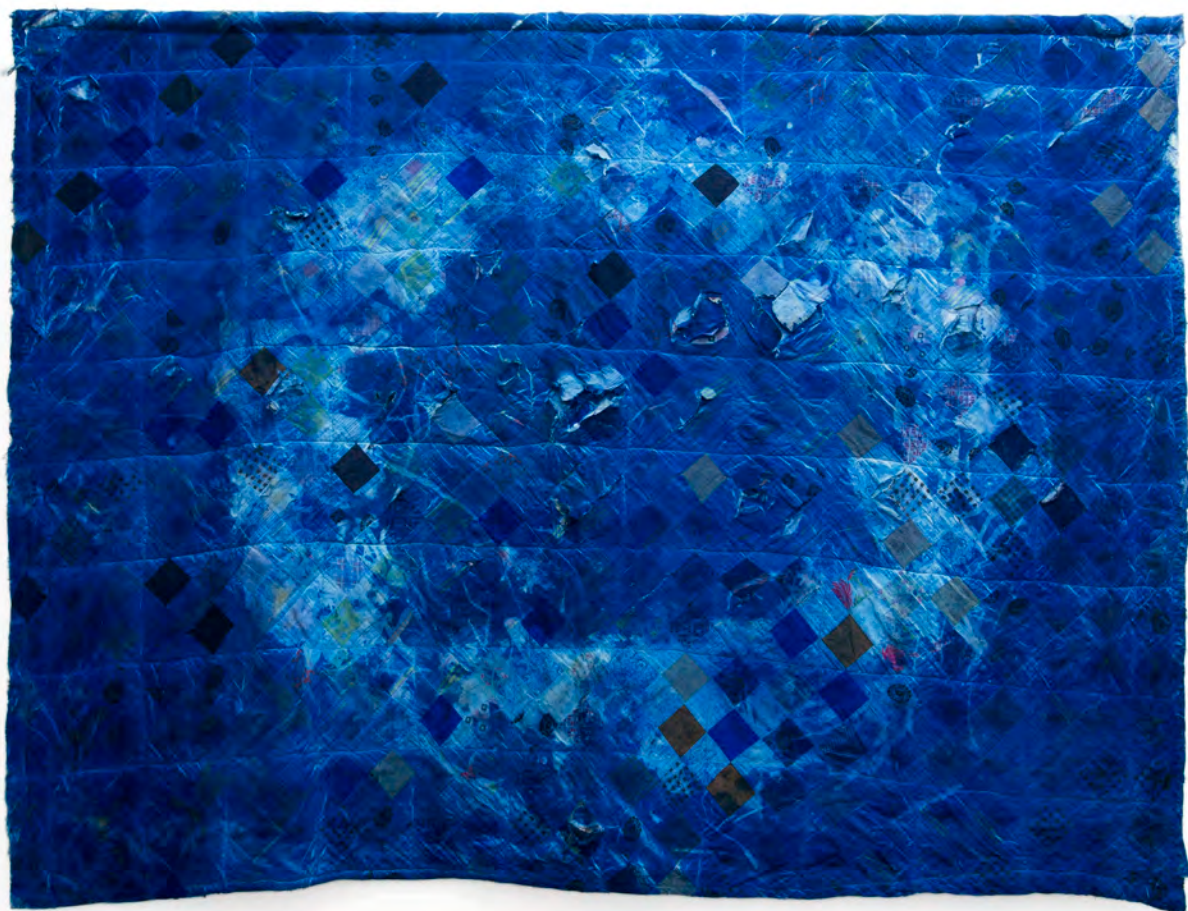












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Carlisle Beaver Pond, Pensacola, FL, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, stainless steel
100 x 63 in
\$8,500



Mississippi River, City Island, Dubuque, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, stainless steel
59 x 59 in
\$6,500



Lake Superior, 2014
Cyanotype on cotton, stainless steel
60 x 58 in
\$6,500



Ohio Farm Pond, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, stainless steel
100 x 57 in
\$7,000



Mule Creek, NM, 2014
Cyanotype on linen, aluminum
61 x 39 x 2.5 in
\$5,000



Rio Grande, Alamosa, CO, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, aluminum
52 x 59 x 2.5 in
\$6,000



Three Rivers, New Mexico, 2014
Cyanotype on linen, aluminum
35 x 61 x 2.5 in
\$4,000



Railroad Arroyo Mud Pit, New Mexico, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, aluminum
70 x 67 x 2.5 in
\$7,000



L.A. Car Wash, 2014
Cyanotype on linen, aluminum
47 x 54 x 2.5 in
\$5,000



Carizozo Bone Yard, 2014
Cyanotype on canvas, aluminum
49 x 32 x 2.5 in
\$3,000



Sacred Datura, San Joaquin Valley, 2014
Cyanotype on buckskin, copper
42 x 62 in
\$7,000



Eagle Heights Community Garden, Madison, Wisconsin, 2014
Cyanotype on cotton, stainless steel
40 x 38 in
\$4,000

Project Room:



Rock Quarry, 2014
HD Video
duration: 4:54
Ed. 3 + 2 A.P.
\$3,500

Performer: Jarrett Earnest
Audio: *Whiskey Noise* (Felicia Carlisle, Emily Milegrim, Mindy Abovitz, Thom Wheeler Castillo, Reed Van Brunschot, Christy Gast)