

EMILY ARTHUR ENDANGERED

ON VIEW MARCH 2-APRIL 9
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WEINGART GALLERY
OCCIDENTAL COLLEGE, LOS ANGELES

Sponsored by the Center for Community-Based Learning, Department of Art History and Visual Arts, Moore Zoology Laboratory, the Remsen Bird Fund, The Cultural Studies Program and Loren G. Lipson, M.D.

Nancy Marie Mithlo, Associate Professor of Art History and Visual Arts, Occidental College and Chair of American Indian Studies, Autry Museum of the American West.

Much has been written over the course of the last two decades concerning new forms of global communications, diasporas and the resulting hybrid mixings. This “trending” factor has become so ubiquitous as to be carefully avoided by serious art commentators. It is difficult however, to avoid speaking of intercultural migrations and displacements when confronted with the works of artist Emily Arthur. Her central motif, some may argue her iconic signature style, is of one of movement; movement across landscapes, movement from earth to sky, movement of creatures both powerful and threatened. These intersecting worlds are ever colliding, often in brutal and unforgiving circumstances. It is in these moments and in these places that Arthur is drawn.

When tasked with the assignment of characterizing Arthur’s works, the themes of displacement, biological mixings and forced alienation are inescapable. Her messengers – those most vulnerable and threatened – serve as central characters in the deceptively simple passion plays she scripts in her evocative printmaking, drawings and installations. These palettes call for careful witnessing, their layered and delicate washings of colored inks on paper betraying our collective denials.

Arthur’s efforts highlight the forced migrations, the stories both tender and traumatic that narrate our times. Her most recent intervention *Endangered* chronicles the forces of Manifest Destiny at play a century and a half after the phrase was first formally coined to justify the conquest of land and peoples under the rubric of divine providence. In our current global moment, the passive narrative of “Western Expansion” no longer suffices to explain the complexities and assertions of power that may more accurately be framed as the “territorial expansion of the American empire.” Yet our Manifest Destiny ideology continues to inform the manner in which lands, animals and peoples are systematically overrun for the highways, homes and businesses that define our American way of life.

Is our collective failure to halt the massive destruction of our environment a result of the blind faith that higher powers dictate our reality? Or are we willing to accept responsibility for the results of our neglect? In this turbulent global reality, what would intervention look like? It is in these moments of indecision and confusion that the role of the artist may most clearly be exercised.

Emily Arthur: Endangered chronicles a crime scene in which nature and power compete for survival. The setting is the coastline of southern California where a fragile ecozone known as the Coastal Sage Scrub

region is currently protected by a small bird known unassumingly as the California gnatcatcher. This single species - some estimate only 2,500 total birds - protects an expanse of wild rugged shorelines where a host of insects, plants and animals still survive. Competing groups of scientists argue the merits of protection vs. development, based on both DNA and the physical markings of the birds themselves, drawn from unique holdings of the Moore Zoology Laboratory of Occidental College in Los Angeles. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will determine whether an estimated 200,000 acres of California coastline will be made available for development. This potential calamity is almost too great to fathom, leading many to ignore or dismiss the impending dilemma. But Arthur has chosen to stay; to sit with the evidence at hand, a witness to the quiet crisis on the horizon.

Arthur's projects seek to interrogate systems of power and inequity. Her impulse is to gravitate the center of the tensions, to the very epicenter of the push and pull of human frailty. Our impossible foibles are chronicled in elegant and sparse vignettes that capture the moment at which we could either teeter forward or draw back. We are with her at the cliffside. Do we run or turn our faces to the wind?

The great American Indian intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. stated, "It is becoming increasingly apparent that we shall not have the benefits of this world for much longer. The imminent and expected destruction of the life cycle of world ecology can only be prevented by a radical shift in outlook from our present naive conception of this world as a testing ground to a more mature view of the universe as a comprehensive matrix of life forms." This matrix is ever-present, waiting for an answer.

With special recognition to John McCormack and James Maley of the Moore lab who have generously made their own research and the Moore collections available to Emily Arthur and the Endangered curatorial team. Many thanks also to sound artist Jon McCormack, who contributed the piece "As Heard by the California Gnatcatcher" to the "Indirect Take" installation.

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Louis Sahagun, "Developers Seek End To Federal Protections for California Gnatcatcher." *Los Angeles Times*, June 29, 2014, accessed February 7, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/science/la-me-gnatcatcher-20140630-story.html>.

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Jordan Bretthauer

Science fails to communicate human emotion. This failure of expression is crucial for the intended objective, unbiased advancement of scientific knowledge. Yet the human brain does not understand information, questions, or controversy in a simplified analytical manner—we need emotion and creativity to fully process the world around us. In her upcoming show, *Emily Arthur: Endangered*, on view at Occidental College's Weingart Gallery from March 2nd to April 9th, 2016, Emily Arthur expertly utilizes the creative, emotional power behind art to actively connect her audience with political and scientific controversy.

Curated by Nancy Marie Mithlo, art history and visual arts associate professor at Occidental College, and the Autry Museum of the American West's chair of American Indian studies, the show builds upon traditional and contemporary American Indian themes while exploring controversy surrounding a movement to remove the Coastal California Gnatcatcher subspecies of bird from the endangered species list. This unique, multi-media show incorporates Arthur's own prints, and an installation of many three dimensional California Gnatcatcher casts, with nature-inspired audio by sound artist Jon Almaraz, and hundreds of physical bird specimen from Occidental College's Moore Lab of Zoology. The interactive media seamlessly weave the intricate scientific processes and multilayered controversies surrounding the Coastal California Gnatcatcher with the more natural, emotional human responses of curiosity, anger, remorse, and wistfulness.



Emily Arthur: Endangered Installation shot, 2016

After visiting the Moore Lab in 2015 to sketch birds, a frequent theme in her art, Arthur quickly learned of Occidental professors John McCormack and James Maley's ongoing research and publications. The professors authored a paper that questioned the private and corporately funded research, which strived to eliminate the Coastal California Gnatcatcher's threatened endangered species title. Delisting the Coastal California Gnatcatcher from the endangered species list would remove protection over the remaining 2,500 birds of this subspecies, effectively opening its Palos Verdes, California Coastal Sage Scrub habitat to developers. This development would result in significant environmental implications while submitting to the biased political influences behind the substandard scientific research proposing to delist the Coastal California Gnatcatcher. Profoundly inspired by her Cherokee heritage and personal experiences, Arthur is interested in natural processes, land usage, and human relationships with nature. Arthur explains that she "see[s] nature as an interdependent living force rather than as the backdrop for human events." To Arthur, "land is living matter that holds specific meaning to a place." [1] In her show, Arthur condenses and recreates her encounters with this "living matter" through her one-of-a-kind screen print paintings featuring centralized images of birds, butterflies, flowers, and landscapes overlaying base images of Southern California maps and California Gnatcatcher DNA sequencing diagrams. The work is flooded with blended washes of bold and lively, yet muted, blues, reds, yellows, and oranges.

The dripping color of the wash, combined with the vertical gravitational pull of the animals, conveys a feeling of a deteriorating earth or unstable environment, as the textured patterns and closely organized specimen highlight the confined compositions. One wall of the two-room show is dedicated to an installation, entitled *Indirect Take*, which features resin California Gnatcatcher casts hanging from silk organza fabric, pinned to resemble scientific specimen bags. Each bird cast contains soil from the Palos Verdes ecosystem in which the Coastal California Gnatcatchers inhabit. Printed with images of Coastal California Gnatcatcher DNA sequences and California Sage plants, their fabric habitat provides a veil of mystery around the resin casts.

Within the same room, a glass display cabinet reveals hundreds of real bird specimen from Occidental College's Moore Lab of Zoology. The abundance of both cast resin and real bird specimens compels the viewer to reflect scientific collection methods that require thousands of samples to produce strong research, understand biodiversity, and create lasting conservation. An isolated sound hood across from the *Indirect Take* installation loops an audio piece in which Almaraz combines piercing bird calls with oceanic sounds to stimulate the Coastal Sage Scrub habitat of the Coastal California Gnatcatcher. The sound component

is intended to “envelope the perceiver and transport them to the coast where this song resides.” [2]

Viewers are transported to this California coast: challenged to think about the changes occurring this habitat, and how their own role as human beings—capable of political decisions, and ultimately destruction—in this controversial issue. Arthur physically integrates science and art through her use of scientific maps, DNA sequences, and anatomically-correct Gnatcatcher imagery. She brings attention to the fragile Coastal Sage Scrub ecosystem, and the ability of humans to manipulate the environment. In this live, emotional space, viewers reflect on the ethics of killing animals for scientific collection, while considering impacts of science and financially motivated policymaking in our everyday lives.

Arthur’s show resembles the work of contemporary artist, John Sabraw, who is also interested in integrating science and art to bring awareness to environmental issues and conservation. With a color palette similar to *Emily Arthur: Endangered*, Sabraw’s “Chroma” series features abstract interpretations of a suffering Ohio ecosystem to create a narrative and bring light to human impact on our surroundings. Like Arthur’s incorporation of Coastal Sage Scrub soil into her California Gnatcatcher Casts, a 2013 Huffington Post interview explains how Sabraw’s work utilizes, “toxic runoff found in the Ohio River region,” from which “Sabraw produces his own DIY pigments – bold yellows and reds that are sourced from the oxidized sludge of abandoned coal mines.”[3]

Arthur’s show brings light to the divisive human manipulation of local land and its natural inhabitants. Arthur uses her art as a catalyst for poetically expressing complex environmental, scientific, and political issues at a coherent, yet emotional level. In a recent interview, Arthur stated she hopes to “bring heart” to the often hard and direct scientific methods—specifically bird collection processes. This show is especially powerful at its host institution, as the Coastal Sage Scrub ecosystem at questions is only an hour away from Occidental College. This controversy is a local issue, and a personal issue to many viewers.

Arthur’s show invites viewers to experience and contemplate a world where art, nature, science, and politics fluidly interact. Through her art, Arthur challenges her viewers to critically consider how ethics, motivation, and personal connection impact the way we approach scientific evidence. The show aims to provoke thought within the viewers, providing them with a greater awareness of issues surrounding the Coastal California Gnatcatcher. Arthur’s work encourages viewers to contextualize their presence and power in the rapidly evolving local controversy, and in manmade environmental change occurring globally.

References

- [1] <http://emilyarthur.squarespace.com/about/>
- [2] February 24th email from Jon Almaraz to Nancy Marie Mithlo
- [3] <http://www.johnsabraw.com/chroma/>

Devon DeRaad

Emily Arthur is an American Indian artist, whose work focuses on natural themes, often with subjects such as birds and butterflies. By bringing her art to Occidental College, Arthur has teamed up with the scientists at Moore Laboratory of Zoology to produce the Endangered installation. Arthur's work makes the Coastal California Gnatcatcher's story into a visceral experience through the medium of art.

In order to fully understand the depth and meaning of each of Arthur's pieces, and the Endangered installation as a whole, the viewer must be aware of the current scientific, economic, and political context of these birds. The Coastal California Gnatcatcher is a sub-species found only along the Southern California coastline, where the birds spend their entire lives in Coastal Sage Scrub habitat. The birds live and breed among endemic plant species such as California Sage and California Buckwheat, and complete their life cycles alongside endangered Palos Verdes Blue Butterflies. The Coastal California Gnatcatcher is currently listed as threatened by the Endangered Species Act, with thousands of acres of California Sage Scrub protected from development by the presence of these birds.

This California Sage Scrub habitat is some of the most valuable real estate in North America and in 2013, developer funded research supported delisting the Coastal California Gnatcatcher as a distinct subspecies worthy of protection (Zink et. al, 2013). Delisting the Coastal California Gnatcatcher from the Endangered Species Act would open up large swaths of valuable coastal land for human development. This diminutive songbird is acting as an effective umbrella by protecting many endemic species of plants and insects that rely on Coastal Sage Scrub habitat. Emily Arthur originally learned of the plight of the California Gnatcatcher during a visit to Occidental College's Moore Lab of Zoology. During her visit, professors McCormack and Maley informed her that the subspecies was in danger of losing protection, and that the lead author of the paper pushing to delist the Coastal California Gnatcatcher wrote previous papers stating that the recognition of any avian subspecies is hindering taxonomy and conservation efforts (Zink et. al, 2004). Arthur learned that McCormack and Maley had fired back, publishing a paper using modern methods to re-evaluate Zink's data, and exposing significant differences

between the Coastal subspecies of California Gnatcatcher and its counterparts in Baja, Mexico (McCormack, Maley, 2015).

Based on what she learned of the controversy, Arthur combined the mediums of printmaking and watercolor painting, and sketched images of gnatcatcher specimens that she observed in the Moore Lab of Zoology. Her works incorporate the image of dozens of gnatcatcher museum specimens overlaying population maps and reproductions of DNA assays, representing the science behind the delisting controversy. Arthur's demonstrates astonishing skill in telling a story that has played out over thousands of words in multiple scientific papers within a single piece of art. The Endangered installation specifically utilizes watercolor prints, three-dimensional renderings, and a sound hood to create an immersive, multisensory experience. Viewers of the Endangered exhibit feel the undeniable weight of the gnatcatcher controversy, understanding that these wild birds find themselves in the middle of a very human dispute.

It is the plight of these 5-gram birds, and their struggle to be recognized that inspires the passion behind the Endangered exhibit. In an era where financial interests often have the final say, Arthur's work stands witness as these birds sit on a razor thin line of survival. To view Endangered is to stand in timeless solidarity and recognition of these creatures, regardless of what the future may hold for their fragile ecosystem.

References

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Zink, Robert M., et al. "Phylogeography of the California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica*) using multilocus DNA sequences and ecological niche modeling: Implications for conservation." *The Auk* 130.3 (2013): 449-458.

Zink, Robert M. "The role of subspecies in obscuring avian biological diversity and misleading conservation policy." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 271.1539 (2004): 561-564.

Ella Fornari

Natural history collections function as important tools for understanding the biodiversity of life on Earth. For centuries, ornithologists have collected bird specimens in the field for scientific study. Scientific methods have changed since the 1800s, but the core concepts and values of these collections remain the same - to understand and describe the diversity of life in order to record and save it for future generations.

In the exhibit *Endangered*, Emily Arthur responds to natural history collections' utility in saving species that don't otherwise have a voice of their own. Arthur presents a language of scientific poetics – a melding of biological concepts with a transcendental connection to life and land. In its scientific poetics, Arthur's project speaks for science in ways science could never articulate.

The inspiration for Arthur's "Endangered" comes from the case of the California Gnatcatcher, an endangered bird subspecies currently threatened to be de-listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. If de-listed the California Gnatcatcher, of which there are an estimated 2,500 remaining today, will lose its protected land to developers who plan to pave over approximately 197,000 acres of its Coastal Sage Scrub habitat. Scientists have identified the California Gnatcatcher as an "umbrella species"- a species whose protection represents the protection of many other species that comprise the Coastal Sage Scrub ecosystem. Protection of the California Gnatcatcher is bigger than saving a small songbird - it means saving an entire ecosystem of native flora and fauna.

At the core of Arthur's exhibit is the question - when is something endangered? The answer to this question is not as simple as it may seem. Scientifically, there is no specific population size that labels a species as endangered or not. The answer to the "Endangered" question, like art, is always subjective and political in nature.

Arthur's work notably advances a message that science presents but can not directly speak out for. It is traditionally held that for science to be taken seriously, scientists should not politically advocate for their research findings. Through her compelling images Emily Arthur is able to insert her commentary on the research- arguing that the California Gnatcatcher is a unique beautiful creature worthy of protecting. "We spend so much of our lives trying to understand the natural world, yet we scientists are often at a loss to describe our spiritual connection to the Earth," states James Maley, a researcher at the Moore Laboratory of Zoology. "Endangered" is a marriage of art and science.

Arthur's work emulates the relationship of science to conservation by including figures and maps published in the Moore Laboratory's research on the California Gnatcatcher. Arthur's inspiration and subject matter of the California Gnatcatcher evokes the comparison to James J. Audubon's "Birds of America." Audubon's dual identity as an artist and ornithologist situates him in a similar place as Arthur- at the precipice of what can so uniquely happen at the intersection of art and science.

Taylor Fuller

While it is rare to see science and art fuse, when they do, it is an immensely special collaboration. This is because scientists are frequently thought to have difficulty describing, and connecting to, the spiritual aspect of our world. Science dictates that human beings should only believe in the things we can see, touch, hear, smell and prove. Conversely, artists are thought to be uninterested in the factual information behind certain sciences. Combining these two disciplines, art and science, allows for a much broader audience to be reached and for deeper and richer conversations to be had. Through her collaboration with Occidental College's renowned Moore Lab of Zoology Bird Collection, Emily Arthur, a Native American artist, has helped viewers to better understand the Coastal California Gnatcatcher and the ecosystem it inhabits.

Through her artwork, Emily Arthur allows for a wider audience of scientists, artists and art lovers to be conscious of a significant environmental issue in the state of California. The environmental issue mentioned above is the potential delisting of the California Gnatcatcher from the endangered species list. There are people who are strongly in favor of having this bird delisted so that the inhabited land can be developed for financial gain. In an effort to oppose developers, Emily Arthur brings this issue to light by melding the beauty of art with the academics of science in a thought provoking way. As explained by Occidental Director of Communications Jim Tranquada, "Arthur's research interests address narratives of loss, rebirth and transformation. Nature is seen as an interdependent living force, with land holding meaning specific to place. Native American narratives of dislocation, genocide and historic trauma are balanced with a fascination for the beauty of nature." Much like the displacement of Native Americans at various times in history, the Coastal California Gnatcatcher will be displaced if specific action is not taken. Therefore, Arthur's artwork is a key factor in making sure this animal survives.

Arthur uses multiple printmaking techniques to create her distinctive artwork. Different from art forms that produce single, original and inimitable pieces, printmaking allows an artist to create countless copies of one piece of artwork. Having the talent to create multiple copies of a print, while manipulating each to look different from the others, is a very powerful ability. One process Arthur practices is called etching, which involves a long-standing type of intaglio that uses acid or mordant to dissolve away unprotected areas of a metal plate. Another process, which Arthur primarily employs for the Endangered exhibit, is screen printing: a type of stenciling that allows an artist to design an image and apply it to material through a screen, using paint or oil based ink. An example

of how this technique is developed in the show is through Emily Arthur's screen printing of the California Coastal Sage Scrub. Arthur screen printed images of the Sage Scrub directly on the exhibit wall, unlike any other art most people have seen. This created a unique effect, as if one was walking through the Gnatcatcher's natural habitat. Overall, Arthur's use of screen printing enhances the viewers experience as they move through the exhibit.

The goal of the Endangered exhibit is to make Arthur's art a personal experience for the audience, where the true danger of the loss of natural habitat can be comprehended. When a situation, like the plight of the Coastal California Gnatcatcher, is presented physically, the intention is to highlight its importance and encourage spectators to take action. Emily Arthur and The Moore Lab of Zoology Bird Collection do a wonderful job of presenting a devastating issue to the public while also attempting to help save this endangered species.



*West Coast Botanicals,
2016 Screenprint on
dyed Canson Johannot
paper 15 x 11 in*

Phillip Grove

Pressured by increased specialization, our society has been ever dividing in the classroom and in the workplace. Our capitalist culture conditions us to place premiums on speed and efficiency, and because of this, fields of work and study have become more concentrated and narrow, causing a disconnect between these separate fields.

But in reality, they are all concerned with the same thing: the search for truth; some combination of fact and abstract emotional clarity which positively informs our personal decisions and influences our understanding of the world around us.

The “Endangered” exhibit is a unique circumstance in that it developed as collaboration between an artist, Emily Arthur, two biologists, John McCormack and James Maley, and a curatorial team from many backgrounds, led by Nancy Marie Mithlo. The combination of these different viewpoints culminates in a broader, more complete perspective of the Coastal Sage Scrub habitat and the California Gnatcatcher, ultimately offering a greater truth about the natural world and our personal relationship to it. Arthur’s exhibit on the California Gnatcatcher comes at the brink of the decision by the US Fish and Wildlife Service on whether or not to protect the habitat.

The California Gnatcatcher, an endangered sub-species located in the delicate Coastal Sage Scrub habitat in Southern California, is threatened by research driven by the interests of land developers. McCormack and Maley are fighting back with their own data, in order to prove, through genetics, that the bird is in fact a subspecies and that the 197,000 acres of habitat should continue to be preserved.

It might be easy for a scientist who works in a lab all day, analyzing genetic information, to forget about the natural beauty of his specimens, or the grandeur of the organisms interacting with the world around them in the wild. Similarly, an artist focused primarily on aesthetics might not fully understand or appreciate his or her subject, without proper knowledge of its biological impact and importance.

Arthur was most intrigued by a particular part of the collection process. After a bird specimen is shot or captured, the heart is stopped by using a finger to apply pressure on its chest. Arthur found this stopping of the heart especially meaningful. Through her work, she hopes to bring the “heart” back, if only symbolically, by bringing emotionality back into the process.

For Endangered, Arthur has worked chiefly with a combination of printmaking and painting. Many of her pieces depict faded maps and scientific diagrams, over which are painted birds and butterflies using drip techniques. The combination of these relatively transparent layers evokes a sense of motion through time and space, and an awareness of an ever-changing environment. Undefined pie charts, dim DNA sequences, and overlapping migration patterns portray the idea that data can be manipulated, and that, while important, can become a sort of white noise in the search for truth and beauty in the natural world.

Arthur’s narrative-driven work helps to prompt social cognizance of the California Gnatcatcher, and more broadly, attempts to define a place for free-roaming animals in an increasingly structured world. Endangered

reminds us that the ability to explore subject matter from a variety of perspectives offers more balanced insight, and that collaborations of this nature can culminate in the unification of differing thoughts and communities to achieve something greater. At its core, *Endangered* is a unique blending of art and science through which a greater collective social awareness might be established.



Occidental studentson field trip to Palos Verdes with artist Emily Arthur, Occidental Biology Professor Gretchen North, Moore Zoology Laboratory Collections Manager James Maley and Occidental Art History Visual Arts professor Nancy Marie Mithlo, March 2016.

Christina Hummel-Cola - An Endangered Subspecies: Emily Arthur’s Eco-Art as Intervention in Environmental Degradation

Emily Arthur’s *Endangered* provides viewers with a prime example of the interdisciplinary approach that lies at the heart of Eco-Art practice. By weaving together the disparate threads of fine art, science, and politics, she creates a cohesive whole that is at once beautiful and alarming in its call for intervention in the destruction of the natural world. As Beth Carruthers has noted, never “has the role of the arts been so urgent as it is in the face of what is now obvious to all as an immediate global crisis within our sustaining and environing world.”¹ Arthur and other Eco-Artists create works that fulfill this role by wedding the expressive capacity of the fine arts with the science of conservation. The resulting artistic works focus viewers’ attention on environmental degradation caused by human activities.

Arthur draws inspiration from a controversy surrounding the California Gnatcatcher, an endangered subspecies whose status protects large swathes of the Coastal Sage Scrub habitat from human development. In 2013, scientists Zink et al. published a study funded by land development companies in which they argued against the Gnatcatcher's status as a subspecies. This created an opportunity to de-list the Gnatcatcher and begin new development on relatively untouched, but fiscally valuable land. If such attempts are successful, human encroachment will threaten both the land and its inhabitants, and potentially lead to the destruction of a rare and unique habitat.

Arthur's *Endangered* utilizes screen prints and sculpture to inform viewers of this impending crisis and evoke action. Arthur utilizes natural images and scientific figures to create beautiful, yet haunting screen prints that emphasize the fragile boundary between life and death. In the foreground of "Gnatcatchers and Blue (with Base Maps)", songbird specimens float motionless and lifeless. A butterfly accompanies the birds, and it is unclear whether it rests on the paper, or has been spread for display. The background consists of base maps from a 2015 paper by John E. McCormack and James M. Maley, which argues in favor of the Gnatcatcher's status as a subspecies. The overall effect is to highlight the tension between life and death in this habitat, and the decisive influence scientific practice will have in swaying the balance one way or another. While strong scientific practices aid in protecting biodiversity, fiscally motivated science could also lead to the habitat's degradation and eventual destruction.



Gnatcatchers and Blue (with Base Maps), 2015, Screenprint with chine collée on dyed Hahnemühle Copperplate paper, 26 x 40 inches

This marriage of art and science in order to call attention to ecological crisis lies at the heart of Eco-Art practices, and echoes the work of other artists, such as Pam Longobardi. An artist working primarily with found object sculptures, Longobardi's Drifter Project emphasizes the environmental degradation of global oceans caused by plastic pollution. Through embarking on beach clean-up projects and collecting ocean plastic to utilize as a medium, Longobardi seeks to both restore beaches and draw attention to oceanic pollution. Newer Laocoon (voice of warning) serves as a powerful example of this process, in which Longobardi transforms ocean plastic collected from across the globe into the dramatic image of entwined black and white snakes. The work is inspired by Greek myths of Laocoon, a priest who warned of the infamous Trojan horse, and was struck down by Poseidon's sea serpents. Longobardi's piece draws parallels between mythological and contemporary events, warning viewers of the dangers plastic pollution, a modern Trojan horse, could have for global oceanic health.

By confronting their viewers with artistic representations of ecological threats, both Longobardi and Arthur seek to raise awareness and evoke action. Longobardi states of her work: "As a product of culture that exhibits visibly the attempts of nature to reabsorb and regurgitate this invader, ocean plastic has profound stories to tell."² Project Drifters and its found-object sculptures serve as a medium through which to tell the ocean plastic's stories. Echoing Longobardi's thoughts, Arthur expresses hope that her artwork will allow herself and her viewers to serve as witnesses and regain control over a profound story of environmental loss.³ The consequences of not heeding these narratives and taking action, both artists warn, could have dire consequences for both the environment and its inhabitants.

1 Beth Carruthers, "Mapping the terrain of contemporary ecoart practice and collaboration," Contextual essay for Arts and Ecology think tank held in Vancouver, Canada, 2006.

2 Pam Longobardi, "About," Drifters Project, 2015, driftersproject.net.

3 Emily Arthur, Skype call to ARTH 392 class, February 2, 2016.

Hannah Kaminsky

Emily Arthur's solo exhibit entitled *Emily Arthur: Endangered* is a visual journey through sceneries of threatened environments bursting with birds, butterflies, snakes and deer. Arthur's creation of threatened landscapes through works on paper and installations generates a sense of wonder as each layered element allows for a multi-dimensional understanding of a one-dimensional flat print.

The colors often used in Arthur's print work are pale and muted tones of blue, red, green and orange which spill over onto each other creating a sense of movement. The mixture of unbounded watercolor is reminiscent of the flowing body of water of the Pacific Ocean, which coexists next to the fragile and threatened eco-zone known as the California Coastal Sage Scrub region, home to the endangered bird the California Gnatcatcher.

Through her work, Arthur seeks to be a witness to the changing relationship between people, plants, animals and shared sacred spaces. For this particular exhibit, Arthur's work serves as a witness to the quiet atrocity that is the potential delisting of the California Gnatcatcher, which unassumingly protects the southern California coastline.

"Gnatcatcher and Coast Sage" [1], a screen print on paper, is one of the many powerful examples of Arthur's ability to tell a story. This particular piece contains thirty-one individual birds, which hang lifeless in a straight line as if in a graveyard. There are also outlines and realistic maps of the southern California coastline. These maps give a clear definition of place because they offer a rich description of the threatened coastal sage. In this way, the maps offer a sense of authority and certainty in the print.

When looking at "Gnatcatcher and Coastal Sage", the eye is immediately drawn to a single dark blue butterfly more formally known as the El Segundo Blue Butterfly. The butterfly's density and tightly rendered form contrasts the more subdued colors and loose representation of other objects in the print. Ina Woolcott in her study of animals as symbols states "if an ecosystem becomes damaged, the butterfly is usually the first to leave, as they are highly sensitive to harmony of the earth."



"Gnatcatcher and Coastal Sage (with Pale Data)" 2015, screen print on paper, 26 x 40 inches

Arthur's use of a single butterfly in this particular piece is a symbol foreshadowing the potential disrupted harmony of this fragile ecosystem should the Gnatcatcher be removed from the U.S. endangered species list. This delisting would open up the 197,000 acres of protected habitat to human development thus destroying one of the few remaining biodiversity hotspots in the world [2].

Arthur's creation of mythical landscapes through printmaking is similar to the work created by Osage painter, Norman Akers, who also uses a layering technique. Akers's paintings contain densely woven environments positioned over animals and brightly hued palettes to tell a narrative of the intersection of tribal and modern life.

Akers believes that the layering method in his work allows for visual images "to coexist without any clear hierarchical order" and in this way he is able to "begin to convey a non-linear sense of time" which allows for his work to break the constraints of time [3].

In his painting entitled "Okesa" [4], Akers explores the notions of migration and creation through disjointed layered images. At the center of the canvas, a large un-rooted tree stump floats out of the background; freed from all constrictions from the rest to the work. Akers includes a realistic map of Osage county, with thick lines as borders within the composition. The red, yellow and blue lines starkly contrast the surrealistic lack of order and boundary less objects, which overlay the rest of the work.

Native artists Emily Arthur and Norman Akers are first and foremost artists but they are also storytellers. Both use images of animals, maps and plant life to tell visual stories about human impact on the environment. They explore the concept of movement in their work physically and metaphorically – beyond the constraints of reality - creating transitive worlds that expand across landscape, time and dimension.

[1] "Gnatcatcher and Coast Sage (with Pale Data)" 2015, screen print on paper, 26 x 40 inches

[2] California Marine Protected Areas. N.p., n.d. Web.

[3] "Norman Akers." Norman Akers. <http://normanakers.com/home.html>

[4] "Okesa" 2006, Oil on Canvas, 66x 60 inches.

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Emily Arthur. Songbirds (with Palos Verdes Blue Butterfly), acrylic on dyed paper. 2015. 40 x 28 inches

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Weingart Gallery at Occidental College
1600 Campus Road
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www.oxy.edu/oxyarts