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Jo Baer

Don DeMauro

MaryKate Maher



September 9 – October 21, 2016
Curated by John Ros

SRO GALLERY
1144 Dean Street, Crown Heights, Brooklyn, New York
Cecilia Whittaker-Doe & Don Doe, Owners/Directors

John Ros

There Is Absolutely No Inevitability As Long As There Is A Willingness To Contemplate What Is Happening

This title, taken from the Marshall McLuhan text, *The Medium is the Massage*, 1967, resides adjacent to a page entitled “the others”, which states:

*The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained — ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.*⁰¹

Apropos? Prophetic? Utopian? This concept, from the book on the progress and effect of technology nearly fifty years old, has so much to do with our moment in time. We devote so much attention to our periphery — our digital selves and interactions — that too often we forget the basics of living in a society. It seems we are missing the component parts of relating to one another as humans who agree and disagree. Physical experience and time needed to evolve and mature have been replaced with immediate gratification and instant forgetfulness. How far we’ve come.

There Is Absolutely No Inevitability As Long As There Is A Willingness To Contemplate What Is Happening brings together three artists who work in different ways and with different outcomes. What MaryKate Maher, Jo Baer and Don DeMauro have in common is resilience and rigor in their practice. Through new technologies and old, this exhibit



looks to the foundational elements within the studio, and how each artist extracts from this interior space to facilitate the process of thought and consideration of a broader nature. The exterior then becomes not only a constant source of stimuli and material, but a contemplative space that balances the equally contemplative, if not combative, space of the studio.

Drawing thus from within and without, these artists create a seamless line between their studio practice and everyday life, moving in tandem with and corresponding with breadth to the modern era. Their purpose is strengthened by an honest and clear willingness to deal with the external, to accept uncertainty and to reject the inevitable.

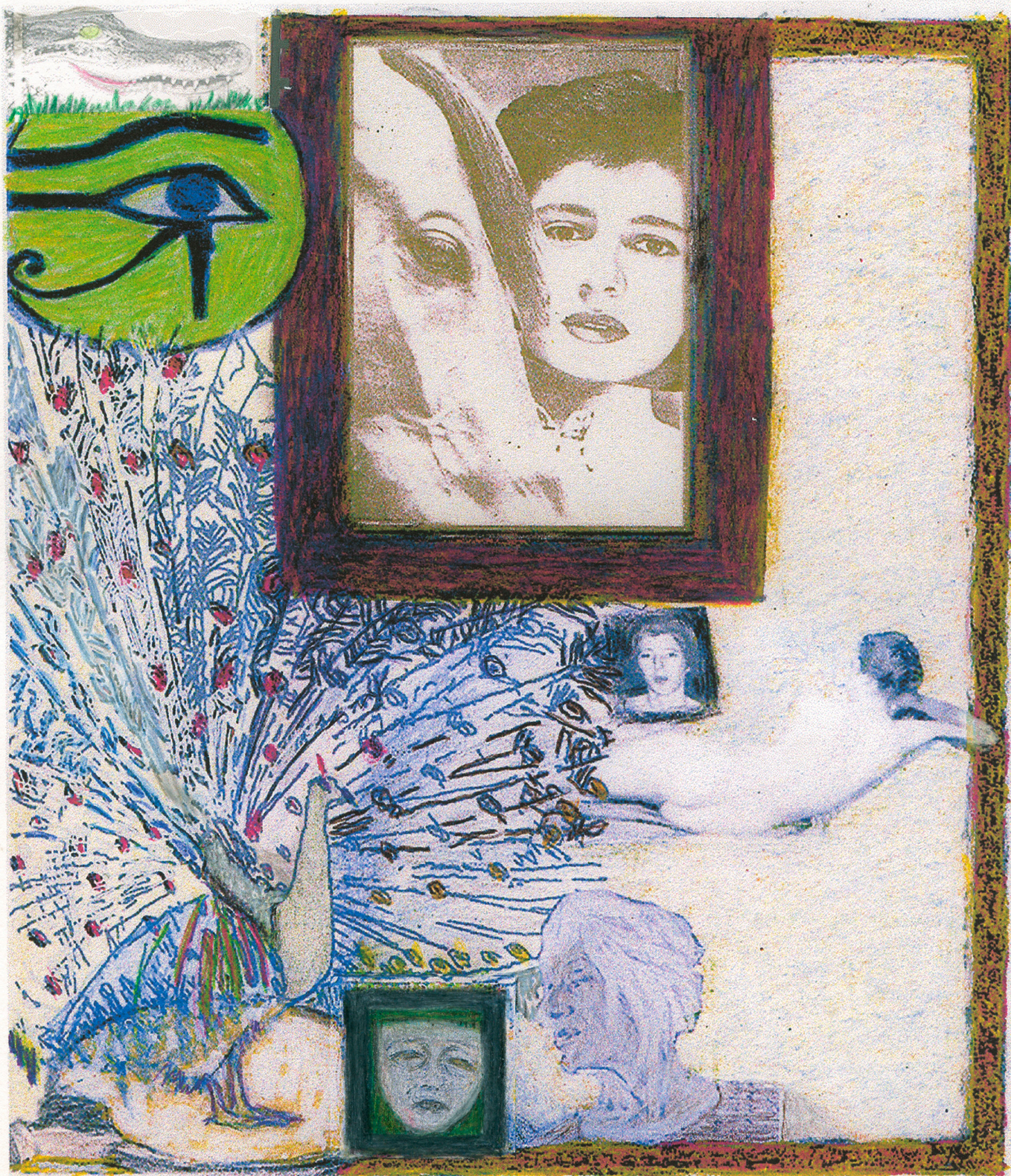
MaryKate Maher refers to her immediate physical surroundings in Bushwick, Brooklyn. In this cosmopolitan petri dish, Maher becomes a scavenger, collecting materials as she walks the streets that surround her studio. Her dedication to the importance of naturally and unnaturally occurring materials within her environment allows for an equally exciting assembly of shapes and textures in her practice. Items from here and there fit together to propose newly formed objects.

Maher may be working spontaneously, but her technique inspires a consciousness of the larger social landscape. She notes, "In the neighborhood where I work, there are a lot of industrial forms, hybrids of mechanical and industrial

with clods of earth ... It's a beautiful composition. I am attracted to the beauty of these hybrid forms. ... I am documenting textures and ideas of forms and how things go together.”⁰² Maher’s finished pieces become homages to the landscapes of past, present and future. These new occupants offer an additional conversation to the process of being a civilian.

Jo Baer’s gatherings are compiled from physical and digital collections. Baer plays with images in layers, digitally collaging the visual collections sourced from her myriad of experiences. The sourced connections fold and flop and hold to her critical hand and eye as she prints and hand-colors and cuts; from digital to analog, then back to digital, then to analog again. This open-ended relay process creates a dynamic and exciting modern practice of hybridity. The computer screen has become a new studio drawing space and by her own account, she is “getting very handy with Google search.”⁰³

Layer upon layer, Baer pushes the limits and allows for possibility in every new transaction. Scanning each reworked print brings further information to the computer drawing space. As with any translation, blips may occur. Baer uses this to her advantage, allowing the process to excite the possibility of unearthing something new by accident. Baer’s practice has been in constant flux for over half a century; now in her late eighties, the thrill of walking in uncharted territory has given her the confidence to accept the uncertainty of such oscillation.

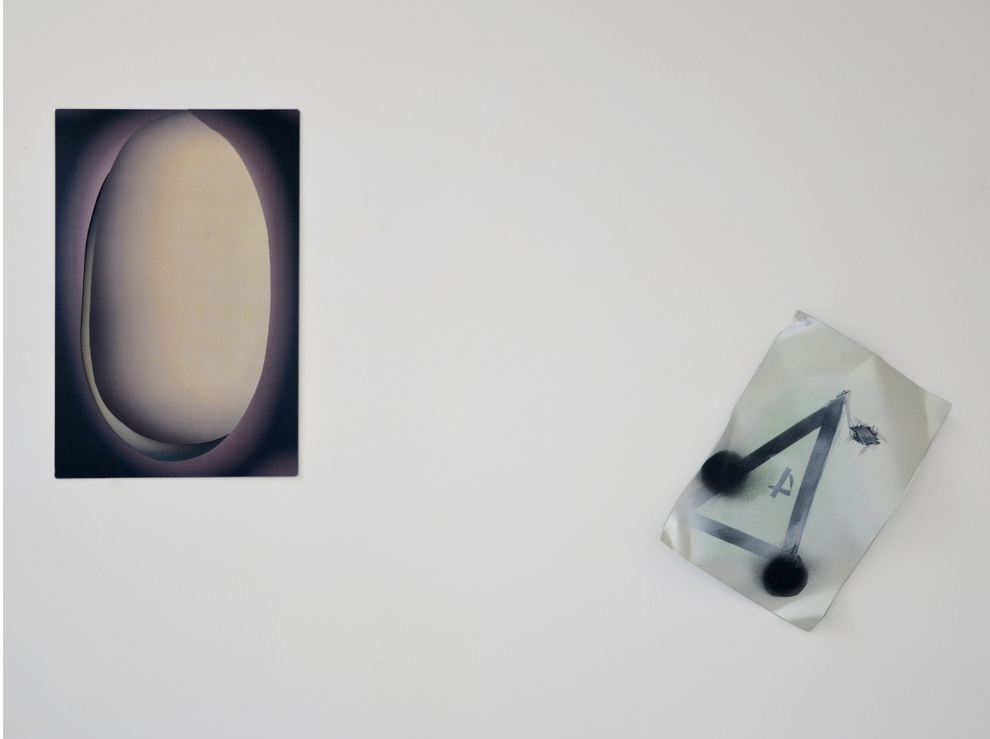




Don DeMauro collects and archives. He is surrounded at all times with all of his materials — beyond entrenched, beyond fascinated, he simply walks around the studio abyss of source and art materials. His exciting laboratory of constant change and chance allows for philosophies to unravel in connections made to history, politics, literature and culture. At eighty, DeMauro's mark is as attuned as his affection for the figure is deep. His artist statement contemplates, "Art is language, and the body is the site of language. [T]he body is by its existential nature nomadic and migrates to the figural. The term figural wants to acknowledge singularity, multiplicity, form, boundaries and becoming. Art is ... equally anatomical and political, personal and social. The body is the site of conception and sensation. Art ... mediates and interprets through line, shape, plane, tone and color; the internal and external intensities of boundaries and their entanglements."⁰⁴

DeMauro's daily movements and methods make up his practice, which is rooted in generosity. He has an insatiable appetite for research, which turns to lived experience. DeMauro then offers that experience to his viewers. It is this personal reach that brings each conversation to full strength, together with the intense compassion for relentless dialogue with the studio, that allows for DeMauro's success.

In *Rules of Engagement*, 1939, Albert Camus wrote, "Clarity presupposes resistance to the impulses of hatred as well as to the cult of inevitability. In the world of our experience, everything can be avoided."⁰⁵ On the experience of the artist, he noted that "all ... held the labors of art in high esteem and complained of the organization of the



modern world that makes so difficult the pursuit of those labors, as well as the exercise of meditation, indispensable to the artist.”⁰⁶ Foreshadowing our preoccupation with the digital “connections” we are forced to make, Camus’ words recognized the importance of the need for a rigorous relationship with the studio. Throughout their working processes, Maher, Baer and DeMauro accept nothing as inevitable in their search for clarity. They share their experiences open-handedly, with the hope of infecting us all with curiosity. Curiosity allows for an engaged public.

Awareness brings hope and despair. It is up to the compassionate observer to act. The studio can be a space for such awareness and activity. As Alice Walker said, “The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”⁰⁷ We are powerful. We must not take anything for granted. We must see past the nods to the inevitable and like Maher, Baer and DeMauro, take to a rigor of practice and learn to appreciate possibility in this world of absolutes. Nothing is inevitable as long as we are aware of ourselves and of the impacts, intended and unintended, we have on our communities.

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John Ros

Jo Baer: In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants

[T]he amazing growth of our techniques, the adaptability and precision they have attained, the ideas and habits they are creating, make it a certainty that profound changes are impending in the ancient craft of The Beautiful. In all the arts there is a physical component which can no longer be considered or treated as it used to be, which cannot remain unaffected by our modern knowledge and power. ... We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art.

— Paul Valéry, 1928 (from: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, by Walter Benjamin, 1936)

We are well past the age of mechanical reproduction being new or revolutionary, yet we find ourselves continually referring back to its possibilities as advancements in the field are made every day. Through this, accessibility has become the new social revolution.

Jo Baer has taken the art of painting to a whole new level. A seamless mixture of appropriation, collage, drawing, sketching and printing, a process has developed that enables her to build physical, as well as emotional and temporal layers. This process offers a new sense of livelihood, in the artwork and in the artist.

Technology upgrades have become so relentless that I am not sure our new technologies and hybrid ways of life can be confined by clear-cut nomenclature. It almost seems that Baer's resistance to a fully digital practice is what is of importance here. Baer remains a tactile artist with a tangible analogue practice and yet there is more. Rather than define the medium, it is the practice that seems more fitting to quantify. This *Practice of Hybridity* within the physical and digital — and in between — develops planes of completion, forming an assembled, mixed-media piece of new dimensions.

Digitally and physically layered, this *Practice of Hybridity* develops new mediums altogether. They resemble a new age of mechanical reproduction in a way that is procedural as well as progressive. Baer employs this process not as gimmick, but as necessity. Her intense research throughout life has brought her to many places. Today, digital information can be brought to her. These spaces and elements are brought alive because Baer has had a physical relationship with them. If she had not, the device would simply become an overused tool, however, because of Baer's empathetic approach to land and history, her present practice fills the studio with life — active in a way that nourishes the viewer — in a way that only the artist used to be able to experience (by being nourished by way of the studio).

Taken from her practice and focused on the most recent body of work, *Towards the Land of the Giants*, Jo Baer offers this folio as a way to disseminate her work and process to a wider audience and to a wider array of venues. I have said in the past that her work is quite generous, but this folio brings a new dimension to the possibilities that lie within the reach of this work. In our own hybrid lives, this folio, which can fit neatly under one's arm, is offered to the many. The pieces within are not meant to replace her larger paintings, but to work in tandem with them — to present the *Practice of Hybridity* by which the paintings are developed. This folio is presented humbly to the viewer as an element of hybridity itself. In the realm of visual saturation and digital noise, we must take pause in these humble prints and accept the offering by Baer to enter her spaces of imagery and practice.

I think bragging Luddites are probably some of the worst artists in the world — I mean, even Vermeer used a camera.

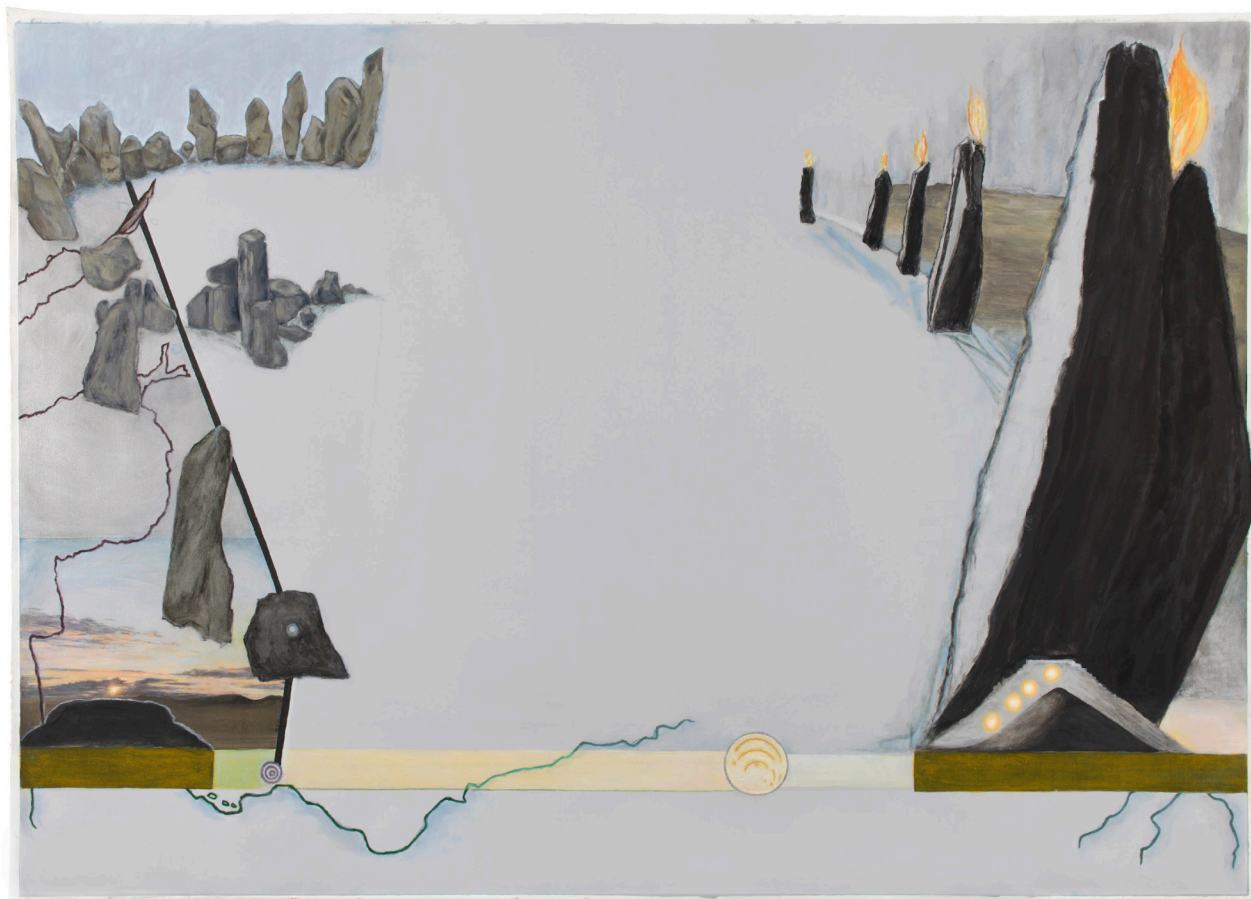
— Jo Baer, 2015



Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: Royal Families (Curves, Points and Little Ones)*, 2015, Giclée print, 30 x 22 inches



Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: Heraldry (Posts and Spreads)*, 2015, Giclée print, 30 x 22 inches



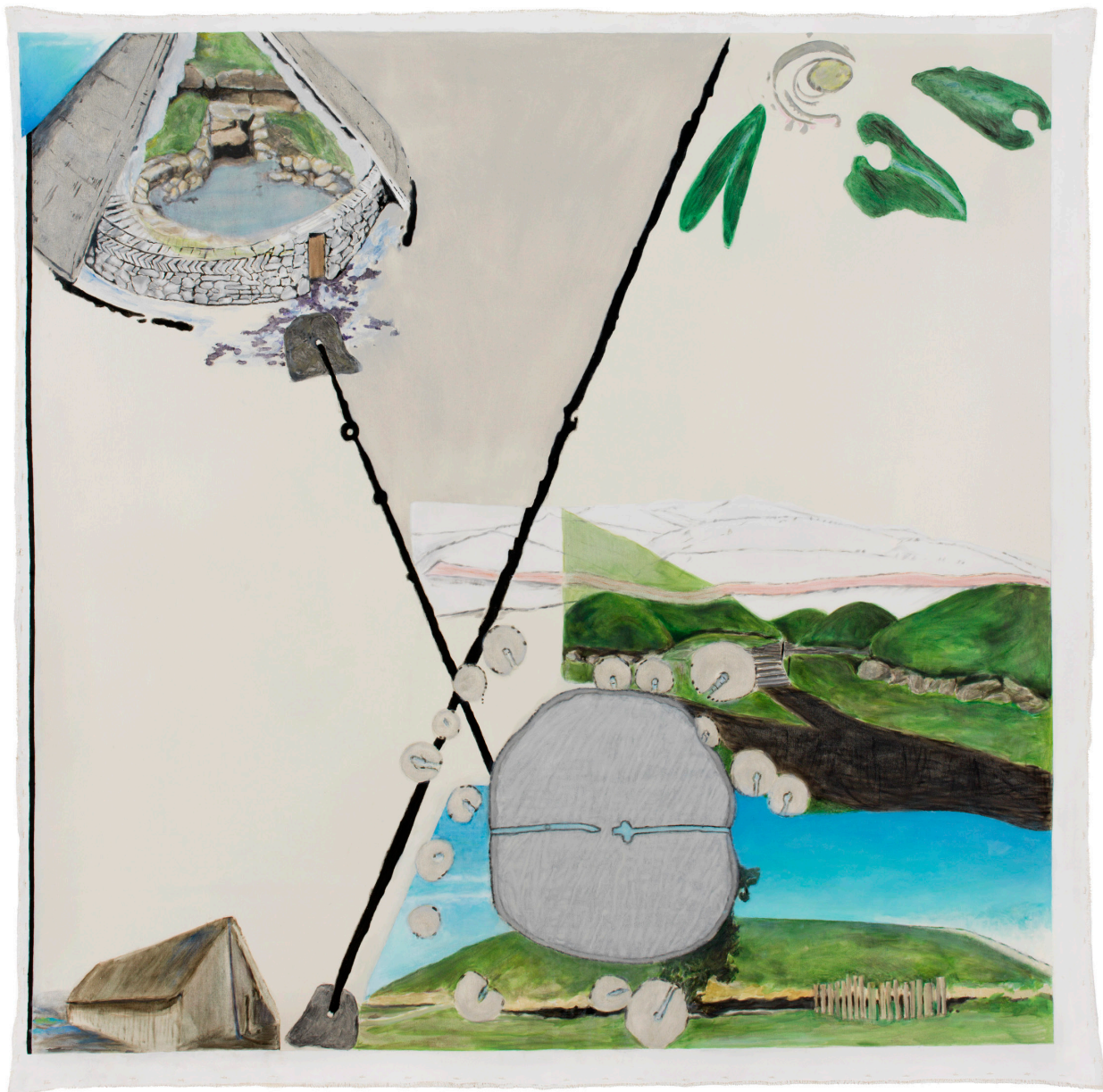
Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: Dusk (Bands and End-Points)*, 2015, Giclée print, 22 x 30 inches



Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: Dawn (Lines and Destinations)*, 2015, Giclée print, 22 x 30 inches



Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: In the Land of the Giants (Spirals and Stars)*, 2015, Giclée print, 30 x 22 inches



Jo Baer, *In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants: Time-Line (Spheres, Angles and the Negative of the 2nd Derivative)*, 2015, Giclée print, 30 x 22 inches

Cecilia Whittaker-Doe & Don Doe

New Age for an Alchemy(?)

Everything that is sacred and that wishes to remain so must envelop itself in mystery.
– Stéphane Mallarmé

A passage taking form in a visual experience holds a poetic vision. In the work of the three artists presented in this exhibition, rhythm, time, closeness and distance arrange themselves to bring a view that taps into an imagined, at times prophetic, science: a kind of alchemy.

There Is Absolutely No Inevitability As Long As There Is A Willingness To Contemplate What Is Happening offers a visual experience that extends between the minerals of the earth and insights into human nature.

MaryKate Maher's sculpture at first appears to provide the exhibit with the necessary synthesis between the organic and the abstract; allowing for a three-dimensional human-scale collaboration with nature. However, constructivist and spatial principles merge with notions of Scottish Cairns, and the figurative discourse held within Maher's sculpture brings us to another order of complexity; balanced rock piles reference feats of megalithic engineering, as if nature were fetishizing itself. Like the other artists in this exhibit, Maher weaves layers of symbolism into an intricate matrix of meaning and personal revelation. The solitary architectural presence, co-existing with something more relational, ignites dialogue to consider the symbiotic and the independent. As in viewing DeChirico's *The Evil Genius of a King*, 1914-15, we ponder this relationship.

Don DeMauro's work literally showcases an airless primordial setting. Viewed as science or fiction, *Regions of the Body*, 1999 is a haunting view from an 'unnatural' history museum collection, his personal mythology gleaned from the fragments of objects his curiosity could not leave buried. Its cabinet setting brings to mind Joseph Beuys, but the more powerful analogy would be with Max Ernst's collages; commentaries on the late 19th century cultural desire to catalog and order nature at all costs still evidenced today. There is an intensity of interior meandering in DeMauro's work that echoes Ernst's pictorial density and the enigmatic search for a myth.

Jo Baer's drawings open up a reflection of archetype as personal meaning in the spirit of play and free association. Collaged as figurative embodiments of time spent, time passed, time to come, reworked to depict rearrangements of time, they evoke opportunity to redefine one's course. Nodding to antiquity, Baer's *Altar of the Egos, Working Versions*, 2002, interact with one another as time travelers. Their shared environment is not physical; it is time itself. We evolve within the constraints and the opportunities we create. Regarding Baer's digital drawings, *In The Land of The Giants*, 2015, and the print edition, *Jo Baer: In the Giclée-ed Land of the Giants*, 2015, there is prophecy in the form of a raven (a reference to Appolo? Or perhaps it is Poe's raven). Rocks and the distance between them are archetypes for mythical and ancient beliefs in a nature that provides rest points within an endless journey.

MaryKate Maher, Don DeMauro, and Jo Baer have each created a metaphoric portal through which all must enter and be incorporated into the 'organisms' of their world. All three artists offer us an alchemical formula with which to feed our imagination and to refine our experience of shared continuity.

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