



Beth Davila Waldman SITES & NON-SITES

"One's Paris room, inside its four walls," wrote Paul Claudel, "is a sort of geometrical site, a conventional hole, which we furnish with pictures, objects and wardrobes within a wardrobe."

– Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

The hybrid "manual/digital" multimedia practice of the San Francisco artist Beth Davila Waldman is a dialogue between or synthesis of two realms, equal and opposite: reality, observed and recorded, or remembered; and the aesthetic drive toward completion and closure during the subconsciously driven creative process. Her two-dimensional works tend to read as paintings with photographic interpolations (or invasions), or photographs with drawn or painted remediations. In our tumultuous era of massive change happening worldwide, liminal (transitional) images that juxtapose complex, contradictory architectural structures with abstract aesthetic epiphanies might be said to represent the spirit of the age. Jonathan Curiel of *SF Weekly* described one work by Waldman as "scenes of an urban horizon where reworked volcanic stones and echoes of modernity merge through pastiches [passages?] of paint streaks. The horizons of windows and white surfaces create patterns and layers one finds around the world ... where the tension between old and new architectures is always unfolding."

The title of this show, *Sites & Non-Sites*, is borrowed from the Land Artist Robert Smithson (best known for his 1970 earthwork, *Spiral Jetty*, who denoted as 'non-sites' the artistic interpretations and constructions he made from real-world materials incorporated to evoke and invoke the places of their origin. The Whitney Museum adds to the definition: "Hybrids comprised of minerals, metal containers, photographs, maps, and other documents, they encompass both the geographical source of his natural materials (the "site") and their packaged relocation in a museum or gallery (the "non-site"), where they become legible as sculpture." Amy Baker elaborates in *Artforum*: In the late 1960s, ... Robert Smithson exhibited a transitional series of sculptures entitled "Site/Non-Site." In each of these works, shaped containers built by the artist confine (as does our experience of viewing the work in a formal space) the collected materials. Exhibited along with this usually geological "sample" are maps, notes, and photographs providing the facts and measurements of the original site and describing its locale. By following these guides it is possible, if you take the time and trouble, to experience personally this same site....[Smithson] understood art to exist in time rather than outside of it, and sculpture to be subject to the same cycle of physical modification and decay as any other matter. He recognized constant change as the only constant....."

Richard Kearney writes, in his introduction to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, "Echoing Coleridge's definition of poetry as the balance or reconciliation of discordant qualities, Bachelard maintains that the poetic instant is a "harmonic relation between opposites."

Waldman's Non-Sites in her various series—*Ancestral Constructs*, *Desert Intersections*, *Inevitable Entails*, and *Merging Grounds*—likewise acknowledge entropy and change, and harness them to the creative imagination.

– DeWitt Cheng