

Special Edition

# ART

H A B E N S

CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW

**CECILIA BORGENSTAM  
MENGDA ZHANG  
BOBBY FORSYTHE  
CAROL LAFAYETTE  
EUN SUN CHO  
ANDRÈ PERIM  
ALICE BROOKES  
JUN-YUAN HONG  
ANNE YONCHA**



**ART**  
Contemporary Art Press

*Tell Me There's A Mathematical Equation For Being Alive*

*a work by Anne Yoncha*



## CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW



**Eun Sun Cho**

Germany

*I work in the fields of photography, drawings, installation and sculpture. My projects revolve around the elements of photographic mediums dealing with physical and technical problems such as measurements, algorithms, analogue/digital difference and representation of language of formality accompanied by the processuality of the image. In conjunction with the themes, I investigate the intersection of chemophysical phenomena with photographic reality.*



**André Perim**

Brazil

*Information overload is a problem that is affecting us all. I think we are facing several deep changes in our lives no matter where we are living in. I am here in Brazil, a country with a very unique culture and now it lot of things are going into a unexpected direction. It seems as most people are not likely to consider complexity. And it is not a local problem, it is almost everywhere. We increased so much the amount of information that we can't handle it anymore.*



**Cecilia Borgenstam**

Sweden / USA

*The definition of "transience", a word used to replace the term "homeless", is "short-lived" or "a state of briefness", but in the context of displacement, the state of transience can be anything but brief. In Here/Not Here, I photograph objects in abandoned camps in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park but the visual topography depicted is sadly not isolated to a specific geographical point.*

*Ordinary day to day objects are left to interact with the natural elements of the park, where the cold pacific coast fog and strong winds make their own mark on the rugged terrain.*



**Carol LaFayette**

USA

*My studio/lab, 40 acres in Central Texas, is an island in an ocean of development eating through green places later named for what's gone ("Wolf Run," "Civet Hollow").*

*I build remote sensing devices customized for the question I'm asking and then fashion the samples into artwork as a trace of where it came from...really nowhere, just ordinary grass and trees, a few bogs, some animals. Remote sensing allows me to get close to subjects, or to see underground.*



**Jun-Yuan Hong**

Taiwan

*My film works have strong inner emotional problems. The main reason comes from my incomplete original family.*

*Therefore, in the film, I like to construct these tangled feelings through close-up, and look for people with similar family situations, let them be my elements of the image that respond to and express their emotional state of facing family problems through the encounters of these different living individuals.*



**Anne Yoncha**

Norway

*My research examines the ethical complexity of ecological restoration in a time of novel ecosystems and accelerating human impact. My studio practice combines digital sensing technology, such as bio-data sonification, and analog, traditional processes including painting with ink I make with locally-sourced tannins and hand-made paper from local plant material. I aim to create work that transforms microscopic or invisible processes into analogues viewers can experience in a tangible and visceral way.*



**Bobby Forsythe**

United Kingdom

Bobby Forsythe is a visual artist based in Suffolk, England. Her creations emphasise spatiality and experience for the beholder by creating elaborate installations that exude vibrancy and luminosity. Forsythe is extremely influenced by the phenomenon of immersive installations and has created sensory artwork that allows for the beholder to interact and immerse themselves into a room of three-dimensional shape and light. In response to her installations, Forsythe creates two dimensional paintings that portray colour and the incorporation of light through various shades and tones.



**Mengda Zhang**

China / USA

I have a research based practice wherein I create performances, videos and installations.

The work unpacks personal, social, and historical complexities of my subjects and search for non-binary perspectives, from reality, literature, or imagination, which escapes any one-side grand narrative.

Through consistently experimenting with different media and materials, I attempt to translate bodily experience, which may be specific and cultural, to audiences as much as possible.



**Alice Brookes**

United Kingdom

Throughout her work, Alice continually questions the custodianship over the female body, in a society obsessed with female beauty.

Pushing questions of what it means to be a woman alongside the notions of fairy tale fantasy & perfection. Alice has been influenced by wide ranging historical references, from the witch hunts of the 1600s, through the waves of Feminism, to present day restrictions on women's bodies with the recent 'Heartbeat bill'.

## In this issue

### Anne Yoncha

Lives and works in Wilmington, Delaware  
Mixed media

4

### Mengda Zhang

Lives and works in the United States  
Video art, Mixed media

34

### Carol LaFayette

Lives and works in Texas, USA  
Installation, Mixed media

58

### Bobby Forsythe

Lives and works in Suffolk, England, UK  
Mixed media

82

### Jun-Yuan Hong

Lives and works in Taiwan  
Video art, Mixed media

106

### André Perim

Lives and works in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
Video art, Sound, Mixed media

129

### Alice Brookes

Lives and works in the United Kingdom  
Performance, Installation, Mixed media

148

### Eun Sun Cho

Lives and works in Berlin, Germany  
Mixed media

164

### Cecilia Borgenstam

Lives and works in San Francisco, CA, USA  
Installations, Mixed media

184

Special thanks to: Charlotte Seeges, Martin Gantman, Krzysztof Kaczmar, Tracey Snelling, Nicolas Vionnet, Genevieve Favre Petroff, Christopher Marsh, Adam Popli, Marilyn Wylder, Marya Vyrra, Gemma Pepper, Maria Osuna, Hannah Hiaseen and Scarlett Bowman, Yelena York Tonoyan, Edgar Askelovic, Kelsey Sheaffer and Robert Gschwantner.

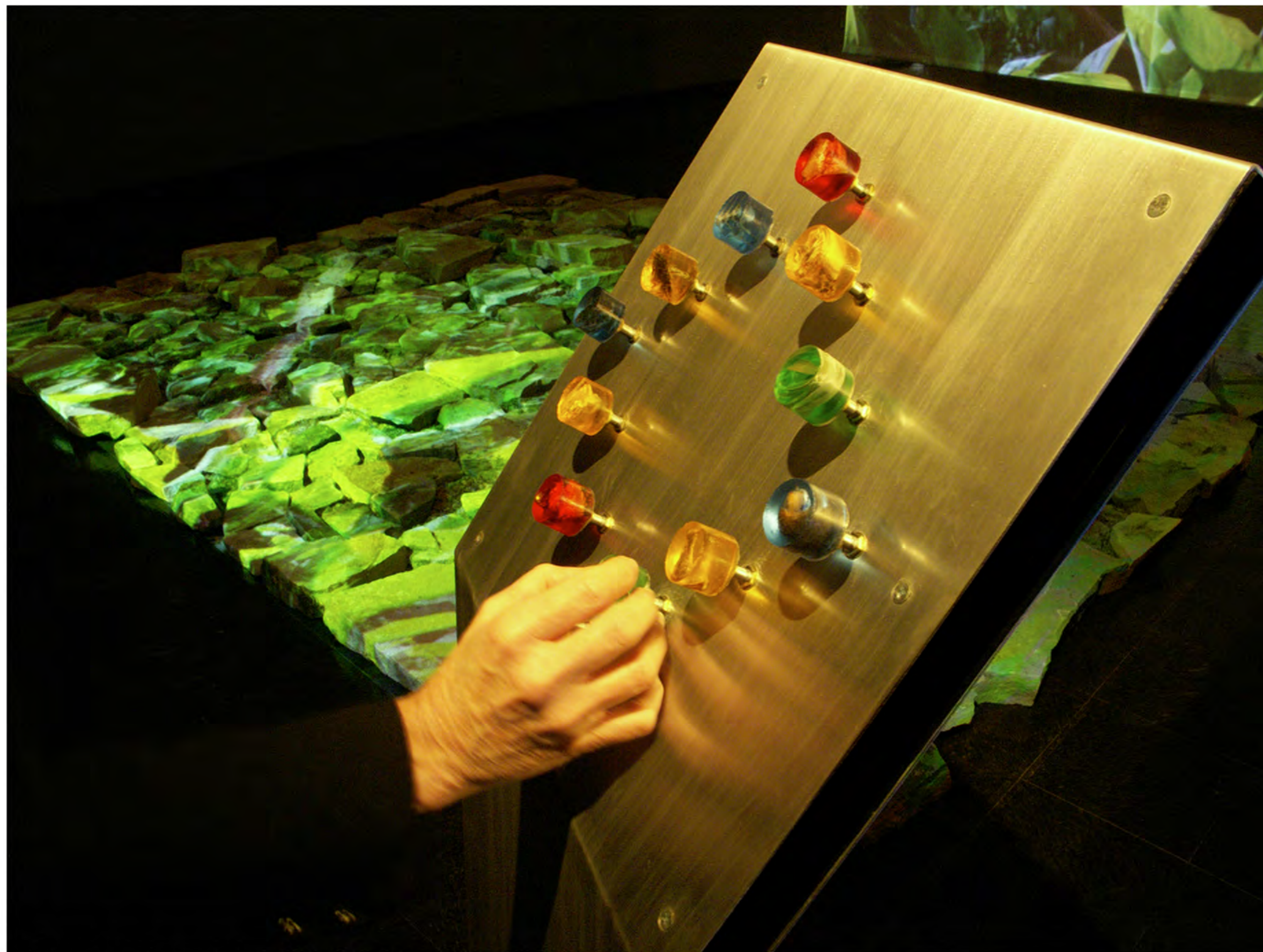
Lives and works in Texas, USA

*Artists such as Judd, Holt, Smithson, and Turrell encourage us to experience the earth differently—the turning of the planet; a salt lake’s cyclic response to a deposit of form; one’s own scale swallowed in vast, west Texas. Today earth artists are cognizant of the increasing fragility and scarcity of open land. Perhaps there’s a way to create earth art while leaving the smallest possible footprint. Experts in diverse disciplines such as geophysics, entomology, and biology can help reframe questions: how flora and fauna sense, signal, adapt, and interrelate. Collectively, this work is a search to discover wonder in a place largely deemed unusable—and perhaps because of that, full of mystery, an element common to both art and science.*

*My studio/lab, 40 acres in Central Texas, is an island in an ocean of development eating through green places later named for what’s gone (“Wolf Run,” “Civet Hollow”). I build remote sensing devices customized for the question I’m asking and then fashion the samples into artwork as a trace of where it came from...really nowhere, just ordinary grass and trees, a few bogs, some animals. Remote sensing allows me to get close to subjects, or to see underground.*

*A company developing “smart dust”—miniscule, networked spyware devices—claims, by the next century, it will build a global nervous system. I decided to create a local nervous system for rural Texas, one that might reveal subtle interconnections. I’m investigating what happens when former agricultural land regenerates but remains an island, without wildlife corridors, subject to pollution from fertilization, dumping, and fracking, while flash floods alternate with extreme droughts, ice storms, and record temperatures. These dramas occur on different physical and temporal scales. Another work in progress involves building a wearable, augmented reality system that can be worn while walking through a landscape to experience ultraviolet and infrared light.*

Carol LaFayette



Installation view, *atta presence sensitive*, Art Gallery, University of the South, Sewanee, TN, 2005



Installation view, *atta presence sensitive*

Art Gallery, University of the South, Sewanee, TN, 2005

## An interview with

# Carol LaFayette

An interview by **Dario Rutigliano**, curator  
and **Melissa C. Hilborn**, curator  
[arthabens.biennale@europe.com](mailto:arthabens.biennale@europe.com)

Hello Carol and welcome to *ART Habens*. Before starting to elaborate about your artistic production we would like to invite our readers to visit <http://www.clafayette.com> and we would start this interview with a couple of questions about your background. You have a solid formal training and after having earned your BFA in Design from the University of Washington, Seattle you nurtured your education with a MFA, that you received from State University of New York at Buffalo: how did those formative years influence your evolution as an artist? Moreover, how does your *cultural substratum* direct the trajectory of your current artistic research?

**Carol LaFayette:** Thank you for inviting me. I grew up in Florida, the youngest of 5 children. My father used to take the family on fishing trips and we would catch dinner for the week. We'd anchor off an island, and he'd instruct us on how to build a shelter for the night. I was the fish cleaner. My mother, who could only see out of one eye, would set up her easel and paint very realistic landscapes — through painting, she regained her sense of depth perception. Those fishing expeditions made an impression on me, and have returned to me now.

I studied at several colleges and universities across the country and I sat in on classrooms in other places. I moved every few years for the road trips, and to seek out remote areas to explore. Now, my studio/lab is in a place where not many people want to



Carol LaFayette

go: spotty broadband. Flash floods are frequent and frightening. Ice storms and then strong winds knock trees down. Droughts dessicate and wild hogs decimate. But it's gorgeous in its way... a flyover for migrating birds... full of bogs, bugs, fungi... I've learned a great deal from staying in one



atta tunnel project on immersive system. Carol LaFayette, Frederic I. Parke, Tatsuya Nakamura, and Jace Miller, 2007

place and developing a dialog with it over time.

The body of works that we have selected for this special edition of *ART Habens* and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article has at once captured our attention

for the way you sapiently explored the sociodynamics of insect societies, shedding a whole new light on Edward O. Wilson's theories, inviting the viewers to explore the elusive still ubiquitous connection between science and artistic research: would you tell us how do you consider the *relationship between Science and Art*?

**Carol LaFayette:** Collaboration intersecting the arts and sciences begins with a need to answer questions. One wants to learn what other bodies of knowledge might bring to the table. Collaborations can result in something different from what can be achieved by a single person. Processes used by artists and scientists are sometimes quite similar.

Active inquiry is always potentially creative, and invention, when ideas are shared and individuals listen to each other, can be groundbreaking. Artists focus on process — questioning and sometimes reconfiguring the basis of the work, the tools to be used, and other elements such as site specificity. Scientists are intent on furthering prior

work, and replicating methodologies in order to build new paradigms. In collaborations this is one area of creative tension that can drive inquiry from different directions.

**The *atta* project maps tunnels and chambers of a vast leafcutter ant colony and we have really appreciated the way — *scaling the viewer to ant size* — you successfully challenged the junction point human viewpoint and the entomological realm, providing the audience with such immersive visual experience. When walking our readers through the genesis of the *atta* project, would you tell us how did you develop the initial idea, in order to achieve such brilliant results?**

**Carol LaFayette:** I was thinking of a traditional landscape painting with foreground, mid-ground, and background. I mentally made that 2D plane into a 3D sphere, so the first challenge was to view this landscape in 360 degrees. What's underground? The first idea was to imagine removing all the soil, so one could see all the tree roots. Then I noticed leafcutting ants in great numbers, long lines of them carrying leaves to their nests.

Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson's *The Ants* changed the way I saw what I was looking at. Scientists view ants not as individuals but as a superorganism. Leafcutting ant colonies can be so vast they can spread miles, and can be as deep as a 3-story house. These ants are good farmers. They select certain species of leaves and vegetation to form giant "fungus balls," and feed it to their larvae. I began to search for a non-invasive way to see the form of the tunnels underground. Carl Pierce, then a Ph.D. student in Geophysics at Texas A&M, introduced me to Ground



Immersive system experience of *atta* tunnel project, SIGGRAPH Los Angeles, 2008



atta tunnel project on HoloLens, 2019. Carol LaFayette, Frederic I. Parke, and Tatsuya Nakamura

Penetrating Radar (GPR). It's used to find lost graves, buried structures, or underground power lines, sort of an MRI for soil. I convinced him to come out and scan an 8 x 8 meter portion of the ant colony.

An installation called *atta presence sensitive* presented a series of video clips collected with different remote sensing devices, including the GPR scan. A viewer could dial through them standing at a kiosk. There were no instructions on the kiosk, and the knobs made of acrylic contained embedded fragments from the landscape that related to the videos (a fish bone, a tooth, the end of a carpenter's pencil... ). There were two large screens, one of silk facing the viewer, and one of sandstone pieced together on the floor in front of the upright screen. At an exhibition in Tennessee, groups of children had fun twirling the knobs as if it were a video game. A program I wrote captured and re-processed what was viewed onto the sandstone. The flickering images and color seemed to make the stones roil. This paralleled a realization of the giant invisible ant colony's movements beneath the soil.

The *atta* project grew into a collaboration with Dr. Frederic Parke at Texas A&M, whose background is in Physics and Computer Science. He has designed large scale immersive systems with affordable, off-the-shelf components. We consulted with graduate students on a process to translate the numerical data from the GPR scan into a 3D model. We were then able to view the "data cube" on Dr. Parke's large-scale immersive system. We traveled the project to exhibit in Los Angeles, packed into a large moving van. Now, 12 years later, the *atta* project can be experienced on the Microsoft HoloLens, about the size of a football.





Immersive system experience of attatunnel project, SIGGRAPH Los Angeles, 2008.

If one is interested in learning more about the *atta* project, here's a link:

[https://www.leonardo.info/LEA/CreativeData/CD\\_Lafayette.pdf](https://www.leonardo.info/LEA/CreativeData/CD_Lafayette.pdf)

Your laboratory/studio, is a 40 acres former ranch in Texas, *a island in an ocean of development eating through green places*: how do your surroundings inspire you as an artist? In particular, do you think that *direct experience* with such unique surroundings is an indispensable aspect of your work as an artist?

**Carol LaFayette:** Direct experience is necessary to learn how to ask the right questions. After I devise a good one and build a system or tool to ask it, the art becomes something else — what results is separate from the on site experience. Knowledge from scientists, biologists, and others has expanded my understanding of the boundaries of my own learning and has caused me to shift perspective at critical times in the process.

James Turrell bought an extinct volcano, Roden Crater, and then began to turn it into a celestial observatory. He studies astronomical charts to understand how the positions of viewing chambers within the mountain might best contain and reveal how the sun and stars move over them across the seasons. Turrell has spent 45 years working at Roden Crater to understand how the work plays out.

Working in one place prompts me to revisit ideas developed earlier. Things don't always repeat from season to season. It's become a study that intersects human, animal, and plant interactions, along with phenomena like weather, climate change, and industrial use.



On site photograph of *Atta texana* leafcutting ants, 2005



Another interesting work of yours that has particularly impressed us and that we would like to introduce to our readers is entitled *Food fight* a stimulating work that has been awarded with the Silver Award at the 2018 edition of Global Independent Film Awards, and that can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/223506081>. We dare say that *Food fight* could be considered a powerful allegory of every society —including human's one, indeed — and challenges the viewers' perceptual and cultural categories, offering them such a multilayered experience. How important is for you to draw a parallel between contemporary urbanized societies and natural environment? Moreover, how do you consider the role of digital technology playing within your investigation of environmental phenomena?

**Carol LaFayette:** Dualities need to be interrogated. For example, urban / rural might be studied for what the duality preserves and what it seems to close off. I'm interested in how flora and fauna redirect their energies to accommodate us: sea cows who've found a warm winter home near sewage treatment plants; hawks who nest on balconies overlooking Central Park; Burrowing owls who've discovered storm drain tunnels in freeway medians. I'm impressed because their environment seems more porous than ours, it's a continuum. *food fight* follows a couple of White-eyed Vireo raising one of their own along with a cowbird chick. Observing these events involved modifying a GoPro to accept a telephoto lens, and a remote capture program. Afterwards, I had a terabyte of shots. I'm not fond of the "difficult viewing" school of film that forces a person to sit and squirm, so I curtailed the length. But I included one

Installation view, *atta presence sensitive*, Art Gallery, University of the South, Sewanee, TN, 2005

very long shot of the male Vireo, standing over the nest with a caterpillar in his beak. He seemed to be momentarily absent minded, glancing around vacantly while the baby birds underneath him begged for the morsel. This seemed to me the point at which everything began to change.

John Cage described time based media as a dialog with phrasing and duration — do musical composers organize a work by paying attention to the phrasing, or to the space between phrases? Peter Wollen discusses how attention to duration can create a different kind of suspense from one created through traditional continuity editing. He describes it as “atavistic” — dropping the artifice of film language to experience an event as it unfolds. An example is Chantal Akerman’s film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels...* in one scene, Dielman kneads a meatloaf interminably.

My decision to use various forms of digital technology is based on my interest in learning how it works, but also on a wish to leave a smallish footprint on the landscape itself. I reuse and repurpose tools and technologies to produce as little e-waste as possible, and power is solar or rechargeable.

**As you have remarked in your artist's statement, today earth artists are cognizant of the increasing fragility and scarcity of open land. Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco once stated, "the artist's role differs depending on which part of the world they're in": does your artistic research respond to a particular cultural moment? In particular, do you think that artists can raise awareness to an ever-growing audience on topical environmental**



food fight, 4K video, 2017

**issues that affect our globalised and ever-changing society?**

**Carol LaFayette:** Our cultural moment is the Anthropocene. Thirty years ago I remember a professor lecturing about how technology

would rescue us. Cities would become obsolete. We’d telecommute across field and tundra — industry would levitate above the land, transact in the atmosphere. We’d have trees again because we wouldn’t need paper.

Some of this artwork is about being an implicated witness. For example, 247 documents a hydraulic fracturing operation down the road. If you live in a rural area where fracking is going on, you get visited by “land men” hired to track you down to



**food fight**, 4K video, 2017

sign a pooling contract. So one has advance notice that Big Oil is coming to the neighborhood. I started a literature review and searched public records, mapping GPS coordinates noted in drilling permits. Through this I discovered a grid pattern and could

pinpoint where the next drilling operation would occur. 247 is a drive-by video, created with a mobile phone as I returned home each day, a sort of extended time-lapse. One troubling aspect of the Anthropocene is the knowledge that, no matter how an individu-

al strives to limit waste, there are other forces out-wasting us all. Another tension is that the misuse of resources is so ubiquitous that individuals are always already implicated. Literary theorist Gregory Ulmer, terms such disasters “EmerAgencies.” For

me, it’s fracking, he explained, but for someone else, it might be a superfund site, clear cutting, or mountain-top removal. Through activating the language and form of these catastrophes, one might reclaim some sense of agency and build a response that isn’t just “singing to the birds.”

**It’s important to remark that your work often involves cutting edge technology, such as the augmented reality system that can be worn while walking through a landscape to experience ultraviolet and infrared light. In this sense, your artworks seem to invite the viewers to look inside of what appears to be seen, rather than at its surface. Austrian Art historian Ernst Gombrich once remarked the importance of providing a space for viewers to project onto: how important is it for you to trigger viewers’ imaginations in order to encourage them to elaborate personal interpretations? In particular, how open would you like your works to be understood?**

**Carol LaFayette:** Gombrich’s idea of opening a space is an important part of the work as it takes form for an audience. The best art isn’t work that delivers an epiphany — rather it’s work that stops one’s thinking, or prompts one to think differently. While I want to engage an audience, putting that impulse first seems to have the effect of deadening the work by positioning it as interpreter for an experience, before I know what that might be.

As predicted by Moore’s Law, growth of computing power and speed has been exponential. Ray Kurzweill and others point to a hypothetical future moment when technolo-

gy and computing power will become irreversible and uncontrollable. Historically, technology's growth has been propelled by the US military and by supersized corporations. Artists and others who use digital technology are, for the most part, repurposing old tech, while computing that involves ultra-sophisticated systems (AI, for example) is out of most artists' reach at the time of its development. This inability to affect development of systems that might play a large future role in our lives occurs alongside community devastation by development and extraction industries. I've become enamored with open source groups that share data and code, and also with citizen science groups that organize virtual and physical communities to report on the effects of such operations. These groups demystify technology, make it participatory and fun.

**You are an established artist: your artworks are collected in several museums —including Museum of Modern Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, The Getty Center and Art Metropole — and over the years you have had solo and group shows in the United States and abroad, including your participation in Balance-Unbalance, in Plymouth: how do you consider the participatory nature of your relationship with your audience? Direct relationship with the audience in a physical way is definitely the most important one, in order to snatch the spirit of a work of Art. However, as the move of Art from traditional gallery spaces to the street and especially to the online realm increases: in your opinion how would this change the relationship with a globalised audience?**



Still from *247*, drive-by video, 2014

**Carol LaFayette:** In general I've observed a shift from what's called "personal expression" to a paradigm that involves shared experiences, tools for others to use, and open source works. This kind of art explodes paradigms — there's an enormous outpouring

of energy. In my lifetime there has been a transition from broadcasting (fewer sources, larger audiences) to narrowcasting (many sources, smaller audiences, shifting audiences). A work that is successful in one arena may go ignored in another, and that's okay. Works

can be repurposed for different results. Systems and tools used to develop projects can be shared for different purposes. I recently had the honor to host a visit to Texas by Dutch artist Theo Jansen, who studied physics and then began to make Strandbeests,



Still from **247**, drive-by video, 2014

beach-walking creatures powered only by the wind. Jansen realized he'd birthed a new form of life, because people were starting to 3D print Strandbeests from models shared on the internet. Strandbeests are evolving out of his personal control. This fills him with joy.

**We have really appreciated the originality of your artistic production and before leaving this stimulating conversation we would like to thank you for chatting with us and for sharing your thoughts, Carol. What projects are you currently working on, and what are some of**

**the ideas that you hope to explore in the future?**

**Carol LaFayette:** I've begun to experiment with augmented reality and robotics. I'm working on a walking hexapod that can filter

out visible light to show you how things might appear in near-ultraviolet and infrared spectrums combined. I'm starting with toy hexapods so I can learn how to build, power, and program them with the goal to accompany a Trossen Robotics PhantomX on a walk through the woods. They're beautiful, they can right themselves from a fall in an instant. Another thread I've worked on for years is the challenge of interrogating local environments in easy and affordable ways. Many of us wonder about our air, water, or soil quality. But it seems most available systems are very expensive, or require a lot of time to study and understand technology, chemistry, and other things. Things are changing too fast for that. I'm inspired by groups such as [PublicLab.org](http://PublicLab.org) and [SkyTruth.org](http://SkyTruth.org). Such groups offer translation from complex to accessible forms of knowledge, data aggregation from participants, and guides for collective intervention. Then there are solutions that come from other fields. I came across a horticultural group in the UK that takes groups on field studies of lichens. Depending on the species of lichen observed, one can learn about changes in air quality that have happened in recent weeks or months. You just need your feet and the field guide. I don't yet know how this might become art or whether it matters, but I'm interested to learn.

*An interview by **Dario Rutigliano**, curator and **Melissa C. Hilborn**, curator*  
[arthabens.biennale@europa.com](mailto:arthabens.biennale@europa.com)