

ARTslant



The Peaks Only I Can See: Rachel Garrard
by Himali Singh Soin

The Vitruvian Man looks, on one hand, like an anatomical drawing of weight and balance, and on the other, like a tree, a constellation, a system of before and after, a ladder or a scale. The criss-crossing lines perhaps allude to earthly entanglements and the elusiveness of total symmetry. Like the drawing, its analysis might be equally simple and complex.

It is no wonder then, that Da Vinci is one of Rachel Garrard's influences. In her art, the human body and mind and the unseeable unknown become a microcosm of the universe. Garrard's pigments pulse with the pressure of all of its parts at once. In *Invisible Structures*, she draws a series of ten imaginary cosmologies, geometric diagrams, with gold ink over black and white photographs of her body. The title implies that the drawings are almost inevitable, simply X-ray exposures of what might already exist. The gold acts as the sun, an object and idea of reverence in the Mayan cultures, one of the many sources of her inspiration. The use of her own body, of the female form within the male structures of mathematics, is a formal insistence on multiple perspectives.

Garrard says:

They are inspired by the ancient idea that the body contains within its proportions all the geometric and geodesic measures in the universe, and many cultures have depicted maps of the universe inside a human form (often female). My maps are inspired conceptually by these historical references, but entirely made up through my own imagination and intuition.

The artist's influences span Einstein and the Dalai Lama. Garrard quotes Anselm Keifer: "I'm interested in reconstructing symbols. It's about connecting with an older knowledge and trying to discover continuities in why we search for heaven." She traveled to Central and South America, collecting rocks and grinding them into powder that became pigment. The result is the opposite of landscape. It comprises the hard corners of human intelligence, geometry overlain in several hues such that the paintings seem to move, to elude, to bear breath of their own.



Rachel Garrard, *Spark*, 2015, rock powder pigment on linen, 22 x 24 inches

Her series of eleven paintings, *The Peaks Only I Can See*, utilizes ash from the fire of a Temazcal ceremony in the Yucatán region of Mexico, in which lava rocks are heated inside a dome-shaped Temazcal, or sweat lodge, a kind of holistic curative sauna. The paintings are a series of triangles both in harmony and in opposition to each other. They evoke imagery from ancient cosmological drawings and refer to the avant-garde machines of geometric abstraction and futurism but contain an immediacy that counters any impulse to historicize. Here, everything exists at once. The titles enhance a feeling of movement by providing a sense of narrative: *Follow > Reach > Entrance > Hollow > Nave > Inside > Draw > Ascent > Precipitate*. These words might imply the literal process of traveling from the ceremony to the culmination of the artwork, or might be read as a process of inner upheaval, a re-directioning, a transcendental moment and a re-emergence into a reality as she never knew it.

Condensations utilizes quartz and powdered ash to recreate the earthly drama of light and shadow, form and fluid. *Condensations* is also imbued with process: the travel, the collection of minerals, the grinding, the watering down, painting, washing, drying. It is precise and arbitrary, delicate and dangerous. The ash, after all, has emerged from fire, the quartz from silicon. In this subtle symbolism is a reference to inward process, a search for materials, a drawing. Garrard explains, “They convey energy and the dynamic integration of opposites, light and shadow, male and female, manifest and un-manifest.”

Like *The Peaks Only I Can See*, the works in *Condensations* contain a reference to a spiritual journey of a consciousness trying to navigate the systems and speed of modernity. The titles progress similarly: *Refraction > Inset > Influx > Convergence > Junction > Succession > Solidify > Reflect > Parallax > Cumulate > Pierce*. Here, the easy pattern breaks and the words play between independent phenomena and voluntary action. The titles are waves of hard and soft consonants shoring up against each other, skewing their own perception, altering meaning, accumulating impressions like the idea of parallax itself.

There is a sense in Rachel Garrard’s work that it is about everything, occurring at the same time, everywhere. It is internal and external, dark and light, it is feminine and masculine, organic and synthetic, large and small, bright and anodyne, personal and universal, invisible and omnipresent. But more than this dance of dualities, is the uninterrupted in-between: the process, the medium, multiplicity. Garrard quotes Buddhist Thinley Norbu: “Any substance that comes into existence is already perishing, all substance is continually beginning and ending within each instance.”

Her art is anatomical and topographical at once. Its analysis is equally simple and complex.

—[Himali Singh Soin](#)

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