



Susan Silton, *We See It Differently, You and I, 2020*, photo intaglio print on paper, 14½ × 18". From the sixteen-part suite *We See It Differently, You and I, 2020*.

temporalities existed multiple possibilities of dialogic understanding, each contingent upon the subject as well as conditioned by the terms of the last encounter. In this framework, “We” likewise extends an earlier work from 2010 that also reads *WE SEE IT DIFFERENTLY, YOU AND I*, its language running atop a photographic diptych of a red-desert landscape, which is actually a Hollywood-style stage prop. Exposing a long and interrogative process, the newer iterations in the show reveal the changing dialogical contexts of the work. Also, the ‘we’ here remains as presumptuous in its address as it is uncertain in its interpolative claim (sentience might extend to the trees). The point seems to be one of discrepancy rather than a fusion of perspective.

Accompanying Silton’s portfolio was a short story by Dana Johnson, “Later and Later, Longer than Ever.” The text was printed and hung in nearly matching frames and existed in some oblique relation to the forest scenes that the writer saw in progress (and on which she reflected to generate her text). Johnson and Silton read the story aloud together—Johnson first and then Silton—on the last weekend of the exhibition, performing the particularity of differences manifest in its content, here embodied in the pair’s vocalization and also in their delivery. As punctual as this occasion was, “We” spilled out from itself. The Armstrong Redwoods reserve has been closed since the massive Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit Lightning Complex fire incinerated it in 2020. Like Zoe Leonard’s documentary photo project *Analogue 1998–2009*, a meditation on the coalescence of the anachronism of technology and the world it is used to represent, Silton’s scorched-earth subject matter draws equivalencies to the cessation of the material used to picture it, since the production of Solarplates has halted, if only temporarily. The whole thing is elegiac, absent of solace. While making her show, Silton also organized MAYDAY! MAYDAY! MAYDAY!, a living memorial to those dead from Covid-19, in the form of a letter-writing campaign featuring the handwritten names of the deceased and aimed at then-president Donald Trump. It existed aside from “We,” but was still right there.

—Suzanne Hudson

## KLEINBURG, CANADA

### Jon Sasaki

McMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

For nearly two decades, Jon Sasaki’s Conceptualist project—via sculpture, drawing, photography, video, performance, and installation—

has deconstructed and satirized traditional genres of artmaking in impressively inventive ways. Periodically focused on landscape, the artist often exhibits apparent affection for his subjects and themes. Eschewing fully dematerialized strategies and cynical one-liners, Sasaki is a rigorous practitioner of reskilling and enthusiastically embraces “wrong” uses of technology while systematically exploring unconventional materials.

Sasaki’s show at the McMichael—a site of determined dedication to the canon of Canadian landscape art for more than fifty years—reflected the institution’s intensifying interest in offering insightful and self-reflexive critiques from diverse perspectives. Organized by chief curator Sarah Milroy, the exhibition featured *Homage, 2020–21*, a suite of eight large-scale photographs. Each of Sasaki’s striking images is the product of an exacting (and sometimes repugnant) procedure with a forensic bent: Working with one of the museum’s conservators, Sasaki swabbed pigments found on palettes and brushes used by Tom Thomson and members of the Group of Seven—artifacts housed at the McMichael—and then combined the samples with an agar solution in a petri dish. The artist managed to activate microbes that had been dormant for more than a century, allowing the mixture to ripen (and stink) over a few days like a fine cheese before capturing and enlarging the image in high-res detail. *Microbes Swabbed from a Palette Used by F.H. Varley, 2020*, for instance, depicts a wondrous terrain occupied by vivid yellow spots, prominent pink amoebic forms, and icy-white expanses that appear to compete and encroach upon one another. Indeed, the scene qualifies as an abstracted and alluring outdoor winter tableau. With its literally toxic content, this multihued and microscopic material may be read metaphorically as signifying the unseen damage inflicted by ideas of colonialist “progress,” such as expansionism and extraction of resources.

*Microbes Swabbed from a Palette Used by Tom Thomson, 2020*, offers up a soupy mixture of rice-like bits, diaphanous shards, and opaque geological-looking shapes with concentric lines alongside a relatively large, black, and ominous form, made from a multitude of minuscule granules. The sense of drama and extraordinary diversity of textures, shapes, and hues in these images recalls Surrealist mindscapes such as André Masson’s painting *Battle of Fishes, 1926*. In addition, Sasaki’s pictures carry (anti)aesthetic qualities that are in dialogue with various Conceptualist histories, including absurdist projects that depict unusual artistic materials, such as Ed Ruscha’s portfolio *Stains, 1969*—deftly crafted works on paper treated with traces of animal, vegetable, mineral, and chemical material—or those “rigorously” exploring phenomena invisible to human eyes, such as Robert Barry’s “Inert Gas” series of photographs from 1969.

In the end, *Homage* expresses a profound sense of ambivalence toward landscape art as a spiritual and epistemological outlet. Although their chromatic and textural patterns were never meant to offer intelligible or aesthetic signification for our species, the works can still be consumed as a stunningly beautiful species of modernist abstraction. Sasaki’s “cultured” and “blooming” moldscape provoke much fruitful and metaphorical speculation, performing semantic shifts between the interconnected ecosystems of art, science, and nature.

—Dan Adler



Jon Sasaki, *Microbes Swabbed from a Palette Used by F.H. Varley, 2020*, ink-jet print, 36 × 36". From the eight-part suite *Homage, 2020–21*.