

# DAVID B SMITH GALLERY

Gregory Euclide  
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David B. Smith Gallery  
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Exhibition Essay by Leanne Haase Goebel

Gregory Euclide is an outsider. An observer. Whether walking in the woods, or driving across country, he pays attention to the minutiae. Important details become part of his art. Since his last solo exhibition at David B. Smith Gallery, his work has branched out into objects that are similar yet diverse. He's created large installations for New York's Museum of Arts and Design and Denver's Biennial of the Americas. He also produced an album cover for Bon Iver, has been featured at the PULSE Art Fair, and continues to broaden his studio practice creating 3-dimensional works on paper, sculpture, captures, and video. Euclide is pushing the boundaries of the way he thinks about the land, and how it's used.

"The message hasn't changed," Euclide said. "But it's a little fractured. The *Captures* deal with something very different than the *Take it with you* pieces. Such drastically different approaches address something that is real, nuanced of the entire, overall issue."

Euclide's nuanced objects are rooted in the expansive history of landscape painting, which is evidenced, but then transformed by the artist. In Euclide's studio work — installations, captures, and sculptures — we see references to the 15th century painting by Albrecht Dürer, *Pond in the Woods*, one of the earliest examples of pure landscape painting, in which the landscape is the subject and not just the setting. However, Euclide's works have more in common with shan shui, the Chinese ink painting tradition, in which the only sign of human life may be the well-hidden hut of a sage. Euclide never includes human forms in his work, but often renders the architecture of humans, the structures and buildings that represent our existence. These are painted in the tradition of precisionist Charles Sheeler. Yet there is also something transcendental and mystic in Euclide's work, similar to that found in Charles Burchfield's paintings. In the end, they seem flourished, baroque, and often

like the kitschy house-in-the-woods paintings that every grandma has hanging in her living room.

But not.

Euclide's objects embrace the political aspects of landscape painting as well. He crumples and cuts up the romantic notions, exposing them as illusion. He adds the trash, the Styrofoam, the cigarette butts, and more that defile the natural world. The objects demand that the viewer move within the artificial landscape in order to see everything, to shift perspective. Euclide is mindful of the land, the landscape, nature as a dynamic system of which we are all a part. He is pointing out that we cannot escape thousands of years of iconic imagery of sunsets, lakes, rivers, mountains, and seascapes that we have been shown and told are beautiful, scenic, important. In Euclide's video work, on display for the first time in this exhibition, the artist has strapped a camera to his chest, recording these iconic vistas as his breath causes the viewfinder to rise and fall. The technique is simple, the idea complex. Euclide wants us to question how a culture can value a fuschia-red sunset, a majestic mountain peak, or a sparse, spatial coastline, and yet, at the same time, remain oblivious to how our daily actions result in the destruction of these locations.

In nature, Euclide believes that we can't help but respond emotionally with our bodies. But he wants viewers to be knowledgeable, self-aware, and to understand why they react to a brook or vista. "Part of my work is about my inability to escape the conflicting thoughts surrounding something as simple as viewing a river valley at a scenic turnout. Someone told you this was where you were supposed to stop and look. You're in a car. That car came on a road that was gouged into the side of a mountain. All of these things that allow for the view are complicated and political. But there's still this emotional pull of the view. Sword of Damocles."

The imminent peril is evident in his compositions, which are drawn, painted, crumpled, discarded, recovered, reused, constructed as multi-layered. They are a flowing mess of tiny scenes and diagrams brandished with embellishment and details. He cuts through the striations to probe the oxymoron of our human appreciation for landscape and our daily destruction of that landscape.

His objects are dense. A combination of turning organic matter into formalist art materials, finding things decaying in the forest, taking them apart and embedding them in an object. A blade of grass becomes a tree, a pinecone is peeled apart and its petals become layers of soil. The components of making a work of art are like memory. Moments of time. Euclide tries to transform the art experience into something akin to a story. Something akin to a journey that one might have in a wood, alone and observing.