

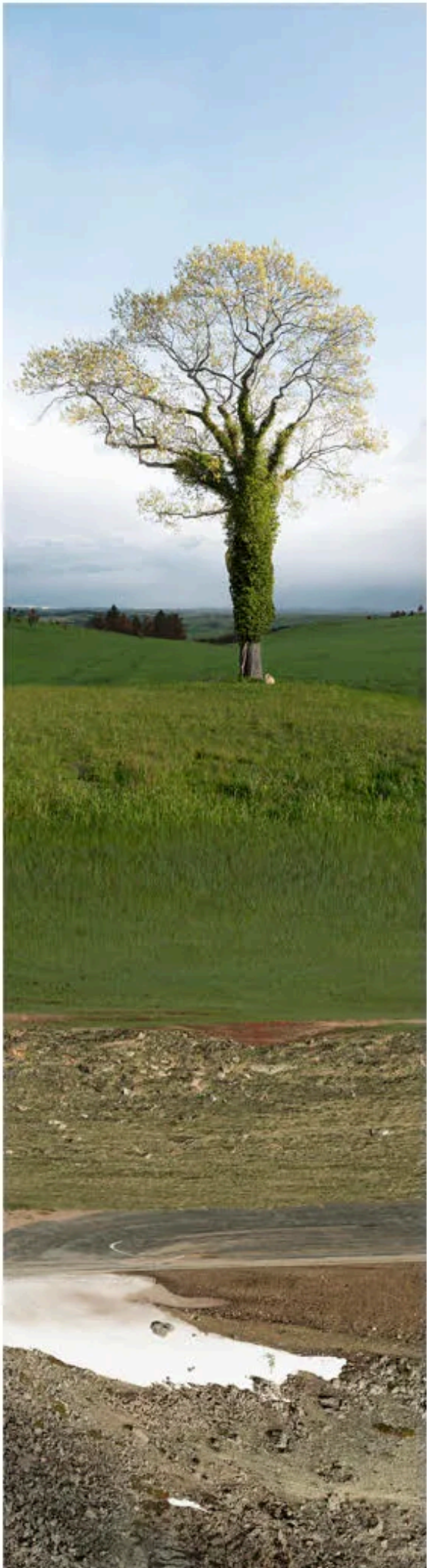
Art Weekend

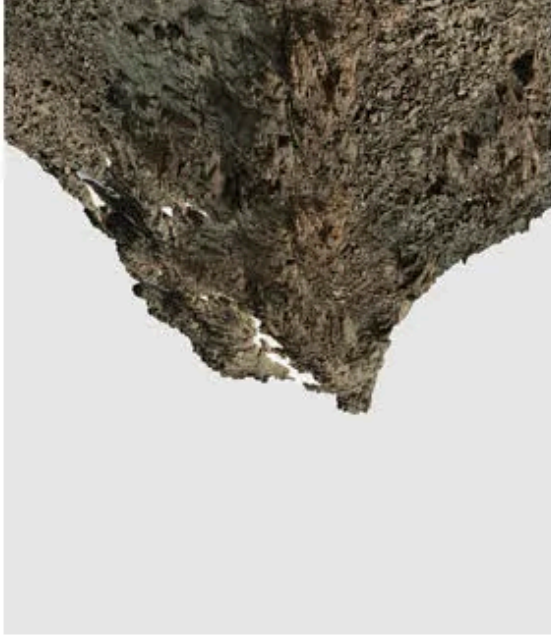
## Mary Mattingly Confronts Climate Change With Utopic Resourcefulness

Mattingly's landscape photographs evoke each site's geologic timeline.



Louis Bury December 19, 2020





Mary Mattingly, "Rematriation" (2020), chromogenic dye coupler print, 72 x 18 inches, edition of 7, 2 APs, For the Green Belt Movement, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai. Maathai received the Nobel for leading an effort to plant 30 million trees in Africa, that has led people to do similar work around the world (all images © Mary Mattingly, courtesy Robert Mann Gallery)

In Mary Mattingly's ruminative exhibition at Robert Mann Gallery, *Pipelines and Permafrost*, photographic landscapes hang from the walls like scrolls. Their elongated portrait orientations (ranging in size from 44 by 14 to 82 by 24 inches) were inspired by the narrow cylindrical lengths and sedimentary layers of core samples. Each image depicts a fictional composite of an actual site, in which three or more landscape photographs have been stacked atop one another and spliced together to form a stratified column of earth and sky. The columns are intended to evoke — imaginatively rather than literally — the site's geological timeline. In most cases, one of the stacked photographs is upside down, underscoring the work's artifice.

Across her celebrated, manifold oeuvre, Mattingly confronts anthropogenic climate change with a utopic sense of resourcefulness (such as *Swale*, 2016-ongoing, a barge for growing and giving away food on New York City's waterways) leavened by gritty Surrealism (such as *House and Universe*, 2013, photographs of the artist's belongings clumped into boulder-sized bundles). Thus it's no surprise that her latest series documents imperiled landscapes with a fantastical twist. What's less expected is that the aesthetic and contextual defamiliarization that animates much of Mattingly's work is, in this series, a touch subdued. Her columnar landscapes exude a geologic calm, gently askew, that feels something like the wisdom of accepting what one has the power to change and also what one doesn't.



Mary Mattingly, "The Gualcarque River" (2020), chromogenic dye coupler print, 72 x 18 inches, edition of 7, 2 APs, For Berta Cáceres, her daughter, and their work continuing the fight against the Agua Zarca dam along the Gualcarque River in western Honduras on territory inhabited by the indigenous Lenca Peoples

In "Desire Lines" (2020), for example, the borders of several landscape photographs blend together to form belts of textured color. The sections of crystalline sky, grassy sand, and snowy mountains conjure a placid sense of deep time. Yet inverted sand dunes create an illusionistic sense of slight disturbance, as if the image's sandy section was floating in the sky above the mountains. "The Gualcarque River" (2020) turns on a similar dynamic. A full moon hovers above a serene, pitch black river, while the column's bottom third depicts a daytime, upside down shoreline whose flipped trees look like plant roots surreally growing out of the moonlit darkness.

The artworks' pronounced portrait orientations also have a defamiliarizing effect. Even though most of their constituent photographs are shot in landscape orientation, the composite images' narrow, vertical format makes it seem as though they're cross-sections, rather than expanses, of terrain. This format not only contributes to their core sample effect but also lends the prints an imposing presence and exaggerated depth of field. However, any sense of depth is complicated by the incorporation of inverted elements and multiple horizon lines, both of which interrupt the column's thematic and visual continuity from foreground to background.



Mary Mattingly, "A Controlled Burn" (2020), chromogenic dye coupler print, 60 x 18 inches, edition of 7, 2 APs, For the stewards of traditional ecological knowledge that have worked for generations promoting healthy forest growth with controlled fire application

For all their jigsaw intricacies, the composite images possess an air of tranquility; their puzzle pieces may not fit together seamlessly, but the incongruities feel deliberately minor in the scheme of things. "Controlled Burn" (2020), for instance, depicts a planned forest fire whose magmatic hues stand out from the image's muted color palette. Yet the fire comprises a mere sliver of the larger image and is safely confined to the smoky forest's edge, while the gauzy stretches of sky above and snow below evoke a sense of vast calm. Mattingly's landscapes take the literal and figurative long view of their own environmental modifications.

When it comes to climate change, taking the long view can easily lapse into resignation akin to what philosopher Eugene Thacker calls "cosmic pessimism." But Mattingly maintains faith in the capacity of both individuals and communities to confront the problem's magnitude in the modest ways available to them. This faith comes across, with grace, in the dedications that accompany each artwork in the exhibition checklist. "For Neetsa'ii Gwich'in elder Sarah James," reads the dedication to "Pipelines Crossing Permafrost" (2020), an image in which the titular pipeline resembles a jagged fault line on an icy moon, "and the fight against oil development in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." Perhaps because that fight promises to be so long and distressing, Mattingly's artistic worlds leave little room for dwelling in counterproductive despair.

**Mary Mattingly: Pipelines and Permafrost** *continues at Robert Mann Gallery (14 E 80th St Penthouse, Upper East Side, New York) through December 31.*

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