

Michele Lauriat  
artist statement

My drawings deal with the irreducibility of place. Our ability to see a place fully is limited by both the mechanics of our eyes, and the intrusion of our mind. Rationally, we have expectations about what will be in a space, and memories of similar places that mingle with our real time perception, never really allowing an unbiased observation. Visually, our eyes take in an endless string of images that enable us to recalibrate our perspective. Our eyes shift focus from near to far, register the periphery, and manage our footing, all without deliberation. I find that trying to be aware of the mechanics of looking is akin to thinking about how to walk – it is the focus on small bits of information that causes one to stumble. I am interested in the line between questioning information's accuracy, and accepting its inherent flaws.

My drawings are quite large. They tower over me as I work and often envelop me when I move them. Although they are landscapes, my images are not vistas, as I seldom experience a vista. My ideas about nature are much more dwarfing. When I was young my family went camping often. For a while we had a VW camper, bright orange. I slept in the storage compartment that snapped to the ceiling of the van. Tiny and suspended, I fell asleep each night very aware of the massiveness outside. Meanwhile our days were all about the details: fishing, swimming, foraging, and exploring. Our bait for fishing was nightcrawlers, dug up from our backyard after an evening rain. Collecting worms by flashlight in our suburban backyard reminded us of the vastness we experienced while camping, despite the fact that our noses were practically in the dirt. It is those moments, when the immensity and detail become inseparable - that I seek in my drawings.

I work from landscapes that I have a personal connection to, and a fractured understanding of. I am interested in the paradox of trying to observe these places in full detail, without reducing them. My focus lately has been on Phil's Hill, a mountain in New Hampshire unofficially named for my father. Phil's Hill is my father's hunting grounds, and therefore a main source of food and legend in my young life. Over the past year my father has taken me to Phil's Hill several times to collect source material (photos, drawings, and the stories he tells me). In the studio I work in a variety of water-soluble media, pencil, and collage on paper. I represent the sprawling parts of Phil's Hill with pattern, line, and shape. These parts float to the surface of my drawings, and then fade away, allowing the dominant contour of the landscape to transform as it is viewed. I use layering to allow one set of marks to come forward, be the center of attention for a moment, and then dissipate as another set of marks moves to the foreground. This creates a shifting and disorienting landscape that the viewer is never quite able to pin down.