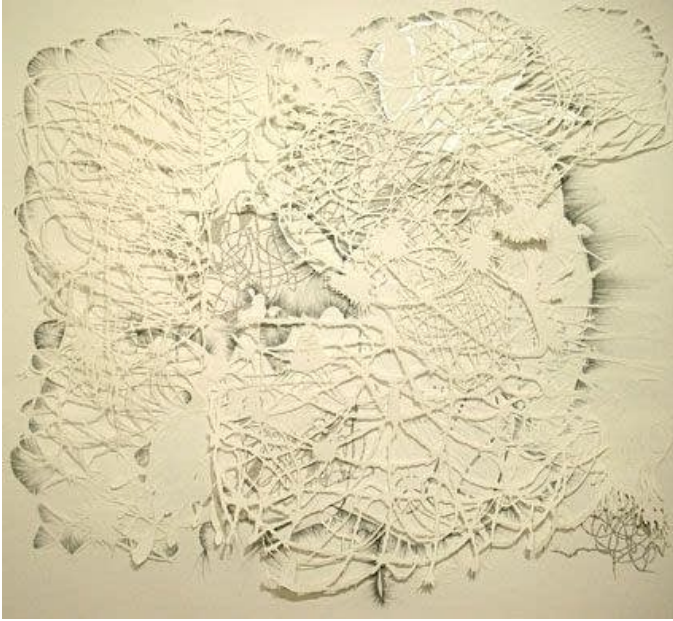


State of the Arts Blog

Cutting away at our nature

Marianne Combs May 14, 2010 4:36 AM



[image]

Reinvention, Sonja Peterson, 2010, 54"x54", graphite, aluminum leaf, newsprint & paper

When [Sonja Peterson](#) reads the economic news, she's reminded of the explorers of the romantic age, and their frenzied quests to conquer the wild unknown.

“ In the Wall Street shake-down we saw this drive for profit through creating more and more complex stocks and bonds that get us lost. In the age of romanticism, nature was once wild and endless. Now it's contained, whereas Wall street is the wild frontier that can't be reigned in. ”

[image]

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Reinvention, detail

Peterson's current exhibition, which opens tomorrow at the Burnet Gallery at Le Meridien Chambers Hotel in Minneapolis, explores this connection between untamed nature and the wilds of Wall Street. In her intensely detailed paper cuts, exotic trees stand next to skyscrapers, while businessmen with briefcases navigate the vines alongside monkeys and cranes. In the shadows of the jungle lie stock reports and Dow Jones averages.

Mungo's Query 2

It might seem irrationally romantic to equate today's financial wheelers and dealers with the great thinkers of the romantic age, but in reading about the lives of people like [Joseph Banks](#) and [Mungo Park](#), Peterson sees a similar madness in their passion for discovery.

“ It was a time when explorers, scientists and poets worked together, excited about studying and unlocking the secrets of nature. They were very excited about "the world beyond." Nature was endless and wild to them. Yet they were all drawn into these perilous journeys, looking out and beyond, and they were obsessed, they had this insane drive. ”

Shadow of the Pleasuredome

Peterson uses etched glass to convey the confusing layers in today's untamed forest of of speculations and

investments. Lights shining on the glass reveal shadows which make it difficult to determine what is real, and what is just a trick of the eye. So it is when we try to shine a light on the truth behind [collateralized debt obligations](#) and [credit default swaps](#).

“ Systems have grown so complex in our technological world that its hard to understand them. That's why I'm interested in light and shadows. Because something may be presented in a way that seems clear and simple, but the truth behind it is much darker and more complex. And it's hard to understand the truth when you see all the layers underneath. ”

While the beauty and intricacy of Peterson's work draws in the viewer's eyes, upon closer inspection it reveals an unsettling relationship between man and nature. Peterson says she's always looking at the ever-shifting boundaries between nature and technology.

“ We're heading toward a "post-natural" world. We are managers of nature now, containing nature in parks, giving nature boundaries, ordering nature to do what we want or need. ”

Peterson's observations make me wonder, will we ever have such control over our economy?

Sonja Peterson's group of works, "Second Nature," is on display at the [Burnet Gallery](#) in the Le Meridien Chambers Hotel in Minneapolis starting tomorrow (May 15) through July 11, with an opening reception from 6-9pm Saturday night.

Interested in learning more about the inspiration for Peterson's work? One of her primary sources was Richard Holmes' [The Age of Wonder](#).

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