Do You Really Experience Nature?
What if our notion of nature is specified through its representations and not through nature itself? Our perception of nature may not be about nature, but about the way other people want us to experience it—like a consumable object.

For a long time I’ve been interested in how media prescribes the way we should understand places or experiences through the containment of an image. I want to look at that image, take it apart, and then add a “delay” to the way we experience it.

Counter Nature
Recently I completed a three-part series titled Counter Nature, which presents encounters with nature as against its cultural construction. The series is also in response to nostalgic visual conventions of landscape and the packaged media images of nature that deactivate our looking and further render nature as a remote concept. Through a series of paintings, painted objects, and photo-transferred cubes, I explored the distance between the embodied experience of nature and its visual representation.

The title, Counter Nature, is a double entendre referring to a site of transactions with nature, as well as contradictions of the natural. In the first two parts of the series, I worked with images of national parks, like Niagara Falls and Hanauma Bay in Hawaii, looking at vantage points outside of the directed encounters. Instead of the commanding falls, for example, I worked with less iconic scenes like the parking lot or the hillside next to the falls.

The third part of Counter Nature focuses on the moment of happenstance created
Counter Nature, a series in three parts:

“Through an orchestration of a shallow, spaceless depth of field with an intensification of brilliant colors in brittle fragments, Park engenders heterotopic landscapes and public spaces that are vividly imaginative and undeniably real.” –Patricia C. Phillips

Counter Nature 1

Counter Nature 2

Counter Nature 3

installation view, Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York, New York (2010)

installation view, Toomey Tourell Fine Art, San Francisco, California (2010)

installation view, Sabina Lee Gallery, Los Angeles, California (2011)

2.5-inch cubes, acrylic and transfer on acrylate (2011)

You’re seeing one image on the top of the cube. When you turn everything around, it prompts you to ask what you’re looking at. It’s a mirror image of the other image, and now you’re suddenly asking yourself which one is the mirror image of the image? It almost becomes a game.
Why this Art?

Even though I grew up in a family of scientists, I became an artist. I was interested in finding the equivalence between things that are categorically very different, like an architectural space and a musical performance or a relationship between two people.

This is the way things percolate for me. Things that are oblique or seemingly extraneous become integral to how I understand something else. Art allows me to observe and think in this way. The studio is also the one place where I can set my own pace. Nobody tells me how long I can spend on something or what its resolution should be.
upon encountering a crowd prior to knowing the exact nature of the event. One day I was passing through Pittsford, New York, and saw a crowd looking at something. It was a moment when everybody was looking. I took the middle ground and the background out of the paintings in this series to focus on that moment and to play with the concept of making the foreground into its own set of spatial distances.

Between the Viewer and the Object
The Counter Nature series includes reverse paintings behind transparent sheets of Plexiglas and polycarbonate, stenciled paintings on Plexiglas cubes, and photo-transferred Plexiglas cubes. I explored geographer Carl Sauer’s notion that any kind of land, whether a national park or a person’s property, are cultural designations by wrapping an image around the cubes. The corners of the painted cubes start to dissolve as the picture plane seems to hover away from the object.

Counter Nature is not about the image. It’s about the behavior of an image, both with other works and with the viewer. In some ways, the work resides somewhere between the viewer and the object. The work becomes most interesting to me when the interaction with it reaches the same kind of cadence as the embodied experience of nature.

Life Informs Art
Having young children, I’m rediscovering developmental toys and find blocks, or cubes, to be inherently perfect. A block can be a discrete object or a part of a whole; I can take a block away from a group, and it is not diminished in any way. This concept of discrete presence happens in art. Working on this scale and in this medium gave me a way to continue my work while I was with my daughter.

Sometimes the mere practicality of life informs the way I work.

Mystery versus Transparency
Sometimes artists like to maintain mystery about their process, but I like revealing or having a certain kind of transparency to the process. The potential that knowing doesn’t simplify the effect of the work is what makes this activity so engaging. I love that people can see the intended image, but they can also see that this is not all they’re supposed to observe. All the unpacking of a certain image through multiple ways of looking at it becomes the work.

Authentic to My Experience
Although I’m a visual artist, I don’t usually remember how things look. Instead, I remember how they make me feel. I work on a piece until it feels authentic to my experience. While working on a painting, a person wearing red or flowers in a landscape may suddenly appear. I did not see the flowers until I painted the hillside, and suddenly I see the flowers there.