

Lucy Mullican: Sensed As Well as Seen

by Clare Gemima
May, 2022



Lucy Mullican, *Through The Clouds*, 2021. Watercolor on board, 12 x 12 inches. Courtesy Olympia, New York.

Mullican's approach to scavenging nature's curio is not unlike James Castle's (1899–1977) artistic handling of human waste and domestic debris. Castle's uniquely sensorial relationship with his environment inspired the making of books, baby carriages, mugs and wallpapers, memorializing objects that once surrounded him, in the form of sculpture. Castle relied on materials found in his immediate surroundings, like old cardboard packaging, discarded textbooks and newsprint to make art, receiving recognition in the early 1950s for his imaginative, multimedia works. Castle's process of applying pigment to water-saturated crêpe paper, like Mullican's direct application of watercolor onto wood, are two processes that wholly surrender to material biology. In *Bodies In The Sky* (2021) a

residual build-up of the paint's expressed minerals cover the wood's surface in a glittery patina, mimicking a glistening seashore. Moments of Castle's stylistic and compositional flair are also present in *Sensed As Well As Seen*, especially in Mullican's more tranquil watercolor pieces like *Map Of The Island*, and *Through The Clouds* (both 2021) that comprise more simplistic forms, reminiscent of Castle's vibrantly-colored soot paintings.

An encyclopedic collection of shoes perch on plinths across the gallery floor, including a pair of vintage Japanese sandals, cast-iron children's shoes, and an out-of-this-world pair of "swamp boots" that Mullican found in Chinatown. The inclusion of shoes from all over the world allude to



VILLA MAGDALENA

the artist's personal dependency on movement and joy in travel. In another material translation, Mullican has extracted pigments from flowers in order to soak strings into its dye. Arranged on a piece of muslin, the once lilac-y and pastel-colored threads have since faded to rustic brown and earthy tones over the course of several years. The idea that natural light was responsible for both the vibrancy of the original pigment, and its active decaying, aligns with the artist's sensitivity to nature's processes, and intention to give back to the environments from which she scavenges.

Inquisitive derivations are depicted in the relationship between the paintings *Home*, and *Home Under The Ground*, both 2021. A grassy green square, outlined in a soil-colored surrounding, presents as a simple abstract composition, signature to Mullican's painterly vocabulary. Hanging below, the artist has expanded the confines of *Home*'s canvas. Illustrated scenes from the earth's water passages, sheltered by a faded field and skyline constitute *Home Under The Ground*'s painted ecosystem, one of earth's many unseeable, but foundational planes.

Sensed As Well As Seen surveys the wide-spanning and wildly interdisciplinary practice of Lucy Mullican, who generously resurrects discarded material, recontextualizes found matter, and borrows earth's elements to create new, and rousing cyclical artworks. By succumbing to her material's temporality, and embracing nature's evanescent effects, the artist's physically active and transient practice mirrors the life-cycle of nature's own organic matter— ever-changing, unpredictable and constantly in flux.



Lucy Mullican, *Home Under The Ground*, 2021. Watercolor on board 10 x 8 inches. Courtesy Olympia, New York.