

THOMAS DANE GALLERY

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Anya Gallaccio: *to see if time was there* at Laguna Gloria

The artist's giant tree stump carved from limestone is a sign that we love ancient things and are part of nature, too

Reviewed By Sam Anderson-Ramos, Fri., June 23, 2017



Anya Gallaccio, to see if time was there, 2017

The artist's giant tree stump carved from limestone is a sign that we love ancient things and are part of nature, too. Anya Gallaccio's *to see if time was there* is a massive tree stump made from Texas limestone and modeled on a specific sequoia tree. The stone is white so that the stump looks like an albino of the species, or a husk, like a discarded snake skin or the dried corpse of a Texas pill bug. Its whiteness also causes the sculpture to stand out, though not in an unnatural way, from the surrounding Laguna Gloria landscape, the greenery of overhanging trees and foliage. The flattened top of the stump is inlaid with a variety of colorful stones – marble, sandstone, soapstone, and quartzite – arranged in a gridlike pattern echoing a distorted chessboard or a painting by Mondrian. The patterns in the stones are characterized by spots, waves, clusters of light and dark, so that the grid also resembles a map of the universe.

From a distance, the surface of the stump has the undulations and variations one might expect from a real tree. However, on closer inspection the hand of the artist is much more clear. The unmistakable seams and furrows of a

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carving tool cover every inch, indicating the meticulous, deliberate formation of the stump from a much larger piece of stone. However, the shape of those markings do not make much sense in stone, at least not to this viewer. Instead, they recall the whittling away of a raw piece of wood, the kinds of scrapings an artist or carpenter would make in the preliminary stages of work. This functions not only as a subtle reference to wood, in the same way the stump and its placement do, but also revives the original life of the limestone, which is as natural and primeval an element as a sequoia's flesh.

Limestone is formed from the remains of ancient marine animals. Suitably, Gallaccio's sculpture is teeming. It has become an ecosystem. I can't think of a better fate for any artwork. If I allow myself to dream far enough into the future, I can picture the Louvre overcome with vines and unruly life, the *Mona Lisa* layered with fungus and crawling with insects having long since invaded its glass cell. Here, Gallaccio has offered up her work, returned it to its rightful place. Giant ants linger over its surface, antennae twirling lazily. Spiny caterpillars advance in slow, minute convulsions. Spiderwebs have formed in caverns and wrinkles. Dirt climbs up from the ground, slowly darkening the stump's pale skin.

"The artist invites viewers to stand, sit, play, or lie on the colorful inlaid surface." I attempted, briefly, to clamber to the top. It seemed crucial to the experience. But my boots slipped on the stump's sides. I had to leave it alone. The insects can go where they want. I cannot.

I would like the sculpture to remain where it is for eternity. I want it to stand as a symbol of defiance long after humanity has destroyed itself. I want it to melt away with the rest of the Earth when the sun expands. According to the California State Parks, the "original coast redwood habitat" covered 2 million acres. Now, old-growth forest covers 118,000 acres. Trees and people die, but even stone is temporary. The committed strokes left behind in the body of the limestone by Gallaccio's tools are signs that we can love ancient things. We are a part of them. We go as they do. We are nature, too.

Anya Gallaccio: *to see if time was there*

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