

Air to Ground

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Ruiz-Healy Art
201-A East Olmos Drive
San Antonio, TX 78212
www.ruizhealyart.com

Constance Lowe's exhibition, *Air to Ground*, consists of highly textural geometric collages that are brilliantly colored and either set against semi-translucent drafting film or presented as shaped panel paintings. A single work's composition often incorporates wool felt, photographs of clouds, peculiarly dyed commercial leathers, and muted passages of acrylic paint and colored pencil. Each collage in the series stands apart from the other in palette, arrangement, and scale, yet they have a kinship in that they all juxtapose traditional and unconventional artistic materials, and share visual and thematic threads.

These works are all part of Lowe's *Garden City* series, 2013 to the present, which, formally and conceptually, evolve from US geological landsat (NASA land satellite) photographs that depict the circle-and-grid-shaped center-pivot irrigation farming patterns that dot the Midwest's landscape. These aerial survey images often code the crop formations in unnatural hues in order to track the agricultural use of water throughout the years, and to document the continual changes to the earth's surface. These human and technological mediations are, in turn, echoed in Lowe's *Garden City* series, yet she pushes, displaces, and layers the flat forms found in the landsat imagery to further abstract the circular, unnatural shapes. While Lowe is hesitant to outline the specific concepts in her work, her interest in the landsat maps reflects her lifelong exploration of various human efforts to understand and tame nature, either through science, psychology, photography, or socio-industry.ⁱ These concerns also elucidate the works' formal compositions and material characteristics, which are two facets of artmaking that are of utmost importance to Lowe. Through the use of exaggeratedly colored natural textiles derived from animal skins, cropped photographs of clouds taken by the artist, and common artist materials, the *Garden City* series explores the intersections of nature and artifice, and underscores how these divisions are becoming progressively ambiguous and, thus, abstracted.

Using the artistic device of geometric abstraction, Lowe's work signals how abstraction underpins almost every aspect of modern life, even in regards to how we instinctually and visually place together organic forms to comprehend nature. This idea is not without art historical precedent. Beginning in the early 20th-century, geometric abstraction was the next rational step after synthetic cubism introduced pictorial flatness, synthesized shapes, and abstract space. Pre-war geometric abstraction was chiefly non-objective and eschewed illusionism and perspective to point to the materiality of painting, and the formal relationships between the composition's different components. Artists continually moved towards even purer iterations of formal abstraction throughout the 20th century, such as the grid and monochrome, and geometric abstraction was overall phased out from the mainstream narrative of post-war abstraction. In the 1980s, artists began coopting geometric abstraction again as a device that, instead of being purely formal, could be coded with meaning. As the American neo-geometric painter Peter Halley stated, he started using geometric abstraction in the 1980s to convey "the increasing geometricization of social space in the world in which we live."ⁱⁱ While Halley's work is

more specific to how the rise of technology has shaped our daily existence, Lowe's use of geometric abstraction parallels his in that she uses it to associate with, and represent aspects of, the physical world, and how we as humans visually code and decode it. On abstraction's increasing role to represent and make sense of life, curator Dan Cameron states, "What we call abstraction is so well understood as a system of signs and symbols and modes of representation that it's really just another kind of representation."ⁱⁱⁱ Through her imagery, Lowe similarly communicates messages and meaning through the visual language of abstraction.

Although science and technology have transformed nature and our comprehension of it, even basic experiences with our natural surroundings exemplify how it is inherently fragmented and generalized to begin with. Such a simple task as understanding "tree" when we see individual, organic shapes that make up its leaves, branches, and trunk, require one to grasp and assume its parts without seeing each specific component and their unique characteristics. While the landsat images are coded, scientific generalizations of crop fields, which Lowe additionally fragments, simplifies, and alters, even experiencing any part of the field on the ground, at human-scale, cannot truly convey each detail or the field's totality, yet we can infer the larger whole.

The materials Lowe combines are visually and texturally disparate fragments on their own, yet are joined together by seemingly effortless and logical forms and shapes. These harmonious non-objective compositions are a result of Lowe's arduous art-making process that includes many stages of formal reconfigurations



Center pivot irrigation, Garden City, Kansas
Photo credit: U.S. Geological Survey, Landsat 7 data acquired 9/25/2000

and visual distancing and distortion of the original landsat images. In *Garden City #4*, 2014, for example, we read two large shapes as circles, which overlap and fill the picture plane. These two primary elements are composed of many segments constructed of varying materials into hard-edge geometric patterns. The components come together visually through gestalt, similarly to how we read a tree in nature, though its parts are unique and abstract. The sections perfectly abut each other like pieces of a puzzle, yet fluctuate in thickness and texture. Some of these fragments are purposely left out, which leaves irregular negative spaces that expose the semi-translucent drafting paper within the composition and create visual pauses for the viewer.

The materials in Lowe's works are often repeated in a balanced pattern. The two finely cut swatches of rust-colored leather in *Garden City #4*, for instance, make up the left and right-hand sides of the top circle; while black-and-white cropped photographs of clouds are situated diagonally from each other. A thick, nearly triangular swatch of tactile lime-green felt partially forms the bottom left-quadrant of the top circle and is in the center of the overall composition. Other geometric forms, such as hard-edged swaths of orange, light yellow, and pale green acrylic paint create the larger, circular shapes that dominate the piece.

Lowe's overall choices for the final composition in *Garden City #4* spatially balance and equalize the handmade and manmade aspects of her work. While the carefully applied paint and colored pencil signal the artist's hand in making these works, she includes the commercially altered natural materials, such as the dyed animal hides and wool felt, to position the works in the physical world.^{iv} However, most of the quotidian materials used in the series exist in a distorted state far from their origins. The rust-colored leather, for example, was taken from a vintage leather skirt that had been dyed and chemically treated so that the material was machine washable, and further achieves the textural effect she wanted to compliment the flatness of the other forms in the collage.

While naturally derived materials are included to plant the works in the tangible world, the most representative of the collaged elements are Lowe's photographs of clouds. Although the photographs illustrate aspects of nature in a rather straight-forward manner, again it is translated through human and mechanical intervention-her decisions to crop and frame the clouds, and the camera. The photographs that appear throughout the *Garden City* series are an intriguing facet of the work, and additionally illustrate the artist's ability to effortlessly tangle the organic and synthetic. While the photographs are clearly representational, at the same time, their cropping disconnects the clouds from place and time; they become illusory passages that confuse and deepen the two-dimensionality of the works, and add an element, according to Lowe, of drama and buoyancy.^v In addition, Lowe's use of representational photography within a largely non-objective artwork complicates the formal divisions of abstraction and representation, and furthers the viewer's experience of flipping from one mode of expression and understanding in their mind, to another.

While the *Garden City* works investigate, as the artist states, the "in-between-ness" amid abstraction/representation and nature/artifice, the title of the series neatly implicates these frictions on its own.^{vi} "Garden" and "city" are two contrasting words that evoke the natural and the urban, but both signal humanity's impact within the world. A "garden," for example, is made up of nature that has been tamed or fully fabricated through human involvement; while "city" implies a built-up urban center that largely consists of inorganic, manmade development. More specifically, Garden City is also a town in Kansas where Lowe's family has roots, and was instrumental in introducing center pivot irrigation to the region. In a serendipitous event, the first geological survey irrigation image Lowe happened upon depicted Garden City, Kansas. "I am intrigued by the name Garden City," as the artist explains, "because-in addition to my family connections to the town-I was interested in the tension heard in the name, as well as the tension between the name and the physical actuality of the windswept agricultural lands which are cultivated (like a garden I suppose) artificially and industrially through irrigation."^{vii}

Lowe's series emphasizes how circular-scarred landscapes and the landsat images depicting such topographies, have essentially become abstracted, yet accepted, versions of nature filtered through human intervention and reclaiming. *Garden City* is the most connected body of work to formal abstraction in Lowe's oeuvre, and the series' furthers her exploration into the many facets of "in-between-ness." Lowe has also created two new panel paintings in the series that relate to the works on paper and combine disparate materials in a similar manner, yet they are amplified in scale. By chiefly using the visual language of non-representation, the collages and paintings all demonstrate how our natural environment and our relationship to it is increasingly abstract.

Alison Hearst is the Assistant Curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth.

- i Constance Lowe in an email to the author, November 14, 2014.
- ii "Peter Halley Biographical Summary," accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.peterhalley.com>.
- iii Dan Cameron, quoted in "'80s Then: Ross Bleckner Talks to Dan Cameron," *Artforum International* 41, no. 7 (March 2003): 231.
- iv Constance Lowe in an email to the author, November 14, 2014.
- v Constance Lowe in a conversation with the author, November 26, 2014.
- vi Ibid.
- vii Constance Lowe in an email to the author, December 8, 2014.



Garden City #3, 2013

acrylic, colored pencil, wool felt, dyed deerskin, inkjet print on Japanese paper on drafting film
23.5 x 23.5"



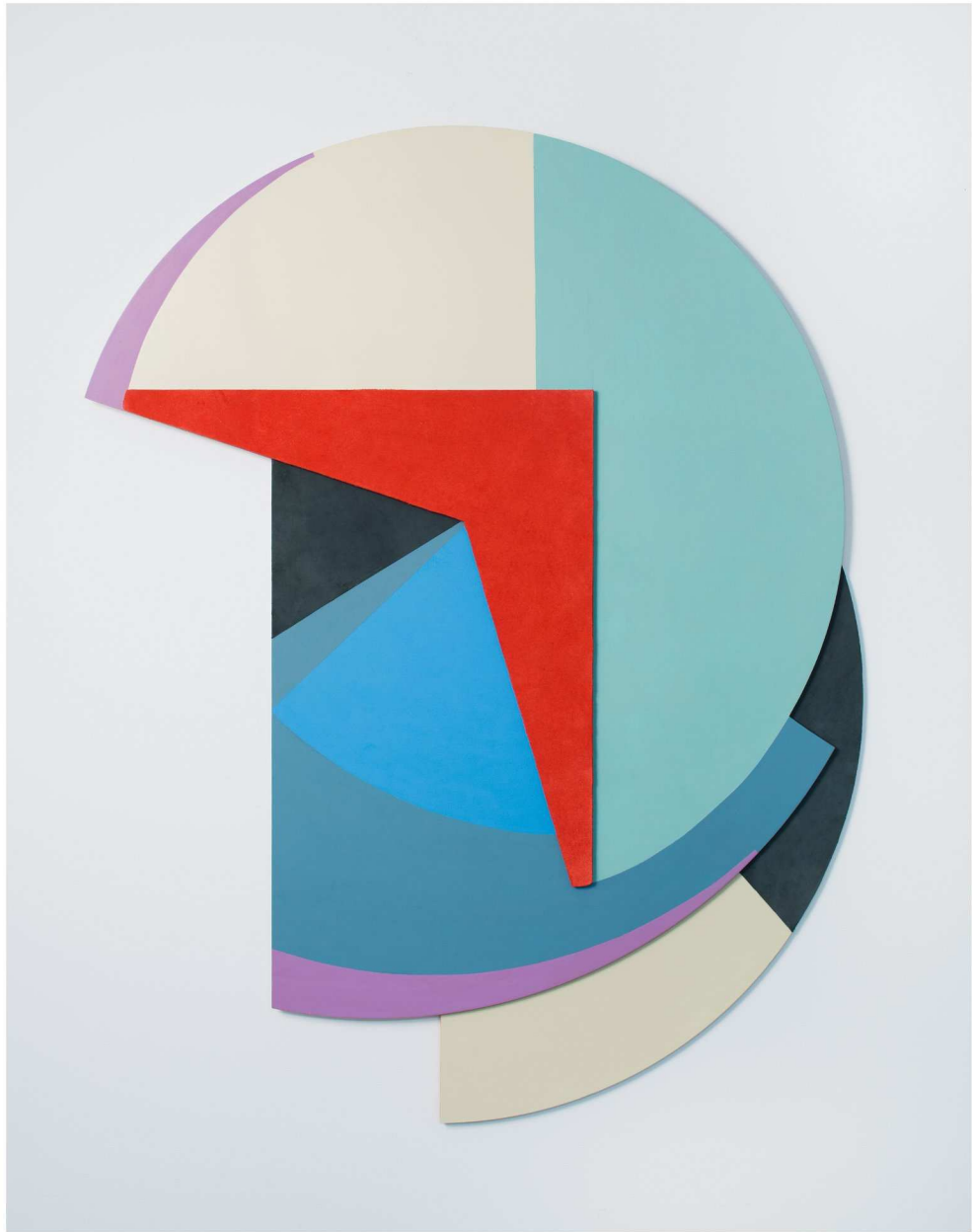
Webb's Bridge: Study 2, 2014
acrylic, colored pencil, wool felt, dyed leather on drafting film
22.5 x 19.5"



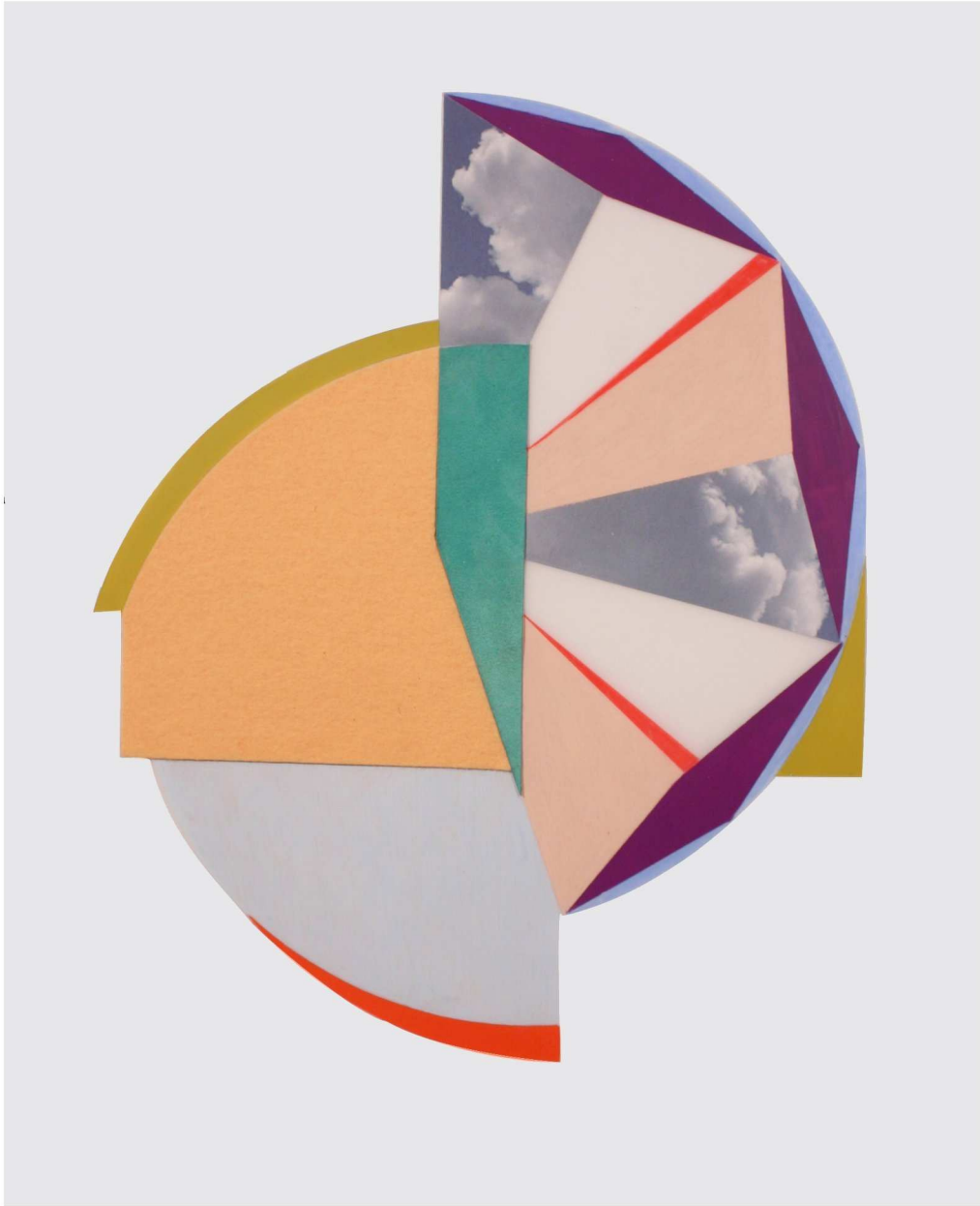
Garden City #4, 2014
mixed media
22.5 x 18.625"



Garden City #2, 2013
mixed media
24 x 19"



SlipShift, 2014
acrylic and leather on mdf
39 x 32"



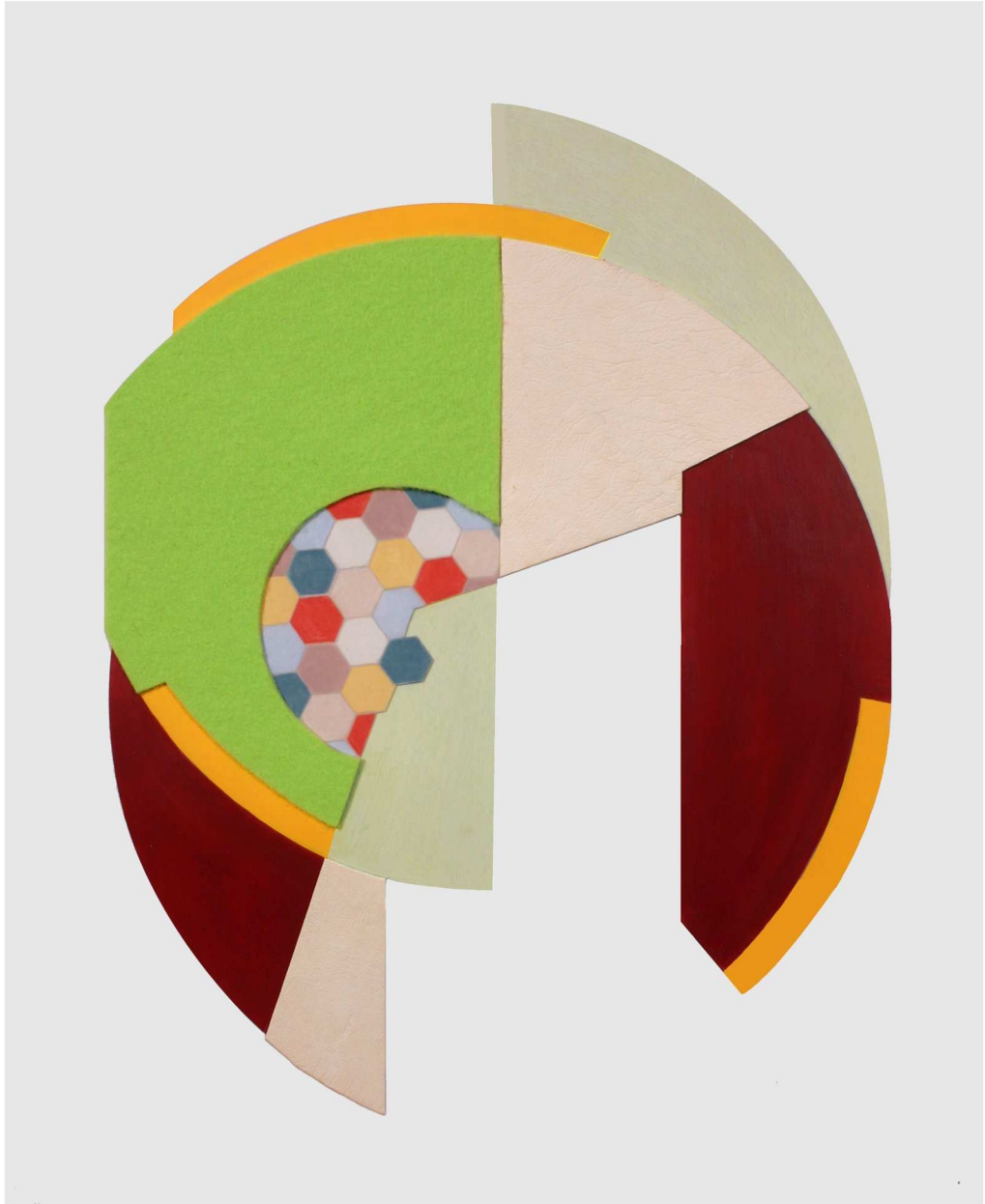
Garden City #6, 2014
mixed media
22.25 x 19.625"



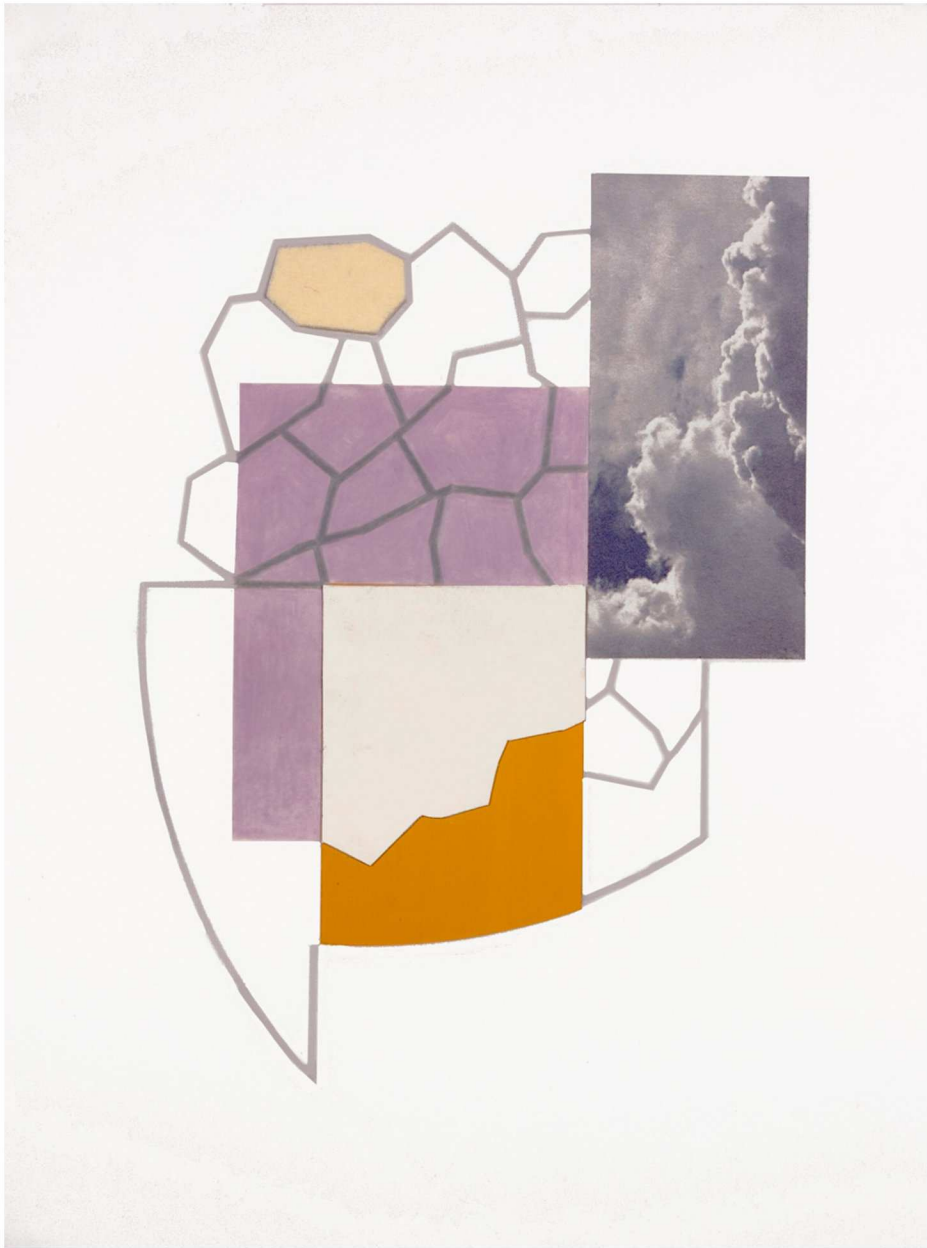
Slip Shift Study (Red), 2014
acrylic, colored pencil, suede leather, wool felt
22.5 x 19.5"



Garden City #5, 2014
mixed media
22.25 x 19.625"



Garden City #7, 2014
mixed media
22.25 x 19.625"



Garden City Study #5 (Soft Cell), 2014
mixed media
20 x 16"



Webb's Bridge: Study 1, 2014
acrylic, colored pencil, wool felt, dyed lambskin on drafting film
22.5 x 19.5"



Garden City #8, 2014

acrylic, wool felt, leather, inkjet print on Japanese paper on drafting film
18.5 x 18.5"



Slip Shift Study (Green), 2014
acrylic, colored pencil, suede leather, wool felt
22.5 x 19.5"

Constance A. Lowe

EDUCATION

- 1986-1987 University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (studies in culture theory and criticism)
1979 Master of Fine Arts, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo
1973 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas

SELECTED SOLO & TWO-PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Air to Ground*. Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas (catalogue)
2012 *(Re)Turn*. Blue Star Contemporary Art, San Antonio, Texas
Constance Lowe: Leap Year. Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas
2008 *Equivocal Topographies*. Richard Hill Rogers Gallery, Southwest School of Art and Craft, San Antonio, Texas (catalogue)
2006 *nether land*. Widener Gallery, Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut (brochure)
2005 *Constance Lowe: Graft*. cactus bra SPACE, San Antonio, Texas
Constance Lowe. Thomas Barry Fine Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota
2004 *Double Vision: Constance Lowe and Alicia Beach*. Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix, Arizona (catalogue)
2000 *NoworNever*. The Project Room, San Antonio, Texas
1999 *striking likeness*. University of North Texas Art Gallery, Denton, Texas
1998 *Colony*. Thomas Barry Fine Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota
striking likeness. "New Works 98.1: Tadashi Kawamata, Glenn Ligon, Constance Lowe," International Artist in Residency Program, ArtPace, San Antonio, Texas (brochure)
1996 *Blankets, Furniture, Painting 1993-96*. Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, Missouri (brochure)
Control of Appearances. Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, Texas
New Material. Milagros Contemporary Art, San Antonio, Texas
Appetite for System and Recent Drawings. Laredo Community College, Laredo, Texas
1995 *Appetite for System*. I Space Gallery, Chicago, Illinois (brochure)
Selected Works from Appetite for System. Thomas Barry Fine Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1994 *Appetite for System*. Rose Amarillo Exhibition Space, San Antonio, Texas (brochure)
1990 *Constance Lowe and Robert Michael Smith: Recent Work*. Anderson and Anderson Gallery, Minneapolis, Minnesota
1989 *Paintings/Objects*. ARC Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
Submerged Circuitry: Virginia Bradley and Constance Lowe. Minnesota Artists Exhibition Program, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota (brochure)

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 Ruiz-Healy Art at INK Miami Art Fair, Miami, Florida
2014 *Sky's the Limit*. Bank of America Central Lobby, Houston, Texas
2013 *Collective Reflection*. Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas
Continuous Change. Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas
2012 *The Long View*. David Shelton Gallery, San Antonio, Texas
2011 *San Antonio Draws*. McNay Art Museum, San Antonio
Ruiz-Healy Art at the Dallas Art Fair, Dallas, Texas
2010 *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960's*. San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas (publication)
2008 *Summer Invitational*. Thomas Barry Fine Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Abstraction. Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas
2007 *All in an Afternoon: Contemporary Drawing*. Monash University, Caulfield, Australia
Visual Directions: Texas. Craighead-Green Gallery, Dallas, Texas
2006 *Blur*. Contemporary Quarterly #3 virtual exhibition at www.contemporaryquarterly.com (catalogue)

- 2005 *Nice to Meet You*. Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, California
Construct: Disclose. Southern Space Project, San Antonio, Texas
- 2004 *The Stray Show, Chicago, Illinois*. cactus bra SPACE, San Antonio
H20: Considering the Hydrosphere. Southwest School of Art and Craft, San Antonio, Texas
- 2002 *Drawing in San Antonio*. McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
Easy as 1,2,3. RC Gallery, San Antonio, Texas
- 2002 *Blue Star Past and Future*. Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
Texas Dialogues: Scenic Overlook. Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
Neo Rococo. University of Texas at San Antonio Art Gallery
Departure/Return. Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
Central Texas Survey. Houston Sculpture 2000 (in conjunction with the International Sculpture Conference) Houston, Texas
- 1998 *A Cool Show (abstract paintings)*. Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, Texas
Collective Visions. San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, Texas
- 1998 *Constance Lowe, Al Souza, and Dan Sutherland*. Fostick-Nelson Gallery, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, Alfred, New York and Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York
a posteriori. charlieuniformtango, Dallas, Texas
Black Eye. Visual Arts and Technology Gallery, San Antonio College, San Antonio, Texas
Ars Botanica. Austin College, Sherman, Texas
- 1997 *Revelation*. Dallas Visual Art Center, Dallas, Texas (catalogue)
2nd Texas Annual Exhibition. Contemporary Art Center of Ft. Worth, Texas
ABC Exhibition (Advisory Board Chooses). Diverse Works, Houston, Texas
- 1995 *Blue Star Ten*. Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
Made in San Antonio. Dowd Art Gallery, State University of New York College at Cortland
- 1994 *Accumulated Evidence: Drawings by Jesse Amado, Meg Langhorne, Constance Lowe and Dan Sutherland*. Visual Arts & Technology Gallery, San Antonio College. San Antonio, Texas
Invitational Sculpture Exhibition. Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas
Putting It On Paper. McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas
- 1992 *Blue Star Seven (+7)*. Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
Six Yaddo Artists. Smithtown Township Arts Council, St. James, New York
Baja Tejas: South Texas Artists - Works on Paper. Peruvian/American Cultural Institute, Lima (Miraflores), Peru
- 1990 *Working on Paper: Contemporary American Drawings*. High Museum at Georgia-Pacific Center, Atlanta, Georgia (catalogue)

PUBLICATIONS

- Colpitt, Frances. *Double Vision: Constance Lowe and Alicia Beach*, Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 2004
- Cuba, Nan and Riley Robinson, eds. *Art at Our Doorstep: San Antonio Writers + Artists*. (Images) San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2008
- Hearst Alison, *Air to Ground*. San Antonio: Ruiz-Healy Art, 2015
- Lowe, Constance. *In and Out of Bounds*. *ArtLies*, November 2003 (feature article and cover illustration)
- Rubin, David, ed. *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art since the 1960s*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010
- Ryan, Dinah. *Equivocal Topographies*. San Antonio: Southwest School of Art, 2008

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arning, Bill. "Striking Likeness," *New Works* 98.1: *Tadashi Kawamata, Glenn Ligon, Constance Lowe*, ArtPace, San Antonio, Texas, 1998.
- Colpitt, Frances. *Contemporary Art Month, San Antonio, Texas* CIRCA Fall 1995, p.43 (illustration)
- Connors, Thomas. *Chicago (Damien Hirst, Nancy Rubins, Constance Lowe) Sculpture*
- Freeman, David McCall. *Collective Visions: San Antonio Museum of Art, Artlies*, Fall 1998 (illustration)
- Goddard, Dan. *Striking Visions: 'New Works' Begins a New Year at ArtPace, San Antonio Express-News*, April 8, 1998 (illustration)
- Kastner, Jeffrey. *Obscure Objects of Desire. Artpaper*, No. 4 December 1990, p.16
- Keren, Jackie. "Constance Lowe" *Nether Land, Art New England* June/July 2006 p. 22 (illustration)
- Kutner, Janet. *Constance Lowe at UNT, Dallas Morning News*, June 18, 1999 (illustration)
- Landi, Ann. "The Ecstati Esthetic," *Art News*, March, 2010 (illustration)
- Roth, Nancy. *Submerged Circuitry. Arts* (Minneapolis Institute of Art) December 1990, p.8
- Rushing, W. Jackson. *Permanent Impermanence or The Paradox of Sculpture, Sculpture* October 2000, p. 74 (illustration only)
- Spector, Buzz. "Appetite for System." *Odd Objects/of Desire, I Space Gallery, Chicago*, 1995
- Tiredo, Michelle. "Constance Lowe at I Space" *New Art Examiner* May 1995, p.48 (illustration)
- Watkin, Mel. "Blankets, Furniture, Painting 1993-96." *Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis*, 1996
- Whitney, Kathleen. "Characteristics of the Fantastic." *Netherland, Widener Gallery, Trinity College, Hartford*, 2006

GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2007 Artist Foundation of San Antonio, Visual Arts Award
Faculty Research Development Leave, University of Texas at San Antonio
- 2003 ArtPace Travel Grant (for travel in Italy)
Faculty Research Award. University of Texas at San Antonio (also 2000, 1996, 1991)
- 1998 Residency. International Artist in Residence Program, Artpace
- 1997 Faculty Research Development Leave, University of Texas at San Antonio
- 1996 President's Distinguished Award for Creative Achievement, University of Texas at San Antonio
- 1991 Resident Fellow at Yaddo, Saratoga Springs, New York Minnesota State Arts Board Career Opportunity Grant
- 1988 Arts Midwest/National Endowment for the Arts Artist's Fellowship for works on paper

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

- 2011 *Magnetic Fields* (Barbara Kreft, Richard Martinez, Kim Owens ,and Dan Sutherland) Russell Hill Rogers Gallery, Southwest School of Art, San Antonio, Texas (brochure)
- 2000 *Edible Material: Paul Kittelson and Robert Ziebell*. UTSA Satellite Space, San Antonio, Texas
- 1997 *Picture Play: Seven Texas Painters*. University Art Gallery, University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas
- Surface Tensions*. Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas (brochure)
- 1994 Organizer: *Accumulated Evidence: Drawings by Jesse Amado, Meg Langhorne, Constance Lowe and Dan Sutherland*. Visual Arts & Technology Gallery, San Antonio College, San Antonio, Texas

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

San Antonio Museum of Art
University of Central Florida, Orlando
University Health System, San Antonio, Texas
CE Group, San Antonio, Texas
University of Texas at San Antonio
Matthews and Branscomb, San Antonio, Texas
South Texas Blood and Tissue Center, San Antonio, Texas
First National Bank of South Texas, San Antonio, Texas
Willmar Community College, Willmar, Minnesota (State of Minnesota Percent for Art Purchase)
North Shore Bank of Commerce, Duluth, Minnesota
Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois (State of Illinois Percent for Art Purchase)





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