

# ***From Nature***

***Paula Gron  
Ann Matlock  
Greg Reuter***

***Curated by Diana Lyn Roberts***



Paula Gron, *Green Offering*, 2010  
round reed, palm sheaths, date palm inflorescence, waxed linen, paint  
22" x 23" x 14"

### ***From Nature: A Curatorial Perspective*** **by Diana Lyn Roberts**

The concept of "nature" is increasingly fraught with contradictions. Referencing the inexorable forces and processes that order or disorder the physical world, the same word can allude to the countryside, to the quality of a person or thing, or the resources we conserve or squander. For all of our attempts to control nature, in all its manifestations, there's always more than we can truly grasp, predict, or define – which is perhaps what makes it such a compelling subject.

The use of themes and materials from nature in art is by no means new. On the contrary, the perception of natural events, cycles, and cataclysms motivated some of the earliest human impulses to create a visual record of life experiences. In the post-industrial world, natural materials and traditional processes are often seen as statements in themselves – the very use of organic fibers, "craft" media, or botanical imagery can conjure

romanticized notions of our relationship to nature, or anxiety and concern over our abuse of it. Yet for all the philosophizing and gnashing of teeth over the art/craft debate, or the polarized politics regarding our stewardship of natural resources, nature seems to endure – both as a state of being (though arguably in flux) and as a persistent theme in the arts.

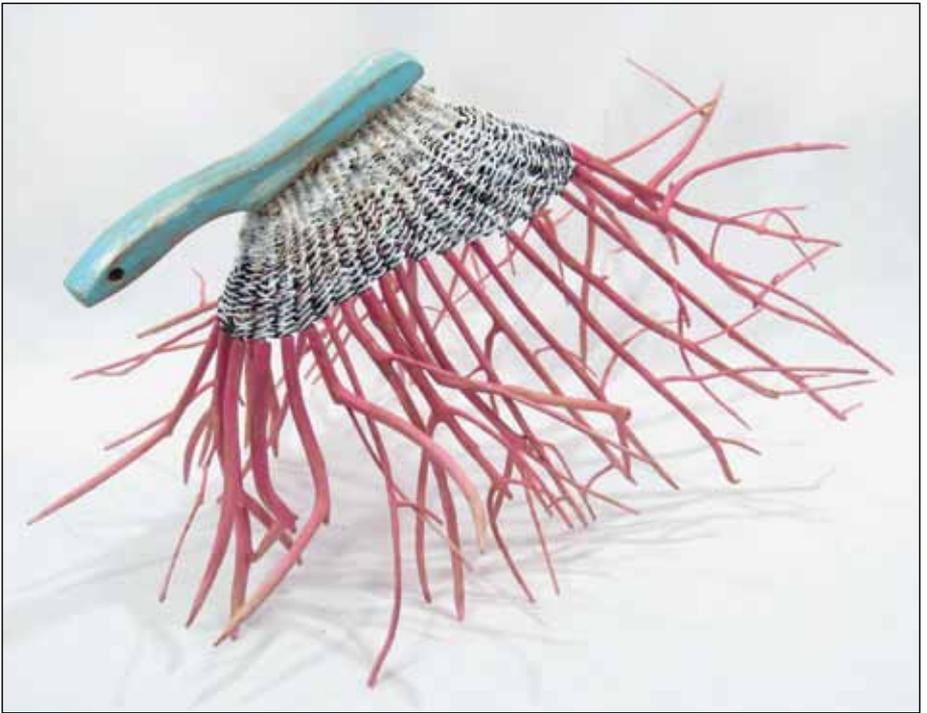
This exhibition features three artists who, in very different ways, incorporate natural materials, traditional processes, and an acknowledgement of nature as a creative source. On the surface, it may seem obvious or even cliché that a basket maker, a tapestry weaver, and a sculptor with a background in ceramics would tend toward the quintessentially “natural” processes of traditional media. Yet there is another aspect to nature – human nature – that drives these artists to observe, analyze, formalize and, ultimately, to aestheticize their perceptions and interactions with the natural world and the world of the handmade: not as a political statement, but because it’s how they process their experiences in the world. Nature both forms and informs their artistic practice, and this is a unifying factor. The fact that they are unique individuals, approaching the whole concept of nature and object making from distinct perspectives, provides an opportunity to examine our own assumptions about nature, art, and the creative process.



Greg Reuter, *Blue Moon*, 2013  
cast iron  
17" x 8" x 4"

Ann Matlock, *Villa Carlotta Bamboo*, 2009  
watercolor on Arches paper  
9.25" x 6.25"





Paula Gron, *My Toothbrush*, 2011  
aluminum wire, found handle, metal paint/patina, Arizona Ash branches  
18" x 26" x 13"

Fiber artist Paula Gron integrates traditional and innovative techniques, materials, and processes to create her basket-weave sculptures, often integrating found objects and conceptual puns to suggest an array of uses, interpretations, and metaphorical possibilities. As whimsical and irreverent as her forms and titles may be - for example, the oversized, almost animated *My Toothbrush* - there is a focused and methodical aspect in the process of conceptualizing, forming, and presenting her works.

In more formal objects, such as *Green Offering*, she revels in the physical beauty of shapes, textures, and added color. The specific use of plant materials from the coastal Texas ecosystem where Gron lives acknowledges both the botanical reality of her immediate environment and the basket-making traditions she upholds. Yet quirky juxtapositions, such as the bucket with an awkwardly elegant, broom-like appendage in *Spring Cleaning*, also conjure up the peculiar humor with which she regards the world, and the ironies of balancing aesthetic sensibilities with the mundane aspects of daily life. The sober realities of human conflict and self-preservation underlie the armor-like use of metals in *Conch* or *Trophy I and II*. Working in collaboration, Paula and her husband Jack, a metal

sculptor, make a unified statement about the human capacity for destruction in works like *Burnt Harvest* and *Baskets 4 Bombs*. Here, Paula's woven forms are partially cast in bronze or aluminum, then further woven and altered to create a complex juxtaposition of form, material associations, and ideological concerns.

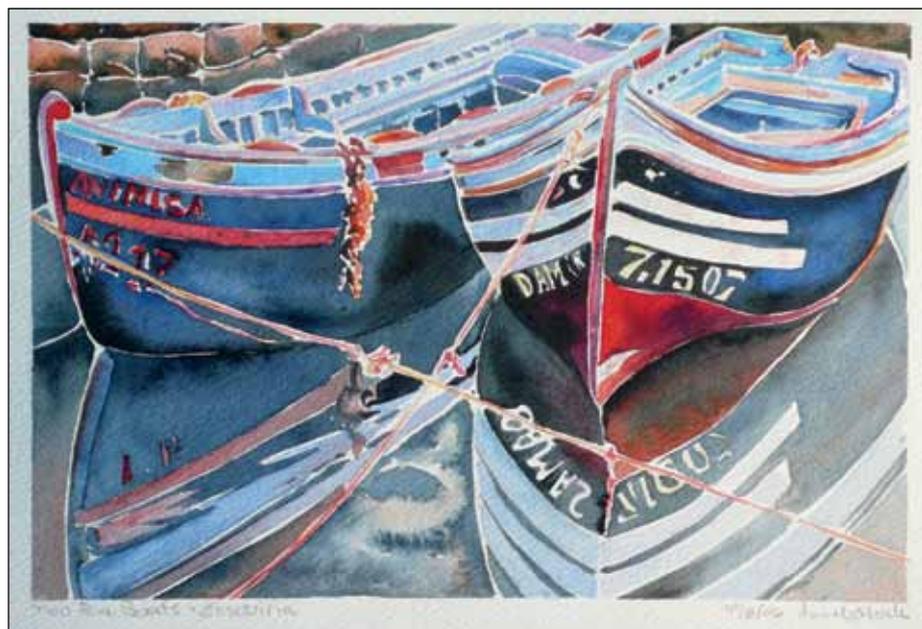
Ann Matlock creates sumptuous, painstakingly designed and hand-woven silk tapestries using hand-spun, hand-dyed yarns. As a textile artist, she is deeply engaged with the history and techniques of world weaving traditions, from ancient Coptic and other North African textiles to pre-Columbian, Middle Eastern, and the illustrious and elaborate range of Western European traditions. Often using washes of color or underlying images stenciled, block printed, or silk-screened with silk dyes directly onto the warp yarns, Matlock uses alternating rows of tapestry and brocade weft weaves to achieve rich layers of color, texture, and imagery in nearly abstract works like *Villa Abegg*, as well as in pictorial pieces like *Two Tomatoes, Home*, and works like *Homage to Vienna Textiles*, which specifically reference historical traditions.

As Matlock states, "unlike drawing or painting, a weaving progresses, row on row, in time. It combines the flow of color of other art forms with the architecture of textiles – the image is not on the cloth, but in it." This notion of "architecture" is both physical and metaphorical: the structure of the textile is also the foundation of the image, and the images are often based on visual impressions captured quickly and intuitively in Matlock's watercolors or photographs.

As a painter, Matlock embraces watercolor as a means of documenting and carefully observing the vegetal motifs, forms, colors, and textures encountered on her travels, in architecture, in the landscape, or in her Hill Country garden. The rich, modeled shades of images like *Villa Carlotta Bamboo* and the clarity of the numerous cityscapes and landscapes in the exhibition reveal Matlock's mastery of a deceptively tricky medium. The immediacy and richness of watercolor can be easily undone by its watery lack of definition and tendency toward



Paula Gron, *Spring Cleaning*, 2010  
round reed, found handle, paint, brass wire,  
springs, patina, wood, metal  
10" x 15" x 12"



Ann Matlock, *Two Blue Boats, Essaouira*, 2006  
watercolor on Arches paper  
6" x 9"

Ann Matlock, *Blue Boats, Essaouira, Morocco*, 2006  
watercolor on Arches paper  
5.5" x 8.75"





Ann Matlock, *Essaouira*, 2011  
all silk tapestry, hand dyed and hand spun yarns, brocade and tapestry weaves  
48" x 48"

muddiness. Matlock's painterly control and weaver's eye for textures, colors, and patterns is revealed in the comparison of the watercolors *Two Blue Boats* and *Blue Boats, Essaouira, Morocco* with the textile *Essaouira*: the clarity and naturalism of the two boats and their reflection in the water yields to an equally representational, though nearly abstract, jumble of shapes in the broader overview, the colors and layers of which make an easy transposition into the vegetal motifs and organic shapes found in the textile's depiction of a metal grate.

Greg Reuter has developed a complex body of sculptures based on his regular (one might say ritualistic) beach-combing expeditions on Padre Island, where found objects, plant and animal remains, animal tracks, and patterns in the sand are transposed from ephemeral phenomena into

bronze, aluminum, plaster, or other modes of sculptural permanence. Using the beach as an open-air studio, Reuter makes plaster casts – sometimes of found tracks or other tableaux, sometimes imposing his own forms, marks, and textures directly into the sand – from which he creates molds for metal castings. These plates, which Reuter describes as the “skin” of the beach, can be manipulated into other shapes, as in *Beach House* or the boat-shaped *Assume*, transforming both the forms and the metaphorical possibilities. Similarly, a simple plumeria leaf – collected as a memento from his honeymoon – becomes a deeply personal emblem for his wife and marriage in general, and is a repeated motif in his work. In the vessel-like tripod *Trine* it suggests the Holy Trinity or an almost sacred fecundity. When the leaf is pressed between roughly-formed mounds in the crusty, heavy, iron surface of *Blue Moon*, it takes on a more primitive character, positioned as a marker in a mysterious astronomical chart.

Aside from the plaster casts, Reuter also works directly in the studio creating his own mysterious forms, such as the plaster *Suspended Beach Seed* series. The colors and shapes evoke strange seedpods, egg cases, or other biological forms, that metaphorically relate to the germination of ideas, to the mysteries of nature, and the often uncomfortable beauty of the unfamiliar. Installed as a group suspended from the ceiling, they read like a forest of ideas incubating or, more accurately, pupating in advance of

Greg Reuter, *Assume*, 2013

bronze

6" x 21" x 10"





Greg Reuter, *Beach House*, 2012  
bronze  
12" x 9" x 12"

a metamorphosis. As an artist who works with reproducible forms, Reuter regularly acknowledges states of being, both in nature and in art: using the cast metal plates as a basis for graphite rubbings, Reuter further transposes, softens, and returns the imagery to a more ephemeral state.

Shifting patterns, metamorphosis, and evolution – life and death – are part of nature, and may in fact be nature's most enduring lessons. Yet in the present wake of climate change, the encroachment of urban development and debris on natural habitats, and the dominance of technology - with its characteristic disconnect from nature and traditional processes - it sometimes requires a conscious act to bring oneself back to some sense of balance between the natural and the human-made world. Gron, Matlock, and Reuter have managed to make it a very personal process that, while fully conscious, verges on intuitive – a natural process. Perhaps it's a result of practice, of formal control, and mastery of skills. Or perhaps this sensitivity becomes more acute and refined among those who strive to maintain a healthy relationship to nature and to the lessons – aesthetic, spiritual, and practical – it continues to offer.



RIGHT:

Greg Reuter, *Suspended Beach Seed*, 2014

plaster, epoxy, acrylic, graphite

12" x 6" x 6"

LEFT:

Greg Reuter, *Trine*, 2013

bronze

16" x 5" x 4"



Paula Gron, *Barnacle*, 2013

round reed, paper pulp, amate paper,

fiber rush, found brush handle, paint

10" x 10" x 27"



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**May 10 - June 7, 2014**

**Opening Reception  
Saturday, May 10  
5-8pm**

**Closing Reception and  
Gallery Talk  
Saturday, June 7  
1-3pm**

Gallery Hours  
Wednesday-Saturday 12-5pm

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FRONT COVER:  
Ann Matlock, *Villa Abegg*, 2008  
all silk, hand dyed and hand spun  
yarns, brocade and tapestry weaves  
28.25" x 28.25"

BACK COVER:  
Paula Gron, *Conch*, 2010  
round reed, queen palm sheaths,  
waxed synthetic sinew, found handle,  
wood stains, brass  
32" x 19" x 18"

