

William Lamson:
A Certain Slant of Light

June 27 through September 14, 2013

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Museum Summer Hours:

Tuesday – Saturday: 11 AM – 4 PM (Closed Thursday, July 4)

Starting August 27: Tuesday: 10 AM – 8 PM;

Wednesday – Friday: 10 AM – 5 PM; Saturday: 12 – 4 PM

Telephone: 518-442-4035 www.albany.edu/museum

Mercy of the Waves (detail), 2013

Glass, sand, and water

Whittier College, Whittier, California, January 2013

Artist Biography

William Lamson was born in Arlington, Virginia in 1977. He lives and works in New York City. Recent solo exhibitions include *Action for the Delaware* at Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, Colorado (2013); *Mercy of the Waves* at Whittier College in Whittier, California (2013); *Architecture of the Invisible: Andrea Galvani William Lamson* at Tatiana Kourochinkina in Barcelona, Spain (2012); *Divining Meteorology* at Indianapolis Museum of Art in Indianapolis, Indiana (2011); *Action for the Paiva* at Moving Image in London (2011); *On Earth* at Kunsthalle Erfurt in Erfurt, Germany (2010); and *Long Shot* at Artspace in New Haven, Connecticut (2009). Selected group exhibitions include *Light and Landscape* at Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, New York (2012); *No One Is an Island* at LMCC Gallery, Governor's Island in New York City (2011); and *A Line Describing the Sun* at Pierogi in Brooklyn, New York (2010). Lamson received a B.A. degree from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire in 2000 and an M.F.A. degree from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York in 2006.



undertaken. I'm interested in how un-egocentric your role is in your work. It reminds me of seeing Wolfgang Laib install his most recent pollen piece at MoMA. At first you watch him, yet in time he becomes a directional device that points solely toward the action. Do you think that the natural forces you deliberately allow to move and erode your works have the ability to function like a similar character?

I would have loved to see him install his work. But despite the efficiency with which my character may perform his task in videos like *A Line Describing the Sun*, I think that the sheer scale of the landscape relative to his size creates a relationship that evokes empathy for this character. In the same way, if you were to see Laib installing a pollen piece by himself in the Tate's Turbine Hall, it would be impossible not to feel the weight of this labor, even if in the moment you are watching him he performs without an outward projection of fatigue.

I'm not sure that the forces that affect my works can ever function the way Laib's character does, because if anything, these forces are as much a part of the work as the material itself. They cannot be separated from each other. ■

Adam Frelin, associate professor of art at the University at Albany, has shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Getty Research Institute, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. He has published two books of photography and has been commissioned for several public artworks. He has received awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Gateway Foundation, and the College Art Association, and has completed projects in Japan, Finland, Austria, Ukraine, and most recently, India.

LEFT: *Untitled*, 2013
HD video, 16:50 minutes; color; sound
Courtesy of the artist

FRONT COVER: *Untitled* (detail),
January 28, 2013
Pigment print, 32 x 48 inches
Courtesy of the artist

Last Light, 2012
Film foil, wire and steel
Installation at Storm King Art Center,
Mountainville, New York
Courtesy of the artist



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An Interview with William Lamson

Conducted via e-mail by Adam Frelin
May 2013

William Lamson and Adam Frelin have been friends for several years. They first met at the MacDowell Colony in 2009.

Whether naturally occurring or staged, Frelin's videos and photography use compelling narrative imagery to speak to the intersection of the man-made and the natural. His fictional and documentary constructs, often involving sculptural pieces that may become nothing more than props to fuel a larger story, have poetic qualities that expose the stark realities of a mundane yet oddly incendiary environment.

Both Lamson and Frelin share an interest in how simple performative actions, when combined with elemental forces (wind, water, or fire), may or may not yield big results.

Adam Frelin: Though our work differs in many ways, we both share an interest in certain fundamentals when it comes to art objects and actions: lines, cubes, circles, etc. I'm sure it comes out of our interest in minimalism, but your work is as infused with content as it is with formalism.

William Lamson: I agree, though I think it is the word "actions" that reflects the performative element in both of our practices, that allows content into the work, and that shifts its meaning beyond formalism. I think about it almost in the way I look at Richard Long's *A Line Made by Walking*. While the grainy black-and-white image of a linear path in a field might be read as a formalist work, my interest in this piece and in his work in general is in the simplicity of his performative gestures and their relationship to the landscape.

I've come to think of the actions we use as embodying their own brand of formalism. Maybe it would be

more accurate to say they are simply straightforward in their aim and delivery. Like in your video piece, *A Line Describing the Sun*, the performer is solely focused on doing his job: burning a line on the desert floor. The performer happens to be you. Would you describe him as a character, or the artist, or something in between?

It's interesting thinking about this question of formalism right now, since I have spent the last week working on a video of a tire rolling across the desert as it's pushed by the wind. Initially I was interested in making this piece because of the effortlessness by which this object moves through the landscape, and the implication that this could exist forever as an infinite system. Although I'm still thinking about these ideas, now that I'm shooting it I realize that what makes watching a tire roll across the desert interesting to me is the slow and constant change in perspective that is happening between the tire, the landscape, and the camera as the speed and direction of the wind pushing the tire changes, forcing me to change the speed and direction of the car as we track alongside it.

Regarding your other question, I think about the role I play in my videos more as a character than as me the artist, and I believe this is because the nature of what's being performed is so simple that only a abstracted character could perform it without his identity getting in the way of the action.

That's such a fitting example! The three attributes you mentioned that played an integral role in the filming of this new piece—perspective, speed, and direction—will be equally present in your final edited video of it, or at least that seems to be the case with your other work. What I mean to say is that you translate those essential qualities of the action into the work's final presentation.

Untitled, 2013
HD video, 12:58 minutes; color
Courtesy of the artist



Untitled, 2011
HD video, 3:44 minutes; color
Courtesy of the artist

What's interesting to me about this new piece is that these qualities—perspective, speed, and direction—are inherent to the way the piece was shot, and therefore they emerge not as something that I control or interpret for the viewer, but rather as a direct result of the action being documented.

It sounds like those qualities are not only "a direct result of the action being documented," but also inherent to how you chose to document the action as well (moving camera with no cuts). For some reason I'm reminded of your recent sculptural works in sand and with candles. Is there a similarity with regard to the specific qualities inherent in making them that comes across in their final display?

You are absolutely right. I choose how to shoot the piece, and it was based on the nature of the subject. This tire will keep rolling as long as there's enough wind to push it, and following that logic the piece should exist as one uninterrupted take, which is why I documented it as a long tracking shot. However, within that system the movement of the tire relative to the camera is not totally within my control, and it is this spatial interaction between the subject, camera, and landscape that I find really interesting.

I think the similarity between this video and the sculptural works you mentioned is that in each case, the work is structured around the specific qualities that are inherent to the material. So the forms made of compressed sand and water eventually fall apart, yet the way they collapse depends so much on the specific sand used in that installation and on the gallery itself. When I installed *Mercy of the Waves* at Whittier College using sand collected from a beach in LA, the collapsing sand forms resembled miniature geologic monuments, like ones you would see in the Southwest. Nothing like this had happened in my studio, because

the sand in LA is much coarser than the sand from Coney Island that I had used to make the tests. In addition, the wooden floors of the gallery and the people walking by it every day created vibrations that contributed to this accelerated geologic decay far more than the relative stillness of my studio.

Let's talk about control.

I'm not sure if you remember, but I'm reminded of one of the last times you were in my studio, when you said something to the effect of how I do not like to give up control (or at least that's how I remember it), which was interesting to me because I often think of my work as being about the opposite, creating an open system in which I can set things in motion but the primary forces involved in the work are ones that I cannot control. As I've thought more about this, I think we are both right, in that many of my projects involve working with forces outside of my control, and this obviously necessitates opening oneself to unexpected possibilities. Yet even with these projects there is always something that I expect and hope will happen. For example, in *Action for the Delaware*, a piece in which I float down the Delaware River on a small buoyant device calibrated to my weight so that it appears I'm standing on the surface of the water, I intended the piece to be about non-doing, or the act of standing on this vessel as the current takes me downriver. However, because the river was not deep enough in all places for the raft to pass over rocks and other obstructions, I constantly fell off. So instead of the video being a work about non-doing, the video juxtaposes my struggle to get back on this device, recalibrating it each time to balance my weight, and the illusionistic moments as I effortlessly glide downriver. To me, this represents the complex relationship I have to control, to expectation, and to the reality that very

often projects will not go as I plan.

Great answer! Yes, I wasn't trying to put you on the spot, or have you think that my question was judgmental. Rather, I'm interested in the thematic role that control plays in your work. Inevitably if you're making work based on natural forces, a part of the work is going to be about your ability, or lack thereof, to control those forces. It's so prominent in *Action for the Delaware*, but equally so in your recent sand sculptures. In other pieces of yours that come off more...flawlessly isn't the right word...faultlessly, like the candle piece you will do at the museum, I get a different read on the work, at least with regard to the theme of control.

I think the big difference is my own presence, or lack thereof, in these newer sculptural works. There is a kind of pathos in seeing someone perform and struggle to do something, and when the work seems to happen by itself it's hard not to read it as being effortless. But this also happens in many of my video pieces where I am not performing. For example, in *Automatic*, a video and drawing project I did in Chile and Uruguay in 2009, I constructed a series of low-tech drawing machines that used the forces of wind and waves to animate the device. In the video, the pencil moves back and forth, stopping and starting with a purposefulness that seems almost anthropomorphic. But this is really the result of how the device was constructed, and the delicate equilibrium between multiple forces that is constantly being interrupted as one force temporarily becomes more powerful than another.

You say pathos, but more often than not your "character" completes his task with efficiency, drawing less attention to himself than to the act being



Untitled, 2013
Candles on molding
Courtesy of the artist