

Layered Time: Naoe Suzuki

(The 2nd of 4 thematically connected solo exhibitions)

Exhibition Dates: April 12th to May 29th 2021
Spoke Gallery- Medicine Wheel Productions

Layered Time is a series of four solo exhibitions connected thematically by how each artist incorporates facets of time into their work. [Layered Time: Naoe Suzuki-On Land](#) is the second solo exhibition in this series. *Layered Time* was originally conceived as a group show that was reformatted to be four solo shows for Spoke Gallery's new space. The three additional artists who were or will be featured in 2021 with solo exhibitions are: David Lloyd Brown, Allison Maria Rodriguez, and Shea Justice. Naoe Suzuki is also debuting her new series of drawings entitled, *Hours Days Weeks Months Years Decades Centuries*, in the Spoke Gallery Flat File Project.

For her *Layered Time-On Land* solo show at Spoke Gallery, Suzuki is exhibiting work from her two thematically and conceptually connected series: [Extinction Studies](#) and [Land Forest Water Animals You and I](#). Both bodies of work call attention to humankind's role in climate change, the destruction of eco-systems, and in species extinction. Both series are monochromatic white and black-toned works on paper. The English language is a key visual element in both series. These two bodies of works are part of Suzuki's long term investigation and questioning of humankind's relationship to and history with ourselves, the environment, and our planet.

On view for the exhibition are two recent large scale works from Suzuki's ongoing *Extinction Studies*: *Map of New York Wilderness, 1869* (2020) and *Map of Upper Saranac Lake and Surrounding Area, 1954* (2019). Suzuki started her *Extinction Series* in 2019. Her main source material for this series are historical "maps of the Adirondack region". She painstakingly enlarges, redraws, and traces the original maps by hand. She includes the original names of geographic areas that were named after the wildlife that inhabited the area and the European grid mapping of land. Due to the materials she uses to create these works (various types of ink), she cannot correct any mistakes or mishaps.

The genesis of this body of large scale map drawings on paper stems from Suzuki's 2015 artist residency at the Blue Mountain Center. This northern New York State-based Center is located in the Adirondacks Mountain range. While at this residency, Suzuki was working on her series called [Water, is Taught by Thirst](#). She shares, "I had a map of the Central Adirondacks, and I was tracing the waterways from the map for my work. When I was tracing those waterways from the map, I noticed that there were many names of animals, such as "Eagle lake," "Little Otter Pond," "Buck Mountain," "Beaver Brook," "Salmon River," and so forth, as if to keep me company along the rivers and lakes, and up on the mountains.The Adirondack region became a place very dear to me, because of the Blue Mountain Center and the natural beauty this region offers. I'm equally fascinated with the history of the Adirondacks, and how the perception of wilderness by the early European settlers influenced the perception of nature and wilderness in America. In this work, I'm trying to connect history, our relationship with land, and perception on wilderness as we experience the sixth mass extinction."

Her 2020 work, *Map of New York Wilderness, 1869*, has direct ties to Boston. Suzuki's large scale drawing is based on the original colorful map that is in the collection of [the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library](#). The upper left corner of this work has, like the original map, the Boston Public Library circular stamp rendered in the light red. It is the only color from the 1869 map Suzuki kept in her hand drawn blown up version. She also meticulously painted the decorative borders of this map in a light black-brown sepia tone. In both of her map drawings, the European land grid system is almost entirely filled in with black ink. She purposively leaves faint outlines of the grid- acting like ghost images of man marking up the land for ownership. Both pieces have tiny white words in English denoting the names of the wildlife that inhabited the area. It is

important to note that these “place names” appear on the original maps and they act as a historical record of the past ecosystems that have long since vanished.

The 2020 work has an expansive white area that depicts key information about the original map and this art work also has white lines depicting water sources (rivers, lakes). Her 2019 map is almost totally filled in with black ink and only has visible, in tiny white lettering, the names of places names after the animals originally found there, the map information, and the compass rose denoting the four cardinal directions (North, South, East, West). As found in the 2020 work, the 2019 has haunting outlines of the European land grid system. However, the 2019 map has no water systems depicted. It seems as if this work is entirely devoid of life.

Suzuki in these two maps is revealing the layers of time visually to her viewers. She has chosen to highlight the history of the original wildlife of the Adirondack region -most of which are no longer present or are present in much smaller numbers. Her use of black ink, also calls attention to the erasure of wilderness and the original ecosystems caused by colonialization or what we now call “development”. She shares, *“I paint in India ink except for these names which are left as blank paper by carefully painting around the letters. Floating in a sea of blackness, these names appear as tiny speckles from afar and begin to resemble stars in the sky. ... Maps tell a story. In addition to the animal names, intricate decorative borders and ornate calligraphy lettering used for a title ... and the grid systems all tell us something about history and our relationships with the place. ... These animals found on the maps, while some of them no longer exist or are in danger in this region, remind me that we are all temporary tenants of a habitat. Water, land, animals, and humans—we are all interconnected. Even though I’m looking back in history, I’m really saying something about the future of our environment and our relationship with land.”*

For this solo exhibition, Suzuki is also debuting three small scale drawings from her series entitled, *Land Forest Water Animals You and I*. Each work is 14” h x 10” w. These works, like her large scale map drawings, are monochromatic and are black and white. All three of the works have the same visual element- a phrase written in English (the title of the series). The words are written in a large distinctive font and the words almost fill the entirety of the paper. While each of the three drawings shares the same title, each drawing has a different year associated with it. The first drawing (on the left) is associated with the year 1979 and one can read the font easily. 2019 is year associated with the second or middle drawing and the font looks as if it has begun to dissolve. The third drawing (on the right) is connected with the year 2050 and it is nearly impossible to decipher the text: *Land Forest Water Animals You and I*. Even though these drawings are much smaller scale than her map works, the visual impact is just as powerful and engulfing as her large scale works.

She states, *“The font I use in this series is called the Climate Crisis Font developed by the Nordic’s largest newspaper Helsinging Sanomat. The font’s weight responds to NSIDC’s (National Snow and Ice Data Center) Arctic sea ice data from 1979 to 2019 and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s prediction all the way to 2050. One can visually get a sense on how much the ice has been melting and is expected to melt in the future based on current forecasts.”*

The exhibition layout for the group show version of *Layered Time* would have had Suzuki’s works on paper installed on the opposite wall or the wall that faced the David Lloyd Brown’s 2021 painting series entitled, *“Small Creatures”* (His was [the first solo exhibition](#) of the *Layered Time* solo series). Their art work is essentially book-ends of each other. One of Suzuki’s conceptual frameworks is extinction, while theories of evolution influence Brown’s thinking and artistic process. She uses a monochromatic black and white pallet. Color is front and center in Brown’s work and it is the basic principles of Color Theory that guide Brown’s painting practice (Monochrome, Complementary, Split Complementary, Triad). Both artists are using templates to create their works. She uses historical maps and a new specific font. He creates and uses curved templates as genetic building block for his paintings.

Suzuki is the second artist to show in the Spoke Gallery Flat File Project and she is debuting another new series of drawings entitled, *Hours Days Weeks Months Years Decades Centuries*. This body of work was created during pandemic and is in response to the pandemic. On exhibit are four circle shaped drawings that have layers and layers of different sized circles. All are hand drawn using different sized templates. Like her works in the Spoke Gallery, these works on paper are monochromatic – black and white. In addition to ink, she used graphite. The works change according to the light in the space and the distance from which one looks at them. At times the graphic outlines of the circles shimmer and at other times the black circles seem bottomless. Like her other works on display, maps and human actions are the conceptual foundations for this new body of work.

An excerpt from her artist statement gives the best context for this new work: *“I started drawing black circles on a bunch of round papers last fall. I wanted to draw perfect circles, so I gathered all sorts of circular shapes to use as templates—lids of pots and pans, tins that came with candles, a Petri dish, and so on. I used these tools to draw many different sizes of circles on the round papers....It’s been my nightly activity to draw and paint these black circles each day..... In the spring of 2020 when the United States and many other countries around the world were hit by the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, I obsessively checked the maps of the coronavirus infection and death rates in the New York Times every day..... The map for the Covid-19 deaths used black circles. The sizes of these circles were growing each day at an exponential rate, to the point that eventually, the New York Times switched to the color-coded maps for each state, because the size of the circles got so big that they started covering the whole state.... Each day, I was horrified looking at those circles growing larger and spreading throughout the country. ... Then, the murder of George Floyd happened, and the Black Lives Matter protests followed. The New York Times was tracking the BLM protests and where the protests were taking place. Again, there was a map. When I first saw the map, I had to do a double take because I was seeing black circles on the map. A strange Deja-vu moment, but immediately followed by hope and joy once I realized what I was looking at.”*

Naoe Suzuki’s artistic practice is rooted in her concern for our planet and for our collective humanity. She creates exquisitely crafted interconnected bodies of work. Her artworks are both beautiful and disturbing. All of the works on view are layered both visually and conceptually. Her urgent calls to action are clear and they are black and white.

-[Kathleen Bitetti](#), curator

For more information about Naoe Suzuki and her art work, see www.naoesuzuki.com

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