

ARTIST STATEMENT

French Curve: Where the River Bends

As an artist I have long concerned myself with the notion of our present landscape and how our ongoing interaction with the earth itself informs our perceptions, forges a sense of community and sustains us as a people over time since this continual process of engagement serves as a form of practice. Events, rituals and celebrations are closely tied to the ways in which we interact seasonally with the landscape around us as we work the land and share those experiences as a people. Sustainability is often explored from economic, environmental, ecological and agricultural perspectives; however, these are not the only forms of sustainable practice that support village life. As a creative artist, I also wanted to explore aspects of sustainability that incorporate the social, cultural and humanitarian dimensions that help shape the heritage of a people. The concept dovetails with my own research goals and agenda of the past two decades focusing on our individual and collective sense of time, place, identity and purpose. This series of paintings involves the use of surface relationships to impart a sense of history, the passage of time and the impact of sustainable practices on the development of cultural identity specific to a place or locale. By taking into account our direct relationship to and with the each other as well as our immediate environment as basic tenets of sustainability, I am also able to examine the role of humanity in developing the current cultural landscape as we strive to reinforce a stronger sense of community in an increasingly fractured 21st century global visual society.

Over time the environmental landscape in the region encompassing Noyers sur Serein has given shape and definition to the local community and in return has been informed and shaped by this culture of peoples. The manner in which the medieval village of Noyers sur Serein is nestled in the bend of the river suggested that the very ebb and flow of the water may have even played a significant role in dictating some of the changes brought upon village and agricultural life as well as culture there throughout history. I wanted to examine the surrounding landscape, its roads, footpaths, bridges, walls and towers, historic structures, architectural remains and land features inherent in the region encompassing the village as well as the contemporary social environment created by the local people who have either made a home in this place or made this place their home. A critical element of my work is this examination of historic and contemporary themes that contextualize our present relationship to the immediate landscape and our place in it as human beings. The regional environment clearly sustained a community of people over time and out of this sustenance and interaction with the landscape grew rituals and celebrations honoring a tradition of engagement with the natural world that speaks to the character of a people. Noyers sur Serein is a unique and well-preserved medieval village in which citizens of the present continue this interaction and engagement with these historic elements in their everyday lives within the remnants of a landscape whose human imprint was largely determined during the period encompassing prehistory through the medieval era. Parallels exist between the surface and spatial relationships in the paintings and the surface treatment, marks, patterns and structural assembly I see in the historical elements of the region that have been worked by wind, weather, water, time and human hands. By first creating underlying spatial color fields, the layering of paint on the surface of the paintings builds up and establishes a kind of visual history that serves as a record of the passage of time. The dichotomy of these spatial relationships and fragmentary images at once emerging from and receding into the surface of the color fields helps emphasize and echo the continued stratification or layering of time as an integral element in this body of work. I then incorporate present day images and evidence of human agency, intention and community set against a backdrop of continual interaction with the natural elements to speak to the identity of a people working in alliance (or at odds with) nature and each other over time.

I did not expect to find such a vibrant, thriving, interactive community in Noyers so that was certainly a delightful surprise. The village seemed to be a community made up of residents who actually spoke to each other on a daily basis, greeted each other on the streets and checked in on one another regularly. It was comprised of residents whose families had been there for generations as well as recent arrivals all of whom exhibited tremendous kindness, respect and concern for each other and the overall well being of the village. They appeared to care a great deal for not only the history of village life but its present and future as well. It was often suggested to me that only in environments where citizens exhibit such concern for one another's shared humanity could a celebration of our inherent differences take place. That more than anything spoke to the cultural identity of the place and its people. The daily individual and group interactions I bore witness to during my time there may very well have been the kind of ritual engagement that helped to forge and sustain that particular community over time. It was a rare pleasure to have been welcomed by the residents into the community they have created in the village of Noyers.

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