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BIGGER THAN THIS ROOM

April 29–July 30, 2022

OPENING RECEPTION

Friday, April 29, 5–7pm

ARTIST TALK & BOOK SIGNING PROGRAM

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(April 2022) “I prefer views that are expansive,” wrote Robert Smithson (1938–1973). **“One must be concerned not only with the landscape itself, but how one looks at it—the view is very important.”** The sculptor and land artist may be associated with Western vistas, but he always paid keen attention to the frames we place around them. **After all, a human encounter with something monumental yields portable souvenirs: a photograph, a pebble or a fragment of a memory.** Smithson explored this in a late-career series he called “non-sites,” in which he extracted mounds of earth from particular places and reinstalled them in gallery spaces. He was wrestling with the meaning behind shaping or containing land, an expansive question that has gained yet more urgency at the turn of the 21st century. **In *Bigger Than This Room*, opening with a reception on Friday, April 29, 5–7 pm, historical and contemporary artists present objects that explore—and challenge—the legacy of land art of the American West.**

“The curatorial process started with this question of how to represent massive artworks within the contained space of a gallery,” says Curatorial Director Marissa Fassano. “The show occupies our atrium, which has 20-foot ceilings, but the works we’re referencing are often much larger than that—literally and symbolically.” Land art of the American West—think Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), or Walter De Maria’s *The Lightning Field* (1977)—has played an outsized role in shaping modern myths of the region. *Bigger Than This Room* reframes the picture, embedding monuments within larger cultural vistas. Small objects referencing famous and lesser-known land artworks fill the gallery’s atrium space, including documentation, sketches, maquettes, tributes and fragments. They serve as portals to the larger works, and simultaneously trouble their legacies.

“There’s a startling intimacy to a lot of these objects, despite the scale of the original works,” says Fassano. “We’re zooming in from sweeping aerial views to footpaths, and expanding our experiential scope from the visual to the tactile and auditory. It allows us to consider the subtler implications of major land interventions, and to focus on vital context that is often cropped out.” Fassano has split the exhibition into two distinct zones: the atrium’s expansive ground floor, and a narrow catwalk space above it. The catwalk features artworks and ephemera from major land artists such as Charles Ross and Robert Smithson, along with documentation of Ross’s *Star Axis* by photographer Edward Ranney. Ranney has photographed the construction of *Star Axis* each year since 1973, and his black-and-white imagery from these shoots offers intimate and gritty views of the process. Two photographs by Smithson, on loan from Mayeur Projects in Las Vegas, New Mexico, represent the artist’s attempts to fragment and mirror the American landscape.

The exhibition’s narrative universe bursts open on the ground floor, as contemporary artists, architects, writers and curators from across the West enter the conversation. Photographer Yael Eban and writer Elaine Ritchel offer peripheral views and narratives of *The Lightning Field* through a photograph and a chapbook, respectively. Artists Ruben Olguin and Diego Medina sculpt works from adobe and other wild materials, documenting the present-day impacts of colonial building projects. French

continued

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artist Lucie Laflorientie cores and stacks earth to create self-conscious mini monuments. Curator L.E. Brown haphazardly pilots a drone above iconic earthworks, revealing the sweaty but often-exclusive experience of accessing them.

“Then there’s the most challenging thread, which incorporates monuments that don’t exist yet,” says Fassano. SITE Spread awardee Mira Burack presents a table of ephemera from a forthcoming earthwork that gently transforms a small plot of New Mexico earth into a sleeping hut, referencing Burack’s Jewish heritage while acknowledging still-visible industrial scarring on a nearby mountainside. Santa Fe-based architect Gregory Waits offers his proposal for a monument to Blackdom, New Mexico, an early 20th century boomtown that was the state’s first all-Black community. “These works are still dreams in someone’s head, and if they do come to fruition they will stand apart from existing land artworks in crucial ways,” says Fassano. “But on the other hand, all land art exists somewhere between reality and dreams. There’s no way to grasp it all, but hopefully this show provides a few new handles.”

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Mira Burack, L. E. Brown, Yael Eban, Michael Heizer, Lucie Laflorientie, Diego Medina, Ruben Olguin, Edward Ranney, Elaine Ritchel, Charles Ross, Robert Smithson, Michelle Stuart, Gregory Waits & more with special thanks to Lucy Lippard and Christian Mayeur for loaned items courtesy their respective private collections.

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