

2017 Benjamin  
**MENSCHEL**  
Fellowship  
**EXHIBITION**



THE COOPER UNION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND ART

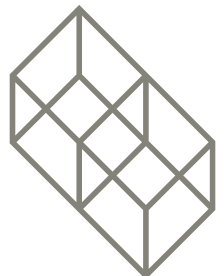
LESLIE DOUGROU ARCHITECTURE | GABRIEL MUNNICH ARCHITECTURE

AUSTIN MAYER ARCHITECTURE

KELSEY MITCHELL ART | NATALIA OLIVERI ARCHITECTURE

IDA PRUITT ART | RACHEL ROSHEGER ART

ZUZANNA SOCHACZEWSKA ART





JANUARY 30 THROUGH  
FEBRUARY 15, 2018

The Benjamin Menschel Fellowship Program to support creative inquiry was endowed by a grant given to The Cooper Union by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation in 1994 to support work in the fields of art, architecture, design, and engineering. This generous grant was intended to provide funding to exceptional students who propose scholarly, independent projects that will in some way provide a culmination to their educational endeavors at The Cooper Union. It is the hope of the Goldsmith Foundation that students designated as Menschel Fellows will be encouraged by their awards to complete bodies of artwork, develop scientific protocols, or otherwise further their intellectual investigations in a manner that will provide inspiration and illumination to the community as a whole.

Professor Sohnya Sayres, *Project Director*



Above: Kelsey Mitchell | Natalia Oliveri

Front cover: Leslie Dougrou | Gabriel Munnich  
Back cover: Ida Pruitt | Rachel Rosheger



## EARTH: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE TONGO HILLS

LESLIE DOUGROU AR'18  
GABRIEL MUNNICH AR'18

The Tongo hills in northern Ghana are composed of dangerously balanced stones, deep green grass, and skinny cows grazing under blue skies. There, we encountered a three- thousand-year-old relationship between social structure and the act of building. The Tallensi people, who call this place home, believe their ancestors to have sprung from the earth. In their language, Talen, the words for “lineage” and “house” are almost identical. Thus, they have traditionally built their houses out of mud, changing their forms to represent every birth, marriage, and death in their family. Their compounds blend in harmoniously with the sacred rock formations that line the uphill stretch leading to Chief John Bawa Zuure’s palace, known as Tenzug, the focus of our project. Our aim was to survey and document the palace. Its status as the largest, most minimally-altered compound of the region, made it the ideal place to draw a connection between this malleable architecture and those who dwelled therein. When we first arrived, Hansen, one of the chief’s sons, told us that there were 300 people living in the house. By the end of our stay, as we completed a census of the house, we discovered that, while some had died or moved away, there were, in fact, 450 people still living in Tenzug, a fact unbeknownst to the chief himself.





We spent weeks climbing on roofs, positioning our cameras and taking photographs that would later be used to reconstruct a virtual, three-dimensional model of Tenzug. The impromptu conversations with those who accompanied us on a daily basis led to a deeper understanding of both the physical and social structures that we were documenting. Under the tropical sun, we learned the correct ways to climb the huts and the reasons why mud roofs collapsed during the torrential rain, suggesting that lineal ties were not the only active agent in the yearly transformation of the house. In recent years, there had been an

effort made to add the compound to the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, this designation turned out to be contingent on the materiality of the compound remaining unaltered. This created tension between the preservation of a traditional house and the tradition which called for that house to change. We also discovered that despite its cultural and religious importance in the Gur clans of West Africa, the record of Tenzug's history continues to be incredibly decentralized. Through this exhibition, we hoped to contribute a comprehensive socio-architectural lens to the portrayal of Tenzug.

LESLIE DOUGROU | GABRIEL MUNNICH





## THE DIVIDED ISLAND OF CALIFORNIA

A border is more than a wall or a fence. It is also a water reservoir, a river, a highway, a tollbooth, a desert, a bridge, a door, a dam, a canal, a traffic lane, a sky bridge, an airport, a parking lot, a jet ski, a helicopter landing pad, a modular steel panel, a Jersey barrier, a camera, a turnstile, a shore, an all-terrain vehicle, a sensor, a camouflage, a stacked pile of rocks, a broken tree branch, a flag, an obelisk, a checkpoint, a car window, a color, a lock, a fish-eye mirror, a sensor, an artwork, a monument, a trailhead, a train tunnel, a memorial, a gate, a current, an agricultural inspection station, a cattle guard, a pesticide spray, a time zone, and, as of October 2017, eight visual monoliths placed in an endangered butterfly habitat. It's not just a line that separates one side from another; it displaces and hides. Cause and effect become unclear. Agriculture grown in Mexico is irrigated with water stored in the United States. A border is controlled movement.

My project explores California in an attempt to find the larger context of the border. California itself is a constructed fiction: in myth, it was a wild island ruled by Queen Calafia, populated by warrior women and flying griffins. Driving from the top of Alta California, US, deep into Baja California, MX, I moved along two intersecting lines: the east-to-west border that divides the two countries and the north-to-south Pacific coastline that is shared by the United States and Mexico. Coastal infrastructure was my constant measure. The US-Mexico border fence starts in the Pacific Ocean and ends in California's eastern



AUSTIN RICHARD MAYER AR'18



AUSTIN RICHARD MAYER

border, the Colorado River. Stepping back from the fence, one of the longest pieces of infrastructure in the world, and considering the coastline as a whole, California, surrounded by water, may, in fact, be considered an island.

Using the syntax of a live-streaming surf cam to record wave conditions, I shot long-running video of these infrastructure sites and captured unexpected moments, such as a group of surfers from the US and Mexico surfing out off the end of the border fence in the Pacific Ocean, cutting back and forth across the two countries. As sand and gravel companies specializing in highway construction compete to design an unbuildable wall, I present an image of the divided Californias and the absurd political structure that joins them.





## CITY, ALTAR, AND PANEL: PLATFORMS FOR PERFORMANCE



Embedded within the pages of the medieval manuscript and manifested in the stone walls of the cathedral is the desire for a tangible connection between our world and the divine. In a theatrical performance, the space between the performer and the audience is framed by the proscenium, marking the separation between illusion and reality, the observer and the observed. In two-dimensional imagery, the margin of a manuscript or a panel painting functions the same way. The margin, as Erwin Panofsky suggests, frames the image, keeping the viewer at a respectful distance, yet also permits them access to its closest intimacies.

For our Menschel project, we traveled to two sites that continue to function as they would have for the medieval person: the Tuscan cities of Florence and Siena. Such a person would have entered the city wall through one of its many gates, circulated through the winding roads, and arrived at a piazza of monumental proportions. The piazza functioned as the center of medieval Italian life, the site for religious and civic activity. It hosted either a basilica or a civic building of great importance to the community that surrounded it.

We had arrived with the intention of performing as observers. Instead, we became the performers in our own theater through the use of the city as a stage. We found the stage at three different scales, nested within each other, and each marked by its own frames: the city, framed by its wall and the doors that protect and invite; the cathedral, framing what lies beyond its facade; and the panel painting, set within its gold

KELSEY MITCHELL A'18  
NATALIA OLIVERI AR'19







frame. These scales hold and reflect the real world's interaction with the divine world. Within the city, they become the representational mimetic double of the world they reference.

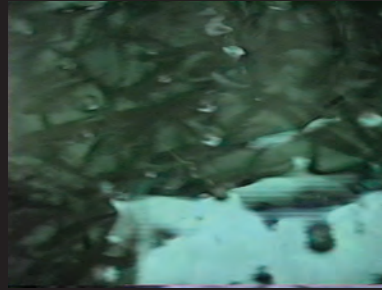
We were able to investigate how the piazza functions as a site for religious and civic performance. We began our first week with the Piazza del Duomo in Florence, and the second week with the Piazza del Campo in Siena. They became the sites where we began each day and where we ended up at again each night. The city and its various mimetic doubles, illustrated within their frames, all lead the inhabitant back to the piazza and its tower, ever-present as a point of observation from which to look out at the theater unfolding before it.





THE GREAT  
DISMAL SWAMP

IDA PRUITT A'18  
RACHEL ROSHEGER A'17







EDITOR'S NOTE:  
The artists did not frame  
their work with a text.



## TOWARDS A FRAGMENTARY PERSPECTIVE

Images of the landscape of the American West have become synonymous with a particularly American notion of freedom. During Westward Expansion, paintings of the vast, empty landscapes of the West were used to attract settlers to the land. Today, these images can be found on government documents, on T-shirts, in poetry, and in film. The landscape is always an imaginary space, much like the transformative tales of travel and return it often accompanies. The fantasy of the freedom and magnificence of the American West is part of a U.S. brand of nationalism.

With my Benjamin Menschel Grant, I aimed to challenge this imperial representation of the landscape. I traveled through the western United States and took photos of landscapes that I can most precisely describe as pedestrian. The focus of my photography was to fragment this totalizing and totalitarian representation of the land by proposing a literal multiplicity of perspectives. Instead of representations of magnificence and power, I stressed the day-to-day interaction with the land on a human scale. I created images without horizon lines, images of debris, of fences and farms, of



ZUZANNA SOCHACZEWSKA A'18





ecological and geological elements. Organized as a collection, these images do not pretend to coherency or completion. Instead, they operate as a working group that could, theoretically, be edited and added to. Without readily recognizable references, the images collapse the spatial and temporal distance between one another.

Every journey through the American West is a project in cartography, as the traveler negotiates their position within the vast array of histories of journeys through the West since before settler colonialism. I decided to structure my own journey using the Rocky Mountains, travelling through them from Arizona to Montana. Land forms transgress manmade borders, and the Rocky Mountains span the entire length of the United States. The Rocky Mountains existed long before U.S. states and will continue to exist past their eventual decline. They are part of a history before and beyond us.



The Rocky Mountains were formed 40-170 million years ago along a tectonic fault line. These mountains are the crystalized spillage and debris of a rupture, a reminder of the reality of constant movement and upheaval within nature. This movement is mirrored in the history of how we organize ourselves and are organized by others, and can serve as evidence of how a political rupture can engender new possibilities.





