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MEAGAN SHEIN and SIOBHÁN ARNOLD



*A MURMUR IN THE TREES by SIEN COLLECTIVE*  
*SIEN Collective is the collaborative work of Siobhán Arnold and Meagan Shein.*



**Reverie**, Beeswax, encaustic, photo on fabric, thread, on paper, 29.5 x 56 inches, 2014

Image Details, previous page:

**Flayedtree**, Beeswax and ink on paper, 54.5 x 36 inches, 2015

# MEAGAN SHEIN and SIOBHÁN ARNOLD

*“A Murmur in the Trees—to note—  
Not loud enough—for Wind—  
A Star—not far enough to seek—  
Nor near enough—to find—”*

*– Emily Dickinson F433 (1862) J416*

We met as art students in Chicago nearly 25 years ago. We have shared both a conceptual and aesthetic sensibility ever since, despite physical distance and working in very different mediums. Meagan has primarily worked with encaustic, drawing, and installation while Siobhán works most often with photography and installation. In 2014, we spent 10 days together on the Oregon Coast in a self-designed artist residency exploring common ideas and experimenting with both familiar and unfamiliar media. We brought together image fragments, experiments, and works in progress. After much conceptual dialog about what really mattered to us, we distilled our ideas into exploring how landscape resonates with mythology and fairy tale, and the role that these myths and tales play in our lives.

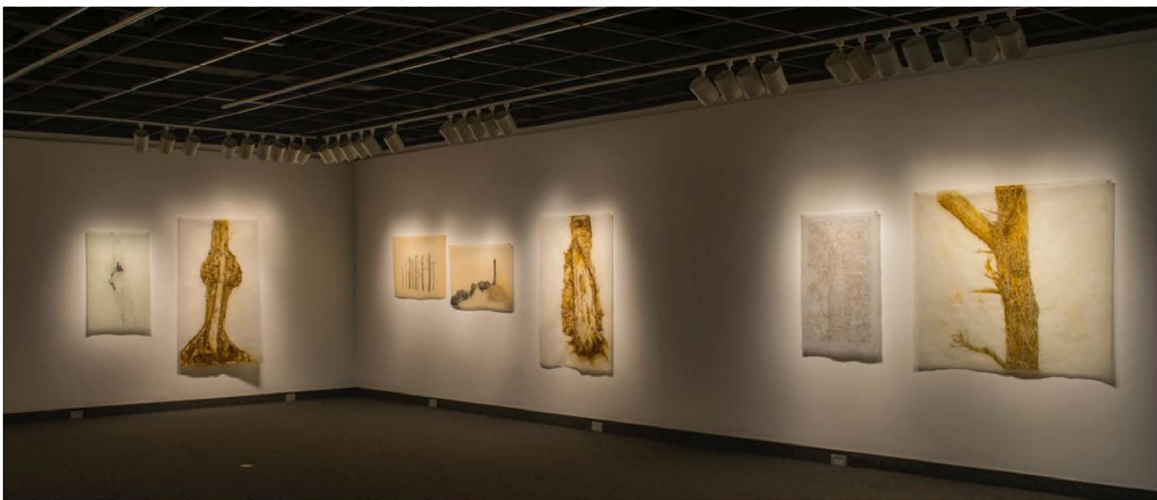
As the landscape became a place to explore inner psychology, one concept in particular became evident to us: the subtle intersection of both looking and seeing. Looking and Seeing are actually two different things. How does one look at something and not see it? And conversely, how does one see something without looking? We wanted to pierce the veil of our own blindness and notice our surroundings, conceptually and literally. The work in *A Murmur in the Trees* begins with observations in nature - photographing trees and landscapes in a number of different locations: Oregon, Michigan, California, New Mexico, Canada. The trees chosen were those particularly enacted upon by another natural or unnatural phenomenon: being choked or strangled by vines, being torn apart, growing inside or around something else. Once we began looking, we found this imagery everywhere. We view the trees and landscapes as stand-ins for human characters; the subjects of our own mythic narrative. The imagery also references motherhood, it is beautiful and painful, something that grows and destroys you in the process of birthing, aging and death.



**Strangletree**, Beeswax, ink and thread on paper, 50 x 46 inches, 2014

Our processes are labor intensive. Meagan coats Japanese paper with transparent encaustics and then draws on the surface with a nib pen by pricking and dotting the surface with ink. The surface is reworked, adding and scraping away ink and wax with traces that are left behind in order for the image to resolve. Siobhán sews into the encaustic coated paper with embroidery thread. The process is difficult and painstaking in that the paper, though strengthened by the waxed surface, is delicate and may tear if worked or pulled too vigorously. The stitches themselves vary in knot type and color so that the drawing slowly emerges from the texture created. With both techniques, the presence of the hand is evident. Combining these techniques with photography presents an interesting intersection of the hand with a technologically replicative medium.

We are interested in process and using media in unconventional ways: new technological processes mixed with ancient and labor intensive work. With *Strangletree*, Meagan challenged herself with scale, working with a larger (46"x 50") sheet of paper than she typically works with, painting encaustic and melting it off on a zinc plate. Meagan began drawing from a photograph Siobhán had taken. The drawing in ink took several months to complete. She then passed it to Siobhán "intervention". Siobhán embroidered areas of gold thread into the piece. *Strangletree* is tragic, heart wrenching and beautiful, a metaphor for all we were looking to express. During the exhibition, the work hung unframed in the gallery, the piece would move slightly as someone walked by, making the thread shimmer and inviting a viewer to come in and look closer.



**Installation view, "A Murmur in the Trees,"** Kruglak Gallery, MiraCosta College, 2015





*Potnia*, Beeswax and ink on paper, 59.5 x 46 inches, 2015



***The Nettle Spinner***, Beeswax, photo on fabric, thread, on paper, 26 x 37 inches, 2015

For works such as *The Trees of the Mind are Black* and *The Nettlespinner* our working process was a bit different. For these works, Siobhán used Meagan's photographs, printing them on fabric and sent them to Meagan for intervention. Meagan cut up and collaged the images onto encaustic painted paper, then sent them back to Siobhán who embroidered thread drawings onto the photos on fabric.

We are influenced by literature and poetry in our visual work. Many titles of the works in this series are taken from poems by poets such as Anne Carson, Sylvia Plath and Marianne Moore, while others are drawn from mythology and folklore. *The Nettle Spinner* takes its title from a Flemish/French fairy tale of the same name, a story that features a woman empowered by her skill with the spinning wheel after refusing the advances of a cruel lord. Potnia is an ancient Minoan Goddess, there is a small sculpture in the Archeological Museum in Crete from the "New Palace" Period (c.1700-1550 BCE) of the goddess with arms upraised, serpents in her hands. The *Potnia* tree is a stand in for Potnia, and at the same time, the body of a woman, inexorably overcome, but standing straight, arms raised wide.





*The Hungry Witch*, Beeswax, encaustic and thread on paper, 38 x 25 inches, 2015



*I am Vertical*, Beeswax, encaustic and thread on paper, 39.5 x 25 inches, 2015





***Blood From a Stone***, Beeswax, ink, photo, thread on paper, 26 x 37 inches, 2015

Collaboration is both exciting and challenging. One must trust the other artist to have something valuable to add to one's vision. This is no easy task. Artists have a notoriously difficult time relinquishing control of their creative vision and process, so this trust is absolutely essential. The exciting part of working together is the innovation that happens. We were ready for the great personal challenge of allowing someone else's opinion or choice to take precedence. It is how the world actually works. An additional challenge that we experienced while collaborating is the fact that we live a couple thousand miles apart.

Landscape is a site of contemporary cultural anxiety. We realize that our landscapes matter for our survival as a species - environmental problems can literally destroy our world. We suffer from anxieties as a result of not spending time outside: "Nature Deficit Disorder" is a phrase coined by the writer Richard Louv. We are tapping into and reflecting back anxieties and experiences, through many lenses, rendered by hand. We continue to explore layer-by-layer, line-by-line and stitch-by-stitch what we see when we look.





*The Trees of the Mind are Black*, Beeswax, photo on paper, thread, on paper, 39.5 x 25 inches, 2015

*“The weak overcomes its  
menace, the strong over-  
comes itself. What is there*

*like fortitude! What sap  
went through that little thread  
to make the cherry red!”*

*--Marianne Moore*



*Engulf tree*, Beeswax, ink and thread on paper, 61.5 x 37 inches, 2015



## BIOS

[siencollective.com](http://siencollective.com)

**Siobhán Arnold** is an artist/educator living in San Diego, California. She is a mixed media artist who works with photography, textiles, sculpture and installation. Her work has been exhibited widely including the Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA; Sherry Frumkin Gallery, Los Angeles CA; SCA Contemporary Art, Albuquerque, NM, and Crossing Tracks, San Diego, CA. Her work has been featured in several magazines including *View Camera*, *Pacific San Diego*, *Detour*, *the Portland Review*, *Orange Coast Weekly* and reviewed in *The Seattle Times* and *The Stranger*. She received a BA in Art and Design from the University of Chicago and an MFA in Art Studio from University of California Santa Barbara. She can be reached at [siobhan.arnold@gmail.com](mailto:siobhan.arnold@gmail.com).

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**Meagan Shein** is an artist working with paper, ink and encaustic living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She has shown nationally and internationally including the University of Michigan, the Maya Polsky Gallery in Chicago, Gallery Project, Ann Arbor and the Urban Institute for Contemporary Art in Grand Rapids, MI; the Delaware Center for Contemporary Art in Wilmington, DE; Miller Block Gallery, Boston, MA; the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and Staub(g\*fzk!) in Zurich, Switzerland. Her work has been featured in *Drawing Magazine* and reviewed in *The New York Times* and *Time Out* magazine. She received her MFA from Hunter College, MA in art history from Williams College, and BA with special honors from the University of Chicago where she met Siobhán Arnold 22 years ago. Their artistic collaboration and a lifelong friendship was cemented when they discovered they were dating the same boy. She can be reached by email at [ms@meaganshein.com](mailto:ms@meaganshein.com).

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