



Bethany Johnson

We Live on a Planet



We Live on a Planet, no. 28, 2018
Collage and ink on paper
11¾ x 9¼ inches (29.85 x 23.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

In Bethany Johnson's recent collages, clippings from science and math textbooks, nature magazines, topographical maps, and field guides cascade in a flurry of glimpses between library catalog cards, blank sheet music, and the artist's photographs. In some cases, Johnson interlaces her collages with ink drawings and security envelope patterns that mirror the image structures of letterpress, offset lithography, and Xerox prints. This rich blend of elements culminates in a concertina of line graphs, data tables, mountain peaks, ocean spray, and billowing clouds that foreground thinking and feeling in scientific observation.

Johnson's collages emerged from her drawing practice in which she drew pictures as a series of dots and dashes in red, green, and blue ink that she patterned after low-resolution inkjet prints. The works on view at the Courtyard engage material Johnson previously reserved for drawing and form another chapter in her exploration of graphic interpretations of the natural world. Here, one wonders how we understand our world both through the structured order of math and science and through our own senses.

In *We Live on a Planet, no. 22* (2018), views of waves, grids, and ice appear as bands of light falling in the distance. The layering may bring to mind the gradual rise of mountains across an expansive vista, or the anxious conditions of a weather report. With a sine wave cast as a seismic report, this work has the strange, unnerving rhythm of a tsunami or a tornado. While the source material was "compiled with a scientific earnestness," the images "remain unstable, slippery, and elusive of concrete categorization or interpretation"—the graphics only echo fragments of data and reflect the process of their own

making in halftones, rosette patterns and chromogenic dye clouds.¹

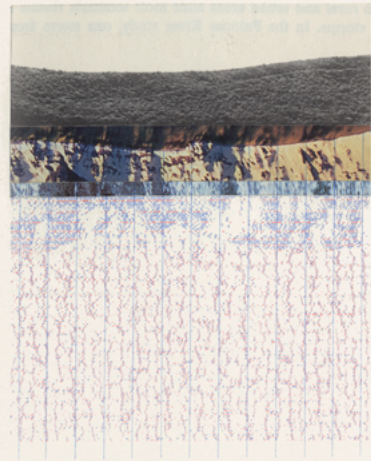
Elsewhere, Johnson's layering looks like a cross-section of a mountain in yellows, blues, reds, and browns. Underneath the pale sky and sloping hillside in *We Live on a Planet, no. 28* (2018), an inverted, snowy rock face sits on a sliver of blue and white ice. Johnson also flips images, destabilizing typically grounding horizons—each slip of paper rests precariously on a field of lines, dots, and dashes that mimic the mountains above and dissolve into a pattern copied from a security envelope.

These mailer designs further belie the sense of clarity built into standardized documents. Typically used to mail contracts, checks, or medical records, security envelopes are lined with patterns that minimize the transparency of the paper. Held up to the light, the patterns mask contents from prying eyes. Like the photomechanical image structures, the marbled, cross-hatched, striped, or mesh patterns form another layer within Johnson's work that tests the limits of perception. Placed between landscapes and diagrams, the security patterns in the composite images act as interference in otherwise transparent acts of representation.

If one data point may presume to represent a dominant whole, what are the choices we make to gather information, and to what extent is that information a fantasy? When isolated data patterns are fed through a shredder in Johnson's meditation on the natural sciences, sensorial information and methodical study merge in a state of disorder and confusion at the intersection of natural philosophy and scientific data.

¹ Artist Statement, 2018–2019

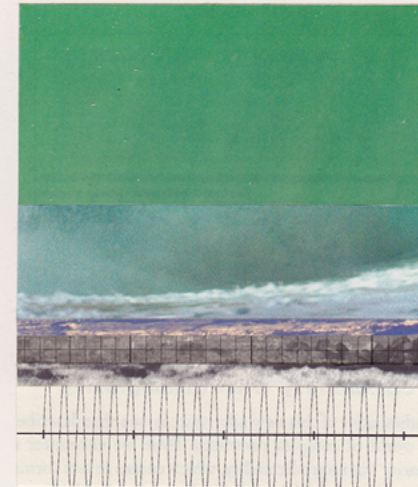
Taylor Bradley (b. 1986, Los Angeles, CA) specializes in modern and contemporary art. Bradley's research concerns and curatorial work touches on work by such artists as Anna Atkins, Eugène Atget, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Ed Ruscha, and Eleanor Antin. She received her BA in Art History with distinction from Boston University (2008), and earned her MA (2012) and PhD (2019) from The University of Texas at Austin.



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We Live on a Planet, no. 13, 2018
Collage and ink on paper
11¼ x 9¼ inches (29.85 x 23.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist



We Live on a Planet, no. 22, 2018
Collage and ink on paper
11¼ x 9¼ inches (29.85 x 23.5 cm)
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**October 3, 2019 –
January 25, 2020**

RECEPTION

Thursday, October 3
5–7pm

Bethany Johnson (b. 1985, La Porte, IN) lives in Austin, Texas and is an Assistant Professor at the School of Art and Design at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. She received her BFA in Studio Art from Kalamazoo College, Michigan (2007) and her MFA in Painting from The University of Texas at Austin (2011). She has exhibited internationally and throughout the United States at the Moody Gallery, Houston (2019); Wild Basin Creative Research Center, Austin (2019); Texas State Galleries, San Marcos (2019); Illinois State Museum, Lockport, IL (2018); MASS Gallery, Austin (2017); Edwin W. Zoller Gallery, State College, PA (2017); Perry and Carlson Gallery, Mount Vernon, WA (2017); Shoestring Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (2017); The Wright Gallery at Texas A&M University, College Station, (2016); The McKinney Avenue Contemporary, Dallas (2013); and Laguna Gloria, Austin (2012) amongst others. Johnson has been awarded artist-in-residence fellowships at the Institut für Alles Mögliche in Berlin, Germany; Vermont Studio Center, Johnson; Wild Basin Creative Research Center, Austin; Soaring Gardens Artist Retreat, Laceyville; and Denkmalschmiede Höfgen, Grimma, Germany.

COVER

We Live on a Planet, no. 20, 2018
Collage on paper
11¼ × 9¼ inches (29.85 × 23.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

The Courtyard Gallery is located in the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center at The University of Texas at Austin and features artwork from alumni of the Department of Art and Art History in the College of Fine Arts.

courtyardgallery.utexas.edu



**Courtyard
Gallery**

**AT&T HOTEL AND
CONFERENCE CENTER**
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



The University of Texas at Austin
Art and Art History
College of Fine Arts