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Peer reviewed

Floodplain (126)

Montana Torrey



Figure 1 Montana Torrey, Floodplain (126), 2018, folded collagraph installation. Image courtesy of the artist.¹

¹ A video recording of *Floodplain (126)* is available for viewing at *Refract: An Open Access Visual Studies Journal* on eScholarship . <https://escholarship.org/uc/refract>.



Figure 2 Montana Torrey, Floodplain (126) (detail), 2018, folded collagraph. Image courtesy of the artist.

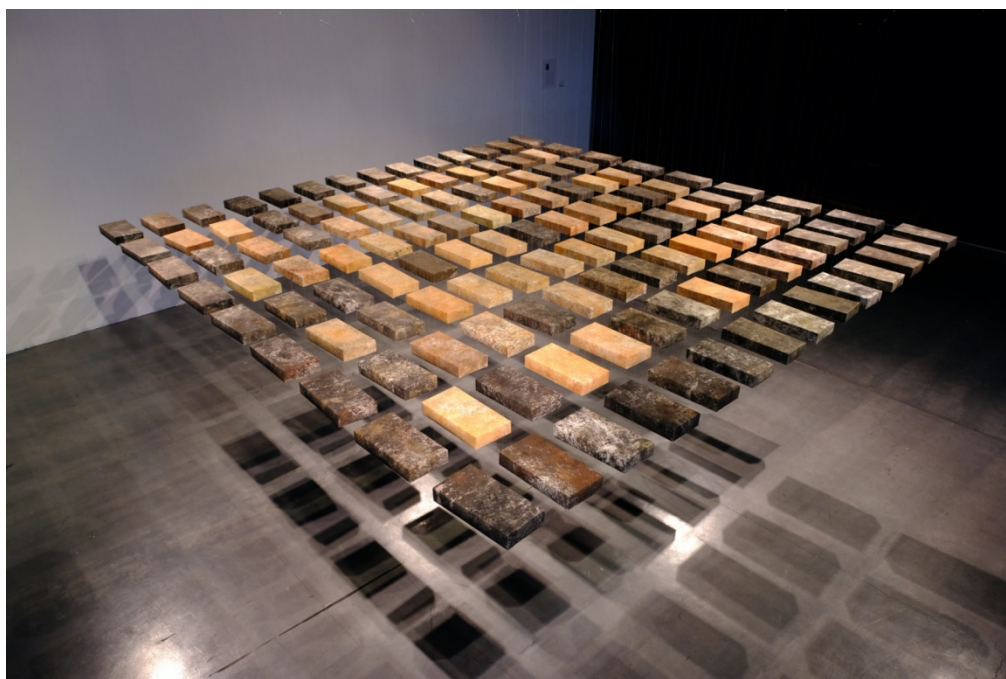


Figure 3 Montana Torrey, Floodplain (126), 2018, folded collagraph installation. Image courtesy of the artist.

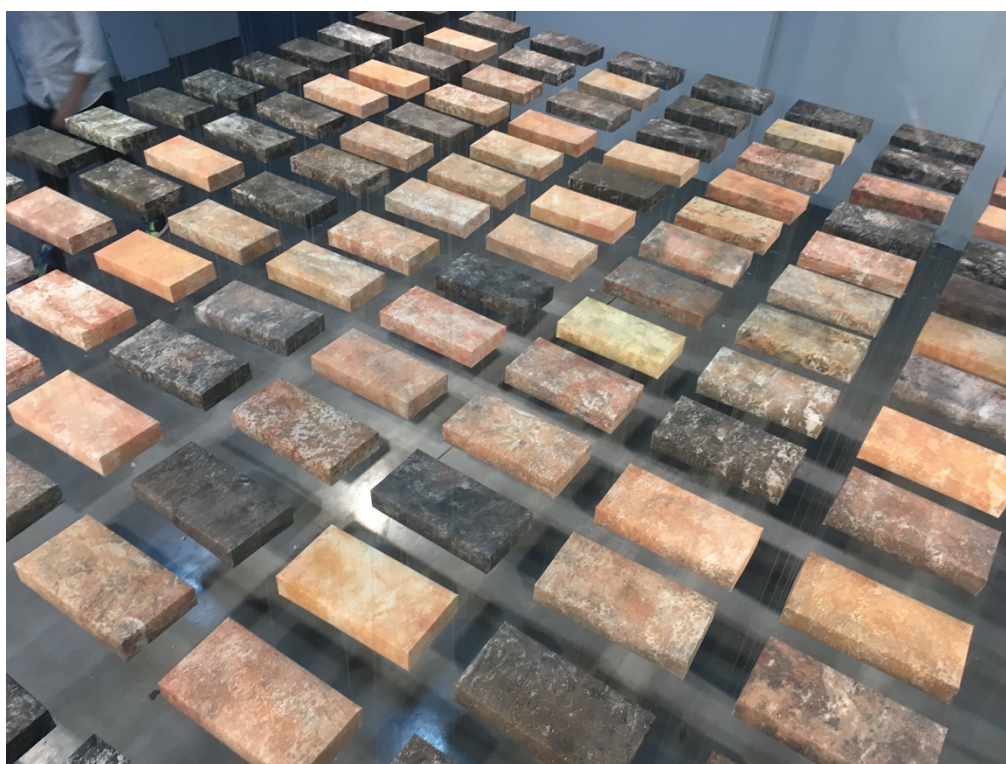


Figure 4 Montana Torrey, Floodplain (126), 2018, folded collagraph installation. Image courtesy of the artist.

Artist Statement

My work explores the intersections between architecture, climate, and the embodied experience of place. In my recent work, I have examined notions of place through architectural reimaginings and overlapping temporalities in order to create a collision of the site's past, present, and future. By combining the static element of architecture with the dynamic element of weather or climatic forces, my work becomes a convergence of histories. I structure a dialogue between the site, material, and an idea, either through direct physical engagement with the landscape or by using metaphorical elements of the landscape contained within the built environment.

In *Floodplain (126)*, I investigated the paleo-flooding of Wiang Kum Kam in the Chao Phraya River basin in northern Thailand. I am interested in the diverse human activities that have existed on floodplains since antiquity. Made of bricks with the very silt and sediment, mud and earth, of the floodplain below, this archaeological site offers a deeper sense of time, of the dynamic cycles of river systems, and of the movement of civilizations. The brick itself is as much a temporal object as it is a spatial one, suspending the alluvial material that took thousands of years to break down, only to become subsumed once again by the river. I exhume these histories as a way to reconstruct the fleeting passages of natural phenomena and the built environment, with the dynamic anthropogenic changes of the Mekong River Delta today.

Floodplain (126) reimagines the archaeological site of the ruined city of Wiang Kum Kam through the lens of its moment of collapse, when the Ping River changed course and caused the severe flooding that eventually led to the city's abandonment over seven hundred years ago. I am interested in how the residual memory of catastrophic natural disasters intersects with the built environment, both past and present. The ruin is suspended in time, physically existing in the present, but perpetually tied to the past, serving as a visual representation of the relentless persistence of time. In my installation, I attempt to excavate and merge the remnants of memory that haunt this site by reimagining the dense bricks that constitute the ruin through folded paper collagraphs to evoke a sense of weightlessness. By utilizing the process of collagraph printmaking, I used the silt and sediment of the Ping River to create the plates from which I printed on paper. This weightlessness is also reminiscent of the bodily experience of moving through water: floating, swaying, shifting, drowning, and rising to the surface as the viewer circumnavigates the printed bricks. *Floodplain (126)* questions how this site/ruin can act as a reminder of the past, and serve as a catalyst to contemplate the imminent threat of global flooding and subsequent mass migrations due to climatic

change, while meditating on the complexities and vulnerabilities of our physical structures and what they reveal to us as they face the test of time.

* * *

Montana Torrey received a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has been an artist-in-residence at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Headlands Center for the Arts, Vermont Studio Center, Catwalk Institute, and the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, among others. She has exhibited in the US and abroad, including *Mississippi: An Anthropocene River, Anthropocene Curriculum*; the Center for Art and Culture in France; D.U.M.B.O. Art Under the Bridge Festival; Paul Robeson Galleries; Doris Ulmann Gallery; SG Gallery in Venice, Italy; and Trükimuuseum in Tartu Estonia. Torrey is currently a lecturer at Chiang Mai University in Chiang Mai, Thailand; she has also taught at Lane College, Moore College of Art and Design, and UNC Chapel Hill. She has been the recipient of many grants and awards, including a Joan Mitchell Foundation Residency Grant, Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Artist Grant, the North Carolina Arts Council Individual Artist Grant and Residency Grant, Skowhegan Fellowship Grant, and a teaching fellowship from the Samuel Kress Foundation.