

ARTFORUM

Lisi Raskin

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Left: Lisi Raskin, *Armada* (work in progress). Right: Lisi Raskin, *Armada*, 2009, wood, paint. Installation view, Blanton Museum of Art, Austin, Texas.

Over the past ten years, the Brooklyn-based artist Lisi Raskin has explored fear, cold-war tensions, and sites that rely on nuclear power in her works. Here she speaks about the process of making Armada, a new installation on view until June 21 at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas, Austin.

THE "MOBILE OBSERVATION" SERIES began over a year ago. The first part of the project, *Command and Control*, was commissioned by Bard College and was exhibited at the Park Avenue Armory for the ADAA fair in 2008. Following that, I was commissioned by Bard to take a road trip to expand the series, and I traveled to several sites near Tucson: the Titan Missile Museum, the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico—which is the site of the 1945 Trinity nuclear test—and a large empty lot of airplane carcasses, called the Bone Yard, whose proper name is the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group. *Armada*, my work at the Blanton, is based on the Bone Yard.

I wanted to use my road trip as source material as the "Mobile Observation" projects unfolded. Normally, I make site-specific works within institutions and galleries, but this project also includes an element of working with the landscape and a question of how to engage space in a more direct way. When Risa Puleo, a curator at the Blanton, approached me, I was beginning to think about the landscape of the Bone Yard. The project emerged pretty organically and intuitively once I visited Austin and decided to use her backyard as a production site and to make the work with a team of local assistants there. I knew I wanted to create a telephone line from my inspiration in Risa's suburban yard in 2009 to my initial inspiration in a backyard in 1984 in Coral Gables, Florida, when I first became aware of the possibility of war, nuclear annihilation, and these kinds of test spaces.

There were several experiences I tried to conjure when I was working on the installation. For instance, I remembered sitting in my van in the Bone Yard: I looked toward Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and there was a huge plume of gray and black smoke that fighter jets were flying into; they were basically running an intense drill. Another day, I parked the van next to a chain-link fence, and it turned out that I was directly under the flight path of the pilots who were out for the day's exercise. After lunch that day, I parked my van, serendipitously, again under the path as they were coming back.

I connected these memories to other, very specific visceral moments. When I was a kid, I used to sit on the hood of my mother's Chevrolet Malibu Classic and look up at the sky and watch the planes go by. I would imagine what it would be like if I were to witness a bomb falling down from one of the planes. Because a backyard, or a suburban site, was the first location that served as a backdrop while these fears and desires developed within me, it was motivation to use Risa's backyard as a kind of memory space.

Working in her backyard, however, created an interesting duality regarding site-specificity and project identity within the actual museum itself, which is not like a kunstverein, or P.S. 1, where I've previously had installations. There are nineteenth-century landscape paintings in the Blanton that we had to be very careful around. Although I wanted to take over the project-space room completely, there were things I had to be cognizant of, like fire codes. This was new for me. Using the backyard as the space of production allowed me to leap over the rules of the institution so my creative process

went unhindered.

While I had memories, drawings, and notes with which to work, once I began on *Armada* I realized that I didn't really want to control or deal with any of the preconditioned ideas I had about what the project might look like. Instead, I wanted to try to abstract it and forget about the idea that abstraction always references something. I thought about the wings and nose of the airplanes and how to make shapes that might communicate those elements, but I was able to dispense with this tendency pretty early on. I was also playing with how I could tweak the scale of such massive planes by using cheap materials. I made two twelve-foot-by-twelve-foot paintings, which is something I've never done before.

I rejected all my impulses that might have made me treat the work as though it were precious. The construction was direct, improvised, and intentionally precarious so that if there were accidents on the way to the museum—we transported it in an open truck—I could incorporate them. I think this element added another layer to the project, and in a way it was also an avenue to explore and utilize failure.

— *As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler*