

ARTIST BIO

Sara Black and **Amber Ginsburg** work together on projects that draw a material through-line across forms, pointing to the complexity of ecological systems. Sara's enduring commitment to the material and history of wood and Amber's background in ceramics incline them to the language of craft, often employed as a metaphor for the relationship between human endeavoring and non-human forces. Their large-scale projects reach into time on a geologic scale and engage audiences to think forward in their habits and practices. Sara is an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Amber is a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Chicago. Their work has been exhibited nationally and internationally.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

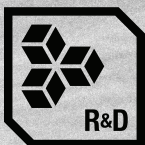
Sara and Amber would like to extend an exuberant thank you to Kerri Frangioso and Feynner Arias-Godenez for helping us find and fell our diseased tanoak tree; Dave Merchant at Out of the Woods Mill and Tom Adamczyk at Woodworks Unlimited for helping us process this tricky material; Kayla Ginsburg, Seth Keller, Derek Ernster, Ramyar Vala, Fran Levitin, Clara Kim and Peter Reese for skilled assistance in wood and metal work; Jurrell Lewis, Maggie Jenson, Karen Xu, Eren Ahn, Angela Zhang, Kevin Pang, Baci Weiler, Xilli Basset, Alan Lake, Grace Hauck, Madeline Kranz and Jo Beccera for assistance in our "pencil factory;" Charles Roderick for gallery guide layout assistance; Karl Anderson, Marilyn Simmons, Michelle Epps and the staff of SPACES for the opportunity and support, and finally, the University of Chicago for grant funding of the pencil factory.

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The R&D (Research & Development) program invites artists, curators, and other cultural producers to articulate their investigation of ideas through a supported project that may take the form of solo, group, or collaborative endeavors.

7000 Marks

Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg (Chicago, IL)

November 17 - January 12, 2018

Large print available at the front desk.  **SPACES** © 2017

7000 Marks

Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg

Tanoak

In March 2016, on the first rainy day after the most extreme drought California had ever experienced, we felled a mature tanoak tree infected with *Phytophthora ramorum*, Sudden Oak Death (SOD). The disease agent responsible for SOD is a member of a group of microscopic, fungus-like organisms called oomycetes, the most notorious of which was responsible for the Irish potato famine in the mid-19th century. The disease was brought to the United States through the global trade of nursery plants for landscaping and through the timber industry. *Phytophthora ramorum* inhibits capillary action within the tree, slowly starving it to death.

The disease fells oak trees, leaving conspicuous browned openings in the otherwise verdant forest canopies, ratcheting up the risk of wildfire and threatening future oak stands. Ecologists and governmental agencies in California are researching the pathogen and protecting threatened native oak populations from this invasive and aggressive pathogen. One path toward conservation of the oaks is to halt all migration of the fungus. Trees infected with SOD, both living and dead, are 'quarantined' and cannot be moved beyond the human-drawn boundaries of their county. However, *Phytophthora ramorum* is a waterborne



*Margins of the disease, 2016,
Image credit: A. Ginsburg*

Friday, December 15, 2017 6-9pm at SPACES SPECULATIVE DRAWING - Panel discussion and speculative drawing session

If biological classification systems are another means of projecting human desires – or even epistemological frameworks – onto the world of nonhuman beings, how might we speculate outside of our human frame and attempt to adapt our relationships to nonhuman beings in an era of ecological uncertainty? Join artist Taryn McMahon, a local biologist and artists Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg in a discussion on these themes and activate the 7000 pencils through a guided speculative drawing workshop.

Taryn McMahon's work asks how we humans consider ourselves outside of nature, and how art can, through its depictions of the natural world, disrupt culturally constructed views of nature to impact our understanding of the natural world and our place within it. She has had solo exhibitions at The Print Center, Philadelphia, PA; Lexington Art League, Lexington, KY; and William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH, among many others. She received her MFA from the University of Iowa and is an Assistant Professor at Kent State University.

Friday, January 5, 2017 6-9pm at SPACES CREATIVE WRITING - Looking to geologic pasts to imagine future worlds

Human beings understand the world through human scales of reference, both physically and in time. The study and consideration of geology encourages us to imagine deep time as it reaches into the past and the art of science fiction enables us to consider deep futures. Join artist and geologic thinker Ryan Dewey, science fiction author Charles Oberndorf and artists Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg in a discussion on these themes and activate the 7000 pencils through a creative writing workshop in which we will aim to imagine outside of the human timeframe into deep futures.

Ryan Dewey's object-based, performance, and installation work pop up in unexpected venues including the British Society for Geomorphology, the American Association of Geographers, the Annenberg School for Communication, Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative, Kickstarter, and living history festivals, as well as more traditional art venues including SPACES, ACRE, and artist run-spaces across the country.

Charles Oberndorf is the author of three novels and five stories. He's reviewed books for the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the New York Review of Science Fiction. His story, "Another Life," appeared in Year's Best SF #15. Charles is the Chi Waggoner Chair in Middle School Writing at University School.

marks, the pencils will grow shorter, and the topography of the pencil landscape will change, oscillating between sculptural artifact and event. *7000 Marks* will end when the pencils have been fully used up.

*Centerfold: *The Tanoak, just before felling*, by Amber Ginsburg & Sara Black

*A version of this essay will be published in *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, Issue 42, in 2018.

*In the exhibition: All tables were constructed using the same SOD-infected tanoak and the drawing of our tanoak tree was rendered using four of the exhibition's 7000 pencils.

7000 Marks Events

Friday, December 1, 2017 6-9pm at SPACES BOUNDARIES - Letter writing and direct action on boundaries and immigration

The geopolitical tightening of boundaries we are witnessing today run parallel to the ecological community's commitment to protecting native ecosystems from invasive plant pathogens introduced through global trade, reckless agricultural and extractionist practices. One can argue that the tightening of ecological boundaries to protect native plant and animal communities is a critical step toward conservation, but how may we problematize the way these drawn and reinforced boundaries echo anti-immigration sentiments on display by our current administration and beyond? Join UC Davis biologist Kerri Frangioso, immigration activist Veronica Dahlberg, and Sara Black and Amber Ginsburg in a discussion on these themes and activate the 7000 pencils through letter writing and direct action.

Kerri Frangioso has been studying Sudden Oak Death since it was first discovered in 2000. She has been a Staff Research Associate for the UC Davis, David Rizzo, Plant Pathology Lab for over 10 years. Living and working in Big Sur throughout this time, she has witnessed the impact of Sudden Oak Death and fire to the forests in this region.

Veronica Isabel Dahlberg was born in Canton, Ohio, the daughter of Mexican and Hungarian immigrants. The founder and executive director of HOLA Ohio, she has been an activist working to empower the Latino and immigrant community for more than 20 years, through community organizing, civic engagement, advocacy, and leadership development. Under her direction, HOLA Ohio has been the recipient of multiple honors. Director David Sutherland is currently filming a long-form documentary about immigration as seen through HOLA's work.



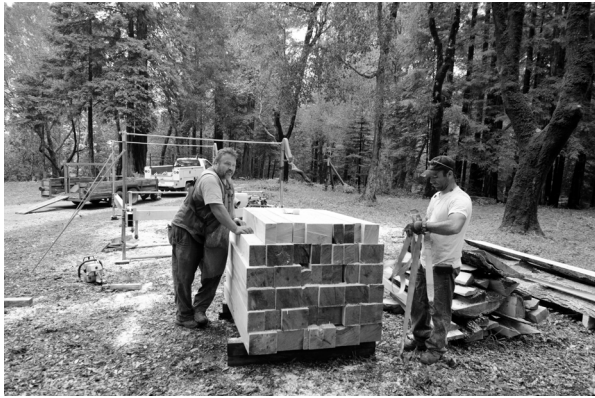
Coastal Highway in Big Sur California, 2016,

Image credit: A. Ginsburg

pathogen. Heat and evaporation render the processed material of wood safe for migration, so lumber that has been milled and kiln dried is free to move across territories.

Over the past year, we have been collaborating with botanist and ecologist Kerri Frangioso of UC-Davis. Kerri is an expert in the SOD pathogen and has been working to salvage the highly threatened oak populations in the coastal west, specifically within the Landell's Hill Big Creek Reserve near Big Sur, where our tanoak was felled. The reserve's longstanding witness and steward, Feynner Arias-Godenez, accompanies Kerri in clearing carrier trees such as the bay laurel to inhibit the spread of the disease.

Kerri and Feynner, equipped with rain gear, poison oak protection and chain saw, led the way to our tanoak. A local sawyer, Dave Merchant, whose work involves the harvest of local diseased tanoak trees to render into commercial hardwood flooring, joined the crew that day. Our rough-cut logs were loaded into his truck, exposing the discoloration of the disease at the tree's heartwood to the naked eye. Hauled along the picturesque coastal highway to his mill, the SOD infected tree has since been milled and kiln-dried out of quarantine, shipped across numerous county and state boundaries of the United States from the coastal west to the midwestern city of Chicago, and transformed into 7000 pencils and five tables.



Sawyer Dave Merchant (left) with milled boards, 2016,
Image credit: A. Ginsburg

Beuys

7000 Marks is both a reference to and lament for the late Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks*, initiated as part of Documenta 7 in Kassel Germany in 1982. Beuys' gesture was a call to foster environmental and social change with the planting of 7000 oak trees. It was his belief that the slow growth of the oak tree held deep symbolic power, representing the Earth and its ages. Beuys' states, "The planting of seven thousand oak trees is only a symbolic beginning," he goes on, "future goals for the project include: an ongoing scheme of tree planting to be extended throughout the world as part of a global mission to effect environmental and social change and an ongoing process whereby the society would be activated by means of human creative will." (Joseph Beuys in conversation with Richard Demarco, 1982)

Beuys' vision that human communities must shape the human and nonhuman world in radical ways through the utilization and manipulation of social and environmental systems, is tempting in its utopianism, but also echoes the colonial and anthropocentric sentiments that led to the very crisis to which his work responds. More than three decades later we find ourselves renaming our current geological epoch the Anthropocene, marked by human accelerated climate change. We know the gestural act of planting trees isn't enough yet we lack the political will to counter the potentially devastating effects

on display by our current administration and beyond? Perhaps our contemporary crises require a deeper reconfiguration of our ontological frameworks.

Marks

SPACES gallery is *7000 Marks*' inaugural site. Like a planting, this is a beginning, the outcome purposefully indeterminate. Planting a tree poses a solution. Making a pencil offers a speculative tool. *7000 Marks* resists the clarion call to action, rather, it places people in a room together each with a pencil in hand, a tool to trace and perhaps redraw our conceptual boundaries and to debate new margins. The actions that follow will be dispersed and emergent from discourse, not asserted from a single utopian declaration.



Artist-made tanoak pencils, 2017,
Image Credit: A. Ginsburg

Central to the exhibition, the SOD infected 7000 tanoak pencils will remain static until released into curated activity. The pencils will be used in collaboration with immigration activists, conservation biologists, geologists, science fiction authors, artists and philosophers. The pencils will be used in an ongoing and ever responsive series of events that address personal, local, national and global concerns. Through letter writing, creative writing and drawing, we will attempt to 'map' our enmeshed and occasionally fictive relationships to nature, adaptation and survival. The pencils allow us to document our coming together as we attempt to cross-pollinate our thinking. As SPACES and subsequent sites are filled with

globalization movements like Brexit, the election of a figure like Donald Trump to the American presidency, the legitimization of France's Marine Le Pen or Germany's *Alternative for Deutschland* political party. Each of these examples highlights an anti-immigrant agenda and a firming up of the human-drawn boundaries of the nation state.

As human beings, we project conceptual boundaries to register meaning upon a complex and entangled world. Often useful and even innocuous, these named boundaries reflect our beliefs about the world we aim to understand, describe and control.

Projections of this kind reflect the human thinking apparatus. Taxonomies are the foundation of science, language itself organizes the world into a semiotic system, and by practiced extension, the nation-state compartmentalizes cultures and economies.



Tanoak tree in Landell's Hill Big Creek Reserve, 2016, Image credit: A. Ginsburg

The geopolitical tightening of boundaries we are witnessing today runs parallel to the environmental and ecological community's commitment to protecting native ecosystems from invasive plant pathogens introduced through global trade and reckless agricultural and extractionist practices. One can argue that the tightening of ecological boundaries to protect native plant and animal

communities is a critical step toward conservation. But how may we problematize the way these drawn and reinforced boundaries echo the fear-laden instincts

that extractionist practices have on myriad levels: human, non-human, geologic, and atmospheric.

7000 Marks reflects on Beuys' beginning, this time with new questions. What does it mean to be native to a place, whether human, plant, animal or fungus? The boundaries that we draw on multiple scales (on a cellular level, an object level, to societal and global levels) are in some ways fictions, but our beliefs and rhetoric around them do have real political, social and ecological consequences. How can questions around boundaries reframe our thinking about human migration, globalization, its effects on ecosystem stability, and our fear or embrace of the Other?



Joseph Beuys, "7000 Oaks," 1982-1987, Creative Commons

Boundaries

As colonialism, industrialization and globalization run us fiercely toward late global capitalism, we have myriad crises presenting themselves to an increasingly anxious global population. Pick your threat – climate collapse, mass extinction, overpopulation, post-industrial joblessness, peak oil, disease epidemics, religious radicalism or 'terrorism.' These threats induce a range of responses, often fear or skepticism. After an era of purported social and capitalist progress, we are witnessing a powerful backlash on multiple fronts. This backlash presents itself in the form of ethnic nationalism, anti-immigration, religious orthodoxy and xenophobic sentiments. A few examples in the west include anti-

