

# DISRUPTIONS

## CAROLA PENN

August 5 - September 23, 2018

“I want to bring disparate elements together,  
in order to stimulate thinking about mending problems  
and finding answers through on-going dialog.”

-- Carola Penn



**ARTREACH GALLERY**

at First Congregational UCC  
1126 SW Park Ave Portland, OR  
[www.artreachgallery.org](http://www.artreachgallery.org)

**HOPE IS NOT** a form of guarantee; it's a form of energy, and very frequently that energy is strongest in circumstances that are very dark.  
-- **John Berger**

**THE POVERTY OF OUR CENTURY** is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but of a set of priorities imposed upon the rest of the world by the rich. Consequently, the modern poor are not pitied ... but written off as trash. The twentieth-century consumer economy has produced the first culture for which a beggar is a reminder of nothing.  
-- **John Berger**

**PLACES MATTER.** Their rules, their scale, their design include or exclude civil society, pedestrianism, equality, diversity (economic and otherwise), understanding of where water comes from and garbage goes, consumption or conservation. They map our lives.  
-- **Rebecca Solnit**

... **IS NATURE A SACRED ENTITY** and are humans one with all living creatures, or is nature a wilderness refuge requiring protection from the ravages of humankind? Or is nature just a reservoir of resources intended for human use? Is nature a web of processes that link garden, city, and globe? Is there a history common to all in a society or is there no shared past? Whose history should be remembered and celebrated in public places? Is art separate from the everyday, or rooted in the normal processes of living? Is art the province of the expert, or can, and does, everyone participate? Should places assert or exert power over people or empower them? ..."  
-- **Anne Whiston Spira**

## **ARTIST'S STATEMENT: CAROLA PENN**

The Free Speech Movement at UC Berkeley, and a summer spent in Washington DC lobbying for the Mississippi Freedom Democrats, made an indelible impression on me about disparities in this country. The subsequent years have reinforced the experience of this fragmented society; urban renewal, wars, environmental degradation, issues of immigration, and general social indifference remain ongoing problems. Both positive and negative aspects of disruption continue to challenge our day to day experience. I feel impelled to find a visual language for expressing the theme of disruption in painted forms.

In the eighties, at PNCA, I began working with irregular shapes, combining images in order to avoid the rectangular format of a canvas and exploring possibilities for creating a different kind of dis-order. While a framed picture can suggest a separate, perfect world, reassuring the viewer that art can solve the imbalances of life, I would rather trigger discomfort by creating forms that disturb. I cut painted wooden panels with a jigsaw, rearrange them, intersperse them with collage, forming irregularly shaped, violently juxtaposed images.

Panels that make up my paintings can be moved, inhabit different paintings, or be replaced depending on the contexts where they are shown. I look for disruptions that are not entirely chaotic but suggest relationships between the images, tell stories of their histories or inspire narratives in the viewer's imagination. I want to bring disparate elements together, in order to stimulate thinking about mending problems and finding answers through on-going dialog.

Some resources for my work include Cubism, Film, Expressionism, and the media. Cubism enabled us to see the complexity of visual representation from different perspectives within one frame. Film has opened my eyes to the power of framing, cropping, and editing. Expressionism empowers the communication of personal vision. And the Media (digital, radio, television, and paper) is a pervasive factor that colors the atmosphere with its intrusion of horrific events interspersed with commercials and trivia.

In the eighties and nineties my paintings were allegorical, influenced by figurative paintings of Max Beckman, Edvard Munch, David Park and many others. Lately, I have drawn more specifically from present moments, living and traveling in Portland, the Northwest, and West Coast. I use the color, textures and the tactility of painted surfaces to express physical connection to these places; they are means of sensing painting as an intimate gestural experiment.

## CURATOR'S REFLECTION: SHELDON HURST

### THE MARKS WE MAKE

As a child in a small town in southern Ohio, I walked many trails through nearby woods. The stories of Native American Mound Builders piqued my interest because of the mysterious presence of these slight and gentle rises in the earth, something created centuries before my family moved there. One of the stories we were told had to do with the way these ancient people lived without disturbing their environment. They made paths through the forest, but they knew how to walk without leaving an imprint, without leaving evidence they had passed that way. They read trees and sky and hills for directions, and nature was a very close friend.

What a contrast the Mound Builders' paths were to Eisenhower's Highway Act of 1956, the national road building project. Near my home was built a road that stretched from Cincinnati to Cleveland via Columbus; the CCC connected three great Midwestern cities for the sake of easy travel and with an eye to possible military use. It also cut great swaths through farmland and made bold incisions into the major cities along the way, including my own. And while I experienced this road infrastructure as it was being built in Ohio in the late 1950s, I subsequently discovered that this same effort was realized in other cities and countrysides throughout our nation, from Boston to Chicago to San Francisco, from Minneapolis to Saint Louis to New Orleans. And, it turns out, in Portland, where I make my home now. The highways cut cities into sections and redefined social patterns according to relatively haphazard ideas.

In her work, the artist Carola Penn confronts us with the planned and unplanned consequences of this highway system in our particular city. Here in Portland, people must adjust to living on this side or that side of Interstate 5, along this stretch of Interstate 84 or that one, inside or outside 405 and 205; we must choose which rush or crush of traffic will define our daily commutes and excursions. For the artist, such roads are a metaphor for the variety of social disruptions that happen, in multiple ways, in the life of any city, in the social awareness of any people, and in the relationships we have with the earth we call home. There are cuts, coverings, and major constructs that define our lives and that shape, at the deepest levels of our existence, how we consider our lives. Penn's paintings in this exhibition explore this metaphor not only with the images she chooses but also with the shapes of her paintings and the physical divisions of each work. Sometimes her panels overlap; almost always they are placed so one is lower or higher than the others; they are not uniformly joined and sometimes they overlap. Her presentation choices as well as her images emphasize breaks and resulting disruptions.



Figure 1. *Free Way through Town*.

*Free Way through Town* (Fig. 1), for example, confronts us with a road which splits the city's people and has cut through animal habitats and the earth itself--a road we know was built for the sake of connecting this city with another and businesses here with others there. Its three panels instead of one compel us to contemplate the role of such a highway in the disjointed nature of city life, in the effects of the resulting social separations, and in the congestion faced in daily living. These are issues we too frequently find it easy to ignore, but they are the foundation for the question Carola Penn keeps asking with her images: "How do we live?" People choosing life in harmony with nature has given way to people living with and continuing to make bold imprints that seem not even to consider nature or community. The result leaves its mark on the land; it marks, shapes and defines the people who live here. Twenty-first century life is a far cry from that of the Ohio Mound Builders or the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest.

Penn's awareness of disruption is not focused on highways alone. *Fast track Forest* (Fig. 2) is one of the artist's comments on big time, self-interested capitalism. The jarring hillside of leveled trees on the right panel and the full forest on the left are split by a panel of lumber, packed onto a train and in rail



Figure 2. *Fast track Forest.*

transit. The disruption to the land is for the sake of big business and high end profit. The lowered central panel accents the disruption. In another painting (Fig. 3) Penn sets the oil fields on either side of hills in northern California, as if the oil rigs squeeze the vast land from which they suck the oil for profit. The upfront, in your face nature of these paintings refuses to let us disregard what is being destroyed: the habitat of animals, the beauty of the once dense forest and rolling hills, and the value of nature.



Figure 3. *Golden State.*

The daily lives of people who live in the city are also a subject of Penn's consideration. She invites us to observe a disrupted scene in the city where we can hear the workmen repairing streets; the sidewalk, the road, the services adjust around the worksite needs (Fig. 4). She also depicts the re-focused lives of those who take public transportation; they are informed and reformed by the i-phones that psychologically distance them from potential life-togetherness in the bus (Fig. 5). And so each artwork in the exhibition opens us to a new level of awareness of the marks we make, and that make us, in our place in the world.



Figure 4. *Paradise 1-800/Broadway Bridge.*

Overall, Penn's art is realistic, each object clearly identifiable. The paint is mostly applied as distinct colors. The perception of the colors can change, however, depending on one's viewing point. For example, viewed from a distance the tree stumps in *Fast track Forest* appear brown, and convey obvious deforestation and death, but up close they are alive with a play of color dancing in delightful rhythms and perhaps conjure up some hope for rejuvenation (Fig. 6 detail). A close look at the central person in *MAX Yellow Line* reveals a massing of brush strokes at the knee, conveying both the bend and the reflective highlight (Fig. 7). The figure on the right includes sharply contrasting lines of color on the flesh, attesting to the way light has its ways with varying textures (Fig 8). These are Penn's gestures in paint that give attention to the fleeting marks we experience each day.

Penn works as one who points out what is happening--here and now--in the hope that there will be those who take notice, take care, consider options,





Figure 5. *MAX Yellow Line*.

and take actions that reflect deepening awarenesses and common sensitivities. She raises our consciousness to the present realities of where and how we live; she obligates us to ponder our responses. As we give our attention to the marks this artist makes on her panels, we become ever more aware of the marks we make in our own places, in our city, in our world. We are not able to return to the pristine ways of forest dwellers and Mound Builders, but we can address the way we live now and the imprint we will leave: we can make choices still. Carola Penn's art is a call to consider just who we are in this place, and what we can do to keep it human and in concert with nature.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is a list of resources for relating to issues that have influenced the artist. They are related to works of art created for this exhibition.

John Berger. *The Shape of a Pocket*, 2001.

*Lilac and Flag*, a trilogy, 1991.

*Ways of Seeing*, a book and a TV Series, 1972.

Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998

Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York, Henry Holt & Company, 2007.

Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*. New York: Penguin, 2013.

Norimitsu Onishi, "Vast Oil Reserve May Now Be Within Reach, and Battle Heats Up" in *The New York Times*, Feb 3, 2013.

David Roberts, "10 reasons why fracking for dirty oil in California is a stupid idea" in *Grist*, March 18, 2013.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PROJECTS

- 2018 Disruptions, ArtReach Gallery, Portland, OR  
2016 Portland Paintings, First Unitarian Church, Portland, OR  
2014-15 *Forest Paintings*, Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1998-2018 *Open Studios*, Seed Building, Portland, OR  
2011 Drawings for the documentary film, "Everyday Sunshine: the Story of Fishbone"  
2005 *Material/Etherial* with Julia Stroll, Lower Columbia, Longview, WA  
2003 *Paintings from My Second Childhood*, Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
2001 *More Dust and Vapors*, Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1998 *New Paintings*, Mark Woolley Gallery, Portland, OR  
1997 *Carola Penn*, The Polish Museum of America, Chicago, IL  
1995 *Compartments*, Acanthus Gallery (aka Mark Woolley Gallery), Portland, OR  
1994 *Recent Paintings*, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1994 Silverton Art Center, Silverton, OR  
1992 *Assembled Paintings*, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1991 *Exteriors*, Cabell Center, Catlin Gabel School, Portland, OR  
1990 *New Work*, Littman Gallery, Portland State University, Portland, OR  
1988 Renshaw Gallery, Linfield College, McMinnville, OR  
1987 *Missing Pieces*, Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, OR

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Around Oregon Annual*, The Arts Center, Corvallis, OR  
2012 *Avoir un Don, Architecture*, Concordia College, Portland, OR  
2008 *Three Artists*, Glen and Viola Walters Cultural Arts Center, Hillsborough, OR  
2008 *Politik: Left, Right and Center*, North Bank Gallery, Vancouver, WA  
2006 *Alien and Sedition*, Woolley at Wonder, Portland, OR  
2004 *21 Years of Studios*, Cathedral Park Place, Portland, OR  
2003 *A Celebration of the Forest: Ten Years Later*, Lower Columbia College, Longview, WA  
2001 *A Celebration for Jack McLarty, Portland Artists*, Portland, OR  
2002 *City Change: Selections from the Visual Chronicle of Portland*, Portland, OR

- 2000 *Anniversary Exhibition*, Quartersaw Gallery, Portland, OR  
1999 *Art Slate*, Veterans' Memorial Hall, Condon, OR  
1997 *Art Slate*, Veterans' Memorial Hall, Condon, OR  
1998 *North and Northeast Portland: Selections from the Visual Chronicle of Portland*, Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, Portland, OR  
1998 *Heads*, Wentz Gallery, Pacific Northwest College of Art, Portland, OR  
1996 *Let Them Eat Cake*, Mark Woolley Gallery  
1994 *Artquake*, Portland, OR  
1994, 93 Group shows, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1993 *A Celebration of the Forest behind My House before Logging*, Blackfish Gallery, Portland, OR  
1993 *Reflective Environments*, Salem Art Association, Salem, OR  
1991 *Oregon Biennial*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR  
1990 *Never Before Funded*, Bumbershoot Arts Festival, Seattle, WA  
1990 *Four Painters*, Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, OR  
1990 *Apartheid and Racism*, Blackfish Gallery, Portland, OR  
1990 *Artquake*, Portland, OR  
1989 *Oregon Biennial*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR  
1988 *Artquake*, Portland, OR

## SELECTED COMMISSIONS and COLLECTIONS

- SW Washington Medical Center, Vancouver, WA  
Lower Columbia College, Longview, WA  
Yale School, Ariel, WA  
Washington State University, Vancouver, WA  
Kows for Kids on Parade, Portland, OR, Land O' Lakes collection  
Boly/Welch Building, Pat Welch, Portland, OR  
Squalicum High School, Bellingham, WA  
Central Oregon Community College, Bend, OR  
Portland Visual Chronicles, Regional Arts & Culture Council, OR  
Capitol Walls Mural Project, traveled to Salem, Beaverton, and Portland, OR  
Paul Sposato and Richard Matkin, Portland, OR  
Nancy and Andrew Glass, Portland, OR  
Susan and Alan Trump, Calabasas, CA  
The Esterle Family, Encino, CA

## TEACHING

2003-5 Workshops at Yale Valley Arts Festival, Ariel WA  
1998 Workshop at Oregon College of Arts and Crafts, Portland, OR  
1990-4 PNCA Extension classes in painting, Portland, OR

## RESIDENCY

1998 Centrum, Port Townsend, WA

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Peter Frank, "*The Human Ecology*," *Artvoices Magazine*, Spring 2015  
*The Daily News*, Tom Paulu, Entertainment, 2/17/05  
*Portland Tribune*, Weekend Life, 7/16/04  
*Oregonian*, Arts and Entertainment, 4/18/03  
*Oregonian*, "Pick Hit," 5/25/01  
*Oregonian*, D.K. Row, "Painters' Painter" 5/8/98  
*The Polish Museum of America*, catalog, Harold Johnson, "Carola Penn," 1997  
*New American Paintings*, Spring 1996, Volume 1, VI  
*Artweek*, Lois Allan, "Carola Penn at Acanthus Gallery," 12/95  
*Reflex*, Matt Ferranto, "Carola Penn at Acanthus (Portland)," 12/95  
*Reflex*, Lois Allan, "Retracing the Landscape," 8/94  
Lois Allan, "Forest Lives; Julia Stoll Installation at Blackfish Gallery,"  
*Artweek*, 1/6/94  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Anderson Moves Along Difficult Artistic Route," 6/17/94  
*Artweek*, Lois Allan, "Natural Acts; Reflective Environments at Bush Barn  
Art Center," 4/8/93  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Critic's Choice; Paintings with Weight," 1992  
*Oregonian*, Randy Gragg, "Critic's Choice; More Than First Met the Eye," 5/4/90  
*Willamette Week*, Renardo Barden, "Openings; Portland State University," 5/2/90

## EDUCATION

1986 BFA Painting, Pacific Northwest College of Art  
1967 BA Art, University of California, Berkeley  
Studies in printmaking, calligraphy and lettering at Portland State University,  
Portland, OR



Figure 6. *Fast track Forest*, right panel detail.



Figure 7. *MAX Yellow Line*, central panel detail.

## CHECKLIST

1. **North Portland Junction**, acrylic and sand on board, 60" x 117"
2. **Night Passage**, acrylic, 48" x 96"
3. **Nights**, acrylic, 48" x 64"
4. **Free Way through Town**, acrylic, 50" x 69 1/4"
5. **Paradise 1-800/Broadway Bridge**, acrylic, 48" x 81"
6. **Gulf**, acrylic, collage, mixed media, 76" x 55"
7. **Red line**, acrylic, 54" x 82"
8. **MAX Yellow Line**, acrylic, 54" x 55"
9. **Unfinished City**, acrylic on canvas and board, 84" x 100"
10. **Fast track Forest**, acrylic and plywood on board, 52" x 96"
11. **Golden state**, acrylic, 52" x 96"
12. **Sauvie Island Road**, acrylic, 48" x 61"
13. **Forest Tracks**, acrylic, sand on board, 59" x 63"
14. **Time and Termites**, wood pieces, sand, termite residue, acrylic, 48" x 36"



Figure 8. *MAX Yellow Line*, right panel detail.

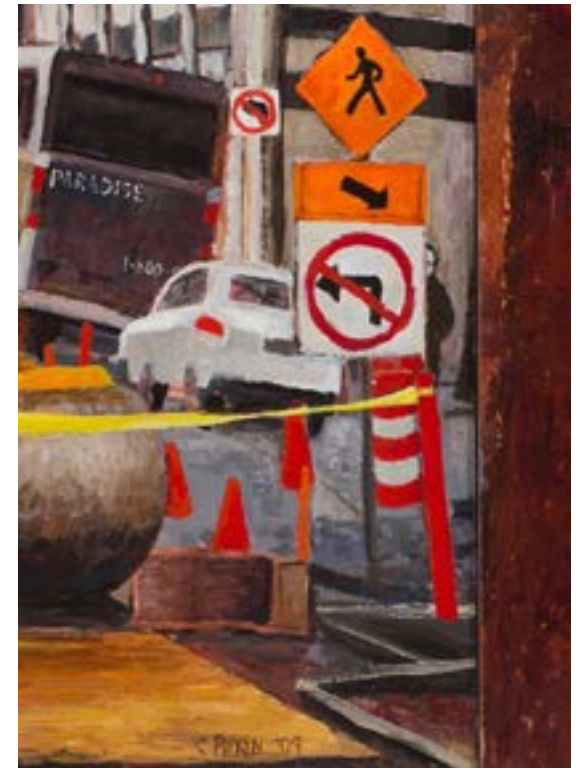


Figure 9. *Paradise 1-800/Broadway Bridge*, left panel detail.





Carola Penn. *Gulf*.

**CURATOR'S EVENT      Saturday, September 8**

10am - Noon

**What kind of violence has disrupted your life?**

**Are there other social issues in this exhibition that disrupt you?**

**Have you figured out what to do about these disruptions?**

Join artist Carola Penn, curator Sheldon Hurst and Elizabeth Durant, minister at First Congregational UCC in discussion and reflection on **DISRUPTION** in our lives today.