

CHANG-AE SONG

ARTIST STATEMENT

Mass Landscape

In my recent MASS drawing series, I am exploring human nature and the human condition in relation to our current cultural, social, ethical, and political situations, using multiple images of human figures to form landscapes.

I employ strategies of dual perspectives and scale. For example, the viewer encounters a panoramic view of a graceful landscape. This panorama might seem at first cliché, reminiscent of romantic landscapes in both Eastern and Western art. Upon closer observation, though, unexpected human images challenge the viewer, contrasting their first impression of what the work was going to be about. Details of fragmented human bodies — entangling, wrestling, climbing, mixing — seem sexual, grotesque, even sinister. Up close, the image appears far more complex and ambiguous. The contradiction of these dual perspectives, the macro and micro, shifts the meaning and experience of the work. The gestalt actively engages the viewer, both physically and psychologically, and allows the work to bridge imagination and real space.

The original source of the figure drawings I incorporate into landscapes comes from online newspaper photos of the Abu Ghraib detainees. One photograph in particular shocked me; it depicted naked figures climbing on top of one another in a pyramid. It was the most appalling and humiliating photo I've ever seen. I use this appropriated image as a basic element, multiplying and manipulating it through photocopying. I conceive of this essential mechanical process as like a mutation in science: a single cell multiplies endlessly by division with modification. This mechanical process also alludes to both constructive and destructive aspects of war and its endless cycle of human atrocities.

The meaning of the figures morphs and expands through photocopying. The symbolic importance of Abu Ghraib becomes less singular. It takes on multiple and timeless meanings, with historical references to genocide, sexuality, landscape, etc. In my MASS series, I hope to present a visual language that enables such a connection between East and West to address our collective human condition related to contemporary events. The ambiguous interrelationship between humans and nature is the core question of my work: Are these figures elements that activate our inanimate land, or are they trash to be swept away?