

Marcel van Eeden, *The Garden*, Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto,
October 17 – November 23, 2013

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Elise Rasmussen, *Rupestrian Sculptures*, 2012.

photo : © Elise Rasmussen, courtesy of the artist and ESP|Erin Stump Projects

Elise Rasmussen, *Finding Ana*

Erin Stump Projects, Toronto, November 7–30, 2013

What if the singular aura of an original artwork, that marker of authority and authenticity, could only be preserved through photography? What if, outside of the realm of museums and conservation departments, original works were left to weather, wear, and disappear? Such is the case with Elise Rasmussen's photographs of the "missing" sculptures of Cuban-born artist Ana Mendieta (1948–1985). Rasmussen embarks on a project of rediscovery and resuscitation but forges something new in the process. In capturing the quiddity of Mendieta's work, Rasmussen creates her own.

Ana Mendieta's *Rupestrian Sculptures* (1981) should not exist anymore. Both the Guggenheim Museum and the Ludwig Foundation reported that the works were destroyed, but Rasmussen managed to find them—this in itself is remarkable. A series of seemingly anthropomorphized rocks, Mendieta carved these figurative imprints into the creviced limestone hills of Jaruco, Cuba, during her only return to the country. Left in their original sites with no maintenance or safeguards, the porous limestone forms have eroded and altered over the last three decades. Rasmussen indulges this aging. A series of five soft-grained photographs captures the saturated dampness of these hills and toys with the deeply Paleolithic elements of Mendieta's aesthetic. Rasmussen makes no attempts to clear or enhance the original works—the sculpture's chalky grays are regularly interrupted by verdant overgrowth.

Finding Ana does not focus exclusively on pre-existing work—some of the photographs illustrate the spaces and locations that surround the sculpture. Two of the images capture cave paintings that lie beneath the Escaleras de Jaruco and inspired Mendieta's work. The caves themselves are wonderfully interior; their cavernous spaces register as rock wombs. One of these photographs, *At Night They Go Amongst the Living* (2012), enhances and plays with the cave's void-like quality. Rasmussen focuses the camera on the periphery, bringing the rocky circle that frames the photograph into sharp detail while allowing the centre to become blurred and distant. The camera directs us to nowhere. The photograph foregrounds nothing, and this absence renders it as haunting as the forgotten sculptures.

In *Finding Ana*, Rasmussen creates documentation without archival sterility; she memorializes Mendieta without slipping into hagiography. At a time when numerous institutions and artists are attempting to re-evaluate and revisit Mendieta's work, striking this balance is no simple task. Beautifully haunting, these images capture the imagination even without the relatively romantic notion of rediscovery. They are photographs that celebrate more than Mendieta—they champion the trace, the hint. They raise the winking suggestion that someone came before; that some magic was here.

[Caoimhe Morgan-Feir]



Marcel van Eeden, *The Garden*, installation view, Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto, 2013.

photo : Jimmy Limit, courtesy of Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto

Marcel van Eeden, *The Garden*

Clint Roenisch Gallery, Toronto, October 17–November 23, 2013

There is fiction and non-fiction; there is also the existence of narrative possibilities at the intersection of both. It is in this murky non-place that Marcel van Eeden has spun his elaborate and ambitious web. His solo exhibition this fall at Toronto's Clint Roenisch Gallery is part of a project so multi-layered and interwoven, it leaves one marveling at the Dutch artist's compulsion to create.

The Garden is part of a series of exhibitions—hosted in various cities around the world and over-archingly titled *The Hotel*—that follows the imagined sensational escapades of K.M. Wiegend (amongst other enigmatic characters) who is an actual (though likely unremarkable) American botanist van Eeden chanced upon in a book. The show consists of several drawings composed in pencil, oil stick, and mixed media alongside a haunting video work by the artist and, curiously, a simplified, stark-black garden that greets visitors as they enter the gallery space.

In the same subtle manner that van Eeden imagines the potential (though improbable) life of this unknown linchpin, he straddles with great skill that elusive perfect balance of conceptual soundness with undeniable artistic skill. His trademark small pencil drawings dot the walls of the gallery, inviting the viewer to lean in very close. This proximity reveals a fragmented, poetic narrative in the form of a hand-drawn font, seemingly conveying a voice that is barely a whisper, propelling one into that electrifying state of mind that tells us something is about to happen. The conveying of this uncanny feeling is a testament to the artist's command of light and shadow, creating the moody atmosphere of what feels like a precursor to a dramatic event.

Many quintessential works of art, literature, and film were created out of a desire to imagine past lives and events, often out of a romanticization of a time unknown to us, or by the need to knit together the pieces of a disintegrating history. This desire likely extends to van Eeden, who is concerned with meticulously documenting, through the process of drawing, pieces of history both real and fictional, spanning the many years between the advent of photography and the date of his birth, November 22, 1965.

The exhibition at Clint Roenisch Gallery also marks a precedent in the seasoned artist's career: two large-scale drawings, both untitled, signal a break away from his telltale sketchbook-sized images, allowing one to wholly absorb van Eeden's virtuosity in drawing. These vast works create a dizzying landscape of smudges and ferocious strokes that reinforce the feeling that van Eeden might draw the way one would take in air—the inkling that his artistry and imagination are no longer his to control but are amalgamated into something much bigger, taking on a fantastic life of its own.

[Mariam Nader]