...colonialism is ‘first, foremost and always about land.’


Literature and art have shaped our understanding of American identity, often depicting histories that disappear the experiences of Indigenous and Black Americans, as well as those of women. Partial and false narratives continue to permeate the ways we conceptualize landscape, national identity, and our experience of place. The collage, drawing, and installation work in *Indigo* inverts and distorts this imagery as a way of poking holes in problematic, seemingly benign narratives.

The collage work in *Indigo* takes two forms. The first uses fragments from Currier & Ives calendars as source material, contorting the original content as a means of questioning the assumptions implicit in depictions of Americana, which is rife with stereotypes that present white, male privilege and manifest destiny as truth.

The second collage form uses digital methods to blend imagery from a range of sources, including early Farmington property maps and tax documents that reveal the artist’s deep lineage in CT, drawings of colonial era ships, photographs of the body in the landscape, and text from letters Julian Hawthorne wrote to a secret love interest, Marion Alethe Morton (these letters are held in the Stanley Whitman House archive). The multigenerational process--draw, collage, digitally manipulate, print, draw, collage, etc.--disrupts historical tropes, in which, for example, a painting might depict a landscape designed to inspire awe, a sense of exceptionalism, and a God-given right to expand the colonial settler footprint across the continent. The work manipulates problematic imagery--the passive female body in the landscape, the “wild Indian” body hiding ominously in the bushes, the grandeur of a colonial ship sailing toward the “new world,”--in order to make its subtext visible. The collages include linear elements which simultaneously reference lines of text and topography. Which stories, letters, documents have been kept--deemed valuable and worthy of protection—and which are discarded? Whose stories are told and whose are disappeared?

The site-specific installation, *Frame*, stands as an intervention in and conversation with the preserved colonial house. The work uses cloth, rope, and beads on wooden armatures to invoke ships, ocean voyages, and constructions and devices from the early colonies. Three structures are installed in the original house, serving also as frames for the colonial reenactment in the museum’s rooms and for our viewing of them.

The history of America is a history of place, and the final collection of drawings roots the body of work in the landscape and demonstrates the artist’s process of research and discovery. An assemblage of process sketches hangs near gestural drawings of passenger pigeons and indigo plants. Now extinct, passenger pigeons were decimated
in the 19th century due to destruction of habitat through deforestation and overhunting, a continuation of the settler colonial ethos. Indigo dye, and indigo-dyed fabrics, were highly valuable commodities in global trade during the American colonial era. Gestural images of bird and plant life ground the work, as a way of honoring the natural world, which has so often been implicated in human folly.