

ABSTRACT

This project encompasses a body of artworks created in exploration of the national parks of the United States. Focus is leveled at the production of particular types of viewership and experiences of natural landscape within the institutions of national park and art gallery, as well as within a historical context of national identity and the formation of ideal citizenship.

NATIONAL PARKING



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Big Obsidian Flow, Newberry National Volcanic Monument



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Daniel Tankersley was born in McMinnville, Oregon. He graduated from Pomona College in 2002 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Media Studies focusing on electronic music composition. This book represents his earning a Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of Art + Art History at the University of Florida in 2010.

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A major component of the project involves explorations of the sign that move fluidly from one application of that word (sign) to another. Many of the photographs depict signage found within parks, inviting consideration of the ways in which linguistic texts are employed to prime the viewer for specific experiences of images of landscapes. Similarly, title cards and artist statements in the gallery setting are constructed to highlight their role in shaping experiential norms. Some elements of the project manifest materially with the trappings of road signs or viewpoint signage. They are physical signs, they depict signs, and they operate within systems of linguistic and visual signification.

The role of the contemporary digital imager suggested for ideal participation in the experience of nature and/or art garners particular attention. As mapping and tourism grow ever more ubiquitous in a rapidly evolving, digitally mediated culture, questions arise to challenge notions of memory, ethical engagement, authenticity, and the spectacular. Definitions of reality and representation are found inextricably embedded within one another.

The images, objects, and sounds are products of visits by the artist to dozens of national parks, monuments, preserves, and scenic riverways. An exhibition of this work was staged October 13 to 22, 2009, in The Gallery at J. Wayne Reitz Union on the University of Florida campus. It included several printed texts and free-standing sculptural objects, such as *Titled*, mimicking National Parks Service road signs, brochures, and informational markers suggesting paths for navigating the exhibition space; *Painted Wall*, a series of five photographic prints (26 x 20 inches each); *Nature Trail*, seven digital paintings (large-scale color digital line art prints on canvas, 48 x 36 inches each); *National Parking*, an automated slideshow of more than 50 photographs (many of which appear in this book) made in national parks, art galleries and museums; gallery seating arranged to loosely resemble the interior of a car from which the slideshow could be viewed on a large computer monitor; *Consequence Canyon*, an interactive video game based on three-dimensional digital modeling of the Grand Canyon, with a free-standing custom controller, projected onto a reflective screen; *Arches*, a stereo audio installation of manipulated field recordings filling the space; and *Gift Shop*, a souvenir bottle of water presented as sculptural object.

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Summary of Project in Lieu of Thesis
Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Jack Stenner, Committee Chair
Wes Kline and Shepherd Steiner, Committee Members
School of Art + Art History

May 2010

To the art that understates its immediate encounter, then avails upon memory with a dissonant harmony.



After Smithson, Crater Lake National Park



Car Camping, Mammoth Cave National Park

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

National Parking was conceived in a station wagon with my wife, Becky Blanchard. Her support and feedback have been invaluable to the development of this project. Jack Stenner and Shepherd Steiner have gracefully endured my peculiar brand of engagement through more courses than any other educators. I thank them for their patience and encouragement. Katerie Gladdys and Wes Kline have inspired and guided me, showing the way to new territories and helping securely ground my bases. It has been wonderful to share three years with Sheila Bishop and Patrick LeMieux, my good friends and colleagues in the digital media art program at UF.

LOCATING TRANSCENDENCE

As destinations, the institutions of national park and art gallery both offer transcendent experience in a public setting and derive authority or importance from notions of beauty. These spaces hold opportunities for extraordinary engagement with objects and images, and grant permission for absorption and communion with creation. Their spectacular potential is the product of boundaries. Physical infrastructure including roads, fences, walls, and signage condition the visitor toward a privileged range of intellectual, recreational or spiritual behavior.

Representation of these moments of transcendence, to the extent they are representable, has received strong attention throughout the history of art. Much of the most compelling landscape photography of the past several decades has clearly demonstrated the human interruption of natural places. My work focuses somewhere in between, on the ways in which structures mediating movement and signification are employed to produce the immediate.



Nature Trail, The Gallery at J. Wayne Reitz Union



Signs Posing, Petroglyph National Monument



Mixed Messages, Natchez Trace Parkway



Human Presence, Badlands National Park



Woman With Grand Canyon, Grand Canyon National Park



Influx, Yellowstone National Park



Platform, Grand Canyon National Park



Train, Scottsbluff National Monument



Tour Boat, Crater Lake National Park

IMAGING

The performance of photography is not limited to the creation of artifacts for future reference. It also functions as an instantaneous reality check or proofing of the body relating to an image or landscape. For many visitors, imaging is the prime experiential action, not simply documentation of some other experience. Though I may have seen El Capitan or the Mona Lisa hundreds of times in books or movies, I am still compelled to make my own photograph. In a way, tourist photography is always a portrait of the body enacting somatic proximity to a specific space.

The image does not only come from the landscape or artwork and meet the eye, as though the body alone contained the apparatus of perception. Cognitive, physical, and emotional structures expect and project the image onto its materiality. A self is present between projecting body and perceived object, the process of picturing hinting at its expanse. The artifact becomes an extension of the body as well, and in a way, the beholder of another's image shares in that process of self.



Functional Self-Portrait, Grand Canyon National Park



Truthing, Crater Lake National Park



Truthing, Crater Lake National Park

EXECUTIVE DESIGNATION

The early 20th century saw Theodore Roosevelt and Marcel Duchamp make strikingly similar moves in regard to power and the boundaries of transcendent space. Duchamp's *Fountain* inaugurated the role of artist as executive designator a few years after Roosevelt allocated hundreds of millions of acres to national parks and monuments. Retrospectively, it is Roosevelt's boundaries that seem to define the ultimate readymades. Delineations of wilderness founded on the absence of human bodies and activity are profoundly challenged when their most obvious examples become explicitly managed by human conceptual order.



Gift Shop, The Gallery at J. Wayne Reitz Union



Priceless, Biscayne National Park



Subtext, Natchez Trace Parkway

THE KNOT OF NATURE AND CULTURE

Nature is a set of all possibilities, including humankind, and a concept negotiated by human thought and action. The idealized wilderness environment isolated from cultural pressures is unavailable in practice, as the natural world requires significant construction. Access to areas emblematic of natural beauty usually relies upon an automobile and the construction of roads, manipulations of physical reality. This reality is constructed in the process of perception and projection. The body implicated in that process is composed of physical elements, forming a loop structure of subject and object.



Parking, Scottsbluff National Monument



Parking, Newberry National Volcanic Monument



Parking, White Sands National Monument

SIGNS

Signs relate distance, direction, and history. They provide contextual narrative at waypoints and vistas, suggesting paths for navigation. The roads they describe allow movement along specific trajectories. Do these structures facilitate experience or discipline the visitor toward a limited set of possibilities? Yes. Defacement and illiteracy constitute strategies of resistance.



Painted Wall and *Titled*, The Gallery at J. Wayne Reitz Union



Overlook, Grand Canyon National Park



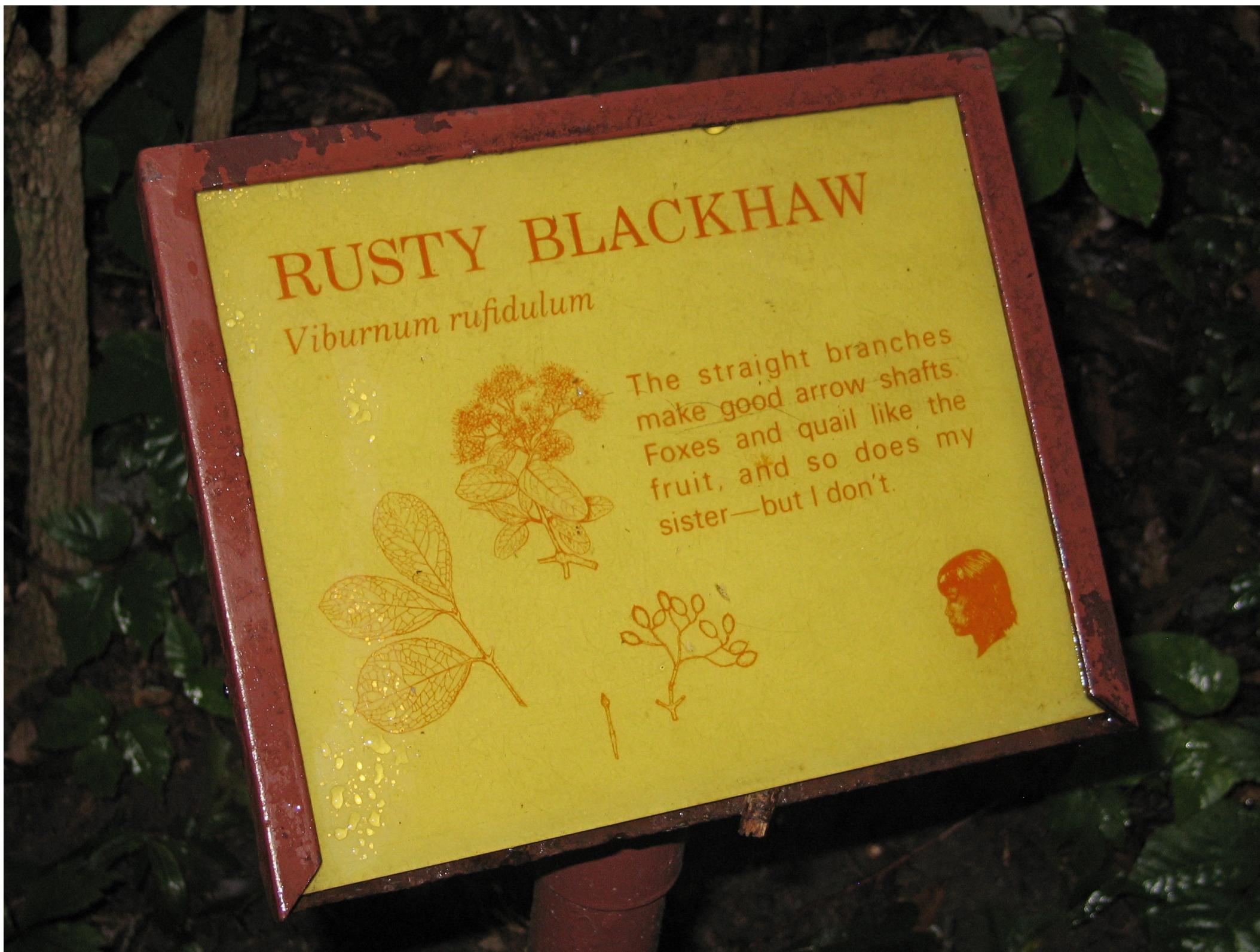
Radiant, Lassen Volcanic National Park



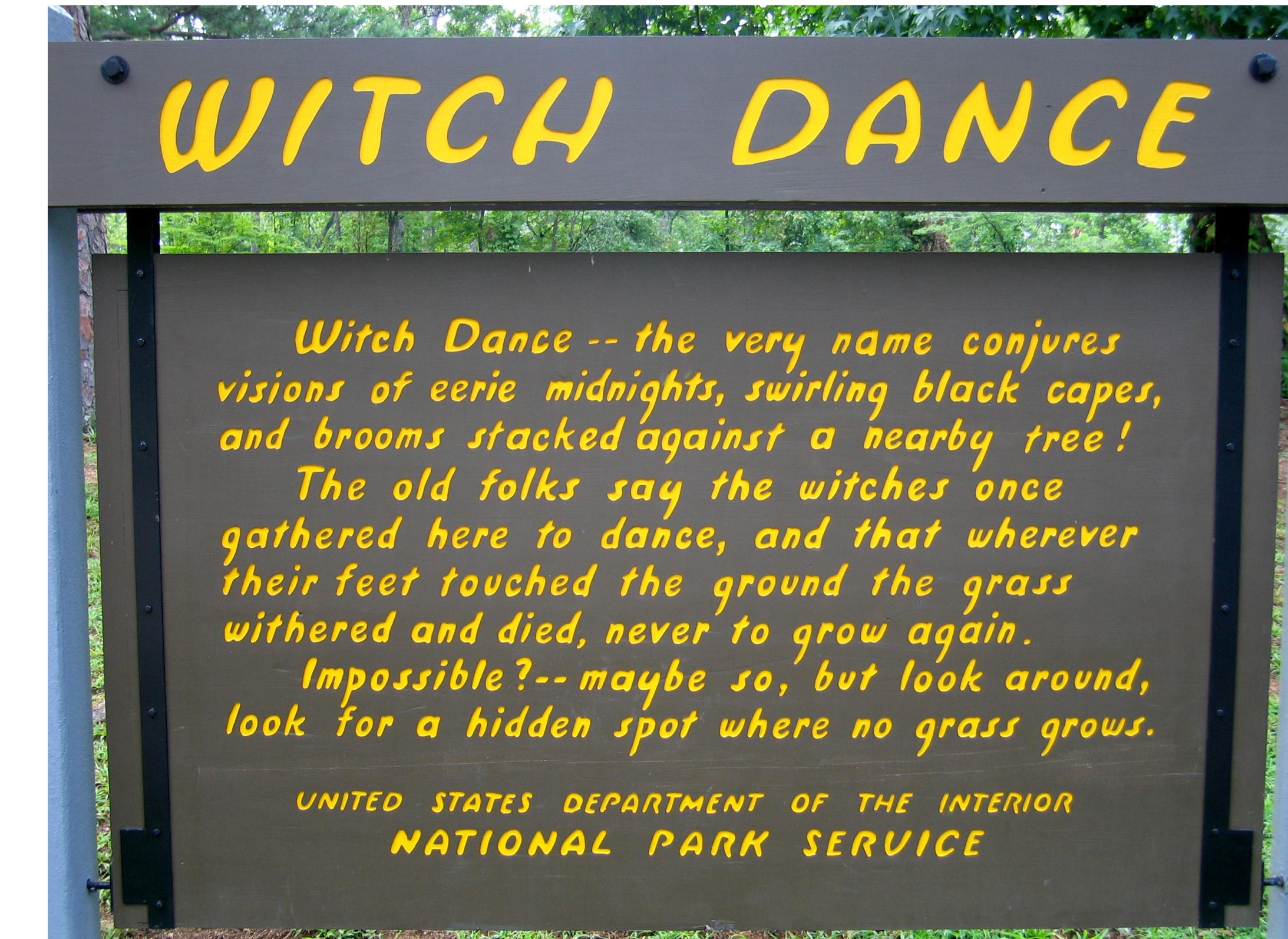
Language Barrier, Biscayne National Park



Magritte vs DHJ, Natchez Trace Parkway



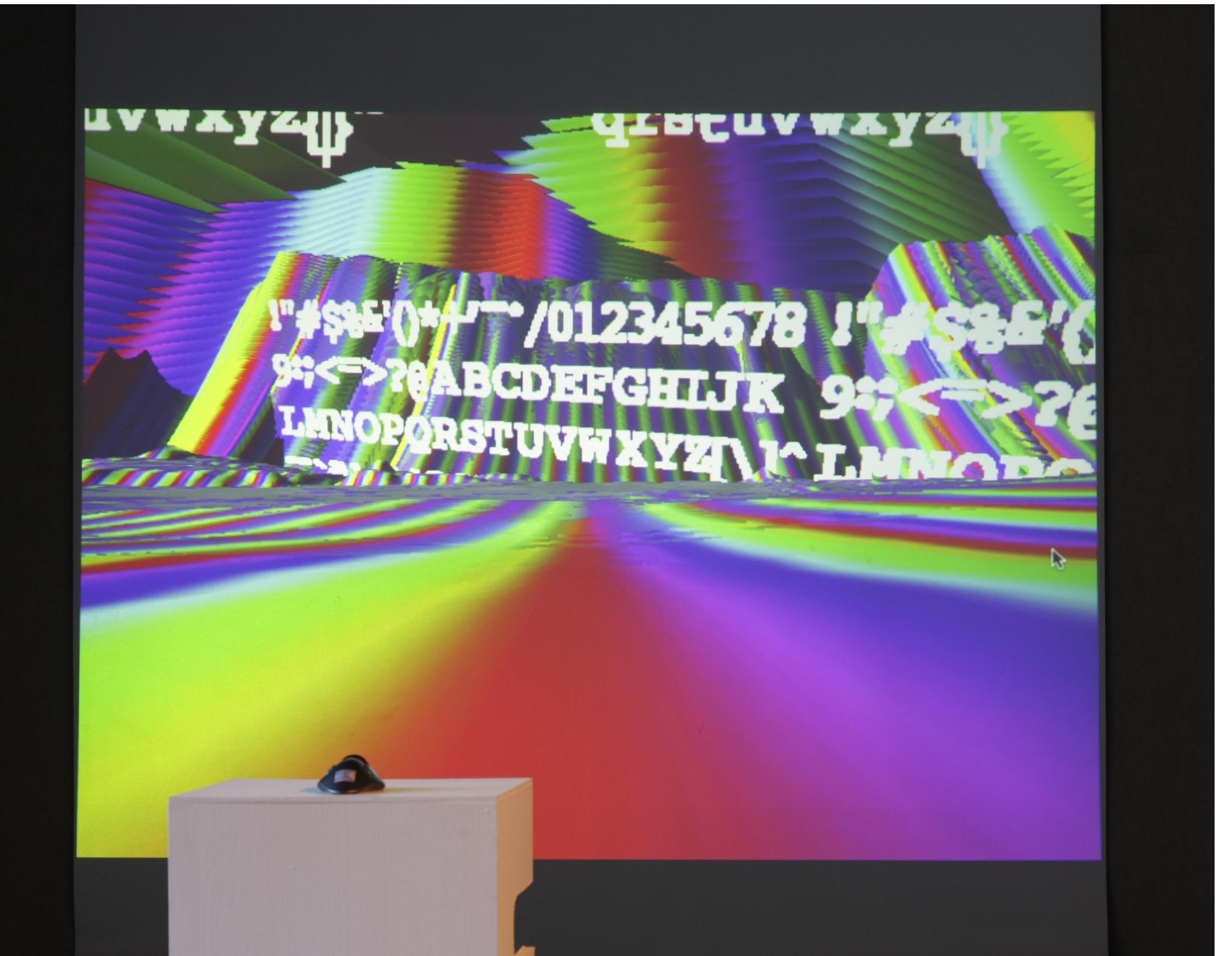
Speak For Yourself, Natchez Trace Parkway



Magic, Natchez Trace Parkway

URISM IS SERIOUS WORK

As people and images travel, they produce a set of contradictions. Place becomes non-place and vice-versa. The same amenities await at each freeway exit as part of a journey that instills a sense of freedom. Perhaps we are convinced of the grandeur of this nation by our spectacular encounters with the art and landscape it claims. Perhaps we are disillusioned by their packaging. In either case, we can acknowledge uncertainty and continue living.



Consequence Canyon, The Gallery at J. Wayne Reitz Union



Morning, Grand Tetons National Park



Futurity, Arches National Park

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