

Unfixed

Spencer Merolla

Library Visiting Artist, 2017-18

Bard
Graduate
Center





My journey into the BGC library began, logically enough, in the As— the museum studies section. Here I found books about collections, monuments, and the way nations and societies tell themselves stories. Then followed books about architectural preservation, where I encountered Alois Riegl and John Ruskin. Freud came up— a lot— and rocks. Rocks were a recurring theme.

But there were strange side avenues of inquiry that led me farther afield. I went looking for an illustration of a civil-war era log cabin interior when, sidetracked, I found myself reading an essay by Gene Bawden about the backgrounds in turn-of-the-century studio portraits of his family. I was familiar with the genre— tacky Victorian cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards in which the (now unknown) subjects leaned stiffly against plant stands in lushly draped interiors, or against a paper maché boulder in front of a vast painted landscape. These photographs were tokens of exchange, collectible keepsakes that promised their sitters both immortality in the drawing-room album, and infinite replicability should they desire to make and distribute more of themselves.

In the Study Collection I encountered more albums, and stereoscopic images of majestic nature and domestic discord. I sought out more library books about Victorian album-making, and writing on photography more generally—Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, Patrizia Di Bello, and Piotr Sadowski. I was over the moon to discover that

BGC's collection has a copy of W.D. Gatchell's illustrated catalogue of supplies for the "artistic studio photographer" of the 1880s, complete with paper maché tree trunks, balustrades — and of course, rocks.

Unfixed is an material response to what I found along my journey here, using found photographs and glass vials. On the heels of my research, my studio practice became a kind of meditation on themes of index and image, memory and dispersal, artifacts, and artifice.

Artist Bio

Spencer Merolla studied religion as an undergraduate and had embarked on a career in academia before returning to her first love, visual art. Her work, informed by her study of religion and history, explores the social practice and material culture of grief through various affectively-charged materials. She has shown nationally and in London, most recently at the Invisible Dog Art Center, Rush Arts Gallery, Art House Productions, and the Fed Galleries at Ferris State University. Her work has been featured on Hyperallergic, The Jealous Curator, and The Creators Project. She has also authored an essay, "The Accidental Archivist" in *Modern Loss*, published by Harper Wave in 2018. She lives and works in Brooklyn.