

Mandy Greer: Seattle-based Multi-Disciplinary Artist

Dai Bosatsu Zendo, a Rinzai Zen Buddhist Monastery,
Residency, Livingston Manor, NY: August 11-24, 2015: Environmental and
Community Engagement Installation and Personal Artistic Research

Overview: I have been invited by Dai Bosatsu Zendo to engage with the natural world and their community on the monastery's 1400 acres -- high in the Catskill Mountains Forest Preserve -- through personal artistic research and through creating a fiber-based environmental installation. The installation will also function as an interactive site for repose and handwork activity, providing a welcoming threshold for visiting family members and the wider Catskills Mountain community on DBZ family weekend of August 21-23. I will be spending a week living in the monastery, observing and sometimes participating in the daily life of their practice of Zazen, chanting and manual work. The second week, I will work in the land in collaboration with my partner artist Paul Margolis, to create a site-specific installation in several of the aged maple, beech, birch and oak trees, creating a lacy cavern of grays and silvers made of shredded old clothes and wool yarn acquired from small, ethical sheep farms both in Washington and the Catskills region of NY.

Context: This residency project, titled 'Woolgathering', is in conjunction with a larger 1.5 year long project of residencies and community-building through handwork that culminates in an exhibition in 2016 at Suyama Space, Seattle, of a media and fiber-based large-form immersive installation/durational performance site that asks questions and bears witness to the human need to make 'home', not just as shelter from the elements, but more specifically as 'sanctuary' or 'refuge'. In this installation, the intimate yet communal construction of 'home' will be activated by vocal and movement performers in elaborate garments embedded sculpturally in the installation environment. These performances will be grounded in explorations of how the mundane movements of labor of caring for 'home' can transcend into rituals of devotion. My time at Dai Bosatsu Zendo will be spent researching ideas for movement and sound scores for this larger work. While I am not a Buddhist, many concepts I am researching seem companionate to the practices of those studying at DBZ.

The installation in DBZ environment: The larger work culminating in 2016 will present three realms, three sites of personal significance to my unraveling the construction of 'home'. These have been fed by the accumulation of work I've done through a series of residencies with my artist partner Paul Margolis and our son the last 2 years, creating films, photography, environmental interventions and costumes in remote landscapes in Iceland and farmland in France. One of the three realms I'll be interpreting is Songhelleir, or Singing Cave, a site I spent time in repeatedly while working in the Snaefellsness region of Western Iceland. The tiny dome shaped cave was first discovered and lived in by the man who first settled the region, who claimed to hear singing from the 'hidden people' while he slept in the

cave. I was drawn to the cave as a place to sing, to heal difficulties in my family through song, and that this 'home' was created by the volatile volcanic eruptions of the Earth, the home to all of us. I'll be recreating this pocket of earth out of hundreds of lacy crocheted and woven mandala forms, created by myself and my intimate friends and family, school children I'll work with on residency in rural Oregon and a workshop with art students in Colorado, as well as family members of those studying at DBZ and members of the Catskills, NY community. Many hands will work on these spiral but intuitive meandering forms, and will reference the many voices heard in the Songhellier, coming from the hidden bowels of the Earth, by a man who was one of but a few human inhabitants on a lonely island, the cave functioning as a threshold between two worlds, his only community. At DBZ, I'll be constructing a domed canopy, much inspired by the webs of Filmy Dome spiders, made out of a portion of these mandalas. Underneath, throughout the weekend, sitting on puffs made from felted fleeces I'm making for the larger installation, I will teach people to crochet and as well as felt around stones.

Community gathering: In my years of incorporating community action into my work, I have found that gathering a group of people together to work with our hands on intuitive, non-goal oriented work, allows people to wander in thought and become at ease with themselves and each other. Comfortable silence can happen in a group of people who don't know each other. People become at ease with playing and experimenting with the hand skills because there is no goal. Again and again, I have been told it's meditative. Whatever they make is accepted by me, a record of our time together, and melded with the stitches of other people. Dai Bosatsu Zendo seems an apt environment to continue this process, where I will act to welcome visitors, allowing them to slip into the pace and quiet of the life there. 'Woolgathering' as a term means lost in thought, but actually describes an action that honors the life and labor of the sheep, where even the bits of wool on the bushes or fence have value.

Because 2015 is year of the sheep, we'll be using wool yarn and batting specifically chosen from ethical farms that provide the best life for the noble sheep and honor their alchemic ability to turn grass from the earth into an extraordinary fiber that has nurtured and protected the human animal for centuries. I have visited Bone Dry Ridge Farm and Green Bow Farm in Washington, and we'll be using fleeces sheared from the sheep in traditional, slow and humane ways to felt around rocks. I'll be getting yarn from Catskills Merino Sheep Farm, near Goshen, NY.

Felting under the canopy. I have been using felting as a way to unpack some complex associations with the rituals that inhabit the essence of 'home'. Cleansing can be spiritual yet cleaning can be felt as drudgery and baggage of oppressive gender or class roles. How can an action be transformed from one to the other and yet remain the same? In felting around stones, I search for cleaning as devotion, as love. Felting around stones feels not unlike the both soft and vigorous action of washing a baby, where touch and feeling what is happening is needed for

transformation, rather than doing it 'right'. The resulting stones become curiously compelling objects to hold and take care of.

I would like to ask visitors to bring several stones, if they can. Felting around stones demystifies the process and allows most people to jump in comfortably! My hope is that they will take one, leave one at the monastery and perhaps leave a few for me to go in the installation.

There is the physical structure of 'home' that is cared for, but there is also spiritual or emotional nature of 'home' that transcends mere architecture, and this larger project asks to explore the small rituals that make that possible, particular in the making of that 'space' for others, in the case of mothering. I will be contemplating this at the monastery and making space for others to do so as well.