



DUDLEY ZOPP

Ground/Underground

D U D L E Y Z O P P

Ground/Underground

Lord Hall Gallery
University of Maine

Cover: *river of sediments*, oil on canvas, detail



Exhibition Notes

As a curator, I am interested not only in a particular artist's work, but also in how I can take that work and create a unique experience for the viewer. How can this particular art unite with this given space? Dudley Zopp's oeuvre consists of paintings, drawings and sculpture that collectively express qualities of time, erosion, and accumulation. For this exhibition I was interested in providing an immersive environment, and Dudley has given us a walking meditation through a landscape of geological formations and the currents of water that erode them.

Careful execution of light and sound, coming from cathedral bells chiming in the distance and flickering votives on the altar at the exhibition's entrance, contribute to the contemplative "slowing down" of time. The placement of the river of sediments, seven hundred canvases winding through the main gallery, has been the focal point for visitors, who have ranged from young school children and community groups to advanced sculpture students interested in the processes of a working artist. The local community has been a strong component of *Ground/Underground*, as Dudley has engaged the public beyond the gallery space with events in the community. She has taken simple materials, themselves having existed in previous formations, and through very physical performative movements, given us a world, one that appears to have been built over time, but that is always in the process of becoming something else.

—Susan Smith

Exhibition Curator

Eons

With her installation *Ground/Underground*, Dudley Zopp has created a meditation on time. We know we are in a place of meditation immediately upon entry, as we hear the sound of bells and are invited to light a candle to images of the Virgin. This is a prayer and we are inside its space, seeking intercession. But for what?

In addition to prayer, bells signify death and time. They mark the hours, the very human way in which we measure out the days. The opposite wall of the entryway tells the tale in another way. It contains three black-and-white snapshots from earlier times. One suggests the 19th century with elaborate hats on the women; one contains an image of men watching something unseen, and another might be a man touring an excavation. These are tiny, fleeting glimpses of time, one of them in fact referencing an even earlier moment in time, the past within the past. Like bells, they mark the hours, at least the hours of human time.

But as we move into the main gallery space, we are introduced to other versions of time, both organic and geological. High, outsized watercolor paintings loom above us, evoking Chinese landscapes and sky but also the flow of water, as if dripping down from the painting itself. In fact Zopp poured water on her work to create the effect, accepting the risk and randomness of what would happen to her art, as if to suggest that it is nature that has the final say. The water theme recurs in a virtual river of paintings, 700 of them, creating a silted stream on the floor that we cannot cross, a dark channel of mud and green-gray sediment. Again a random element seems apparent on the surface of these paintings, a squiggling of wet paint to create constantly varied textures. As we walk back and forth and around, a persistent windy sound in the air ducts fortuitously heightens the effect of something ongoing, ineluctable.



Gazing at Zopp's watery reminders of the constantly changing organic world, we begin to apprehend yet another version of time, that of geology. Glacial erratics that have characterized her work in the past loom above us on the wall, tumble down into a pile in the corner, and cluster up and down the interior room. Fashioned of builders' paper bearing indecipherable writing, they simulate boulders, uncontrolled trajectories, and perhaps ruined civilization. Even in a relatively small gallery they convey the power of scale, evoking eons. As if to remind us, several paintings of simple clay vessels arrayed near the floor locate incipient human culture amidst this overpowering rush of time. Their lowly position suggests that these pots were carved out of the earth, to which they will eventually return. *Ground/Underground*.

Geological time, the biological time of organic life, and human chronological time (bells, photos) all suggest the relative nature of these markers. Time seems to alter with the scale, from massive geological movements, to layers of soot and soil in a riverbed, to the sound of bells, which has no mass at all. Nothing stands still here. There is the recourse, certainly, of praying for intercession from an eternal world, but Zopp's three depictions of the Virgin take the shape of beans, as if to situate the Madonna firmly within natural processes.

With this installation Zopp has fashioned an impermanent record of impermanence, arresting the flow of time only long enough to make us aware of our impotence within these larger forces. She has employed sculpture, painting, photography, and sound to this end, but the effect is something like music: it is in motion, ongoing. Think of an unending version of Arvo Pärt's *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten*, the background constituting slow and remorseless movement punctuated with the sound of bells. It is telling that Pärt, who wrote this piece in the 1970's, found his inspiration in early music, while Zopp, using the very postmodern form of an installation, evokes primitive civilization with earthenware pots, as well as

the eons that preceded them. This is art that represents the very opposite of “objecthood.” We are not outside the work gazing at a self-contained image, a geometric shape on a wall. We are inside, moving through gigantic and minute processes over which no one, not even the artist, can ultimately prevail. But through her agency we may apprehend, beyond the gallery and beyond culture itself, this vast, unfinished journey.

—Mary Joe Hughes
Retired Adjunct Professor of the Humanities, Boston College
Author of The Move Beyond Form













Maine-based artist Dudley Zopp was born in Kentucky. She received a BA and MA in Modern Foreign Languages from the University of Kentucky and went on to study painting and drawing at the Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville. She has completed residencies in the United States, Canada and Europe, and received a fellowship from the Maine Arts Commission. Her work has been exhibited in solo and group shows regionally and internationally.

Zopp creates installations that combine simulated geological forms with paintings that refer to cultural history and question the nature of painting as an art form. Her project, *Ground/Underground*, takes the form of ephemeral installations that add, subtract, and recycle materials according to the exhibition site. At the University of Maine, she installed a series of articulated builder's paper forms referencing glacial erratics and grouped these with four oversized watercolor paintings inspired by Chinese landscape scrolls. That installation also featured a "river" of 700 small oil paintings that mimicked sediments. Three paintings referring to the Virgin Mary as intercessor were placed in the entrance to the gallery. Taken together, the installation's components serve as reminders of the limitations of humanity's ability to control the forces of nature.

Exhibition Checklist

Dudley Zopp (United States). All works copyrighted and courtesy of the artist.

River of Sediments / **1**

Oil on canvas, 700 paintings, each 8 x 10 inches

576 x 162 x 12 inches

Erratics / **3**

Articulated builder's paper, laminated tissue, collaged text, shellac
multiple pieces, dimensions variable

Underwater/Underground I - IV / **4**

Watercolor and graphite on Fabriano paper

each 90 x 55 inches

Virgin of the Bean / **2**

3 paintings, oil on birch panel

each 29 x 11 inches

Sarah Louise / **5**

Natural Bridge

Henry on the Wall

Digital prints from vintage photos and *Erratics* details

each 8 x 10 inches

The exhibition also includes 5 oil on linen paintings from the *Jars and Vessels* group, handmade wooden objects, votive candles and cards.





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