

ART IN NATURE

FRUITLANDS SPEAKS A LANGUAGE ALL ITS OWN

**FRUITLANDS
MUSEUM**
102 PROSPECT HILL
ROAD
HARVARD,
MASSACHUSETTS
**THROUGH
NOVEMBER 1**

The slope down to the farmhouse at Fruitlands is a cultivated one. It expresses a “language” of architecture and agriculture. When Bronson Alcott and his fellow Transcendentalists arrived here in the early 19th century to begin a communal farming experiment, this landscape was already far altered from its primitive state. Forests were hewn to make way for fields and stones harvested to fence them in, orchards were planted for fruit and pines for shade. The sun did not just set but beckoned over the hills to the American West and its receding wilderness. This back-to-the-earth attempt, supported by a belief in the divinity in man, the authority of the self, and the grounding of human intuition in the laws of nature, was simply one more moment in an evolving ideology of “Nature.”

While the title of this year’s outdoor exhibition at Fruitlands, “Art in Nature,” avoids imposing an interpretation of nature, taking the nature of “nature” for granted implies one. There may be a greater preference for work exuding clarity of boundaries and confidence about its place in tradition. For many of the artists, consideration of the relation of their works to associations of place and placement occurred as an afterthought. Many even delegated the sitting of their pieces to the curator, as though the specific environment was no more than an amenity to be dealt with.

SITE-SPECIFIC

Curiously, only one artist, Gianna Stewart, took the initiative to propose an idea specifically generated by the site. Stewart’s converging steel “Ladder to Fruitlands” powerfully fuses a physical, personal, and metaphorical relationship between the viewer and the Fruit-

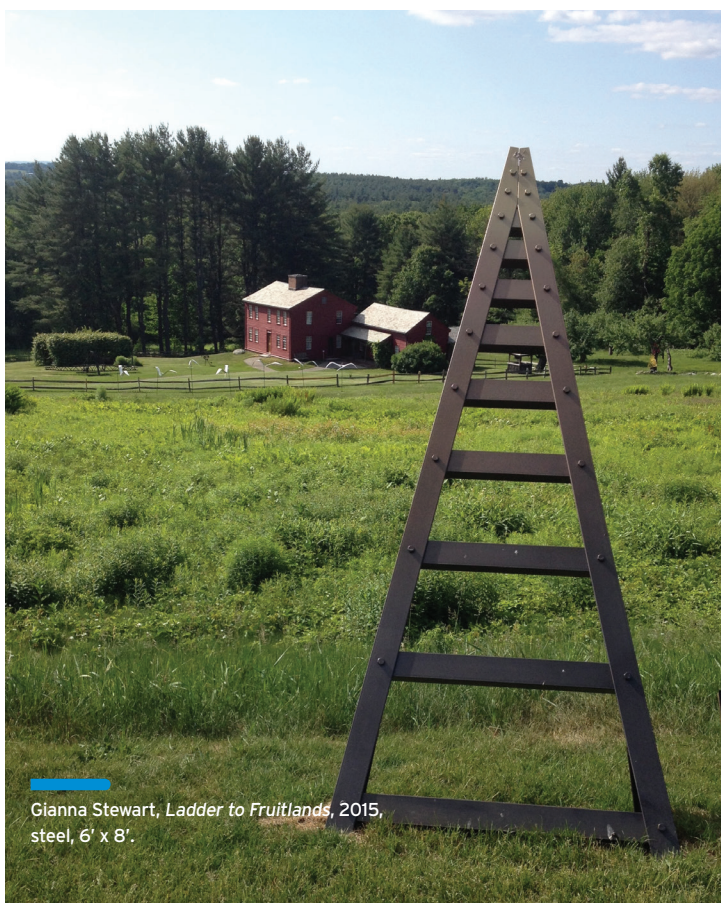
lands experience. It centers her directly before the structure and draws her gaze outward over its apex toward the Alcott farmhouse, then upward toward the horizon of its inhabitants’ ideals. It would be interesting to see how a curatorial vision seeking out more such works

would fare here – a vision daring artists to fail as well as to succeed.

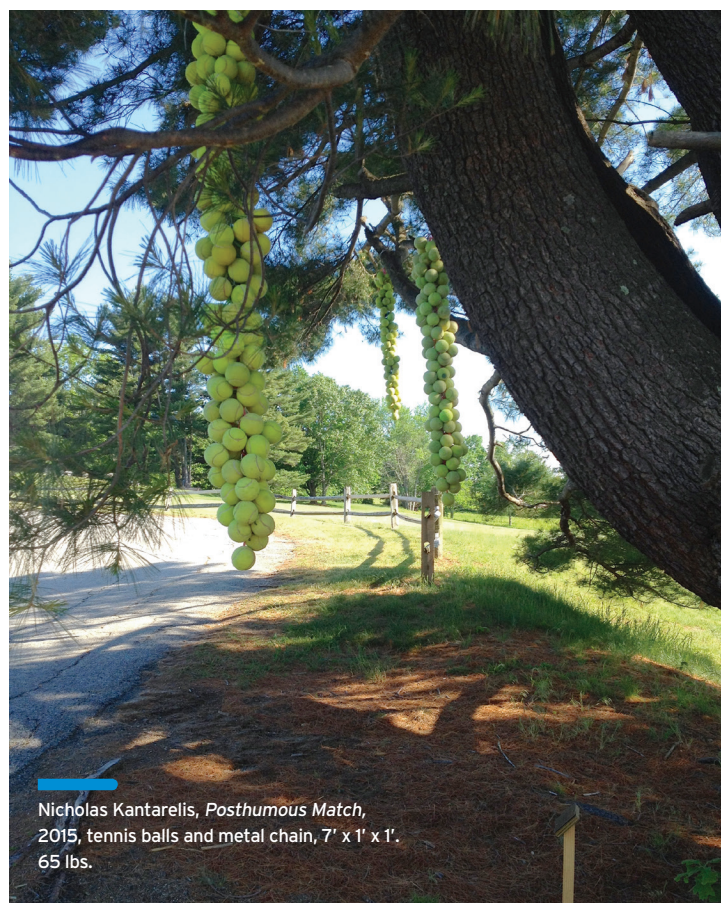
This year’s sculptural crop nevertheless contains many works that are well thought out and constructed to entice, puzzle and amuse. They keep to a compact footprint, clinging to the access



Taylor Apostol, *Colletta*
Caotico, 2014, wood and steel,
12' x 12' x 12', 400 lbs.



Gianna Stewart, *Ladder to Fruitlands*, 2015, steel, 6' x 8'.



Nicholas Kantarelis, *Posthumous Match*, 2015, tennis balls and metal chain, 7' x 1' x 1', 65 lbs.

road that winds down to the farmstead. Each piece in turn compels attention to its materials and the details of its construction. Taken as a whole, the show alerts us to a variety of purposes and styles of artistic imagination.

Several active and interactive works flag us down; some by actual motion that entertains the eye, and others by stimulating bodily awareness and an impulse toward sympathetic movement. Among these, Bernie Zubrowski's flock of flapping plastic wings twirling on their posts like errant gulls ("Flight") seems posed to alight on the zigzags of a split-rail fence. Another of his pieces, "Fantail," a rack of undulating rods that cast neon flashes in the sunlight, recalls the kinetic forms of George Rickey and William Wainwright.

BOOM

Anachronistic and displaced industrial forms moderate the chill of the Alcott group's self-discipline. A puff of wind can set off the clanging of "Boom," Brendan Stecchini's wind-chime extraordinaire, a steel wheel-rim like a giant "O" with dangling rods and chunks of steel; his hybrid lawn-swing/teeter-totter is reconstituted from the crocodilian carcass of a steelyard crane he once operated. Madeleine Lord's rusty welded "Ostrich" struts nearby in the dooryard. Paradoxically, Fruitland's vegan adherents would have abhorred any reminder of the exploitation of animal labor, food, or by-products.

It pays off to pick one's way through poison ivy for a visit to Taylor Apostol's "Colletta Caotico." The artist has sharpened a score of 10-foot saplings into double-ended spikes, then stood them on end and crammed them through the clasp of a hollow steel cube. Poised in place like a handful of giant "Pick-up Stix," they splay out and prick the air in a delicate starburst. Standing aloof in another rolling meadow, Leslie Zelamsky's

oddly split construction of wooden planks ("Compartmentalized Inclinations") equivocates as one approaches, seeming first a solid pyramid, then an open wood-shed. Although the form would seem to have been casually plunked down far from any reference, from one point of view its angles perfectly align with the roofs of a distant barn.

Evan Morse's "Rython" integrates man-made forms with surrounding natural features in a self-dramatizing physical tension. Morse has secured in place just off the ground a heavy nose-cone of carved marble, pierced through from three sides, using a thick rope cable wound tightly around three sturdy spruce-trunks. The dead load of stone resting just a few feet off the ground gives the illusion of a mighty force that can barely restrain the trees from toppling over backwards.

On a lighter note, trees down the road sport bizarre fruits and roosts. From a muscular pine bough, Nicholas Kantarelis' clusters of used tennis balls ("Posthumous Match") drop like elongated bunches of ripening grapes. In the shade of another ancient pine, a Dr. Seussian blob (Phil Marshall, "Dream Pod") floats irreverently overhead, with improbable yellow-rimmed horns trumpeting out from its green skin in all directions. Absurdly issuing from the orifices, pink balls impaled on fiberglass wands bob lazily on the air currents.

Adria Arch's collection of "Tree Glyphs" offers the final word. Her gawky multicolored plywood cutouts, derived from casual scribbles, ornament the apple trees behind the Alcott's farmhouse. At the risk of going out on a limb myself, I confess to having picked out two embellished "A"s straddling the base of a rotting, arching branch as representing the artist's signature – a fitting conclusion to this exhibition.

| Elizabeth Michelman