

Traces: Daniel Ranalli, Cape Work 1987-2007

This twenty-year retrospective focuses exclusively on Daniel Ranalli's artworks that are embedded in the ecology and landscape of the Outer Cape. Environmental and conceptual, Ranalli's work often begins on-site in the tidal areas and sandy beaches near his summer home in Wellfleet, Massachusetts. Exuding a profound sense of place yet also engaging universal themes, Ranalli's practice is both what he has described as a "personal natural history" as well as a true collaboration with nature.

Running throughout Ranalli's career is a deep interest in the elemental and elusive nature of the making and understanding of marks. He turned to such process-oriented works in the late 1980s after working extensively with the cameraless technique of the photogram. To create his initial installations, Ranalli wanders along the beaches with only a few accoutrements, including a backpack, notebook, and camera. Using the raw materials that surround him—seaweed, sand, rocks, sticks, shells, and even creatures—he arranges and re-arranges natural elements and then photographs the results, often over time.

The first piece in the show, *Every Mark I Make...*, serves as a perfect introduction to key ideas that fascinate Ranalli. The artist has arranged a line of clam shells parallel to the shore. In each successive frame the rising water of the tide gradually obscures the shells. Demarcating and tracing time, the individual images in this triptych reveal a progression. Photography can pause such moments and allow them to live in the present; nevertheless, art and life will not endure forever. As each of his earthworks lasts only for a short while, the resulting photographs become evidence—traces of ephemeral actions and sculptural interventions—and the final results touch upon notions of control and chance, existence and decay. The remainder of the title announces the inevitable conclusion: each effort "seems to fade away."

Although situated mainly in the realm of the photographic, this body of Ranalli's work straddles documentary and performance, printmaking and sculpture, and often incorporates objects themselves. Engaging many media, Ranalli can be understood within a tradition of walking artists, including Richard Long and Hamish Fulton, as well as land artists, such as Robert Smithson and Andy Goldsworthy. In the final compositions, Ranalli also frequently includes phrases written in his own hand, adding another level of poetic meditation.

Spanning the two decades Ranalli has spent on the Cape, the series represented in this exhibition include "Site Works," "Zen Dunes," "Snail Drawings," "Tidal Plain Works," and "Whale Strandings" as well as several individual pieces grouped in thematic sections. With the addition of text on the walls, the gallery itself becomes a part of the work. Indeed, the whole exhibition could be described as a site-specific offering—the artwork aptly brought together in, and reunited with, the environment in which it was made.