

## Nature Makes Its Comeback

*Three artists do field work in reality.*

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Barring disasters, we generally see ourselves as above nature, so until recently, media-culture imagery (simulacra and pseudo-simulacra) dominated contemporary art. Due to current socioeconomic and ecological uncertainties, however, nature has made a comeback, albeit tinged with postmodern artifice and mock-scientific irony. The group show *Nature Study* at **Chandra Cerrito Gallery** presents neither Albert Bierstadt's imperialist grandiosity nor Samuel Palmer's visionary pantheism; rather, we find fragments, specimens, and devices that engage the intellect and eye, but seem to document a lost world: relics, for better or worse, of our fading connection to both real and imagined Edens.



Sheila Ghidini's "Red-Tail Hawk."

The large color photographs of **Stephen Galloway**, apparently objective depictions of leaves, grasses, and other organic detritus, "art from nature" scanned from light-table collages, are informed by art as well: the shallow space and baroque movement of "Corkscrew" and "Simula 2/5" recall the proto-fractal drip paintings of Jackson ("I am nature") Pollock, while the pyramidal evergreen discernible in the forest litter of "Sierra Fall" derives from Bernd and Hilla Becher's typologies and Romantic storm-tossed trees.

**Sheila Ghidini's** meticulous graphite/beeswax drawings search out the "growth, decay and the continuum of change over time" as revealed in organic pattern. In "Dwelling 1," "Dwelling 2," and "Hummingbird Nest," the avian architecture becomes a vortex, or focus of visual energies around a dark core, but the cosmic feeling of "nature's innate order" is tempered by the beeswax simulation of faded or stained old photos. In Ghidini's more forthright, traditional studies of fallen birds, "Red-Tail Hawk" and "Sparrow," the subjects' pathos is allowed full expression.

**Lawrence LaBianca** explores the interface between city and country, culture and nature in his hybrid sculptures. Some employ an abstract anthropomorphism: in "Full Stop," steel tubing is cut into vertebral sections, threaded on steel cable, and torqued into circular form and held in tension by a winch; the cabled, segmented trees of "The Birches" are held together by the weight of dangling stones; in both works we're aware of the effortful struggle for existence. Others, however, take form as strange devices: "Tool for Seeing," a lens suspended over a wooden slab landscape, suggests both gunsight and bombsight; "Process" seems to flay and pulverize its specimen branch; yet "Thesaurus" suggests a happy union of nature and culture, its wooden and glass panels, deeply grained, revealed as mirror twins — and synonyms. Through May 24 at Chandra Cerrito Gallery (25 Grand Ave., Oakland). [ChandraCerrito.com/cc](http://ChandraCerrito.com/cc) or 415-577-9737.