

STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

DAVID BROOKS

July 19, 2018

Interviewed by Sarah Dzedzic
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Thank you!

David Brooks

Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic

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1 audio file

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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is July 19, 2018, and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing David Brooks for the Storm King Oral History Program. Okay. How did you first encounter Storm King?

Brooks: I was brought here on a school trip, when I was in art school at Cooper Union. This would have been the late '90s. I don't remember what year, but it was for our art history class. It was one of those art history classes that covers like, the entire world of every culture within one year, [laughs] which is an impossibility, [00:01:00] of course, and so everything is left out except for basic larger benchmarks, and one of the benchmarks was a number of works that were here at Storm King, so, and Mark di Suvero and the larger Alexander Calder [*The Arch*, 1975] by the entrance. So those works were a benchmark in modern art history that we were looking at, in that class.

So, I came with skateboard in hand, thinking that I would [laughs] skateboard down the roads here, then I quickly learned that wasn't allowed. But, yes, so that was the first time I had come.

Dziedzic: What do you remember thinking about the artwork?

Brooks: Well, I was still very much [00:02:00] drifting, in terms of trying to figure out what I even wanted to do, what kind of approach. I come from a background actually of photography, strangely, which then became—I would build these constructed sets. And then have people in them, and then photograph that. Then that eventually morphed into sculpture, and then, briefly, film for a while, and then painting. Then I was told my senior year at Cooper Union by three different painting instructors that I really should just stick to sculpture, and so I was like, "You guys didn't want to tell me that like, two years ago?" [laughs] Then, back to sculpture again. So, for me, I remember looking at the environment and the landscape of Storm King more than even the artwork, actually.

And that's probably quite telling [00:03:00] of the place in general, in that it is not just about these little cherries-on-top of sculptures in landscape, but are really about the whole site as a living kind of thing. So, yes, that's what I'm recalling. I haven't thought about that in years, so that's an interesting question. So that totally just came, percolated to the top there.

Dziedzic: Yes, thinking about how you would traverse the grounds, maybe there's a connection there.

Brooks: With skateboarding?

Dziedzic: Yes, that was your—

Brooks: Oh, it totally—yes. I wasn't sure if I should go delve into that. I talk about skateboarding a lot, because skateboarding actually is a bizarre synthesis of really instant, quick, creative thinking, and a type of athleticism, but it's less [00:04:00] about the athleticism than it is about being resourceful, and so figuring out how to use a curb, or in this case, these roads and hillsides. But you know, a skateboarder would come through here and probably could see different routes across the landscape that a normal visitor wouldn't even think of. Like, oh, you could skate down that hill, then ollie the gap into the parking lot over there, or you could slide across [laughs] that barricade over there onto that sculpture. [laughs] And so, it's a different way of like—I always think of it a little bit like visual Braille, like your eye kind of skimming and scanning across the landscape or the surface of something, and kind of finding new ways across it.

So, yes, skateboarding was a huge deal though, for me, in that sense, and now that I'm older and have done enough work to be able to look back on and have some kind of analysis of, [00:05:00] I can see, very much so, how much that idea of the site—and the site doesn't mean necessarily just the physical site—even an art fair is definitely a loaded site that I've worked with a lot. And so, when I say site, I don't just mean a place that has a long historical significance like Storm King, which has been established for many decades, but it can also be these things that are constantly moving. But that notion of site, object, engagement by the occupant or the view, and so forth, has been so instrumental in almost everything, which clearly comes directly out of skateboarding. [laughs]

So, yes, viewing Storm King from a skateboarder's eyes is pretty revealing, but again, it goes to this idea which I think is pretty clear: with Storm King, those that visit, whether it was many years ago or today, you can see that it's constantly a work in progress. There are the [00:06:00] picturesque sightlines and main views, but even those are completely a cultural construction. And so, that's what I find fascinating too, is this synthesis between a cultural construction, the ongoing maintenance of it, and it living out a life with these natural elements as well. So, that was a long circuitous route from your original question, which now I don't remember what it was.

Dziedzic: No, you really blew my mind, thinking about skateboarding in this way!

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit about the landscape where you grew up, and how that had an effect on how you look at landscape?

Brooks: Yes. The landscape in which I grew up could be regarded as very unremarkable: Brazil, Indiana. It's actually grown to be a larger town. I haven't been back there since I was really quite young. But, it's a very small town, and in fact, I'm not even from the center of Brazil, [00:08:00] Indiana. I'm from a little enclave of houses on the outside of Brazil, Indiana, which was called Cloverland, which was basically a bend-in-the-road town. So out there in this part of the country and Indiana, it's—surprise—a lot of cornfields, and it's very flat. And so, when I say unremarkable, it's pretty much whatever image you have in your head—that's what it looks like; [laughs] it actually does. I do remember though we had a wonderful apple orchard next door to where we lived in Cloverland, Brazil, Indiana. Yes, it was really cool—I remember riding on the neighbor's tractor through the apple orchard, and we, of course, would build forts in the cornfields and around the apples. So there was magic, deep inside. You really had to use your imagination.

So, there is a childlike imagination that I can look back on and think about [00:09:00] the place fondly in some ways, but then as I grew older and was interested in things like skateboarding, Brazil, Indiana is not exactly the mecca for aspiring skateboarders. But yes, it was a pretty dull landscape: no mountains, no beautiful vistas. In fact, the idea of a vista is a very strange notion to me until I was much, much older. There was never anything to look at in the landscape. You didn't go somewhere to like, peer out upon and take in the landscape. A lot of agricultural machinery around. My grandmother was very in tune with the seasons, which I always thought, even as a kid, was so cool. She'd note when certain birds were arriving for the season, for [00:10:00] the spring. She'd always keep notes on if the harvest was early or late this year; if the rains were early or late; all these things. She was very in tune with that, and I was not. But, I could appreciate that she was. I think that certainly had an influence on me, later on, as I started to appreciate what that means.

Now this is maybe not, well, it's not irrelevant, but Brazil, Indiana, has had a hard time in the Midwest in terms of drugs. So, this is not entirely irrelevant, but it actually was a pretty major haven for crystal meth labs. And so, there are distant family members and so forth; I know that there's been a lot of horrible stories and things [00:11:00] going on in that part of the distant part of our family, and, a sad situation with that part of the country. So, yes, kind of a depressed place.

But then there's, again, magic hidden inside. My great uncles all worked at the steel mills in Gary, Indiana, so I just always remember them as being these gigantic human beings, with just massive hands when they go to shake my hand. But my Uncle Verrell, who would literally roll up a pack of cigarettes in his white V-neck crew, and white [laughs] T-shirt, and had slicked-back gray hair, a slight pompadour, a

little bit; played Frisbee outside, of course, and cook out on the weekends, and drove a red convertible Ford—anyway, that is like classic, straight out of [00:12:00] the movies, which I didn't realize until later in life. But yes, that was the land, the setting, in a way.

Dziedzic: Indiana was the first place where I saw the curve of the earth, as I went west.

Brooks: Yes. Flat, and when your eye can pick up that curve, 14 miles, and you'd be able to see that distance, in order to see that curvature—yes.

Dziedzic: Oh wow.

Brooks: And, you can also chase the sunset, because I forget what highway it is—it's like 70, 72, or 64, or 75; maybe it's Highway 75. Anyway, it goes directly west, east-west, perfectly, and so when the sun is setting, in the road, you can chase it, and make the sunset last longer. It's hilarious. People do that sometimes.

Dziedzic: I'm like holding back tears thinking about doing this. [laughter] So excited. [00:13:00] So, when did you go to New York? I'm asking this I guess in the context of when your vistas maybe started to change, or when the idea of a vista started to make sense.

Brooks: Well, when I decided that, after some strange bouts of life events, and depression, and all these things that hit a young teenager, and then artwork was definitely—really saved my butt. [laughs] It really saved me in this way that I could put all of these things that were distressing, or that I was being critical of—or just simply experiencing—put them in a way into something that can be actually constructive, and a reflection of something. And so, that would have been when I was around 16, 17, gave up the idea of being a professional skateboarder [laughs] and [00:14:00] had to just get out of the Midwest, period. So, for me, I, of course, had a romantic idea of what it was to be a young artist in New York City, and I had no idea how on earth to get there, and don't, I don't come from a family of any kind of means. And so, I had to really figure out, okay, I got to get some money; I got to get out of here somehow; what do I do? And there was a lecture being given, an artist talk, at a nearby community college, or something. I don't remember what it was. It was a really small college. It could've even been a vocational school; I don't remember what it was.

Anyhow, Paul Davis, who was an illustrator for Push Pin Studios, a design firm started in the 1960s by a group of Cooper Union graduates, and [00:15:00] Milton Glaser was one of the founders of Push Pin Studios. People might know Milton Glaser for—probably his famous thing is the “I Heart New York” logo, and Paul Davis, who worked with him, probably mostly known for—he did tons and hundreds of posters

and record albums, but probably the one he's most known for is that illustration of Bob Dylan with the rainbow hair. There's a famous, I think it was album cover, and then was a widely distributed poster of Bob Dylan with this rainbow hair. So, I had no interest in that necessarily; it's just that I had never heard of an artist talk happening before. I didn't know what it was. Like, an artist talking? What is that? So, I went there, and I knew he was from New York, so all I wanted was to find out how I can get to New York. And so, again, skateboard in hand, I go up to him after his talk, and I'm like, "Hi, Mister Davis. I'm [00:16:00] an artist and I want to go to New York. [laughs] What should I do?" And he's like, "Oh, well if you want to go to New York, you should apply to Cooper Union; it's free." And so, I was like, huh, Cooper Union. I'd never heard of this place, and I was like, it's free? And I was even thinking if it's free, it must not be very good.

And so, at first I didn't even want to apply to Cooper Union, and I did get a Rhodes Scholarship to SVA, interestingly, so I thought I was going to be going to SVA. But as I, of course, learned more about Cooper Union, I learned that it's not that it's free, it's full scholarship, which is a big difference. And so then I got accepted there, and then, yes, got to do the great escape. It was really funny that when I arrived, in New York. A number of the faculty there, who are on the admissions committee, [00:17:00] were so excited to meet me because they hadn't had anybody from Indiana, as far as they know, ever, [laughter] come to Cooper Union. I'm sure there had been at some point; they just had never heard of anybody from there, because this is before internet. This is the fall of '94; that's a long time ago. So, internet was not really used—I mean, it was just starting, you know.

So, I remember, I don't even think I used the internet for my first time until '97, I think. But anyway, so, no they didn't, Cooper Union never advertised. They didn't have to. They were a full scholarship school. So, I never heard of them. In fact, my family—I remember my grandpa—"You're going to Cooper Union; what is that, some kind of mechanic school or truck driving school? What is that?" Because "Union" was just tacked on to a lot of different other institutions, and vocational schools, and organizations in the Midwest aimed [00:18:00] at mechanics, trade schools for truck driving and mechanical, and mechanics. And so, [laughs] that was a really funny entry into New York. And then I quickly realized there are things like art high schools, which I had never heard of. I looked weird and crazy. I had long hair but wore saddle shoes, and again, skateboard in hand, while wearing a cardigan.

I was definitely a weirdo-looking kid arriving, and then, there was all these famous 18-year olds, because there's these awards, these very famous awards like the Presidential Scholar Awards, the Scholastic Awards, all these things where I have competed. And I had gotten some regional awards, but I had read about all the big winners of these competitions, and they were all there, and so, [laughs] it was a really funny time. So, I learned. I was an extremely fast learner though. I had to start learning like—[00:19:00]

oh, there's this whole world outside of Brazil, Indiana. It was definitely like classic, small-town-boy-coming-to-a-big-city moment. So that was 1994. That was, again, a long tangent.

Dziedzic: No, no, so interesting. I definitely had a very similar experience going to Columbia from cornfield Pennsylvania.

Brooks: Lancaster region, yes.

Dziedzic: Yes, so I can relate. No skateboarding though.

Brooks: That, I've got to say, that really helped me in the city, because I was like, oh, I know this; like, I know how to get around here. I know what a city is. I wasn't scared of the city as a physical place, you know? It's like, what, what's the big deal? And I'd skate in and out of traffic, and I'd hang on the back of taxicabs for an extra lift on my skateboard, or on buses. The best was the bus, because you know exactly when they're going to pull over, so you just hold on to that back doorway exit. There was a little good finger [00:20:00] hold there, [laughs] and the buses were the best. I would do crazy things though, like skateboard underneath of semi-trailers, as they were turning. I mean like really, in hindsight, they were hilarious at the time, and totally idiotic and stupid, and that kind of thing, you're like, yes, that's the kind of stuff you do, and you get people killed.

But yes, we had a whole skate posse, [laughs] at Cooper Union too. I got everybody that used to skate back into skating. We'd all work in the studios until midnight, and then we'd all leave, eight of us, and kicking down Broadway [laughs] to the downtown area, and skate around City Hall, and the Brooklyn Bridge Banks—really famous skate spot, historically. Used to skate there a lot, and uptown near the Mies van der Rohe building, the—[00:21:00] on Park Avenue. The Seagram's Building. And so, but long before I knew what the hell that place was, I used to skate that place constantly. It had—Mies van der Rohe designed a perfect plaza in front of the building for skaters. It had this marble kind of side rail thing, and it was almost as like, is he a skateboarder? He knows exactly the proportions, and the length, and, anyway, we had a lot of fun skating there. And then we learned the next year, all about the history of architecture and that's a very famous building, and then we had a slight guilty conscience about it, but we didn't hurt anything permanently. [laughs]

Dziedzic: That's pretty wild. [00:22:00] So, you mentioned kind of having the clarity that you should stick with sculpture by the time you were done at Cooper Union. What sorts of things were you making? Does that have a connection to what you've done since? Do you see a trajectory?

Brooks: Yes, I was actually much better my freshman and sophomore year than I was my junior and senior year. It's almost like I figured out, without over thinking anything, my freshman and sophomore year, exactly what to do, and then my junior and senior year, I started over-thinking everything, and then double guessing myself, and then, and actually made worse work, which is funny. Actually when I talk to students, I tell them, "It's really important though, by the time you leave undergrad, that you really bring a body of work to completion, whatever that notion of completion means for you, or, maybe, bring it to fruition, [00:23:00] as some kind of level of fulfillment, so that you can reflect on it and reject it fully, if you feel like it's the wrong direction, or, you have something to build from." But, for me, it was an absolute, full-on rejection of what I had done. It became, the work became extremely formal, and formal in the sense that it really was just about the form, in some kind of internal, mystical sensibility around what the forms mean, to me, in a hyper-subjective place.

So, ultimately, that became incredibly uninteresting to me, because it was all about me and less about engaging all of the dynamics, people, things, around me. And so, but my freshman and sophomore year, I was basically kind of already doing, I think, quite good work that was on that path. I did sculpture my—the first sculpture of my second semester, freshman year, which I think is actually a really good piece. I [00:24:00] had gone around New York City at construction sites, and gathered up pieces of the roads, and not small pieces, like coffee-table size pieces of road—so like of Madison Avenue, Third Avenue, Hudson, Greenwich Avenue, kind of also fairly well-known streets, and brought them on my skateboard, rolled them back, [laughs] which is funny, rolling a piece of street on a skateboard on a street. And then, [laughter] rolled them back to the studios where I then built these strange devices that would suspend them above eye level, but they were like through these roller devices, so that if you loosen the device, the piece would slide through these rollers and slide out. So, their weight was being counteracted by the simple tension of pressure, which then disengages these roller devices. It's a hard thing to describe, word-wise, [00:25:00] it's one of these things to see.

Anyway, that piece, which was really a display and a collection of street, and which was very much a way you could see, you could get a kind of different image of the topography, and of the layout of New York City through seeing the different kinds of street. In fact, Third Avenue had this sub-layer of brick back from, probably 150 years ago, that was attached to the bottom of this concrete, and it was just this little section of brick. So, it would have been when it was either a brick curb or a brick gutter or something next to a storm drain, 100 years ago or something. So, it was just the remnants of it, attached to it still. Anyway, that was freshman year, [laughs] and then sophomore year, I started doing work that was very much critiquing the school itself, through its architecture. And so, there was already [00:26:00] an avenue into that, which is not necessarily precisely how I would explain what I do now, or what I've been doing, but it's in the same spirit of.

In fact, at Cooper Union at the time, there was two people who, I think kind of were indicative, or exemplary of the spirit of the school at that time. On the one hand you had this artist, Ery Schwartz, who's, was sort of a mentor of mine at the time, and who became really like family, eventually. She was such a maker of stuff, that she would say, "If you're going to use a screw in your art work, you make the screw." And so she made everything she ever used. There was nothing store-bought in her work, you make everything. So it was a thinking through making that was very integral to, I think, what she imparted on the students around her.

And then therefore, the sculpture shop, which everybody loved to hang out at, [00:27:00] was very much a maker's-maker's place. It was intense. It had a really great spirit about it. Everybody was in there excited to make stuff, because you could do in that one shop, on the fourth floor of the foundation, but at Cooper Union, you could do everything from, of course, work in clay, cut wood, weld steel, cast bronze, warp plastic, vacuum-formed plastic. You could cast plaster. Everything was on that floor, and it was all intertwined with each other. Industrial sewing machines, so I even worked the sewing machine for a while. As soon as the first kind of laser cutters came out, we had those in the shop there. So, it was kind of this great maker's place.

On the other side of that, of the school ideology, was Hans Haacke. And so, Hans is a sort of the [00:28:00] godfather, or the grandfather of institutional critique, and very much a conceptual artist where, I don't think he's ever—well, I know he's never made anything himself ever, and it's not about that, because the medium is the social discourse. And so, those were the two camps at the time, and I think it quite dramatically colored the spirit and the work coming out at the time. I think, fortunately, I was able to pull from both. But Ery Schwartz, who was really a maker, became more like family, and so, all the way up until she just passed away two years ago, and left me her studio in New Orleans. And so, I have recently been trying to get some work going in the studio down there, surrounded by this incredible array of her sculptures, [00:29:00] and drawings, and family heirlooms. She's like eighth-generation New Orleanian, so, it goes way back, before New Orleans was called New Orleans, really. She's part of the first family of French colonizers and settlers there, but yes. So that was Ery, on one side, the makers, thinking through making, and on the other side, Hans Haacke, all about the discourse.

Dziedzic: How did you first get involved with going on expeditions, or participating in the collection of scientific information and biological information?

Brooks: That's an interesting unfolding of things for me, [00:30:00] in that I was always a little bit of like a swamp kid, like I always liked going into the woods, whenever we could find them. And, I remember going [laughs] on a class field trip in middle school to some place that had a lake and a little swamp, and well, you're supposed to take the kids overnight, and you're supposed to learn about leeches and worms, and

[laughs] these things that are in these deciduous forests. And I remember just jumping right into the swamp and digging around, and I even thought it was strange, that I was behaving like that. It was like, why am I doing this? I seem to have no problem, my shoes completely muddy and wet, and just had no problem whatsoever just getting into the water with all my clothes on, just mucking around and looking for things. So, there was clearly a natural urge for [laughs] just wanting to explore the kind of natural elements and see what they [00:31:00] are.

I also, in my mind, I just hadn't separated that there's that culture over here and nature over there. To me it was like, oh, this is all stuff around me, period. Just like one might find a gum wrapper on the street. It's stuff around you. So is this frog in this swamp, is stuff around me. [laughs] And so yes, that, but I had lots of moments of just personal investigation, just literally going out into some undeveloped part, and these are rural areas of Indiana—it was like a little forest or something—and just literally exploring, just looking around, and just paying attention, is actually what it is. Just slowing down, looking around, and just paying attention. And so, when I went to Cooper Union, one of the people who became really [00:32:00] one of my closest friends still, is this Juan Rosa Leon Valadez. Juan Valadez was this Presidential Scholar Award winner I mentioned earlier, [laughs] and so that was funny, but we were fast friends, and he is from Miami, and he had spent his childhood kind of tromping around the Everglades, and I had just come back from a summer, because my brother was living down in Key West, of time spent in the Florida Keys.

And so, we had kind of this stuff about the wilds of Florida, that we could kind of compare notes on. So, we quickly became friends and then that following winter break, and then spring break, and then the following summer, and all of the following summers after that, I had spent all this time down in South Florida with him. And, we just started exploring different parts of the Everglades. I'd buy a boat every summer, usually some kind of crappy boat that the engine barely starts, so then I have to figure [00:33:00] out how to fix it, and then would usually get stuck like 10 miles out, [laughs] or, in these awful situations, and just kind of learning the hard way, also, because I'm from one of the most landlocked places in the continent.

And so, [laughs] here I am trying to learn how to navigate the Florida Keys and the Everglades, and dealing with ocean currents, and things that I didn't realize were even there, and yes, so that was a very long learning experience, but you know, when you go into these un-built areas, you just simply pay attention. It's really about that. And so, and we took a year off of Cooper, he and I, and we went down to South America, and traveled a lot, and then, there was just something about, we had to get into the Amazon, for whatever reason. Now I know the reason. The reason is that the Amazon is filled with clichés, [00:34:00] most of which are true. So, it is this place of great unknown biodiversity. We still don't have an understanding of what levels of biodiversity exist because the more we know, the more we realize we don't know, this ongoing situation. And so, it really is a great escape for the Western

imagination, of this organic abyss, in a way, and it kind of really is that. At the same time though, it is a place of great vulnerability, quick, rapid erasure of both people and species. Its ongoing, current-day levels of colonialism are an unchecked kind of exploitation of the indigenous peoples. It's shocking that it happens with such scale and speed that it still does. It's [00:35:00] traumatizing to watch.

And so, anyhow, that's been a long part of the time I've spent down in South America, and so I was really fascinated with that place because it was all of those things. Also, my lifestyle is completely complicit in acts of its destruction, meaning: I remember one trip I came back from—this was in 2010, in Peru—and there was a whole area of forest that was razed, and illegally logged, a vast section, and when I'm talking a section, I don't mean 500 acres, the size of Storm King. I mean, you drive for a long time, and it's just razed, old-growth trees in and the stumps are all being burnt. And I come back to Brooklyn, and the lumberyard right down the street from my house—just like a month later, [00:36:00] I went to go buy some plywood and there were these big pallets of cheap plywood being unloaded that had an "*Hecho en Perú*" stamped on the side of them. And you just realize how absolutely and completely tied in to these very large, inhuman-scaled mechanisms we are. And so, the Amazon is a place. Again, it's not about this exotic getaway.

It's actually kind of like going straight to the heart of a system of global capitalism that I am a part of and that I have a hard time wrapping my head around and feeling that I'm linked to or can make an effect on in some way. And so, that's actually a lot of why these Amazon trips for me, as an artist—it takes you straight to the source of what eventually become consequences of a larger capitalist network that we're all tied in. The first expedition I was on though wasn't until [00:37:00] 2005. Before that in 1997, when Juan and I had taken a year off, we helped a couple groups of biologists. There was a group of ornithologists in Venezuela. This place called Paso Portachuelo, it's a famous low mountain pass on the coastal mountain range of Venezuela, where a lot of birds migrate from North America.

That might be the first place they make landfall, is right there, and it's known amongst birds, because birds have extraordinarily good memories, that Paso Portachuelo is the lowest altitudinal pass, so they can get past that Coastal Mountain Range by flying through there. So, a group of ornithologists will do mist netting—mist netting is just simply where you set up these nets that birds really can't see, and they get tangled in them. You have to very carefully untangle them, and then they get banded; they get weighed. Now they take a slight [00:38:00] little tissue sample for DNA sequencing, and then they send the bird along their way. And so, that was my first time ever doing mist netting, which was 1997, and then seeing direct field science and what that does, and also that it's not always a perfect science. I mean, that's kind of a little bit of a joke with science is that science is not always fully a full science. It's made up of human beings, and humans make errors, and so, it's a methodology that tries to have a verifiable set of

evidence to support something, of course, but there's all kinds of interesting and hilarious flaws within it, which makes it very human, and interesting, actually. Just don't tell the scientists I said that. [laughter]

But, so I had in '97 been on that long trip. Of course, that trip was huge in my mind for the next few years, just like, [00:39:00] what an incredible trip, and all these things we saw, and this is the late '90s in South America, so, there was certain dictatorships that had just ended. Venezuela was an extremely—not wealthy country, but pretty wealthy, not bad. Their oil boom had been well established, and there was a lot of money flowing into that country. Their 1950s and '60s ventures into futurist architecture and utopian architecture were not quite ruins yet. They were still actually these places that had a little bit of hope hanging on. [laughs] Now they're absolute ruins, and are basically favelas. But, at the time, it was still a pretty booming city, Caracas, itself. We were in and out of Caracas as well as Bogotá, [00:40:00] and we went a little illegally into Brazil; that's another story. But, it captured my imagination, and also my concerns. So, it's these two things. Yes, it's amazing. What's not amazing to a foreigner and seeing this organic abyss? Seeing Amazonian umbrella birds, these animals that are, if I even try and explain them, they sound invented, seeing all of these amazing fish that we were fishing. We were fly fishing down in the Amazon. [laughter] You can imagine how creepily colonialist that looks, fly fishing a bunch—well—Juan is of Mexican origin, but—and I can look swarthy enough to not just look like a British or Spanish conquistador. But anyway, I'm digressing. [00:41:00]

So, it was a place that first captured my imagination as well as kind of stoked these kind of early concerns. Like wow, there really is a form that we might call modern-day slavery, in this continent, people that are enslaved to these larger, whether it be corporations, the carryover of robber barons and things where estates would cultivate certain things and have workers on the land—but really those are indigenous lands, and where else are those people going to go? They have no other economic means, other than to be basically enslaved to the very entities that are exploiting their resources.

I mean, it's a horrifying thing to come to realize all of that, and be there in person and so forth. So those two things: on the one hand, the organic abyss, and on the other hand, this, the actual seat of full exploitation. That [00:42:00] I'm complicit in both. So, fast forward a few years. Then, a friend who's a biologist, he studies freshwater mussels in Alabama. He was a fishing friend, and I just said it: "If you ever know of anybody working in the Amazon, I'm happy to go and work. I'd be a really good field crew member. Yes, I'm not afraid to get muddy or whatever." And it's just funny; like a few weeks later, I get this scratchy phone call, on a satellite phone. I'm there in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg, 2005. I hear this: [imitates static] "Is this David Brooks?" "Yes, yes it is; who is this?" [imitates static] "This is Doctor Nathan Lujan. I got your number from Mike Gangloff." [imitates static] "So, he said you'd be interested in doing some work in the Amazon." "Yes, sounds great!" He's like, "Could you be here by Friday?" [00:43:00] [laughs] "Yes, of course! Of course." [laughter] So I quit my job, and then it was, let's see—four planes

and two boats later, rendezvousing with him in this confluence of two rivers, the Casiquiare and the Orinoco, in the middle of the night. And then he hands me a seining net, and he's like, "All right, let's go." "Okay, where are we doing it?" "In the water."

And so, middle of the night, and getting in the water, not knowing what I'm even looking for yet, because I didn't even know what he studied. [laughter] I just wanted to kind of generally "go to the Amazon," whatever the hell that meant, and I show up, and he had Joan Baez playing on the radio in this [00:44:00] boat that had all these hammocks strung up in the boat, and then, and all this gear on this big rock on the side of the river drying, and we go in the water, neck deep, in pitch-black water, in the middle of the night. Like, "Okay, just tell me what to do," [laughs] and then out comes this pretty large fish that he collected. He actually grabbed it from underneath a rock. He was feeling with his hands along these rocks, and it's these fish that he's a specialist in, and they're called Loricariidae, and they are like aliens. They have these big odontodes that come out like whiskers off of their mouths, or even off the sides of their heads, which they still are trying to figure out what all of these elaborate, evolutionary, morphological characteristics are even for.

They believe, actually, a lot of them are mimicking the way eggs [00:45:00] look when clinging to certain aquatic plants, which is kind of fascinating. Anyway, to the layman's eyes, they might at first look completely hideous, and then when you look again, you realize how alien-like they are to what we associate with a fish, and then as you look closer, they actually are quite beautiful, almost like certain orchids or something, or these really elaborate things that happen. There's a real beauty in seeing these hyper-specific-niche-habitat kind of adaptations that they've developed, and they've developed in their own kind of form. So, after that particular trip, I was really fascinated with how field science worked, unfolds, and what it does, also seeing firsthand [00:46:00] how subjective a lot of it is, and it's really just up to the mood of the day. Convenience plays a large part in it. It's more convenient to collect right here next to this rock, versus try and get ourselves across the river to that rock over there. However, you never know, because sometimes a little riffle in the water, or a small little set of rapids can separate fish populations by tens of thousands, if not even up to a million years in time, which actually is very long in order to allow a completely new species to develop.

These little subtle things in a landscape dictate quite a bit, evolutionarily. But there's only so much a human being can do, and so, the group dynamic is really weird and interesting, and important, and on trips where we have had a really great group dynamic with everybody, [00:47:00] I've noticed them—although again, don't tell the scientists this—but I've noticed that the scientific work that comes out of it is better, than when there's a strange or off dynamic. It might just be because we didn't sample as intensely, or whatever the reasons may be. I mean, this is also from an artist's lens on this, but the dynamic amongst the group is a really important thing. You're also stuck together for weeks in remote parts of the

world. Now, next month, we're going to do our, I think it's our seventh expedition, funded by a particular institution that Ery Schwartz, her family, established. So, there's an organization called Coypu. [00:48:00] Coypu is the indigenous name for the nutria rat, which originally comes from Argentina, Bolivia, Peru—it was the southern part of the continent. It's an aquatic large beaver—bigger than a beaver—rodent, that eats lots and lots of vegetation, and was introduced in Louisiana in the 1950s for a couple of reasons, but it's now considered either fifth or sixth of the worst invasive species in North American history, [laughs] along with things like kudzu and the Norway sewer rat above it, and the German cockroach.

Dziedzic: I'm trying to think of the list—I got the rat, but—[laughs]

Brooks: So, the water hyacinth [00:49:00] was another invasive species that was brought from South America as well, and the nutria rat eats the water hyacinth, in its native habitat; however, it doesn't really tend to like it, in North America. So, that was one reason it was supposedly introduced—to help combat the water hyacinth, which, that failed. [00:49:19] It was also introduced by Ned McIlhenny, who was the son of the founder of Tabasco, and Ned's nephew, Jack McIlhenny, is who started Coypu. Jack and Ery are cousins, and so Ery was part of the McIlhenny lineage in that way, and so she would sit on the board for this foundation, which Jack established, to fund conservation biology projects. They don't state this, but clearly, if they're calling the organization Coypu—because the Latin for [00:50:00] nutria rat is *coypus*, and Coypu is obviously the indigenous name for the rat—it's clearly a kind of a karmic retribution [laughs] for the deed the family had done.

And so this is now, I believe it's either our sixth or seventh expedition funded through that foundation that we're embarking on next month, and another trip to Peru. We've been through Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Columbia, Venezuela, Guyana, and Brazil, over the years, and those are just the trips I've been on with this group of biologists. This group of biologists, a lot of them will go multiple times a year, and so, they've been studying throughout the Amazon Basin extensively for years. And so, I helped get that funding, I helped with the grant writing, and then, since I know folks in the organization, I kind of give a little [00:51:00] nudge to give special attention to certain proposals. It's not always guaranteed, but I've helped get funding for them through that foundation.

Dziedzic: And then when you go, are you still working as part of the crew, or are you now going as an artist?

Brooks: I'm really still just crew. There's not really time to sit back and paint, like plein air painting, because I think we're really, [laughter] we're often moving, so only in a couple of these expeditions have we had a base camp. Otherwise, all of them, we've really just been moving, so you're collecting at a site

and you move on. Whether you move up river, down river, to a different river, you're trying to sample across what we call transects. For instance, you could establish a transect going down an altitude across certain drainage system, and then what [00:52:00] a transect established through that can show how biodiversity increases and at what increment when you descend an altitude. And so, you can see exactly where these moments of increased biodiversity happen.

And so, that's one thing we've looked at. What that also helps illustrate is that nutrient, as we're doing nutrient sampling, down a river or something, you might also then see that nutrients move up and down rivers, not just down, and then what that is, it's a good case for, or a good argument against, hydroelectric dams, in critical areas where you have sensitive organisms and sensitive habitats. You can now make the case, and this is only recently, that it's like amputating an arm, or putting a tourniquet on an arm; you're not letting blood flow in either direction. You're not letting nutrients flow in either direction. It's not just down, which is what people used to think. And you also can begin to see [00:53:00] that interdependence of a system that again, we don't know everything about, and we go in and do these major alterations to it.

I mean, you don't enter into brain surgery and just start milling around, figuring out as you go, right? And so, you also can't really be doing that with the environment, even though we have a very illustrious history of doing that. So yes, a lot of insight I've gotten over the years has really been—it never ceases to be an amazing thing—is that usually there's going to be more ichthyologists on these trips, people that study fish, than there are, say, macro-invertebrate specialists, people that study aquatic insects, but we've had herpetologists with us, that study reptiles and amphibians; ornithologists; [00:54:00] limnologists, people that study nutrients in water; and not all of these people are ecologists, which is interesting. So, what that illustrates is this interesting world, this interesting dynamic in the life sciences that, on the one hand, you have taxonomists that are really interested in the relationships from one species to another, but not necessarily in like a whole ecosystem. They're not really that interested in figuring out how that tree then gets its seeds from this bird over here that eats this thing over there, or how pollinators function. It's not really their thing. They just want to know, is that a new species, and why is it not like the other species?

And so, ecologists will kind of look at a whole system and want to see the dynamics and the inner workings of that system, but not necessarily determine if that's a new species of woodpecker or not. That's not necessarily that important to them. [00:55:00] And so it's rare to find these scientists that do both, and Nathan Lujan, who I have always worked with on these trips, he's very interested in both, so he's a little bit of an oddball, from what I've seen, in the world of life sciences. But back to my original point with this that, a lot of these ichthyologists will be kind of holding this fish in their hands that we just collected, and like, "Ah, this is a new species, I think," and which, that happens so often now, that it ceases to be this magical moment. Like, yes, of course it's a new species; we don't know anything. You realize how little we [laughs] know, and how arrogant we are that we think we know everything. It's

always a humbling experience too, these expeditions. So, they're holding this fish. It's like, "Ah, this is a new species, because look at how it has a different formation of its dorsal, or something about its jaw, [00:56:00] maybe look at the teeth." They study the teeth of these fish a lot. And they're comparing it in their minds to a fish we just caught either that morning or yesterday at a maybe a mile away, or a different drainage that was separated by three million years, geologically speaking.

It's that kind of deep-time awareness and deep-time kind of insight, right then and there with this living, breathing being, [laughs] that represents this moment that's happened over three million years, that I can peer into and have an understanding of or an acknowledgment of that, because of these scientists that understand the differences of them. And so, for me, it really is to experience millions of years in that one second, in that one moment. That's a really a palpable quality to deep time, and specifically then, life on earth. How do you even begin to get close to these things? [00:57:00] So that's one aspect of it. I also realize that with these scientists, looking at things like subtle differences in teeth, which tells them what kinds of things they're eating, and historically, over thousands if not millions of years, how that food has changed and therefore how that landscape has changed, and I realize that for them, there's also these moments where it's like they're witnessing evolution itself, in that moment.

These are really exciting things. They sound very theoretical, but they can be experienced in a certain kind of way. So, those are some of the things that are just really fascinating about these trips. Some of the challenging and problematic things are that the money comes from a North American [laughs] corporation, in this case, Tabasco, which we're very thankful for the funding. It is helping, but it's [00:58:00] also part of this larger global capitalist system—I'm a white man coming into this place, and Nathan Lujan is of Dutch descent, and he's tall, and thin, very white with a bald head, and little wire glasses. So, we do usually work primarily from there with a lot of either PhD students in the country where we're studying, or just other scientists. The world of science is just like the art world: small. Everybody kind of knows everybody at some point in some kind of way, or at least in your area of interest, you'll definitely know everybody.

So, it's not like just a big pack of gringos showing up, but it's a small pack of gringos with a bunch of locals [laughs] showing up, which still always feels a little bit wrong and problematic, [00:59:00] which also at the same time doesn't mean one should not do it. One should feel awkward about it, but like that first time in 1997 fly fishing in the middle of the Amazon, [laughs] as a young, once-aspiring skateboarder, now trying to figure out, why am I here again? So, yes, so, that was, again, a very long ramble about the expeditions in the Amazon.

Dziedzic: Well, I had many questions, but you ended up answering all of them.

Brooks: Oh, good!

Dziedzic: From the bigger systems down to the smaller. I think we'll come back to that a little bit with *Permanent Field Observations* (2018), but I want to talk about how the formal relationship with Storm King [01:00:00] developed around the *Outlooks* (2013) exhibition.

Brooks: How the relationship developed, or how we started working, and then how we decided what we're going to work on?

Dziedzic: Yes, how did it come to be that you were the first artist for this new series?

Brooks: I wasn't entirely conscious of the fact that it was going to be a new series. I think Nora [Lawrence] did the whole time; maybe I just glossed over that point. [laughs] So it was during the round of my project that it was formalized, that it was to be an annual series of either emerging or mid-career artists, and that it would be a one-year-long project and that it would be called *Outlooks*. So [01:01:00] that, I wasn't really aware of, in the beginning. In fact, from my recollection, we didn't know if it would be something that we would develop that would be there for a month, or for five years. I don't think it was ever considered that it'd be anything permanent, but it wasn't necessarily that it would be longer than a month, or a whole year, or five years; that was a little bit undecided.

But anyway, it ended up not being that important in the development of the actual project. So, Nora had come to a couple of shows I had had, gallery exhibitions, and then, she came over to my studio, and then I gave her this big, long slideshow mostly about these expeditions, [laughs] like, "Oh, and here's some artwork too." [01:02:00] I think she was interested in that approach to investigating a place in that other kind of way. So, yes, should I talk about that project a little bit?

Dziedzic: I would like to know what role investigating this place had in your *Proverbial Machine in the Garden* (2013), as well as how that idea for that particular project came about for you.

Brooks: [pauses] Well, there was a lot of work I'd already done that was about the things in what we might call landscape, if we're going to [01:03:00] call South America and the Amazon Basin a landscape, which is a complicated notion of a landscape. But I never actually worked in a landscape, interestingly, so I think that was the big difference. I did this big project at MoMA PS1 where I covered a whole forest that I planted, with 20-plus tons of concrete, which is a pretty horrifying experience, and a horrifying thing to make, not necessarily something you make a series of. [laughs] You kind of do a gesture like that once, and that was really looking at that history of highway development in South America. Or, in other words, the project came out of this notion of looking at the history of highway development, paving over the

Amazon, ostensibly—most recently, in the last couple of decades, for soy exportation. And so, for me, it was a collapse in these notions together and letting them [01:04:00] fight it out. But that was, again, about a landscape somewhere else, and not necessarily in a landscape.

So, I wanted to understand what these sort of whispering, little dynamics going on in Storm King are, because it is a place that has these big, glorious vistas, these incredibly perfectly crafted sightlines and things, that come, certainly, in a large part, out of the Hudson River School, and certainly out of that culture, of thinking about what this Hudson Valley region is, the idea of a viewshed, and that on one side, there is a little bit of like, helping nature out, [laughs] to make it into something, which is hilarious to me, [01:05:00] as it also has its own history in an expertise that is fascinating. Frederick Law Olmsted had always been an interesting character for me. As I learned more about Frederick Law Olmsted, what I realized was Central Park was actually sort of a diary. Central Park was basically a collection of experiences he had had himself when walking across the Northeast, because he used to be a big walker, especially within his youth. He'd just walk across the Northeast and camp out someplace and make drawings, and then continue walking, and he would do that for weeks if not months.

And so, I realized Central Park is really this collection, his journal of all these walks, which is again, a different way of what you investigate a little bit behind a site, a landscape. It opens up all these other things. So Central Park now being absolutely a cultural [01:06:00] construction, it's not nature, [laughs] in the way we understand nature. It's what at one point in time, one group of people decided what nature looked like and what it meant to them. And so, it can be seen as sort of an artifact of that. Storm King, in its early period of development, can kind of be seen in a similar way—I know that it took them a number of years to actually sculpt this landscape into what they wanted it to be, which is an even more picturesque version of what it—[laughs]. This is what I love about Storm King also, that it's a perfectly crafted version of the Hudson River School of thought of what a vista is, and what a pastoral landscape is, and that it is already in the Hudson River Valley, and I love this sort of doubling up on something. It's kind of fascinating, and charming, [01:07:00] and masterful, and hilarious at the same time.

So, at one point, I had, through discussions with Mike Seaman and David Collens and some aspect of records, I had made a whole tally of how many dump trucks full of earth it would have taken to have sculpted Storm King, how many gallons of diesel and gasoline it takes to keep the lawns mowed annually, how many trees had been planted. We had made a whole long list of things that—about both the construction of Storm King, but also the maintenance of Storm King. And it's pretty interesting, the incredible amount of effort behind it to make it appear absolutely effortless, in a way, and perfectly in sync with the natural environment, even though it's not necessarily in sync with the natural environment. [01:08:00] It's re-crafted the natural environment in a particular ideology.

So that's what's fascinating to me right there: it is a landscape that we understand—we relate to it still today—that represents for me a moment in history where we absolutely crafted an entire landscape, with many ecosystems within it, but we crafted a natural landscape into an image of something that is representative of a way of an ideology, of a way of understanding the world. And so, the pastoral, the *Proverbial Machine in the Garden*, was to look at that very action. On the one hand, you could take the title itself, the “proverbial,” but “the machine in the garden” is actually a title from Leo Marx's writing, his text on the pastoral American ideal in art [01:09:00] and literature, specifically looking at the mid-to-late nineteenth century. So he's kind of looking at this kind of skyrocketing rise in industrialism, and how it's coming in direct confrontation with this pastoral quality of what America would see itself as, that of the North American continent being this Garden of Eden, or that these idyllic farms that are in harmony with the seasons and the elements, and that the Garden of Eden of North America was there to replenish and fuel [laughs] this American vision. On the other hand though, we actually had already logged over this entire region before, once or twice, and this rise [01:10:00] of industrialism was not necessarily living in harmony with this Garden of Eden, but was actually harvesting it for its resources to fuel industrialism.

A lot of the artwork that Leo Marx was pointing to in the late nineteenth century, you can see this really direct confrontation. We live out of the same confrontation still; it's just that it's become incredibly more nuanced, and has many other stakeholders now, and many other reverberations that we weren't even aware of before. And so, Storm King in that way is a perfect case study for that. With Storm King having been at one point an active farm, in 1957, and as well as having a gravel quarry on it, some of which was helped to build Highway 87, [01:11:00] right on the edge of its boundary, property line. You can see how that landscape had changed dramatically. And so, the *Proverbial Machine in the Garden* was putting this machine quite literally back in the garden, on a hillside that was a manmade hill, and putting this heavy piece of machinery, an excavation machinery, a piece of a tractor, specifically the Dynahoe, which was one of the pieces of equipment at that time that would have been used on the very grounds that sculpted Storm King, because the Dynahoe tractor, the combine of the combination front-loader backhoe was an invention right at that exact same time.

It was the perfect synthesis for me as an artwork to put these elements together and allow them to be a little [01:12:00] bit ambiguous as to which one's dominate. So, the tractor's not necessarily dominating this landscape in that setting, although it could have been this machine that dug itself into a hole. [laughs] But on the other hand, this landscape is actually completely encasing it into this hillside, so, it could be seen as the dominate one. But nonetheless, neither are dominate, which was part of the intentionality behind this piece: to actually highlight more so this idea of these dynamics within the landscape. For me, just from a quick-glance perspective, it is a metaphor for that, but it also quite literally does that in the visitor's experience of it, where you experience the front-loading bucket, and then you're walking across the landscape, and now you see part of an elbow of it, and then you see the cab. [01:13:00] You have to

put these things together in your head as you are walking across. Sort of like, you can't see the whole thing at one time, just like a landscape: you can't see the whole thing at one time. You have to really assemble it in your mind after you've experienced it. And so, that was also part of the intention behind that project, in relationship specifically to Storm King.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about deciding to bury it, compared to the other artwork at Storm King, and the sightlines that you mentioned being so intentional?

Brooks: Yes, I was a little worried that that might be [laughs] a make-or-break kind of aspect of the project, because you know, you can be cruising along Highway 87 at 75 miles an hour, [01:14:00] or, sorry, what's the speed limit there? [laughter] You can be cruising along Highway 87 at 70 miles an hour and you can take in visually three Mark di Suveros. You can take in a lot of these artworks really quickly as you go along. And no disrespect to those artworks, because they are what they are, but as just sort of an antidote to them, rather, I wanted something that you actually, physically had to be on top of before you could experience it. There is a sensibility that is a romanticization of a landscape, that these artworks may, in fact, actually contribute to, that I think is a problem.

On the one hand, if something's really far away, or if you make it into a vista, you don't actually have to go out into it. You get to separate it from me over here and it over there, which [01:15:00] is a way of excluding and also dominating something. So, if you get to make that decision, it's a sense of domination over it. Just like if you clear cut a whole bunch of trees, you can have this perfect sightline down to your stream on your property, and maintain this, you are dominating that landscape; you are controlling it. And so, there's a sense of domination hidden within that idea of a vista, and specifically with these large objects that you can be a mile away from, and still experience, and for me, it reinforces that notion of something over there and me over here. [laughs] And so, I wanted to very specifically and directly invert that, and that you couldn't even see the artwork until you were [01:16:00] standing on top of it. And so, so that was a very specific and considered decision of which, I don't think it hurt anybody's feelings. [laughter] Although there were many times that people would come up to Storm King like, "Oh yes, I went up to see your piece, but I couldn't find it!" [laughs] They're like, "Yes, we were on the tram, and the tram went up to the circle, and started talking about David Brooks's *Proverbial Machine in the Garden*. We're all on the tram looking around." And I was like, "Well, did you get off the tram?" "No, we had no idea it was under the ground! I would have thought it was like, some little thing on the edge of the woods over there. We just couldn't quite make out, but it—" "No, it was in the ground." [laughs] So there were a lot of people that missed it altogether, but that's okay.

Dziedzic: Well it strikes me as being something that—it wasn't that you minded taking up space. It wasn't that kind of gesture [that intended to question scale]. It was more specifically about [01:17:00] the way that it would be encountered.

Brooks: Yes, and I think that I've done a lot of projects that people say are big, but it's not that they're big, but it's just that the scale of the things they're in conversation with—I feel that it's a very big difference actually, of an idea, than making something big. I'm not necessarily interested in big things. [laughs] I have had to do a number of projects that were on the scale of the thing they were in conversation with, like there was a piece I did in Times Square. These rooftops that were meant to be designed after how sand dunes are formed, and they were composed according to sand dunes, but they were built to New York City building code, so they had a very particular conventional quality to how they were made. And they had to be of a certain scale, both to fit that site, and to be on the conversation of the thing they were [01:18:00] kind of scrutinizing. So, if they were any smaller, or not to scale rather, they would look like an artist's rendition of it, or it would be just an imaginary notion of it, not necessarily the thing itself. And so, Storm King, that project, the *Proverbial Machine in the Garden*, had to be on the scale of that hillside, in order to be able to think about, look at, and engage this reality of a transformed landscape in our own image, so, yes.

Dziedzic: So, you mentioned this in the context of a conversation that you had with Mary Mattingly in *BOMB Magazine*, and you were describing the kind of objects that you have in your studio as “material documentations.” So that strikes me as being related to scale, what you were [01:19:00] just describing. So, I was curious to hear about how is artwork also a material documentation? Or is it different?

Brooks: Yes, 100 percent. [laughs] Actually, I'm recalling, in that same discussion we had with Mary and I, in fact, when I was talking about that rooftop project, I even specifically talked about how that rooftop project, when it was on exhibit, was just a momentary state for it, and it, for me, it was important that where all the material went afterwards was completing its life cycle in a way. So, it was designed to be able to come back apart without destroying all the [01:20:00] material, which, for anybody that's curious, it costs about 35 percent more to build something to come back apart later. So, most of these ranch houses and things of which these rooftops are modeled after are not really meant to come back apart. They're like disposable architecture. So, they're meant to go together once, then maybe you do some fixings along the way, and it'll probably be torn down in about 60 years or less.

And so, to design it to come back apart was expensive. Fortunately, Sotheby's was paying for it, so that worked out well. [laughs] But the material, once it all came back apart, all went to Habitat for Humanity, to help build actual rooftops, which is a nice, feel-good story and all, but the reality is a drop in the bucket to what they really need. But at least, that project, yes, was a momentary kind of state for it, as a total

project, [01:21:00] just like the tractor, backhoe in the hillside was a momentary situation for that project. And yes, so one can definitely see these certain—not necessarily every artwork or all artwork, but yes, it is one way to think about and look at and consider an artwork, as that it's just a momentary situation of all that material, or, a performance work is a momentary situation for these people to come together. So, absolutely, these momentary snapshots. And I think it's important to understand them as momentary, also, if we're going to compare them to like, fish that have evolved over three million years. [laughs] So, it's just another way of thinking a little bit more robustly about the stuff around us, is one way to put it.

Dziedzic: Was the tractor useable?

Brooks: Before?

Dziedzic: No, after.

Brooks: No.

Dziedzic: It was totally encased in concrete where it was [not visible through the grates]?

Brooks: [01:22:00] It was covered in concrete, and then in order to get it out, it had to be torch cut into lots of pieces, which then was all recycled, and that recycling of the steel, and the money that we got from that—which was not a lot, but a scrapper would pay a certain amount for it—then that paid for the tires to be recycled, because with tires, you have to pay to have them recycled. And so, it all was kind of a neutral [laughs] break-even situation with it. I wanted for the piece just to get buried over, just fill it in with earth, and we're done, but there's a New York State law that you can't bury vehicles. And so, that was one issue, that we didn't want to open up a can of worms, with the Environmental Protection Agency looking into what this vehicle was, even though we'd call it a sculpture, and of course, all the fluids were drained out of it and cleaned, and there's no battery attached to it, [01:23:00] and all these things, but it was just a can of worms for that, so we opted to just remove it entirely.

Dziedzic: If you were going to do some kind of other *Machine in the Garden* project or inspired project, what that would look like in other places, in other parts of the country, or in other parts of the world? Do you think that it would share anything with the project that was here in 2013 or would it be entirely different?

Brooks: Well, me being educated here in New York, and then therefore having a relationship with the Hudson River School, and both artwork but also the way of thinking, was clearly an influence, which you can then extrapolate to other situations similarly around the world. [01:24:00] There actually is a version

of the *Proverbial Machine in the Garden* in South Korea. It's a long story. It might be interesting just for it to be—I mean, everybody here knows about it, but it's funny. Before the one here, I was asked just by email, and it was actually an email that ended up in my junk folder, and I was just searching through, because a friend said, "Oh, I sent you an email." So, I was looking through my spam folder, and "What's this weird email?" And it was an invitation from a Korean curator asking if I would participate in this sculpture biennial, which, I don't know if it happens anymore. One of the beauties of South Korea is that they've created a biennial for everything, and so [laughs] there's so many biennials: there's the media biennial; the nature art biennial; the women's art biennial—at one point it was called the Women's Art Biennial; I hope it's changed the name. There's the [01:25:00] architecture—there's just like a biennial there for every—there's an amazing amount of biennials.

So, Changwon, which is a city in the south that was combining two smaller cities into one larger city, they were doing a big celebration around that. They have a little island that sits right off their shoreline there in south Korea. It's called Dot, and it's sort of like their Central Park. There's ferries to and from it constantly, and it's just the big part, and nobody lives on it. And so, they were doing this sculpture biennial on Dot, and it was specifically also in celebration of this merging of two cities. So, I sent in this proposal, and it was specifically about the Hudson River way of viewing a landscape and transforming a landscape, because when I looked online and did a little research about this island of Dot, I realized what a manicured, cultivated landscape it was. It was really just a big sculpture. And so, I sent in this proposal. It was all about the Hudson [01:26:00] River Valley, and the Hudson River School, and I just sent them this very quick simple Google SketchUp drawing of this "Machine in the Garden," and they're like, "Great, sounds good." And so they proceeded to make this thing, and they had a huge budget for production, but no budget for the artist. So, since the city was paying for it, they were paying all the budget for the construction, and production, and the arts organization that was curating the artists for it, they would pay the artists' fee. So basically, we got nothing, but it paid for us to come out there for the opening at least, and then I think you make a couple thousand dollars for a major project. [laughs] So, I wasn't able to go out and supervise its making, is my point, so it was done entirely by email.

Not only was it done entirely by email, but I was on an expedition in Ecuador, at the time, with [01:27:00] Nathan Lujan. Fortunately, we had a satellite connection, so we could access internet, and I was emailing them updated drawings while we were collecting in the middle of the Amazon on this project, on an island off South—off the tip of South Korea, a place I'd never been, and a major construction project of which they were pouring tons of money into, but had none for me. So, it was a very strange situation. I finally got there some months later for the opening of the whole "sculpture biennial," and within 30 seconds or less, I could see everything that was wrong, and, okay, that shouldn't have been like that. Had I been here, I could say, "Don't do that; don't do that; move that over an inch; move that back there. You can't see that from there. Why would you establish this like this?" Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, I quickly took notes

of everything that went wrong, and I was like, well, it's on an island off South Korea, I doubt that many people [laughter] are going to see it, or ever link it to me, in the larger body of work. [01:28:00] They had a big military parade out there as well, and I was asked the day of to give a speech during this ceremony. The whole thing was hilarious. So I wrote this whole speech about deep-time geology, that the island itself is a sculpture, and you can just picture these generals or colonels or whoever they are, these military officers, kind of through a translator, who was translating what I was saying; me, dressed more or less exactly the way I'm here right now, not necessarily formal, for everybody in military regalia, and then lots of suits and black tie going on.

And [laughs] me, I think I was wearing like a guayabera, some Doc Martens or something, and I'm sitting here talking about deep-time geology, that the island itself is a sculpture, et cetera, and then there's like a big brass band behind me, [laughter] that was playing once [01:29:00] I'm done. So, it was a very surreal situation. They put glass over the top of theirs, which I told them not to do that, that they should put metal grates, and how that should be arranged. I can't even begin to calculate how many tons of concrete they poured. It's anchored in. They had to jackhammer out of this rock island, a big rectangle, in which to place this brand-new, never-used-before backhoe front loader, which I chose from this agricultural equipment website, while in Ecuador, but the agricultural equipment supply was in Korea, just shopping online for a massive piece of equipment that they went and bought, and then lowered with a crane from a barge. So, the thing never even rolled on land, and it was lifted by a crane from a barge into this giant hole they jackhammered, and they filled the entire hole with concrete. [01:30:00]

Extraordinary thing, which was an absolutely poorly executed piece. And so, I knew exactly what to do, and I was like, oh, if only I could ever do this project again. Then Storm King comes about. Nora and I talk. I actually gave them a couple of other proposals, not this piece. I thought, "Okay, I need to do something completely new," even though it was obvious I should be doing this project, because now I really know how to do it really well. I kind of did the sketch version in South Korea, and the part that I wanted to do was not really logistically feasible. And so, we were kind of scratching our heads, like, "Well you know, I did this project in South Korea. I wasn't going to tell you about it, but it was really done poorly, and it was really based on this exact landscape, and this idea of transforming a landscape according to an ideology, and that form of terraforming." And I was like, "I don't know if you like this idea of doing it, but what if we did it here? This is where it should really be, is here." [01:31:00]

They were very excited about it, and I had all the plans from it. I knew exactly what everything was. I had [laughs] everything ready to go, down to all the mistakes they had made in Korea, and the kind of "I told you so" moments, and what exactly we can do for it here. And I've got to say that the crew here, and I can never say this enough, but Mike Seaman and his crew are incredible. I mean, actually, they set a new bar that most other institutions have failed to reach, in my experience, about how to go about working with an

artist and realizing the project—it was executed perfectly. I mean, that was, it was perfect, actually, I've got to say. So, anyway, that was a long, another ramble.

Dziedzic: No, I think it's so important to know that there was a sketch. [laughter]

Brooks: It's a sketch, that still is embedded in the middle of a rock on an island, that, [01:32:00] who knows if it's still there? Because I told them, "After one winter, that glass will break. It's impossible, because it will freeze." Anyway. I don't really want to know. I kind of just wanted it to be this interesting mystery there. I think that that project though, could be put into any situation that clearly overtly terraforms landscape or site. It could be any place, not necessarily just Storm King, but where it's obvious that we've transformed a landscape into a particular vision or ideology, especially one that appears to be natural, or have elements of being natural, which is interesting. It's very ironic, to me.

Dziedzic: I almost think of it as a useful tool—in landscapes where it is hard to tell that it's been altered to look [01:33:00] "natural"—as sort of an indicator of the work that's been done to make it look effortlessly natural, or to meet some kind of expectation of nature. I said "indicator," so, [laughs] it must be a subconscious—

Brooks: *Indicators*—

Dziedzic: So yes, how did that project that's in this year's exhibition, *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change* (2018), how did that come about?

Brooks: Well, over the last few years as I've been looking more closely—and as I was saying, the world has just become more nuanced in how we investigate the world around [01:34:00] us and more nuanced in terms of also the different perspectives, that there are different perspectives. [laughs] Surprise! Human beings are very layered and different from each other. From an environmental theory on that, that's actually hilariously been an eye opener for people, I think, or rather, not in terms of people writing—say, Timothy Morton writing around environmental theory and philosophy and so forth, because that's a given—but that this idea of difference that people gather from this, I find amazing. It's, "You really didn't get that before?" I'm not sure if that had anything to do with *Permanent Field Observations* or not. [laughter]

Dziedzic: It's perspectives around [01:35:00] climate change, maybe.

Brooks: Yes. So, we kind of suffer from environmentalist hangover, of like oversaturation with information about the environment. The majority of it is extraordinarily negative, and it's a lot about prohibition, like

don't do this; don't do that. It's a very negative, prohibitive kind of language and sets of information that we all take in constantly, and so, yes, environmentalist hangover. That's a whole other topic that I could talk about that is wrong, but [laughs] there's the bumper sticker version: it's wrong, [laughter] and it's actually not about just prohibiting things; it's actually about a nuanced looking at things. So, if I wanted to go and experience ecosystem, I don't just go walk up to the edge of a forest and just sit there, right? You don't just get to witness ecosystem [01:36:00] like that. It is a thing, but it is witnessable only through experience over time, with a place, and the dynamics of it, and with some insight, some knowledge.

And then it's the combination of those couple of things and then with your imagination, that you could kind of put it together and witness it, which is a very interesting way of how to see things. Like oh, you're seeing, you're witnessing something through a recollection in combination with knowledge and your imagination. That idea though, of seeing, is really at the core for me of what I'd—well, we'll just call it a problem, a problem around our relationship with the environment, because we don't actually know how to see it. And so, seeing, and how to see these dynamics, is something that's so important to me. So, the [01:37:00] *Permanent Field Observations* was meant to be this act of seeing that unfolds over time, and in different ways. On the one hand, to go out into these un-manicured areas, [laughs] of the Storm King landscape, these areas that have not been necessarily sculpted, and then to try and—first of all, just the very simple act of slowing people down, and just looking for things, is already a different approach to attuning one's perceptual capacities to one's environment, to slow down, and then now look around and take things in, as opposed to impose one's preconceived ideas onto something, but actually to take something in as opposed to project out. So, to already have to go and walk around and look for these objects, because there's 30 of them, [laughs] [01:38:00] these bronze objects that have been permanently affixed into the landscape and will remain there forever—permanently affixed meaning there's about three feet of concrete underneath each one with rebar support rods anchored into them.

So, to have to go out and look for them is already one act of seeing the changes up your momentum, or your routine—the act of seeing something that is a cast from a situation that's very ephemeral, like say, just a set of branches, and how they just happen to fall. That ephemeral moment now fossilized into kind of a stasis is already a different act of seeing now; that's seeing something into the future. And then this idea of seeing that very thing, of which once you realize that part of the artwork is that they stay there forever, and they themselves [01:39:00] don't need to be maintained, like they don't get re-polished; they don't get name tags stuck next to them. They don't get like the leaf litter picked up around them. They just stay, and then they're going to stay forever, [laughs] and whatever forever even means, because forever's a really weird word. Is forever like, forever, forever? But how do you even know that forever can be forever? And so that already complicates how one might see this very thing right in front of them. So, it was like three different ways of kind of seeing, and then also, seeing these things that are not manicured;

they're outside this other landscape of seeing. So yes, so there are a lot of ways of seeing something, which is, I think, really important. Yes, so that was the beginnings of that project.

Also, a landscape, and it's [01:40:00] a collection of sculptural situations here, that have a history, and an acknowledged history of being—a lot of large, metal things, right? So, I [laughs] also wanted to invert that dynamic of where, letting the site itself be more so the work, in a way, and specifically this un-manicured site. So, it's this thing that plays out over time. The objects are really small, and just are little. They're almost like tiny little windows into the site, and they're large, only as large as someone's view perspective or traversing of the landscape is large. So, it's up to the viewer also to kind of complete the work, it can be as small or as large as that person takes it in, as the viewer takes the work in.

Dziedzic: [01:41:00] Were there any other locations that you were interested in doing this at, at Storm King? And how did you come up with the idea that you were going to cast these objects that you found?

Brooks: There wasn't necessarily any other sites, because I just needed to be outside of the normal viewshed of Storm King. So, it needed to be outside of those sightlines, was just the simple parameter for that. Once the conceptual framework was established—okay, I'm going to cast these ephemeral situations, make them permanent. They exist as time capsules, in a way, for some future generation that may or may not happen upon them. [laughs] Once that was established, that framework, then now the other [01:42:00] sets of poetry can [laughs] happen, for lack of a better word, in that you can really just be hyper-subjective: I like the way that stick and that rock look, or, I love the kind of gridded pattern of this decomposing log, or, look at how, almost like a butterfly, that little mushroom growing off that stick looks. I like that root; it looks like a lightning bolt. [laughs] All these little things that are so subjective can now play out.

Obviously, if anybody else would have gone and selected objects to be cast, that would be totally different, but if you put mine up next to theirs, you'd see a total difference in vision. And so the selection of the objects was definitely very hyper-subjective, in that it specifically meant to be embedded with whatever the aesthetic of David Brooks's preferences are. [01:43:00] There were a few where it's just kind of like, okay, anybody would cast this. You have to. Like say, that giant mushroom that's bigger than a rugby ball, you have to cast it. [laughs] Who would not? Things like the coyote scat and the deer droppings, you got to cast them. But there are other things, like just simply how two trunks were crisscrossing, or these little subtle moments that are very much a very personal thing.

Dziedzic: Can you take me through, very literally, walking along this trail, what time of year it is, how you ended up with the number you did? I noticed they're kind of in clusters, so, was there a strategy? What was the strategy? Just step by step.

Brooks: Yes. So the strategy was, I wanted it to be to accessible parts of the Moodna Trail. So, [01:44:00] every piece is very accessible. There's only one that you have to climb up the hill a little bit, and anybody could climb up the hill. It's not like it's only mountaineers can get up there. It's like anybody could get there. So, there's nothing out of the way. So, one, they'll still be very accessible, also because you should happen upon them and then be like, oh, why didn't I notice that before? [laughs] So, again it's not this exoticized landscape, this romanticization of a landscape, something way over there and out there and I'm over here. They're right in front of you. You just have to kind of look harder. So, accessibility was a really important aspect of that. Number two, was that once you can see, once you can make out a shape in the clouds, you all of a sudden can start seeing the entire sky and all types of shapes and forms. [01:45:00]

So, it's like that kind of trigger, that moment when it clicks, and you can all of a sudden see the trees from the forest. Same thing here, and hence why they're in clusters, in a way. Once you see one—does that mean there's more of them here? And so, you can begin to look at your area and your environment differently with a different heightened anticipation. And so, they are kind of clustered in that way, so that you can, once you find one—like wait, there's another one right around here too. And, the GPS coordinates are provided for the viewers, so they can, if they really can't find any, they can just plug it right into their phone, and [laughs] it'll find it for them. But you know, we did all of the onsite casting in the middle of three major snowstorms, which is the absolute opposite of an ideal time to do casting outdoors, [01:46:00] of natural, ephemeral objects.

Dziedzic: So, you cast them along the trail. You didn't take them, and then—

Brooks: So, there was a majority of them we cast right along the trail. I mean, you'd see it as things you just simply can't take off the trail. Like say, there's one of a trunk that's snapped, and the tree is still alive, but the trunk has snapped. Now you can't just take the whole tree back to the studio and cast it, so, all of those kind of things, pieces of—yes, it's certainly a lot of tree parts going on. You're left with a few things. You have trees, rocks, some leaf litter, and scat. These are kind of like your choices. [laughter] So, there were a few things, like the really large mushroom, that had already fallen [01:47:00] off of the tree that it was on, so it was already a separate object. So that one, I simply would mark it out, photograph it exactly where it was, and then that one we took back to where we were doing the casting, so we could do that one indoors.

But the majority of them, with the exception of just a handful, were all done on site. So, in fact, I should probably say for the public's awareness, they're all done right on site, [laughter] but anyone that's done casting before would know that certain ones are just impossible to do on site. So, they would be flagged,

marked, measured, photographed, and then put exactly back where they were, so. Now, I will say, [laughs] the time of year also dictated certain things that we could cast, because if you have a foot of snow on the ground—fortunately we were able to go through and do a lot of these molds of things, very small and right on the ground, before the [01:48:00] snow came, but then we had two big storms that happened. So, whatever we were able to get before that happened, we were left with trying to find things in the snowy landscape, which is fine. I think we got a good sampling of both worlds in that way. There's a material that Smooth-On now makes, it's a new material called PoYo Putty, and it's like this space-age miracle. Anybody could cast, like "my son could paint that" or "my daughter could paint that"—your six-year-old daughter can definitely do high-end mold making now, with this material. It's not cheap, but it's a silicone that will actually set up even in near-freezing temperatures. So, that definitely saved us, and allowed us to do a lot with this project that wouldn't have otherwise been possible.

Dziedzic: [01:49:00] Going out there with this map, which has the GPS coordinates on them, I think I was kind of overwhelmed with the history of these field expeditions, and read the GPS coordinates as your notes, kind of, as to where these items were found, and assumed that you'd taken them away and then replaced them back with their new [bronze] partner. But I was also terrible at finding them too, so, [laughter] so I wouldn't take my reading with a whole lot of weight. [laughs]

Brooks: There very likely might be more than half of those that may never be seen by a human being again. In fact, I've been gone now for two months; I'll be curious to see how many of them are covered over completely with leaves. That's part of the [01:50:00] leap-of-faith aspect of the work, of like, wow, these may never be seen by another human being again. Even though they're this extraordinary amount of work, labor, and so forth that went into it, it may not ever be seen. But the understanding and the knowledge that they are there is, for me, equally as interesting and as equally as fulfilling part of the artwork as if you even get to find it, so.

Dziedzic: And I can complete the story of my experience of walking along this trail, and potentially, you can talk a little bit more about your ideas about engagement with the work. I went in there overconfident, quickly remembered how bad I am at using maps, even though I like to think of myself as being good at maps, and then looked very closely for a long time. But then I started to think, well, you know, even if I'm not finding things that are bronze, I'm still [01:51:00] finding things that are really wonderful. And then I started thinking about, if I was somebody who was going to decide to cast something and then have something placed, where are the spaces where I'd be like, oh, aha, definitely this tree, there's definitely something at the foot of it? So that's how I ended up finding the things that like—

Brooks: Did you find the big slab of bark, by that giant fallen—no.

Dziedzic: No, no, not that one. [laughs]

Brooks: Oh, sorry.

Dziedzic: No, I found number 17, [laughs] and number—

Brooks: Which one—

Dziedzic: —six. [laughs]

Brooks: —is that? Trying to remember which one 17—

Dziedzic: It's the sort of snaky stick—

Brooks: Oh, you found that one!

Dziedzic: —and then a sort of—

Brooks: Oh cool!

Dziedzic: —the triangular rock and branch together. But I'd be coming around a curve or something and thinking yes, this is a nice curve; there's going to be something at the foot of that tree. So that was pretty much how I did it, but the overall experience was just—[01:52:00] I went in basically ready to check everything off of a list, and at the end of it, I was like—

Brooks: Check, check, check—

Dziedzic: —forget this!

Brooks: —check, check. [laughs]

Dziedzic: I'm just exploring, I'm just walking, and—

Brooks: Did you see the vine?

Dziedzic: No. No. [laughs]

Brooks: That's the biggest. I thought everybody would find the vine, and nobody's found it.

Dziedzic: I only did this part.

Brooks: The vine is quite large. The vine is—oh, are you here tomorrow or—

Dziedzic: Yes.

Brooks: You are, okay.

Dziedzic: I'm looking forward to actually seeing some more tomorrow because I—yes, I had kind of pushed aside my feelings of failure, and been like, "it was a success because—"

Brooks: I wonder if people think I'm lying. Like, "Wait, did he actually put these out here? Because I don't see anything." But some of them are, once I'll point some out, and it'll definitely be the *ohhh* moment: "I can't believe I walked by that five times." And there's some though that I, myself, when I was looking for them again, to get the GPS coordinates from them, I was standing on one and didn't realize it. [laughs] [01:53:00] So there are some that even I could not find, even though I was literally standing on one. And so, yes.

Dziedzic: I wanted to ask about what you think about the differences in terms of preserving something, which in a way, I think of these cast objects as being kind of preserved, and then, documenting something, which is sort of what I think about within that kind of expedition/field observation mindset. How do you think about those two terms?

Brooks: Huh, that's interesting. And specifically, in terms of preserving, you mean in like, let's say I'm going to preserve this pencil the way it is right now, forever?

Dziedzic: Well, I'm thinking about the "forever" word, and how complicated that is [01:54:00] to sort of say. I think there's a bronze cast of John Cage's shoes that I've encountered.

Brooks: Wow!

Dziedzic: Maybe they're gold. I don't know what they are, but the sort of dipped, in the San Francisco Art Institute's Library, I think. So those, I think, they have been preserved, but they're presented in kind of a glass case, so in a sense, they're also documented.

Brooks: You know they're both—well, the preserved thing, it's definitely different scientifically versus artistically, so, I mean, scientists are under no illusion, or delusion, that when they're preserving something, they know darn well that it's not preserving the thing truly, because either it has to go in formalin, [01:55:00] and it's going to just basically—they call it the DNA stapler, [laughs] staples everything exactly the way it is, but it will lose all color; it'll lose that sensibility of what it is to be a living organism, of course. But it will keep everything intact the way it is, the DNA stapler. So that's not a true preservation of what this thing is. That's not really all that it is.

It's not just a bunch of DNA. It's also has a behavior, a habitat, et cetera, et cetera. So, that's one idea but the idea of preservation, even from a scientific point, they know that it's not true preservation. The idea of preserving the Everglades is an interesting idea. Are we preserving it? And this is something: I did an interview, a conversation with Timothy Morton, [01:56:00] and he's like, "Yes, I've talked about the Everglades." I brought up the idea of invasive species with him, like, "Does that even exist? [laughs] And is the Burmese python that's taking over as apex predator of the Everglades an invasive species?" And of course, his answer, ultimately, after a long conversation, is: "Of course not." [laughs] So, but equally, one, the idea of the Everglades, to preserve it, are you preserving it the way it is now? Are you preserving it the way we remember it being, before we messed it up? Are we preserving it to some pre-human interaction period, like even before indigenous peoples were living there? Are we preserving it to some untouched, primal purity that we don't even know what it is? Or what? So, what are we preserving?

Because we're going to alter it in whatever way we want. So, [01:57:00] the idea of preserving is also again, actually an act of creating or constructing. And so, equally, here with *Permanent Field Observations*, I'm preserving the way these few branches fell on top of each other, but I'm really actually constructing an image for you. I'm constructing a composition, also. So that's another layer of that idea of seeing and preserving. But, there are things that—like say the way a tree trunk snapped when it fell over, the way a rock started to fracture and crack, the way this particular root started to kind of wrap around this hillside—there are things that are actions within these objects that I chose that are being preserved, and it's more of like fossilizing the active moment of something. So, that part of it [01:58:00] is equally a construction of an image, a composition, but also at the same time, really is meant to kind of highlight that. It's as verifiable of a past that we can actually have. So, it's like trying to make a ghost. [laughs] It's trying to preserve a ghost, in a way, and how do you preserve a ghost, of which not everybody is even going to believe it's there? Well, this is the closest I can get to preserving this past ghost of this living thing, versus documenting, again, another act of constructing, constructing a narrative.

They both are—documenting and the preserving of things—are clear reflections and descriptions [01:59:00] of who we are, whether it's the person doing that documenting or preserving, or whether it's the culture that's doing it. So, that'll never cease to be interesting. It's such a human thing to do, and so,

it's just, it's only getting more nuanced and accentuated with our abilities—I can now take 100 images in this conversation and be sending them to my friends on the other side of the planet before the conversation's done, and that's not that big of a deal. That's so easy to do; that's unremarkable. [laughs] And so, how fast they can zap them. So, what we end up collecting and preserving are clear reflections of us, and that will always keep changing as we do, and so, there's not like one final moment of making a big declaration of what it all means, because it's not about that. It's about reflecting on and experiencing that [02:00:00] ongoing, never-ending kind of evolutionary march, in a way.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about the choice of using bronze, and aesthetically, what you were going for? Is what you ended up with what you started with or was there some refining?

Brooks: Well, I had never used bronze before, so, I used bronze because that's what sculpture is made from. [laughter]

Dziedzic: It's in the textbooks, right?

Brooks: Yes. I mean, that's actually a completely ironic or it's a totally true answer. I, just like, "Oh, what do you make 'sculpture' from? It's made from bronze." And so, great, I get to make bronze sculpture for the first time in my life. So that's true, and completely part of the work. Another part of it though is simply that [02:01:00] bronze, versus aluminum, it's just sturdier; it'll hold up longer. Bronze versus iron, well, iron requires a different kind of a facility, and so, I already knew that I could access some bronze, a bronze foundry, that I needed to use, and bronze just simply will stand out in a natural environment like that as a cultural object, as opposed to being a natural object, or as if they were cast in iron. There's a sensibility to it that it might be actually from that landscape. And so, bronze versus silver or bronze versus gold, that's a budget issue. [laughs] That's a completely budget-based decision. Yes.

Dziedzic: So, would you have used a different material if budget wasn't an issue?

Brooks: I would certainly [02:02:00] consider silver or gold. [laughs] However, the likelihood of those remaining in the landscape, in this supposed forever idea, is unlikely. So, in hindsight then, would I? I would still stick to bronze. It's also, again, it's what sculpture is made from. I didn't want anybody to question the materiality, and it's like, oh, of course it's bronze. But if I cast it say, in glass, now it's going to become so much more about glass, and why it's in glass, and then who made it, how was it made in glass, because that's complicated to make these molds that are then going to be poured in glass. It's a rarified material in that way. Yes, so bronze is kind of like the default; this is what sculpture is made from. You're in a sculpture park, [laughter] so you're not [02:03:00] questioning the materiality in the same way

that I want you to question the materiality of the site, or the materiality of your situation with it, as opposed to the materiality of the object.

Dziedzic: Well, they have this incidental, if not deliberate, effect of blending in with the landscape more because of the appearance of bronze. And I imagine that their color will change over time, too.

Brooks: Yes, the color will definitely change over time, and because they have a wire-brushed finish to them, so they have a shine, but, it's just shy of a polish. It's not a polish, but it's a wire-brush shine, and that shine though then takes on the colors and reflections around it. So, some of them, depending on the light, actually blend in eerily well to the landscape, because it takes on the colors around it. Like that scene in *Predator*, or whatever, or the new [02:04:00] *Jurassic Park*—[laughter] I took my little godson to see it of course—where that T. rex dinosaur merges with the landscape, by simply reflecting it.

Dziedzic: Well, you're reminding me that it was on my list to see that, some hot afternoon. How do you imagine the maintenance of these objects that will be there, you know, in this place forever? How can you kind of make that a human scale?

Brooks: Well, we're going to monitor them during the period of the exhibition, and see if we did it the right way. We think we did it the right way, so that they will just simply remain, and one will never have to do anything to them ever again. And they just are. They have a lacquer finish on them that [02:05:00] has a guaranteed lifespan of five years, but really, actually, if they're not in the blazing sun, that specific lacquer has actually been known to last well over 10, if not 15 or 20 years, but even once it starts to deteriorate, the lacquer finish, what will happen is, the bronze will just slowly become dark, the way a kind of a classic old bronze, it has that dark patina to it. Which is fine, that's just what the material does. So, as far as the anchoring, we'll see here over this next year if we need to change how we did any of them. There's some that are so well anchored that, you are welcome to take it if you can get it out, because just knowing that somebody was able to get that out is like, you really deserve that piece now. [laughter] There's some that have an odd kind of intertwining [02:06:00] of the anchoring system with a set of roots of a tree nearby or something, that we needed to kind of intertwine them for the longevity of it, and let them anchor each other in a way. We'll have to look at a second time and just to make sure we did it right.

Ideally there's no maintenance though; they just are now objects in the landscape that will be there and be seen, or not be seen, [laughs] and then be slowly folded into the landscape over time. And so, some will remain visible, and probably will for generations, and some may already be impossible to find because of leaf litter falling on them or something like that. But we did a lot of digging, and there's a lot of concrete, [laughter] and so, those are the kind of things that we know work, in general, so, we'll see.

Dziedzic: And, [02:07:00] if the leaf litter was to be removed, I suppose for the sake of them being more visible, do you see that as an issue?

Brooks: Not really. If, two years from now, three years from now, the curatorial staff, “You know, what? We should really highlight those again. Let’s find them all and let’s wire brush them, get their finish back, put another coat of lacquer on them, make them look great.” That’s fine. I mean they, the majority of them will no longer have the object they were cast from next to it, because it probably will have either decomposed, or there’s a couple of rocks that will continue to break up over the coming winters, as water gets in there and freezes and breaks them up, so even those will probably change pretty dramatically, and that’s fine. It’s just part of the [02:08:00] process of it, because it won’t compete with the scale of the foreverness. [laughs]

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: The last thing I really wanted to ask about was the climate change aspect of this. How do you imagine it relating to this bigger question of climate change?

Brooks: Yes. I think that one can draw conclusions on, or relationships to, this kind of ontological relationship with the object. Of course, things are changing; we need to be kind of be accustomed to that, thinking in deep time, starting to relate to these notions [02:09:00] of larger shifts in the landscape around us, the fact that some of these species of trees that these were cast from, may not even exist in the future, and so forth. For me though, the larger situation, again, is seeing, but also seeing that this really is happening, and we need to think outside of our own lifespan. And that’s, for me, the most important component, is thinking outside of one’s lifespan. So, it’s not going to be resolved with some kind of quick policy shifts. This is something that’s going to be around now as long as humanity is a thing. And so, it’s another element of the culture that has not gone anywhere, and has not really been addressed in the complexities that it represents, and that it arose from. And so, this piece does not, by any means, [laughs] begin to address the complexity of these issues. For me, it’s kind of doing one thing, in that relationship to [02:10:00] climate change which is just simply: I need you to think outside your own lifespan, and to think of these things in a very long view, and a big-picture kind of way, these things which are going to be experienced in a very intimate scale, on a one-on-one kind of relationship with one person, one viewer, one little object, and then thinking in contrast to that, thinking on this kind of large scale, and so, to reconcile those things.

Dziedzic: Sorry to rush our end here, but is there anything that you’re still thinking about that you want to add on?

Brooks: I don't think so. If I think of anything later, I'll let you know, but I don't think so. Think those are the main stuffs, yes.

Dziedzic: [laughs] Okay, fantastic. Thank you so much, David.

Brooks: Yes! Thank you.

[End of interview]