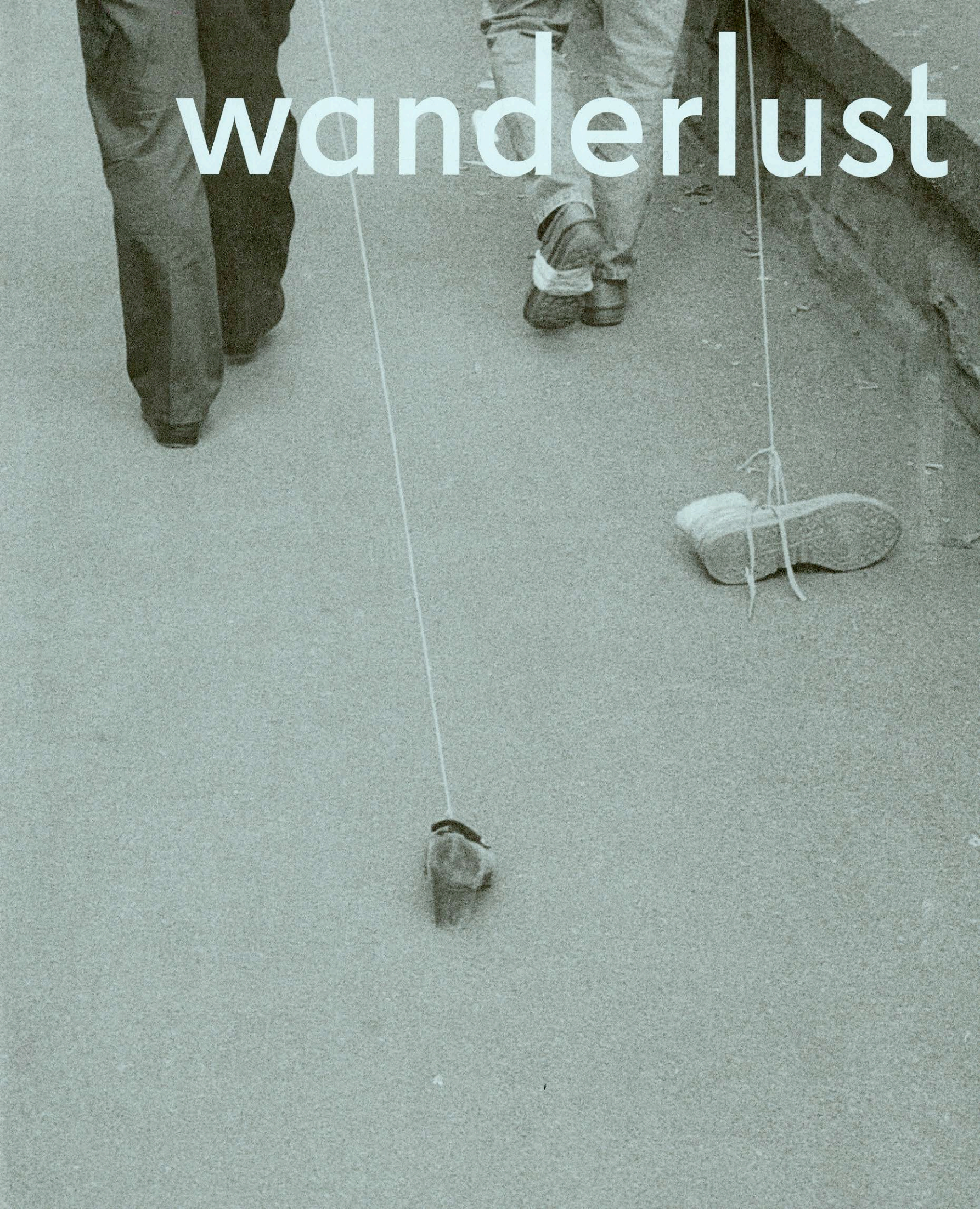


wanderlust



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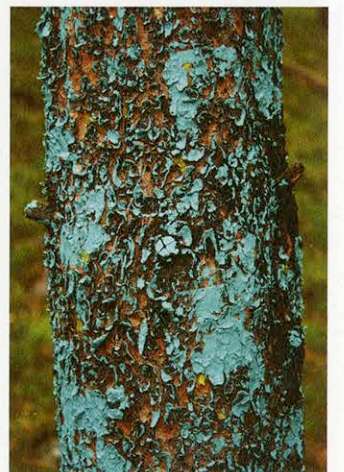
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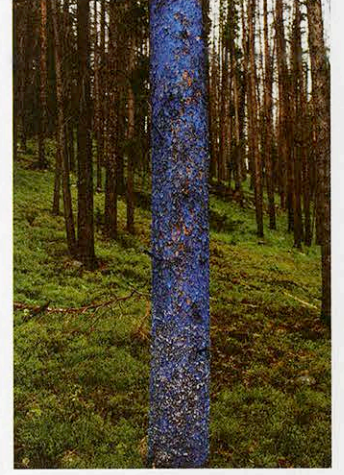
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Allan Kaprow. *Taking a Shoe for a Walk*, 1989.
Activity presented for "Allan Kaprow: Precedings."
Sponsored by Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten. Image use courtesy Allan Kaprow Estate and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Wolfgang Träger. © Wolfgang Träger. Image courtesy of Wolfgang Träger.





Over the last twenty years, Mary Ellen Strom has produced elegant and visually compelling video installations that address how labor and capitalism are performed by and integrated into the body and the environment. Strom pairs a conceptual approach with the formal languages of drawing, painting, sculpture, and dance to unmask the illusions, collusions, and repeated gestures that produce history, society, and even art itself. Many of her projects have been influenced by the history and awesome landscape of the artist's home state of Montana. Wild and vast, Montana is the American West of our collective imagination. Some of the most violent moments of American history scar this land and it is in these wild places that the effects of climate change are dearly felt.

In her installation *Tree Lines* (2013), Strom has created a roughly 10' H × 11' W replica of the NTSC video color bar spectrum from 22 color portraits of pine trees in a Montana forest. The trunk of each tree has been coated with glittering grey, yellow, cyan, green, magenta, red, or blue paint. Marked out from their sisters, these trees are either dying or "dead standing," the effects of the mountain pine beetle visible even through a thick layer of pigment. Once considered part of natural conditions, changes to the global climate have resulted in a loss of homeostasis in these ecosystems and bark beetle infestations are decimating forests from Mexico to Canada. Transformed into the test pattern for color television that is used nearly universally to calibrate television and computer monitors in North America, these photographs alert the viewer to the urgent need to adjust the human inputs that affect this forest, and the ever more fragile wild.

Tree Lines is one of three works that document this ghost forest. *Selva Oscura: Drawing of Dead Standing* (2011) and *Mary* (2013) are related video installations that memorialize the lost forest and project

a vision of tender efforts towards remediation. In *Mary*, an elegiac two-channel video installation the artist's hands appear, covered in paint, caressing the trees to coat their trunks in thick pigment, covering the resin deposits that belie the presence of the beetles. Her footsteps crunch through the leaf litter as she moves from tree to tree, visiting them with a beautifying touch. Off screen, over a score by MJ Williams, a woman's voice directs the painter, the camera, the forest, and even the weather, with commands like: "Stop." "Go." "Yellow." "Standby snow. Snow go." Her exhortations are a nod to the consequences, both deleterious and healing, of human action.

Ariel Pittman

98–99 Mary Ellen Strom. *Tree Lines*, 2013. 22 digital prints. Images courtesy of the artist and Longhouse Project Gallery.

2013 *Tree Lines*