



**Garry  
Noland**

**Base  
Materials**

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## Foreword

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Justin Witte

### Garry Noland

Garry Noland has maintained an active studio practice in Kansas City and Los Angeles since 1980. He earned a BA in History of Art from University of Missouri-Kansas City. Noland was a regular contributor to *Art Extra* (Wichita), *Forum* (Kansas City) and *New Art Examiner* (Chicago). He was awarded a NEA/Mid-America Arts Alliance visual artist's award in Works on Paper (1994); a Studios Inc Studio Fellowship (2011) and a Charlotte Street Foundation Visual Artists Fellowship (2013).

Notable exhibitions include *Unorganized Territory* at Bemis Center for the Contemporary Art (Omaha); *The Tyranny of Good Taste* at Glass Curtain Gallery /La Esquina (Chicago/KC); *Near Abstraction* at University of Tulsa; *The Center is a Moving Target* at Kemper Crossroads; *Rough Patches and Glitter* (Los Angeles Valley College), *The Most Beautiful Thing in the World* at Tiger Strikes Asteroid in Chicago, *Made and Connected* at John Michael Kohler Art Center with Peggy Noland and *UnCommon Materials* at California State University-Dominguez Hills.

### Jennifer Baker

Jennifer Baker is an artist, curator, and educator who creates experiences that are durational and unfold in space. She teaches and lectures on both studio and curatorial practice regularly and serves as Assistant Curator at H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute

I am incredibly grateful to Garry Noland for bringing his exhibition *Base Materials* to the Cleve Carney Art Gallery. When I visited Noland in his Los Angeles studio in the winter of 2018 one corner of the space was occupied by a pile of construction foam, reclaimed wood, duct tape and other cast-off materials. During our visit he would periodically reach into this pile and remove projects he had been working on. These cut cardboard and foam paintings, re-configured exhibition posters and old magazines would seemingly appear out of nowhere. One minute blending in seamlessly with the material on the studio floor the next minute revealing their intricately worked or painted surfaces. This is the magic of Noland's work, nothing is ever what it seems to be. In her essay "May God Thy Gold Refine" Jennifer Baker talks about how this surprising nature of Noland's work not only brings up the obvious issues of our consumerism and waste but also of power and politics. At a moment when nuance is discarded in favor of the simplistic and ignorance is mistaken as authenticity it is good to have work like Garry Noland's; work that asks us to look deeper.

Jennifer Baker

Garry Noland is a jolly scrimshander of trash, incising psychedelic patterns, maps, and portals into polystyrene, pieces of cardboard, and stacks of old magazines. He weaves textiles and gilds objects gold with polyethene tape, creates mosaics with shining tesserae marbles, and confidently posits that monuments can be dredged from polluted urban lakes. He wears a vintage mohair cardigan and is quick with a bad/dad joke. He has a rigorous and sacred studio practice to which he shows up daily and works diligently, letting the materials he sources from dumpsters, sidewalks, and his studio floor guide his process with an almost religious faith in their ability to reveal underlying truths.

Noland's ongoing *America the Beautiful* series (2017-present) is a group of collages titled after and featuring reproductions of a poster series of bucolic American landscapes produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the 1960s. Noland alters the graphic black lettering of the original images from a vintage *National Geographic* international travel advertisement that read "ATTENTION ESCAPISTS!!!" to "ATTENTION FASCISTS." The collaged block letters loom over hills and mountains where the viewer's perspective is sometimes aerial and sometimes on the ground. In some of the collages there are cattle grazing in a field; in some a figure observes a pastoral scene, and in others a rural highway winds through the landscape. Each of the scenes we encounter are lush and seemingly pristine—apart from the ominous typographic call for attention.

These works prominently exploit midcentury print and advertising aesthetics, but have been created and presented during a time when the American population is politically divided and reeling from a reality television star entering the office of the U.S. Presidency using the campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." This imperative was overwhelmingly effective in mobilizing a voter base by referencing the nostalgia of a bygone America and an implied decline that has been attributed to liberal ideals. The images of American spaces that Noland deploys in these collages bring into focus the prominent rhetoric of a political campaign—one that romanticizes what America has been and the ideals embodied by the nation. Noland notes that the good old days weren't good for everybody<sup>1</sup> and aims to use the emblazoned letters and

his appropriated title for the series to place the nostalgic image into a contemporary context.

The juxtaposition created by applying sans serif, all-caps font to a familiar image is formally effective. The aesthetic of the stark black lettering paired with the slightly faded poster is a visually compelling design on its own, but it also references the conventions of both historical propaganda and online image macro meme culture. Internet memes are predicated on a visual strategy of hijacking the original meaning of a familiar image to call attention to the way information is processed and spread in contemporary online culture—rapidly and often relying on irony, ambiguity, and/or sensationalist tactics. By collaging the word “fascist” into Midwestern landscapes in a manner that mimics such varied reference points as internet memes, sensationalist propaganda, and even the famous Hollywood sign, Noland implores viewers to consider the landscape in a new way—to ask, “Who is being summoned by this call for attention, from where, and to what end?”

The first Fascist movement is attributed to the political party led by Benito Mussolini in Italy from 1922-1943 leading up to and during the Second World War. Mussolini took power during the March on Rome in October 1922, endorsing a platform that was expansionist, believed in Italian exceptionalism, and looked to create a new Roman empire. The doctrine of Fascism outlined in Mussolini’s manifesto relies on extreme nationalism, wherein the government must exert imperial power over not only territory and economics, but also spirituality and ethics. Vehemently opposing the individual freedoms and progressive ideals of classical liberalism, it targets civil liberties, workers’ rights, and free thought as enemies of the state. This authoritative vision demands conformity to a national identity at the expense of individual expression and characterizes collaboration with other nations as weak, pacifism as cowardly, and war as noble and unifying<sup>2</sup>. Mussolini’s regime used propaganda, theatrical speeches, and dramatic pageantry (the 20th century’s version of reality television and sensationalist cable news programming) to inspire uncritical faith in these tenets.

After the Allied victory that defeated Nazism and Fascism in 1944, George Orwell (author of the dystopian novel *1984*) wrote in the short essay *What Is Fascism* that the word fascism is almost entirely meaningless. Orwell recognized that post-war American culture made a habit of using “fascist” loosely to describe anything that is unfairly or unnecessarily strict. In the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Noland noticed a similar fre-

quency and casualness in how the word was being brandished in the media regarding President Trump—a practice that has been examined critically in notable publications such as *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Guardian*.

This observation led Noland to look toward a familiar source material in his art practice: *National Geographic* magazine. The widely distributed publication, easily recognized by a gold rectangular logo that illustrates its own larger structure, was first published on September 22, 1888 and has been ubiquitous in many homes and libraries since. Downplaying American politics, the magazine has largely served affluent or upper-middle class white readers by delivering articles about science, history, and the cultures of distant corners of the world, and focusing on award-winning photojournalism that often captures scenic panoramas of breathtaking landscapes. Critics of the magazine—Noland among them—claim that while the magazine may further scientific inquiry and research, it also exoticizes non-Western cultures and documents American Imperialism. This notion is exacerbated by the likelihood that many “readers” look at *National Geographic* only for the photographs, not reading its content—a humorous inversion of the dubious claim that so many *Playboy* readers make—and demonstrates the kind of everyday, passive viewing and media consumption that Noland’s work aims to implicate.

In this exhibition, Noland presents new bodies of work that engage *National Geographic* magazines as both source and physical material to examine language and media representation. Like his *America the Beautiful* series, two other series of works employ print media collage and *décollage* techniques to suggest characteristics of screen-based media. Noland activates several copies of the entire April 1972 issue of the magazine for *If your six year old saw something like this would he know how to phone for help?* (1995-present), cutting into the body of each magazine to create a television screen-like window depicting a group of sheep(le?) to whom we can infer that this question is being directed. And the most recent work, *Scene from JFK’s Funeral* (2018), is a suite of seemingly identical images published in the March 1964 issue that depict the funeral proceedings for President John F. Kennedy. Upon closer inspection, slight differences appear: cropped scenes taken from other photographs within the same article have been superimposed onto framed artworks in the existing scene. These alternative viewpoints of the same event do not share the vantage point of the viewer or of the camera depicted in the original photograph, conjuring the aesthetics of surveillance. Noland’s gesture suggests that critical suspicion on the part of

the spectator has always been a necessary tool to confront the implicit biases embedded in our governments, our media, and ourselves.

Noland is known predominantly as an artist who works with *textural* rather than *textual* relationships, despite his long history of using both language and *National Geographic* magazine to critique right-wing political aims. In the past, these works have taken sculptural rather than two-dimensional or relief form, and referenced Morse code rather than digital culture, but still departed from his more familiar formal compositions. In presenting Noland's collage and text-based works alongside his abstract representations, this exhibition allows a complex dialogue to emerge, and an understanding of the artist's inquiry becomes richer. One can see that each mode of studio production is in keeping with his larger project—a practice predicated on manipulating commonplace materials to explore varied interfaces and refine an understanding of form.

In sourcing found and reclaimed materials from the humblest sources, Noland positions his work within the tradition of Arte Povera, an avant-garde movement that emerged after the Fascist-friendly Futurist movement. Italian artists in the 1960s took a radical stance to the values of established institutions of government and industry, using commonplace objects and found materials that energetically evoked locality, physicality, and materiality. Their use of unconventional materials aimed to disrupt the values of an increasingly commercialized contemporary gallery system and align art and everyday life more congruently. These artworks presented absurd and humorous juxtapositions, often highlighting distinctions between new/old, highly processed/pre-industrial, purposeful/accidental, and play/toil. In his manifesto on Arte Povera, Germano Celant positioned the movement as a critique of capitalism and consumerism, questioning the “use value” of art.<sup>3</sup> Celant linked Arte Povera's aims to Italy's political history and art's potential and failure to respond successfully to the relevant social issues of its time in both this founding manifesto and his call for the group's dispersal in 1971.

In his own artist statement, Garry Noland proffers, “The oft-quoted role of the free press is to ‘afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.’ Art's first-cousin role, then, is to find the mundane in the grand and the grand in the mundane.”<sup>4</sup> Across his varied artistic practice, Noland cites the abutments between boundaries—whether formal or conceptual, historical or contemporary, playful or serious, grand or ordinary—as a reflection of human interaction with art and with each other. The phrase “living in the moment”

is as banal and easily dismissed as Noland's raw materials, yet it functions to describe his practice and the resulting presence of the objects and images he creates. With borders and frames that are often fugitive and contingent properties that literally and figuratively lean into one another, these works are charismatic instigators that implore viewers to engage actively with the present physical, social, political, and emotional spaces we inhabit. For it is *we*, the consumers of visual culture, who are being summoned by Noland's call for attention, in order to examine the role of art and images in how we think about our everyday lives.

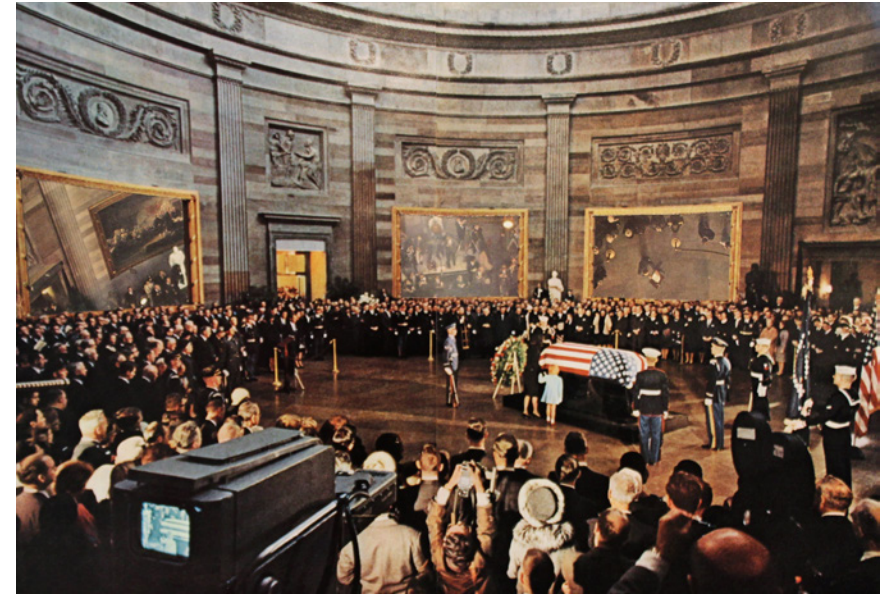
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<sup>1</sup> Garry Noland in conversation with the author surrounding a possible public art project, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Benito Mussolini, “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” accessed January 18, 2019, <http://www.sjsu.edu/people/james.lindahl/courses/Hum2B/s2/Mussolini-on-Doctrine-of-Fascism.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Germano Celant, “Arte Povera: Appunti per una guerriglia.” *Flash Art* 5 (November/December 1967): 3, <https://www.flashartonline.com/article/arte-povera/>.

<sup>4</sup> Garry Noland, “Artist Statement,” accessed January 10, 2019, <https://garrynolandart.com/home.html>. <https://garrynolandart.com/home.html>.



*Scene from JFK's Funeral*  
2018 –19  
photomontage, pages from March,  
1964 National Geographic  
 $9\frac{3}{16}'' \times 13\frac{5}{16}''$   
series of 9





Installation View:  
*If your six year old saw something like this, would he know  
how to phone for help?*  
1995 – 2019  
collage, decollage, April, 1972 National Geographic,  
size varies



*If your six year old saw something like this, would he know  
how to phone for help?*

2014

collage, decollage, April, 1972 National Geographic  
10" × 7"



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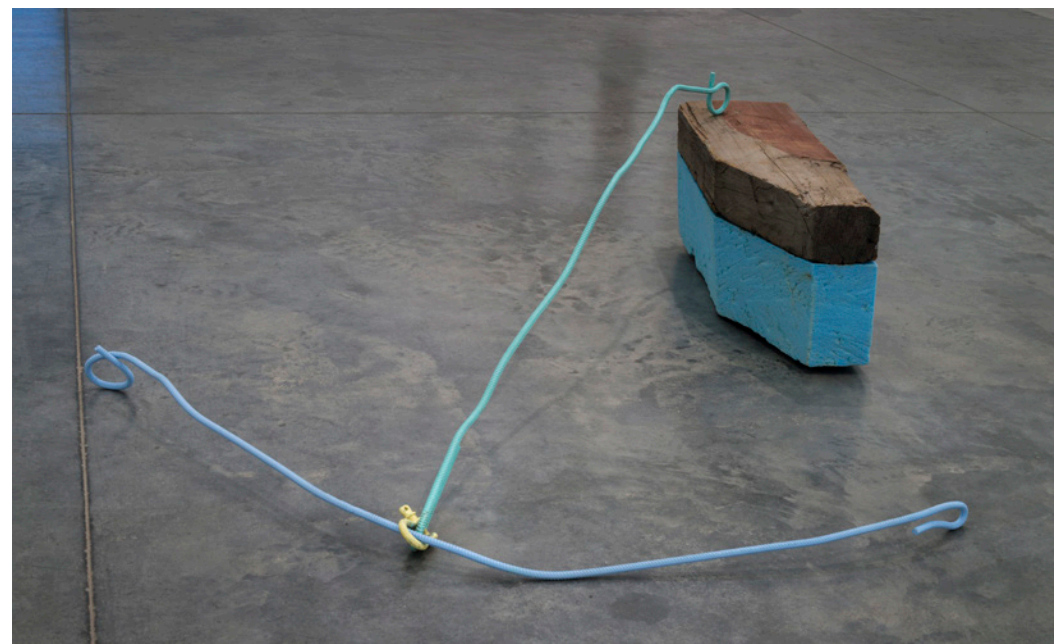
*Anchor*

2015

wood, polystyrene, rebar, spray paint

22" × 80" × 85"

photo: E.G. Schempf





*Engaged Pilaster*

2017

wood, hardware, pvc pipe, marbles

63" × 70" × 7"

photo: E.G. Schempf





*Landscape with Ocean*  
2018  
polystyrene, vinyl paint, spray paint,  
charcoal powder, decollage  
19" × 44" × 3"



*Landscape with Ocean*  
2018  
(lozenge shape)  
polystyrene, vinyl paint, charcoal powder,  
spray paint, stones  
22.5" × 24" × 3.5"

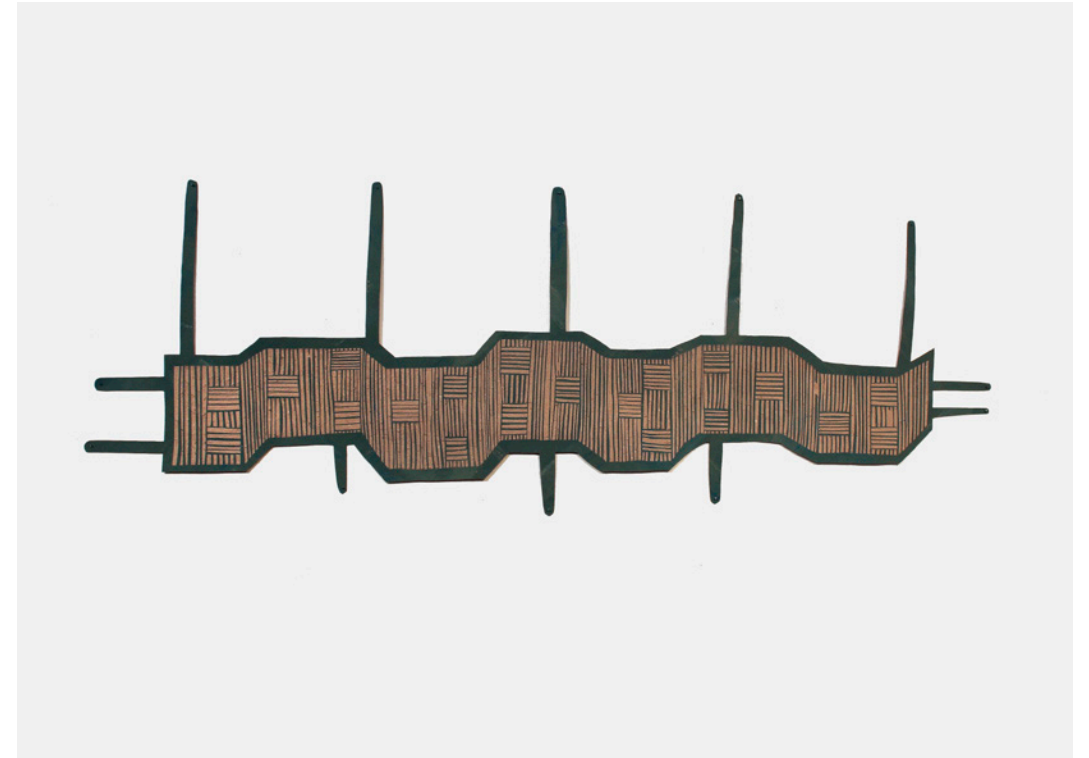




*Landscape with Ocean*  
2018  
polystyrene, vinyl paint, graphite powder,  
spray paint, decollage  
22.5" × 16.5" × 2.75"

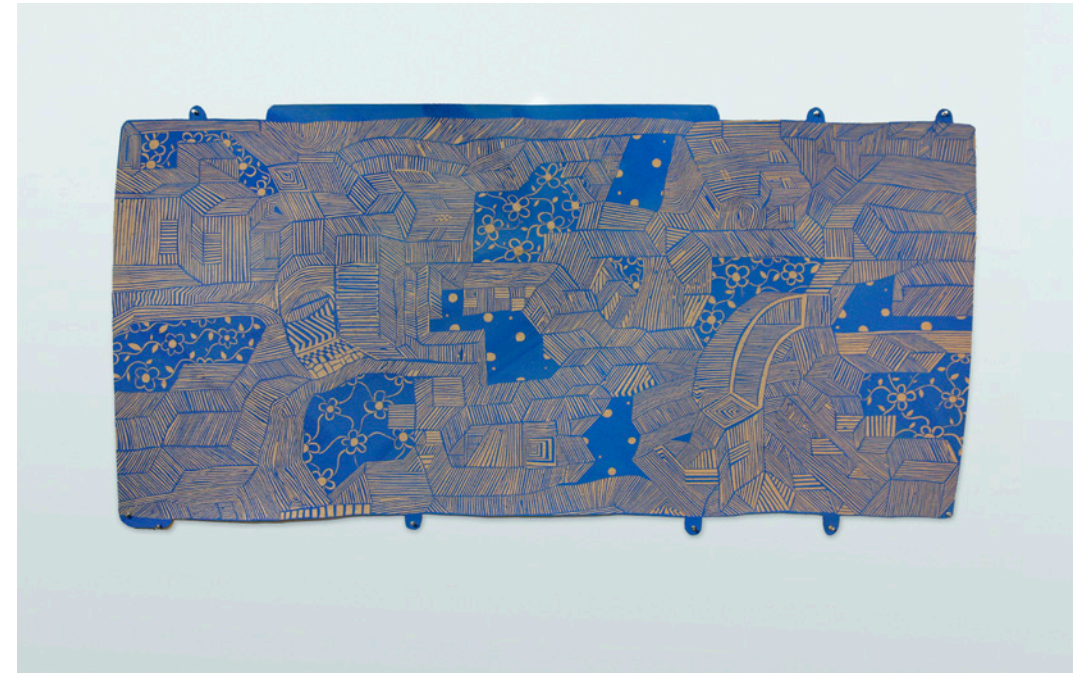


*Super Economizer*  
2018  
polystyrene, vinyl paint  
4" × 21" × 2"  
photo: E.G. Sempff



*Surface Treatment*  
2018  
cardboard, vinyl paint, decollage  
24 1/5" x 69"  
photo: E.G. Sempff

*Surface Treatment*  
2017  
cardboard, vinyl paint, sand, decollage  
37" × 78"  
photo: E.G. Schempf



CLEVE CARNEY  
ART GALLERY



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