



Warren Quigley, *Erratic*

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Buffalo Arts Studio

Expect the Unexpected

Curatorial Essay by Millie Chen, Edward Y. J. Millar,
Warren Quigley

“Control of nature is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man.”

— Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*

Everyday we venture out into the world, we look for patterns in our environment, meaning in our experiences, and structure in our lives. From walking down the street, to reflecting on something said, to writing shopping lists: if nature has an insatiable appetite for disorder, we have a predisposition to defy it. An obsession with trying to create outcomes where we can anticipate specific consequences from specific actions. However, life is inevitably inconsistent, unpredictable, and unexpected.

Erratic is an installation of 37 carved wooden spheres by Warren Quigley that challenge anthropocentric¹ worldviews and reveal a core paradox: the more we learn in our pursuit of control over our environment, the more we become aware of our own vulnerability. Our efforts are largely meaningless in chaotic, natural systems where inputs can yield erratic outcomes. Countering despair, Quigley’s work encourages us to recognize the humor and absurdity of our unavoidable labor as we struggle to control the uncontrollable.

Spheres are a rare state of balance and uniformity in nature. Nature favors them as they are the most efficient, low energy, stable physical form an object can take, inhabiting the least amount of space and offering the least resistance to its surroundings. Quigley’s interest in these shapes is due to their universality at all scales and frequency of appearance, from planetary bodies down to blueberries, water droplets, and more. By encountering them in nature, we become drawn to their design, structure, and potential for organizing. Their shapes inform the creation of a great many inventions, including ball bearings, cannon balls, and bubble tea.

Quigley’s repetitive, meditative labor of grinding down fallen tree trunks and limbs into spherical forms created a fertile ground for free association, from critique of mass media hyperbole to self-questioning. Whether marked with non-human or human interventions, the unexpected textures and text in each piece address common and personal perspectives. The resulting spheres are conflicted, erratic masses—contemplative self-contained wholes that are overrun with skepticism and self-doubt.

Made between 2010 to 2017, Quigley guides the spheres into the present by layering recent musings as projections onto the forms and within the space. This contemporary text emerges from an embattled state of mind grappling with control over cognition and memory. Incorporating these personal struggles continues Quigley’s ongoing exploration of dystopia through the optimistic lens of poetic contemplation and wit.

Installed in loose, ever-changing compositions inspired by glacial erratic—a rock transported by glacial ice and deposited in a new location—the placement of these spheres avoid intention or expectation. Audio of their rolling, wandering movement across the floor contrasts with their stillness in situ, pointing to the continuous creation of new patterns that cannot be observed or controlled.

Through its spherical carvings and commentary on our futile attempts to master the environment, *Erratic* echoes the myth of Sisyphus, condemned to roll a boulder uphill only for it to escape his grasp at the peak. This eternally escaping boulder is a timeless metaphor for humanity’s environmental and social frustrations.

Through Quigley’s work, we recognize how we are trapped in a systemic loop: destined to labor towards a goal we can never attain, toiling ever-long in a battle for control with nature we can neither win nor escape.

Front Page: Warren Quigley, *erratic*, 2010-2017, carved tree trunks (varied species) (detail)

Facing Page: Warren Quigley, *untitled*, 2002, laminated aromatic cedar

¹ seeing humans as the most significant entity in the universe





Warren Quigley, *What Kind of Fool Am I?*, 2002, white pine and paper collage



Warren Quigley, 1974

Artist Bio

Warren Quigley has exhibited across Canada, the U.S., China, and in France, Brazil, and Japan. He has realized a number of permanent public art commissions, and his work is in private and public collections in Canada, the U.S.A., and Europe. He has taught at Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, China, and is a lecturer in the Department of Art at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. Quigley is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto.

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