

...s. Here, however, we do not propose to give a complete account of the laws governing meteorological phenomena, which can be studied to better advantage in a more specialised text; instead we shall confine ourselves to information necessary for the intimate understanding of our own planet, its origin and history.

Thickness of the atmosphere. — What we often simply call 'air' is in fact a mixture of many gases in different proportions. It envelops the Earth in a spherical mantle and although, as yet, we have not determined its full extent, it must extend several hundred miles above the surface. In this connection, the Earth's rotation imposes a certain theoretical limit beyond which there will be no remaining air; at this distance molecules of air would be spilled off into space at a tangent, overcoming the Earth's gravity. This limit is calculated to be at 24,560 miles above the surface. For the same reasons this sphere of air must be fattened even more than the globe itself, since its outermost parts, at whatever distance they may actually be, are further from the axis of rotation.

However, these are purely theoretical considerations, and the actual height of the atmosphere must certainly be less. Up to the present time, the question has not been settled.

It has long been known that the air becomes thinner the higher we climb; mountaineers and high-altitude flyers have neglected this to their cost. It is also known that at great heights the background luminosity of the sky tends to decrease, and the beautiful blue tint we see at sea-level dulls into a deep violet. This is because the number of molecules present to diffuse the light of the Sun is decreasing. As the last traces of diffused light

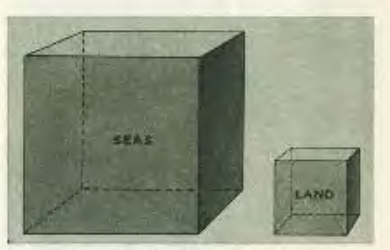


Fig. 184 — RELATIVE VOLUMES OF THE OCEANS AND CONTINENTS.



Fig. 185 — COMPARISON BETWEEN THE AVERAGE HEIGHT OF THE LAND AND THE AVERAGE DEPTH OF THE SEA.

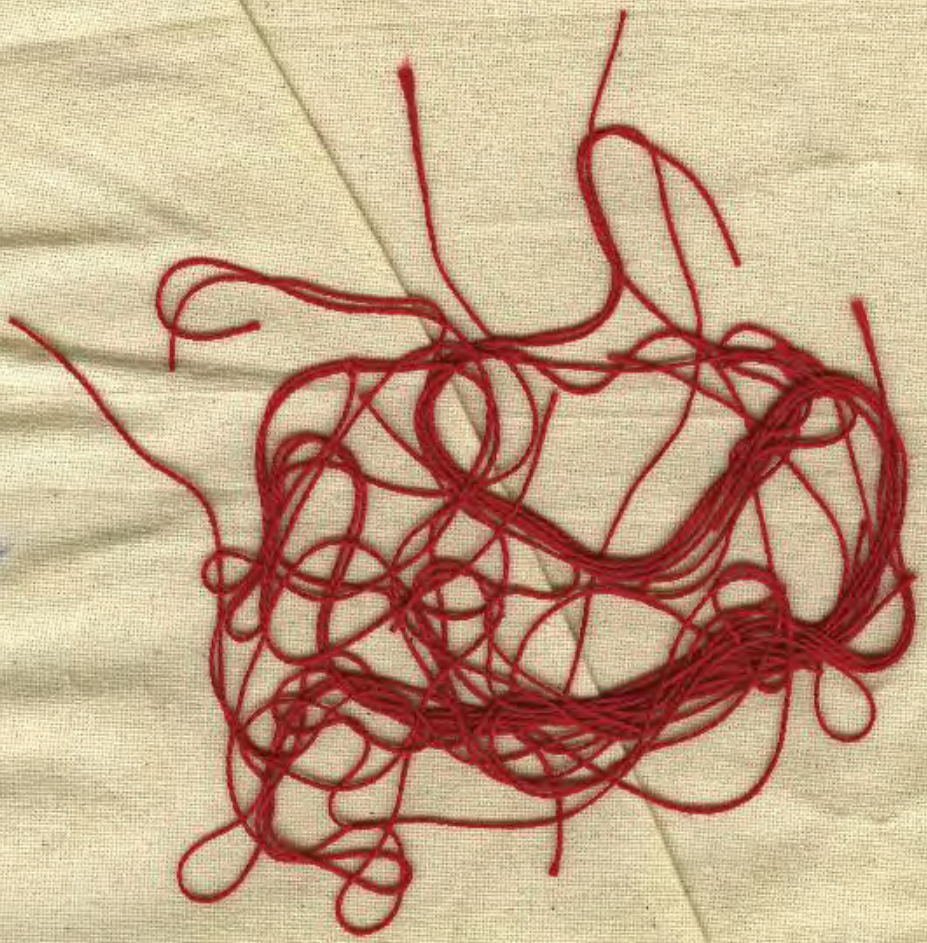
The Forces That Shape Them

An Introduction to the Work of Dianna Frid

The Ascents, a sewn book by Dianna Frid, is a tactile reflection on the names that human beings have given to the moon's craters. Aldrin sits next to Icarus, Pavlov and Petri, Planck and Fitzgerald, Verne and Freud. This one-of-a-kind work is at once a theater of memory and an investigation into the ironies and inconsistencies of the tribute paid to particular human achievements. In one spread, Frid stitches the names of scientific or mythical luminaries within a circle of shimmering fabric. Thus she inserts the textuality of planetary nomenclature into a textile moon. In another spread, Frid hints at the hierarchies of human remembrance that inscribe and sustain this lunar codex; here, she sews the peculiarities of cartographic convention in the form of a smaller,

blank globe traversed by meridians. *The Ascents* concludes with a final twist of memory as Frid acknowledges that her selection of crater names is incomplete and "based on personal familiarity — at times merely superficial or coincidental — with those commemorated in planetary nomenclature."

Floyd Collins, Cave Explorer was one of the first artist's books that made me aware of Frid's work. Collins was a farmer who discovered a cave on his land and became trapped while trying to find an entrance through which visitors might pass to the much larger, adjacent Mammoth Caves. As Collins lay trapped, a crowd of 20,000 people converged outside. In this way,



Collins suddenly and briefly became an unlikely celebrity shortly before the cave collapsed onto him. As a finely textured memorial, *Floyd Collins, Cave Explorer* quite literally buries its protagonist within the layers of cloth that comprise its pages.

Both of these artist's books, *The Ascents* and *Floyd Collins*, explore scalar difference and incommensuration to invoke the persistence of human longing and the uncertainties of exploration. As such, they also prefigure and open onto Frid's recent works on paper, presented in *The Forces That Shape Them*. The sequentiality of the books plays on the lexis of reading, on the articulation of repetition that linearity implies. In her works on paper, we find a different modality of repetition: an iterative modularity of material and subtle variations on recurrent diagrammatic imagery. In *The Forces That Shape Them*, the intimate sequentiality of the books is recapitulated on a vaster scale, as Frid activates the longest wall of the gallery by laying modules of yellow cellophane over an expanse of 84 feet. Traversing this forceful field as viewer-readers, we move from moment to moment, bound by light, energy and reflection.

Frid's books encourage acts of naming and titling to disclose a register of desire that is at once human and impersonal. Her sculptures, fabric pieces and works on paper refer to this desire, palpably if not visibly, back to the body of the artist. This is a chronotopically conditioned body, alive in the expanse of the universe for the briefest of moments, yet precisely for that reason not averse to utopian gestures. Elements of maps, charts and lists appear at once as provisional abstractions and as highly concrete bridges across the scalar chasms that haunt Frid's work. Here are crystal palaces that look like spaceships and maze gardens that grid wilderness.

One of Frid's earliest books, *The Whereabouts of the Duke* (1995), features the quotation: "It is such a delightful experience to see what neatness and pleasure the unassisted human hand can produce alone." Perhaps one might say that Frid's work is an affirmation of the ambiguous agency of facture, for which the cadences/repetitions of sewing stand at once as expression and allegory. For hers is an imperfectionist precision in which the poetics of abstraction are discovered by hand.

— Kie Ellens

Kie Ellens is a Dutch artist and the director of the Wall House #2 Foundation, where artists and musicians are invited to do projects in or with John Hejduk's only realized theoretical model. He has also curated many public commissions for the Chief Government Architect of the Netherlands. In 2008, Ellens wrote a book about Sam Durant, *No Lie Can Live Forever*, and he recently published an artist book with Richard Tuttle, *Dogs in a Hurry*.

Dianna Frid was born in Mexico City and immigrated to Vancouver, Canada, as a teenager. She received her M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2003 and is currently Assistant Professor in Studio Art in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

Frid has been the recipient of various grants and awards, most recently a Project Grant from the Canada Council for the Arts (2009) and an Artadia Award (2004). She has exhibited her work in the United States, Canada, Mexico and Belgium. She has had solo projects at P.S.1-MOMA (2005), the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2006); Croxhapox in Gent, Belgium (2006), Devening Projects + Editions in Chicago (2008) and Bravin Lee Programs, New York (2009). Her work was chosen to be part of The Drawing Center's *Selections – Spring 2008* exhibition in New York. Frid is preparing for a large site-specific project to take place at the Neues Kunstforum in Cologne, Germany (2010). To see more of her projects and artist books, please visit www.diannafrid.net and www.deveningprojects.com.

