

The Sandbox: A Meditation on Japonisme dans la Campagne
At the Grange du Tokyo
December 2023

Well you see it's really quite existential. Within the wooden frame is our sandbox, a blueprint for juvenile expression, soggy, pulpy, pungent. Manure. Cast within a box sharing the ratioed dimensions of its container, a sty in an abandoned barn, this microcosmic sample of the French countryside subverts the processes expected of its agricultural heritage, in short, turning back time. Doesn't one usually shovel manure out of a stable? Commanding this materiality, the artist retrieves the present by performing an act of devotion: collecting poops to form a world of imagination.

Our shit box's environs: a dry garden ala zen buddhist temple, rising from the detritus of crumbled walls: beams turned to sawdust, petrified cow dung, all unified by the grimy language of time. From the ghost of its industry, a meditative garden is combed with farm rakes to frame fresh fertilizer. Our garden's peaks and valleys crested by flagstones rejected by the cobbled walls, is mirrored by one monolithic highlight in the sandbox: one dry turd. A call through time claiming the delicate power of the present for its magnetic self. The cow's gift commands power equal to that of ancient geology. Given a few decades in this garden of time, the contents of our fecal box will turn to sand. For now, in this temple to play, and invitation for nirvana, it teems with life-giving potential.

Consider Walter de Maria's Earth Room, host to a unique microbiome. Consider minimalist traditions in sculpture exemplified by Isamu Noguchi's formal unification of eastern and western modernity. Now consider the sand box: symmetrical and wet, within its asymmetrical arid host; part of the living culture of this landscape, situated within a lip-service homage to ancient tradition; patted caringly by hand to its final form, while the exterior was roughly disrupted by rake.

The great French tradition of Japonisme was adopted by the most influential artists of the impressionist period. To depict their rural surroundings, they sought to distill the oriental essence of Japan. Absorbing and expanding a minimalist practice prioritizing the inherent materiality of organics and the aesthetics of decay, the impressionists emulated a form of art they recognized reached for a higher natural truth. To transpose a temple garden to this humble barn is a nod to their legacy: this rock garden will never grasp the gravity of its Japanese predecessors, but it will present an anomalous incongruity. Une boite de merde.