



Degradation and Preservation

Ellen G. Levine

This painting was made in the summer of 2012 at a lecture at EGS given by Stephen Levine and Paul Antze on ecopoiesis—the relation between the environment and aesthetics. The idea of painting during lectures is not so much to illustrate the text of the lecture but to engage in the making of an art work inspired by the “music” of the words. I also often bring in some kind of material to give myself inspiration or a point of departure. Every fifteen minutes a bell rang, and I talked about what was happening in the form of the painting and the process of making it. Although I was not listening to the lecture very carefully, the painting and the shaping of it had an uncanny way of responding to its subject matter. Making a painting in public in front of the students and faculty was challenging but seemed to add another dimension to the lecture.

On this specific occasion, I had the idea to bring in some trash to incorporate into the painting to develop the theme of art and environmental degradation. But when I looked around the town of Saas-Fee, there seemed to be no trash, only a few cigarette butts! I wandered around hoping to see something that would inspire me and happened upon a construction site for a new roof on a house. There I found some burned asphalt from the old roof. In its raw beauty, the burned piece of asphalt looked like a mountain range and reminded me of the shrinking glacier around us in Saas-Fee. I began to wonder how this degraded material could become part of something worth preserving in a new form...