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Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Graduate Student Summer Field Research,
Terminal Report

My time in the tropical dry forest of Santa Rosa National Park in Costa Rica was an incredibly productive. I did not deviate from my initial prospectus much, with the exception of the fact that I relied less on my camera to document the forest than I had initially planned. Instead, I spent time translating the jungle in ink, pencil and gouache. I spent a sizable amount of time hiking to different destinations throughout the forest. The more lush area of primary forest was a solid three-hour hike from where I was staying. The reward was a wider range of textures and shapes to inspire my drawings and small paintings. I have come back to New Orleans with six full journals and a large stack of paintings, and have already begun dissecting this work in my studio at the Woldenberg Art Center.

Living in the forest, amongst other researchers, gave me a unique take on the ecological focus of Costa Rica. In a country with one third of its land delegated as national reserves, it is interesting to learn the struggles and payoffs of such an ecological investment. Part of my interest in making art based on landscapes is to investigate nature's confrontation with culture. Speaking with Costa Ricans, while explaining my own reasons for being there, I noted their pride in the rich and varied ecosystems of their country. However, observing the repercussions that development and the tourist industry has had on the country and environment was at times disillusioning. The amount of development in Costa Rica is staggering, and with that comes a price, both for the

cultural identity of the people and for ecosystems outside of the jurisdiction of the National Park Administration.

By documenting my experience of different ecosystems I am placing my work in the long trajectory of landscape painting. Doing so in a time when we are globally beginning to address issues of climate change with increased environmental awareness links such an activity to the social and cultural realm. It provides a forum for appreciating what we have, and what we stand to lose. Santa Rosa national park used to be a large expanse of farmland that butted up against a section of primary forest. When the land was marked a national historic site in 1971 after a victory over Nicaragua, the farmland was left unmanaged and gradually rejuvenated into the forest that it is today. Santa Rosa is a success story, one which I enjoyed celebrating.

Since returning to New Orleans and contemplating the drawings I made this summer, I have begun to pull the pieces apart. Isolating the shapes, lines and colors of the drawings in large format oil paintings. In my process, it is as if I am de-fragmenting the forest, isolating my interpretation of all of the pieces that make up the overwhelming visual and physical impact of the space. The rich and elusive action of memory comes into play, making the new works take on a symbolic language of the forest. The body of work that is being created out of my experience this summer will hopefully continue to be fruitful for the next two semesters. The new paintings, as well as the small drawings and paintings that I made this summer, will all culminate into my thesis exhibition to be held this March in the Carroll Gallery of the Woldenberg Art Center. I am incredibly grateful to the Stone Center for Latin American Studies for this wonderful opportunity.

