Mass MoCA and More

This past weekend I took a trip out to North Adams to MASS MoCA (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art). They were showing some great exhibits like Sol LeWitt's wall drawings (I'm standing in front of one in the picture), a collection of pieces all by Canadian artists, and Xu Bing's phoenix sculptures:

Isn't that incredible?
My favorite part of the trip was after wandering through a series of dark rooms I stepped through a curtain and was enclosed by white walls with a video of what seemed to be an arctic landscape projected, huge and imposing, on the wall in front of me. I sat on the small bench by the doorway and watched. What at first appeared to be a static expanse of stark white became slowly stained by a distant and fast-approaching cloud of violet. The purple wind was blown directly towards me, and I was immersed in rushing gusts of color threatening to push beyond the borders of the screen, and in the sound of wind pounding in my ears and faint strains of music that were barely discernable above the din. As quickly as it came, the cloud blew past me, and once again I was staring at a limitless field of snow.
This piece (Charles Stankievech's LOVELAND) reminded me of experiences both concrete and ineffable. I can recall being nine years old and standing on top of a mountain at sunset and feeling cold wind in my face. However it is more difficult to recall and communicate the feeling of being both afraid and in awe of the power of nature, being aware of how little I mattered in the grand scheme of the world, and still being able to appreciate the incomprehensible beauty that surrounded me. What I love about art, and especially this piece, is its ability to access the collective human experience in subtle and powerful ways. After watching the film twice, I rushed out, found some of my friends, and hurried them into the room. Though this piece didn't awaken the same memories in each of us, some people thought the landscape looked like a cloud and recalled being on a plane and flying through a thunderstorm, we were each brought back to common feelings.

That's what I love about art, its ability to tap into collective human experiences, and I feel so fortunate that there are so many opportunities for me to see great art out here. Yes, North Adams is a bit of a journey away, but there are beautiful museums on each of the five colleges' campuses, there is Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, and there are galleries and art spaces scattered throughout the valley. Don't postpone seeing these places, they are beautiful and they are waiting for you.