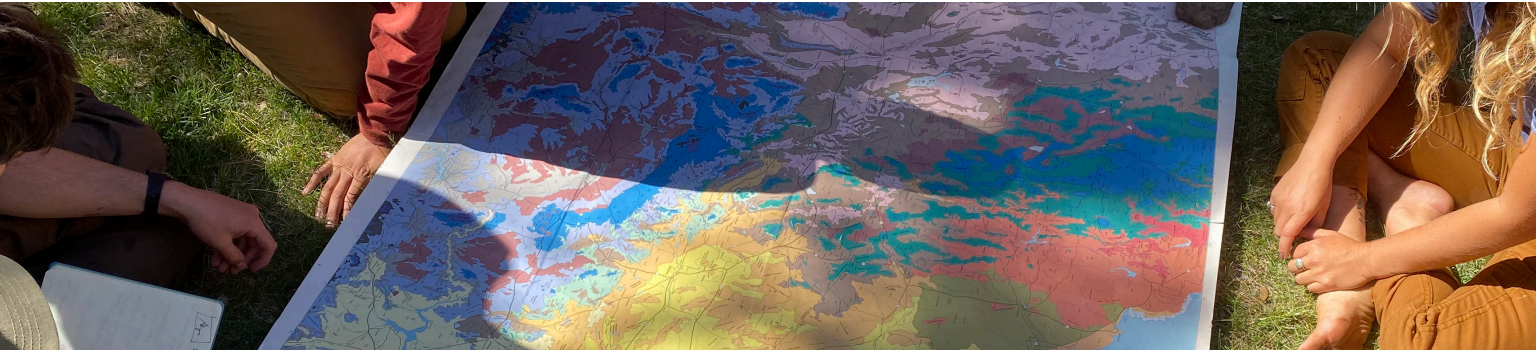

these systems are not static
LAND ARTS OF THE AMERICAN WEST
2019 EXHIBITION
Hyunju Blemel · Chelsea Call · Nancy Collins · Wheeler Fink · Jake Gatehouse
Juana Estrada Hernandez · Katie Keaveny · Ben Schoenburg · Mark Williams

Introduction:

This catalog presents a series of photographs, writings, and creative responses from artists who participated in the 2019 Land Arts of the American West program. It is not our intention to present this content as a comprehensive summary of the many experiences undertaken or the resulting art that came from these. Rather, it is our intention to share experimental moments in the making, as each artist expresses concepts, creative processes, and pivotal moments from this embodied experience.

The artists and LAAW program would like to acknowledge that all of the places we visited and learned from are home to many indigenous communities, land-based peoples, and more-than-human persons. We are honored to have had the opportunity to have these experiences and forever carry this wisdom of place with us.





Nancy exploring Muley Point
Photo by Jake Gatehouse

About the Program

Land Arts of the American West is a semester long, full-time, studio art program at the University of New Mexico committed to mentoring students into the field of Art & Ecology as professional creative practitioners. The program's pedagogy is unique, employing a combination of the following: student centered research and practice, intensely experiential and embodied bioregional field-based explorations, collective daily living/workshopping/projects, and opportunities to publicly present finished works.

The semester begins with six weeks of travel exploring the ecology of place within the American Southwest. These Field Investigations include Independent Work Sites, Investigative Sites, and Collaborative Engagement Sites. During Individual Work Sites students come in contact with the Southwest's biodiversity while remotely base-camping in various econiches such as subalpine, desert, juniper-scrub, grasslands, and riparian environments. At these sites, students work on individual creative projects. Investigative Sites are spaces where the entire LAAW group is guided by local communities, organizations, guides, artists, and/or scholars to learn about a particular place, current environmental justice issues, and human-impacted environments. Finally, during Collaborative Engagement Sites, LAAW artists partner up with local communities to investigate current bioregional issues and engage creatively and collaboratively with a public output.



LAAW Artists 2019

Ben Schoenburg
Chelsea Call
Hyunju Blemel
Jake Gatehouse
Juana Estrada Hernandez
Katie Keaveny
Mark Williams
Nancy Collins
Wheeler Fink

Photo by Chelsea Call

Visiting Artists, Scholars, Ecologists, Organizations, and Community Representatives

Craig Allen, Forest Ecologist
Scott Chaskey, Poet and Farmer
Valer Clark, Cuenca Los Ojos
Sunny Dooley, Navajo Storyteller and Artist
Josie Lopez, Albuquerque Museum
Orien MacDonald, Artist and Teacher Gila, NM
Jose Manuel, Cuenca Los Ojos
Perin McNelis, Borderlands Restoration Network
Todd Miller, Freelance Journalist
Allegra Mount, Borderlands Restoration Network
Kendra Pinto, Greater Chaco Coalition
Samual Sage, Greater Chaco Coalition
SeedBroadcast, Artists, Farmers, and Seed/Food Sovereignty Activists
Eileen Shendo, Greater Chaco Coalition
Daniel Tso, Greater Chaco Coalition
Denyce White, Utah Diné Bikéyah
Jonah Yellowman, Utah Diné Bikéyah
Nancy Zastudil, Tamarind Institute

Field Sites

Bears Ears National Monument and Muley Point, Utah // Independent and Investigative Site
San Juan River, Utah // Investigative Site
Angel Peak BLM, New Mexico // Investigative and Collaborative Project Site
Counselor and "The Checkerboard," New Mexico // Investigative and Collaborative Project Site
Chaco Canyon National Historical Park, New Mexico // Investigative and Collaborative Project Site
Hart-Mann Farm, Anton Chico, NM // Investigative and Collaborative Project Site
Albuquerque Museum, New Mexico // Investigative and Collaborative Project Site
Valle Vidal, Carson National Forest, New Mexico // Independent and Investigative Site
El Coronado Ranch, AZ // Investigative Site
Chiricahua National Forest, AZ // Investigative Site
Boot Heel Ranch, AZ // Investigative Site
Gila River and Wilderness, NM // Independent and Investigative Site

Photo by Katie Keaveny

Bears Ears National Monumemt and Muley Point, UT

24th August - 30th August

Our first field journey started off with a visit to Muley Point in Bears Ears National Monument, Utah. Here we met with Diné storyteller Sunny Dooley as well as members of Utah Diné Bikéyah, Jonah Yellowman and Denyce White. *- Ryan Henel*

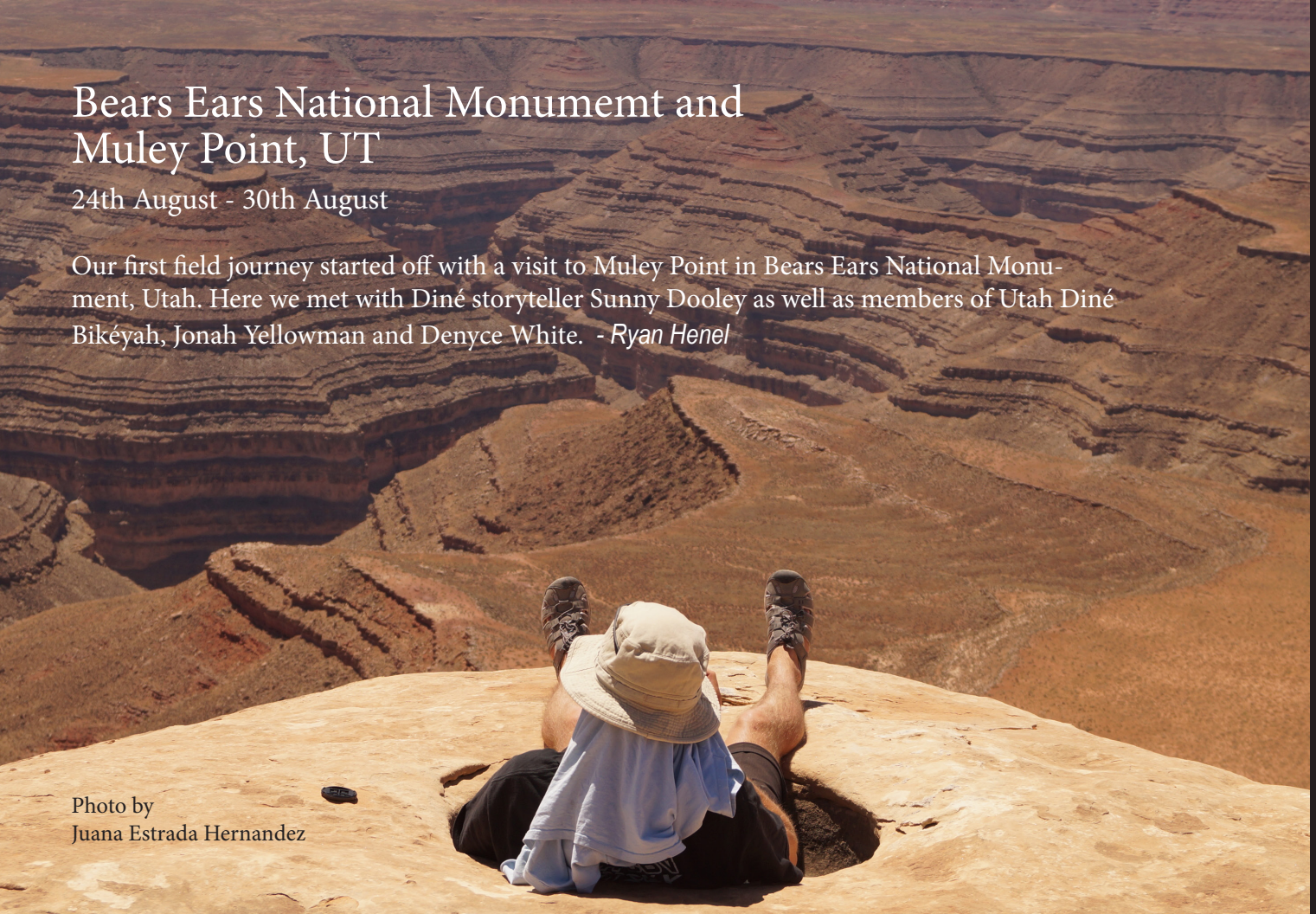


Photo by
Juana Estrada Hernandez



Hanbok

Hyunju Blemel

Under the Milky Way
I danced
In my
dress.

Bright.
Vibrant.
Breathtaking.
All the way across.

Glowing.
Shimmering.
Speckled.

Day 3 - Monday 26th

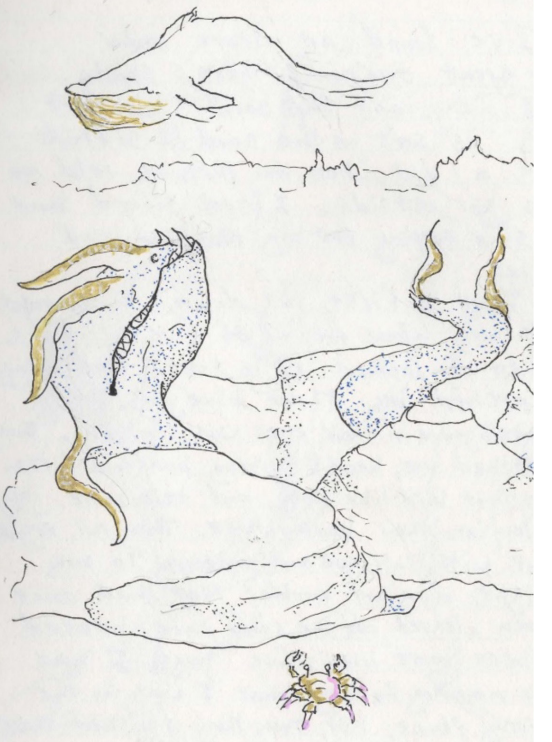
I've Always had a hard time understanding how this area could have once been under an ocean. It's so dry and barren, It never really clicked in my head, even as I go around finding clam fossils in the mountains near where I live.

But out here, sitting on this great plateau, looking over the flat land interrupted only by haunting spires of rock and deep wind-swept ravines, I feel like I'm under water.

The landscape takes your breath away then keeps it for itself. The raging winds up here are made of lungfuls from countless others, and the longer we stay here, the harder they blow.

The ravines below me look, not perfect, but not made by a force of nature. Like long ago, some massive serpent dug trenches out of the ocean floor. A Moray Eel of unusual size. Were they digging for food, or for homes, I wonder? Perhaps it was for nothing but sport, or a philosophy of some sort.

I'd trust a giant serpent to give me some good advice every so often.



Wheeler Fink

The Road

Nancy Collins

There is so much to see at Muley Point; standing on the cliff ridge the eye is drawn down to the valley below. The San Juan curves its way through the canyon and silhouetted in the distant Monument Valley stands majestic.

Along the bottom a dirt road winds across the mesa, visible from almost every spot on the ridge. This road hugs the edge of the canyon before peeling away and fading into the distance.

A reminder of humans imprint on the land? A constant need to mark?

I prefer to think of it as a beautiful line across the desert, signifying journeys, adventure and excitement. Sometimes a subtle shadow, other times a powerful stamp on the land.

Looking back through my pictures I've noticed that the road appears in almost all of the them, I seem to feel a pull to this winding ribbon.

I wanted to acknowledge its presence and beauty.





Juana Estrada Hernandez

~~Calor~~
~~Dignidad~~
~~Humanizando~~
~~Sacrificio~~
Poder
~~Sueños~~
~~Futuros~~
~~Inclusión~~
~~Participación~~
~~Violencia~~
~~Niños~~
~~Justicia~~
Para Adelante

Chaco Canyon National historical Park, NM
Councellor and 'The Checkerboard', NM
Angel Peak BLM, NM

31st August - 5th September

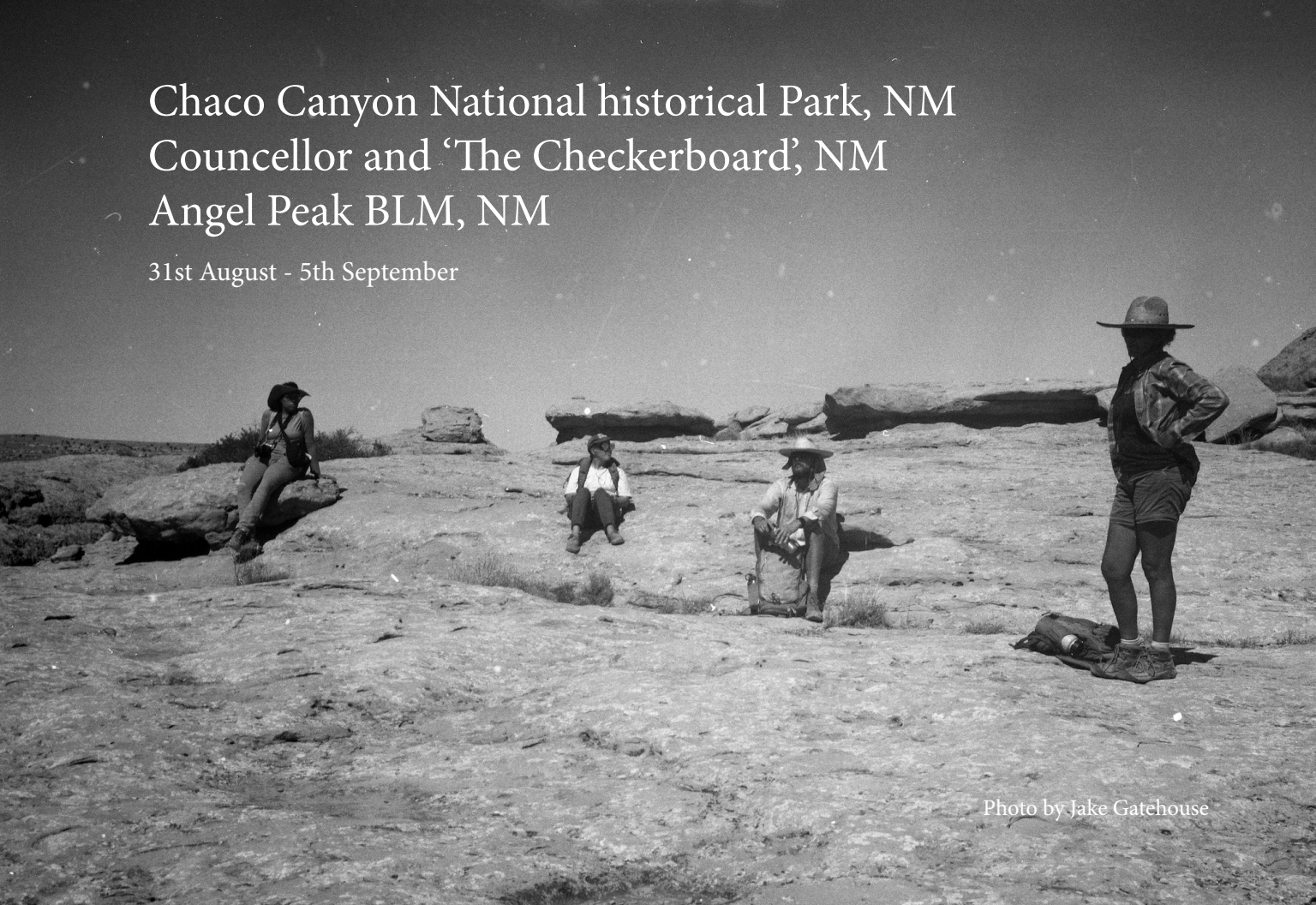


Photo by Jake Gatehouse



For the second leg of our first journey, LAAW visits the Northwestern Checkerboard region of New Mexico. Here we visited with Greater Chaco Coalition's Daniel Tso and Kendra Pinto for the "Fracking is Fracking Reality Tour". Followed by an exploration of Chaco Canyon. Lastly we met with coalition members Samuel Sage and Eileen Shendo.
The week culminated in the making of three short films, raising awareness about the impacts of oil and gas in the region.

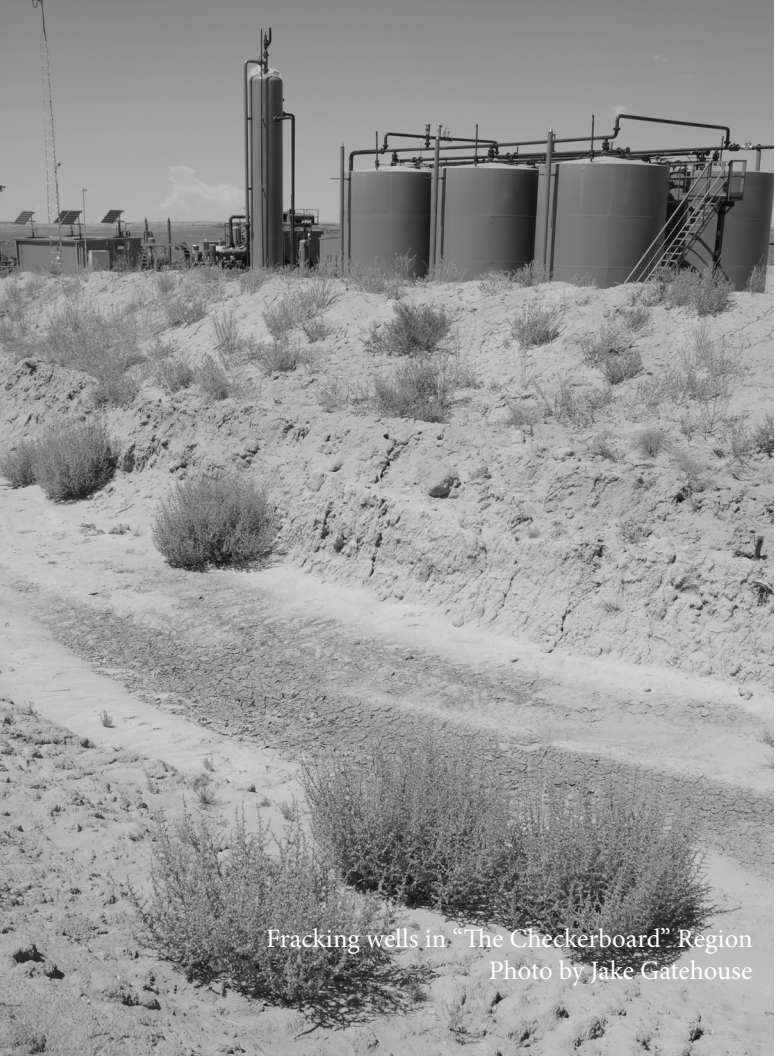


Daniel Tso
Photo by Chelsea Call

Mark Williams

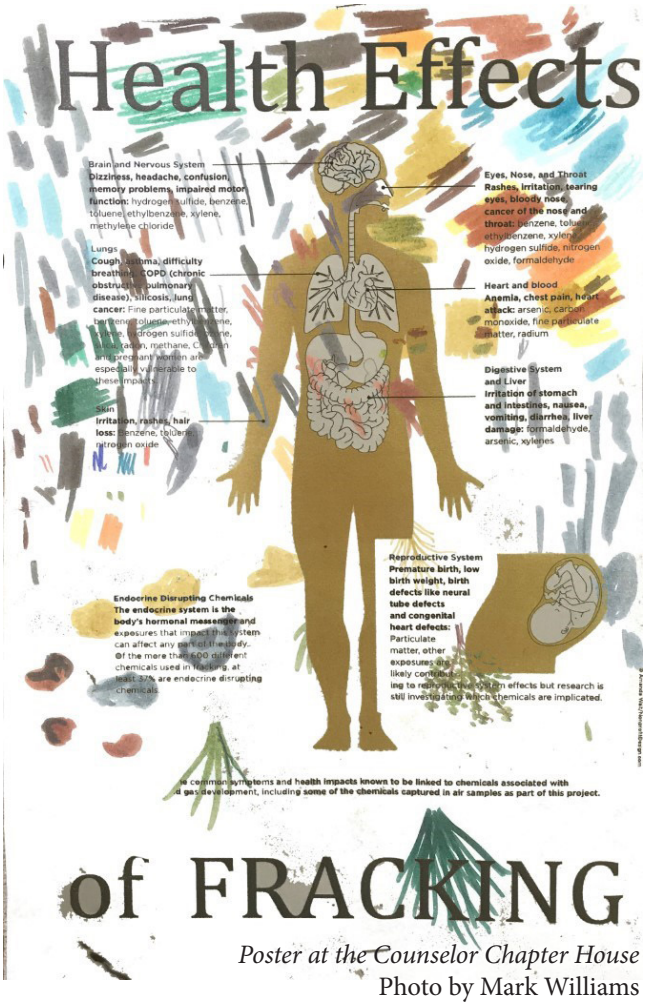
After going on the Fracking Tour with Daniel Tso and then spending a day visiting Chaco Culture National Historical Park, we traveled to the Counselor Chapter house to meet with Samuel Sage. In our conversation, he updated us about the steady influx of oil and gas operations in his region over the past couple of decades. He also spoke of the serious cultural shifts and gaps that he has witnessed as a result.

One example he offered, is that a large percentage of his community are struggling with diabetes but lack the resources to curb their lifestyles and eating habits. One major limitation is that a lot of families are locked into food deserts relative to the BLM land and industrial sites that surround them. Most communities have a single gas station that serves as a local food market and meanwhile, the nearest grocery store could easily be more than an hour away. People that don't have transportation or lack the funds to commute back and forth are forced to subsist on gas-station fare for most of their sustenance.



Fracking wells in "The Checkerboard" Region
Photo by Jake Gatehouse

Currently, Samuel mentioned, the younger Navajo generations are faced with more and more unforeseen struggles and are lacking the language/knowledge/support that existed before as ways of perceiving, mapping and dealing with such high levels of grief. The pollutions and toxins received from living in close quarters to industrial oil and gas sites as well as the introduction of industrialized pharmaceuticals and food sources have brought on cancers and other illnesses that are causing their elders to pass much earlier than times past. In traditional Navajo cosmology, it is believed that the spirits of the ancestors are forever laying witness to the living's actions in the present and are to whom prayers are placed for future guidance. In the recent present though, most children are now growing up without ever getting to know their grandparents because they have already passed. On the other end, the youth are now being born with diabetes as well as contracting an array of allergies that were also unheard of before.

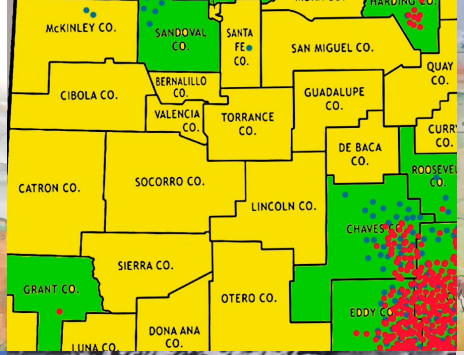


Poster at the Counselor Chapter House
Photo by Mark Williams

As a result, whole communities are experiencing a higher rate of traumatic situations due to the changes and fragmentation they are experiencing in their culture as well as the physical landscape from which they have traditionally gained their livelihood. This situation leaves individuals more susceptible to negative coping mechanisms such as substance abuse which in return leads to further neglect of their families and ties to the land.

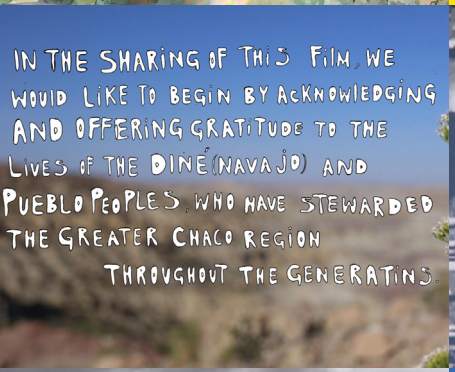
Samuel then went on to explain the Navajo perspective of wellness, in regards to the Health Impact Statement that is currently being drafted in relation to the continued fight against the growth of fracking sites in the region. In their perspective, a single individual's illness is not understood to affect them in a vacuum, but rather is seen to have a rippling effect that the entire community must bear. If a community member is ill, then the entire community that they are part of is equally seen as ill. Such a perspective offers a dynamic critique towards the Westernized diagnoses of "depression" and "mental illness."

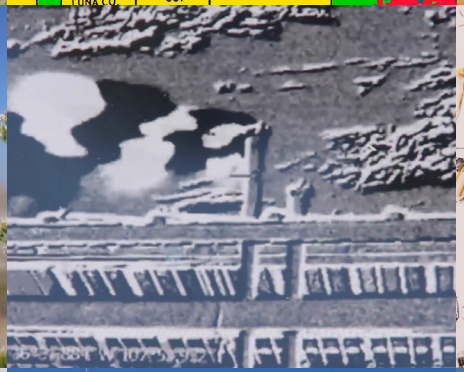



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SANDOVAL CO.
SANTA FE CO.
SAN MIGUEL CO.
QUAY CO.
CIBOLA CO.
BERNALILLO CO.
VALENCIA CO.
TORRANCE CO.
GUADALUPE CO.
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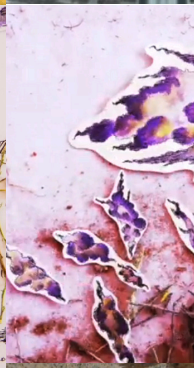





IN THE SHARING OF THIS FILM, WE
WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN BY ACKNOWLEDGING
AND OFFERING GRATITUDE TO THE
LIVES OF THE DINÉ (NAVAJO) AND
PUEBLO PEOPLES WHO HAVE STEWARDED
THE GREATER CHACO REGION
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

















Stills from three experimental videos produced in collaboration with Greater Chaco Coalition



Hart-Mann Farm, Anton Chico NM
Albuquerque Museum, NM

15th September - 21st September

Photo by Chelsea Call





This week was about rethinking what an art project has to look like, working the farm and leaning about food and seed sovereignty. Joined by Scott and Meegan Chaskey (bottom left - photo by Jake Gatehouse) we developed projects to go along with the seed exchange at the Albuquerque Museum.



Hands On Seeds
Ben Schoenburg

So many seeds, processes, human-powered tools, and food. Amaranth was threshed by hand over a tarp and winnowed by pouring it from a height to let the casings or chaff blow away. It was then popped on a hot pan and eaten. Apples were picked, fed into the grinder, pressed, and drunk. Corn was shelled, winnowed, and ground to make masa, cornbread, and atole. Seeds from plants with the most desirable traits were stored in the seed vault to await the next planting. At the farm, each process begets another in a reciprocal dance of renewal and decomposition.




Photo by Nancy Collins

Amaranth Abundance
Chelsea Call

There is magic present in fall. The plant world communicates this transition through color. As a visual artist I find this fascinating. A perennial plant that dances brightly in the last light of the day, amaranth is a superfood in the family of grains. While at the farm in Anton Chico I spent time watching the amaranth flowers change, little pops of black emerging, signaling harvest time. With the other land arts kin I rubbed the amaranth flower together between my palms, black seeds and flower bits then fell onto the tarp beneath me.

A meditation occurred between my palms, as I rubbed the amaranth flowers together and listened to Jen share about her work with seed sovereignty. I learned that amaranth was once in abundance in the Southwest, before colonization. Amaranth was, and still is, a sacred plant to indigenous peoples and was incorporated into many rituals. Due to Christian conversion the plant was viewed as a threat and often burned in mass. In an effort to decolonization and reclamation, amaranth is reemerging in farms across the Southwest. While at the Albuquerque Museum for the Encuentro de Semillas // Gathering of Seeds event I attended an Amaranth Harvest where I learned a nourishing amaranth seed recipe from some Guatemalan women. I am grateful for my time connecting with this plant and look forward integrating amaranth's nutrition into my diet.



Katie Keaveny

Wow! So much to say about our experience at Jen's farm in Anton Chico. Seed sovereignty, social justice, sustainability, history, land and water rights, acequias, and community supported agriculture were just some of the topics we were introduced to and which we discussed at length. What really was most meaningful to me was the collaborative and community processes we engaged in together.

We were able to experience the process of harvesting corn, shucking it, grinding it into flour, making tortillas, then filling our bellies with tortillas+fillings. We all worked together to complete these tasks, making it more meaningful as we shared the work, as well as sharing stories and conversations. The process of making apple cider was so fun as well. Collecting apples and putting them through the cider press was a collaborative effort in which we all got to enjoy the fruit juices of our labor.

Being at the farm reawakened my awe for the magic and intelligence that exists in every seed. The fact that something so tiny can produce towering trees and an enormous variety of fruits and vegetables that sustain our existence, is by far one of the most amazing things on this Earth.

Valle Vidal
Carson National Forest
NM

22nd September - 28th September

Our second independent work site bore the evidence of past fires and oil company ownership. It began with a tour from forest ecologist Craig Allen who frantically bounced from tree to tree, exclaiming "these systems are not static".

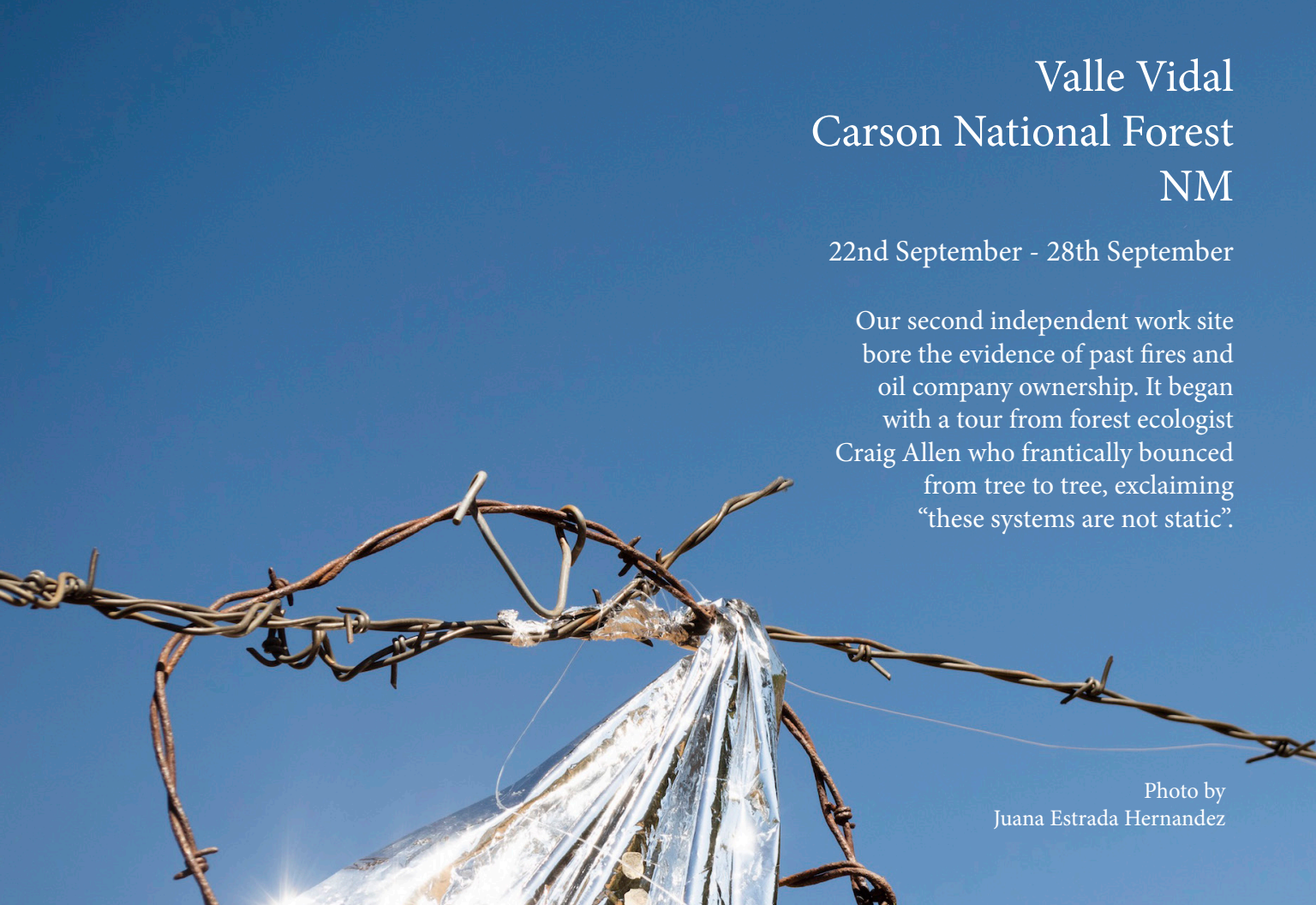
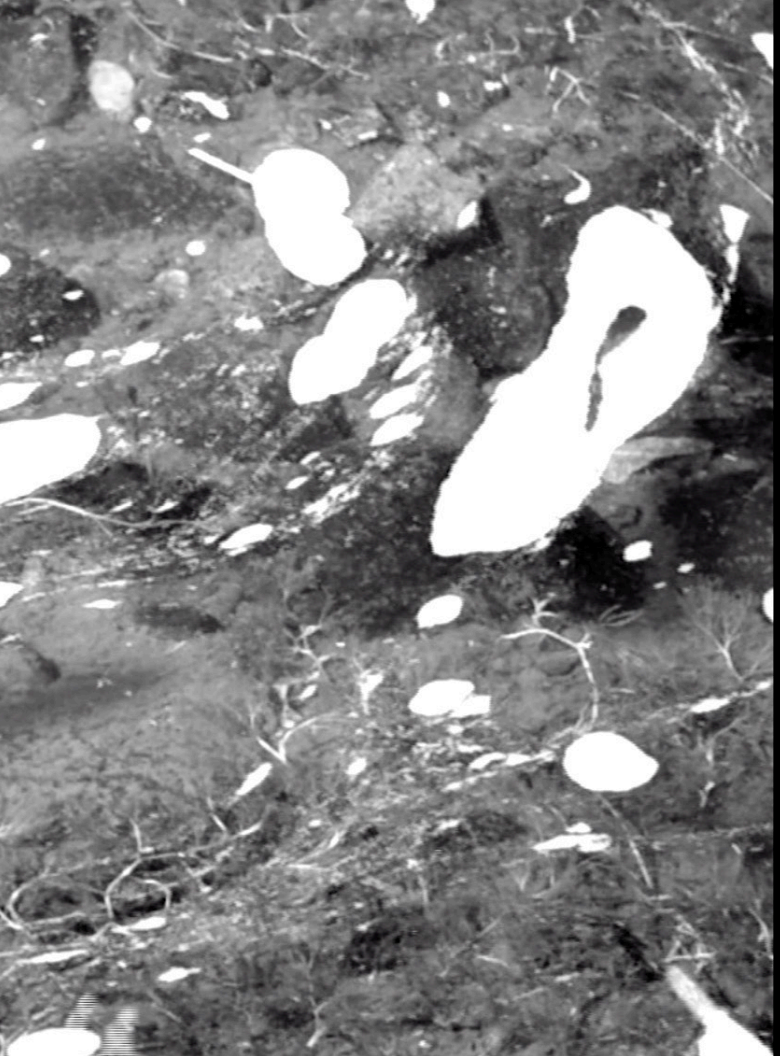


Photo by
Juana Estrada Hernandez

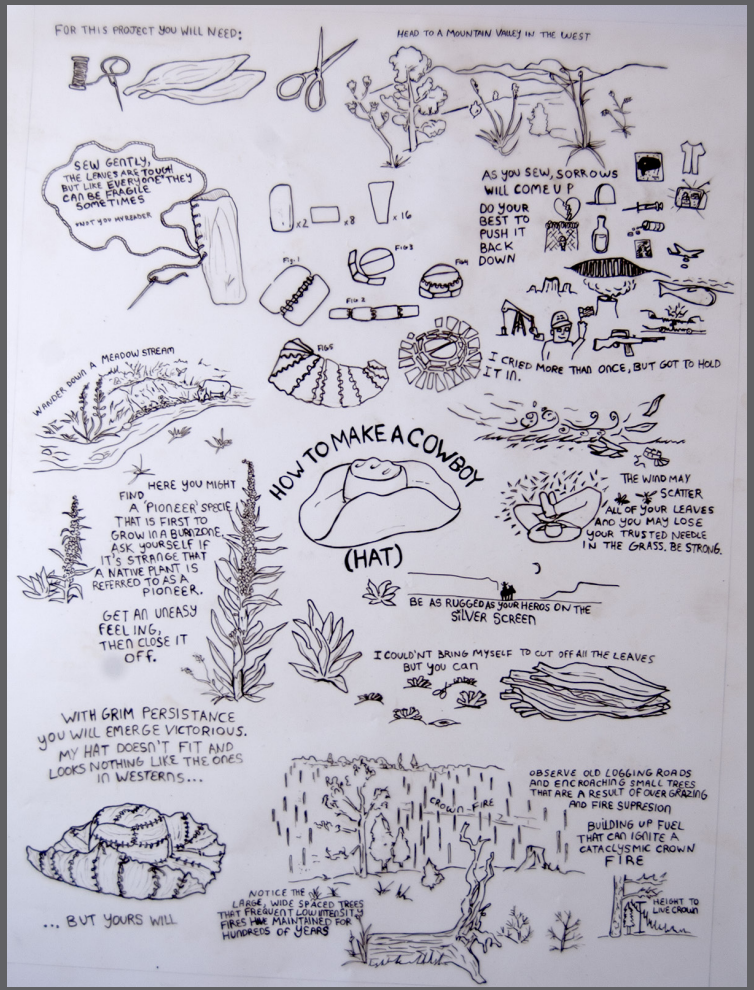


Nancy Collins

The Shuree ponds are my main focus during our stay in Valle Vidal. Mainly because of the calming and beautiful atmosphere I always find when water is near. I watch as the wind rushes across the surfacing of the water creating ripples which quickly expand cross the pond. These ripples are mesmerising.

I start taking a series of short films which aim to capture the hypnotising effect these patterns create. I am interesting how one body of water can look so different at different times of the day and in various weather conditions. I experiment with varied angles to catch the light bouncing of the water and try to get the ripples to absorb the shot.

There is so much shape, texture and light to be found in water.



Sewing Patterns
Ben Schoenburg

Instead of stitching together patterns in my head, I set out to do it with thread. I sat in a mountain meadow and began to sew, here's what you need to know.



Katie Keaveny

What I learned at

Valle Vidal:

Trees communicate with each other.....

Through soil, air, energy, and root systems.

Bugs send out hormones to other bugs telling them

where the healthy yummy trees are.

Trees secrete resin to smother the bugs that are attacking them.

Trees let their fellow trees know they are being attacked.

Chipmunks are adorable.

Trees have wounds and scars just like us.

Trees can heal their wounds, Just like us.

Trees are essential for all of survival.

Bugles are sounds the bull elk make to attract mates.

The forest is abundant with wonder.

Forests can evoke strong emotions.

I feel safe in fields and Valleys.

The grasses keep me safe, warm, and protected.

The vastness of the sky has room to hold my overwhelming thoughts & feelings.

We are not separate from "Nature"

We are Nature.....

Nature is Us.

We humans have the ability to separate ourselves

from Nature, and that is what has allowed us to do damage to our home.

It is all connected.....Nature Heals, and So can we☺





The burn at Valle Vidal.
Photo by Jake Gatehouse



El Coronado Ranch, AZ
Chiricahua National Forest, AZ
Boot Heel Ranch, AZ

8th October - 14th October

Our third trip began at the ranch of Valer Clark, where we were joined by Allegra Mount and Perin McNeils of Borderland Restoration. As well as Jose Manuel, from Cuenco Los Ojos, and author Todd Miller.

Photo by Chelsea Call



The team makes seed balls from harvested Campher Weed mixed with clay and water!

Photo by Jeanette Hart-Mann

Recipe for Soil Sponge
Jake Gatehouse

Now you've heard of a Victoria Sponge, a Lemon Sponge or even a Chocolate Sponge. But please let me introduce to you, the ancient sponge, indeed the mother sponge, the sponge that was perceived to be no more, but a sponge that is making a comeback right here in the Chiricahua Mountains, and is about to sweep across the united states.

Step 1: Gabion Construction!

Okay first you are going to assemble our dry ingredients, which is going to take the form of rocks and lots of them! (The odd stick is also welcome). Gather help from some willing people, persuade them with the assurance that their children will have a reliable source of food beyond the age of thirty. Once everyone is on board you are going to leave your decrepit soil alone and instead look at it carefully, read the land and see where it comes from. It should lead to a wash, dry this time of year, that leads up to the top of your mountain. Now, you are going to follow the wash and scale the mountain, with your trusty team and your valiant dry ingredients, I didn't say this would be easy but trust me the results are delicious!
At the top of the mountain you are ready to assemble your dry ingredients into Gabions! Where they will shortly be introduced into our wet ingredient. Gabions are dam-like structures constructed from the rocks and placed across the wash. At the top of the wash where it is the steepest, each gabion should reach up to the bottom of the one that is ahead of it. As you descend the mountain the space between the gabions should widen as the gradient of the mountain softens. Once all the gabions are in place, we are ready to introduce our dry ingredients to our wet ingredient!



Step 2: Water!

As the monsoon and winter rains come, our water will then, mingle and integrate with our carefully placed gabions. And THIS is where the magic will happen…eventually, because my friends this does not happen overnight. You are going repeat this process for up to six years, building and rebuilding the gabions and introducing them to the water. Hey I didn't say it would be quick but trust me the results are really, really important.

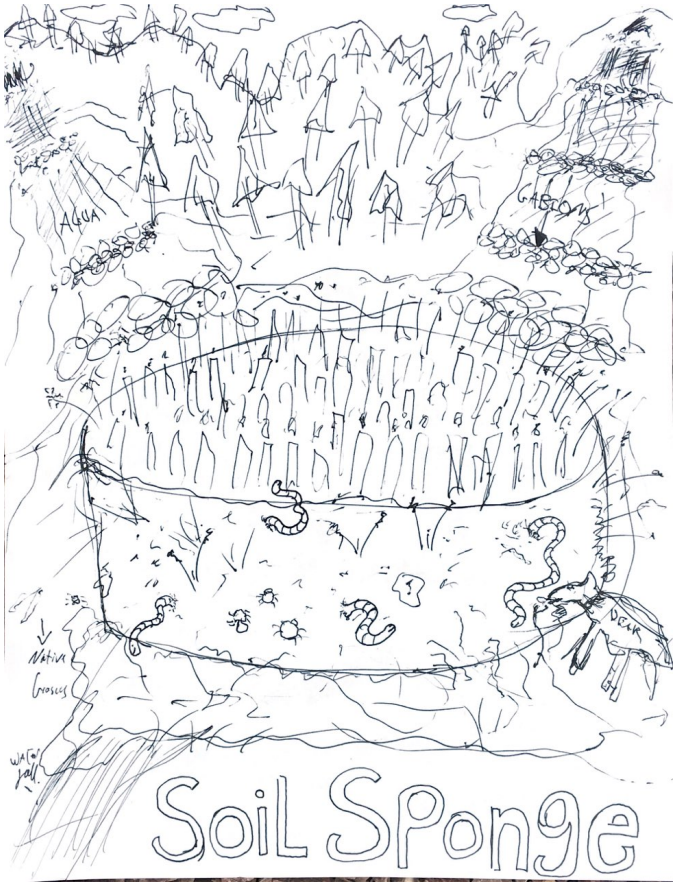
After six or so years your gabion constructing ability will be masterful and the aging process that has undergone between your dry and wet ingredients will have resulted in a harmonious and homogenous relationship, and water will be slowed down by the gabions but still pass through. Filtering the water of sediment and allowing it to trickle into avenues that have not seen moisture in years!

Step 3: See, feel and taste your results!

The water will permeate the land running along the wash and most importantly into the starved soil, and before long the fruit of your labor will begin to show. Your soil will start to become soft and tacky and then right before your eyes and your hands, you will discover the wonder of spongey soil, or the Soil Sponge.

Once these steps have been taken your Soil Sponge is going to be the perfect nutritious delight for your neighbors to marvel at. But crucially after cultivating your sponge, and this is the curveball, don't eat it! Because do you know who really enjoys it? Native perennial grasses like Hairy Grama, Blue Grama, Giant Sacaton among so many more which will provide a strong and healthy root structure amidst your spongey land! Yes, this sponge is a gift of nutrition, let it absorb and replenish the surrounding landscape, creating a diverse and vibrant environment. Allowing plant life to thrive and eventually feed your belly and your soul!

May we all build gabions and save the world!





Gila River and Wildeness, NM

15th October - 22nd October

Orian MacDonald, local craftsman and teacher, welcomed us to his "back yard", and in our case, our sixth and final site.

Photo by Hyunju Blemel

Thermo-Blanket
Juana Estrada Hernandez

You provide shelter, warmth, protection. Your sole purpose is to help people survive. Survive. You're not used to help better the lives of people. My people. Our people. You have been recontextualized as a material of oppression. A vessel that carries the hopes and dreams of so many. One that carries the smallest but strongest of heartbeats. Heartbeats that carry past generations of people. Of people that despite the cold floors, thirsty dessert nights, calloused feet continue to step forward. Gambling it all to have a chance to live on the other side of the barbed wire fence.











Harvesting Yucca for various weaving endeavors.
Photos by Jeanette Hart-Man and Chelsea Call

Day 40 - Thursday 17th

There are hot springs here. It's very distracting, especially when the mornings are so cold.
Considering the mineral content of the spring water, I'd bet that nymphs that live in them are a bit different than the ones in the river. Considering I've never properly seen a water nymph in person, I have no clue how these things would change them, though. The only frame of refrence I have, are ancient Greek texts and illustrations, but knowing how... lets say... desperate the authors of such things were, well, I find it doubtful that these nymphs are truly beautiful women with waterfalls for hair and sea-shell colored eyes.
Based off of my interactions with the grass nymphs, I suspect that the forms that nymphs possess are just a bit more inconspicuous.



Wheeler Fink

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Land Arts of the American West's mission is to inspire and support environmentally and socially engaged art practices through field-based bioregional teaching, collective learning, interdisciplinary research, community collaboration, and creative forms of publication and exhibition.