Dr. Thomas Minckley Artist Statement:

I am from the desert through the happenstance of parents landing in Arizona, versus cultural affinity. I have dabbled in capturing the images and sounds of the desert for much of my life, having traveled and recorded the spaces typical of the natural world while ignoring the legacy of people. Of late I am increasingly interested in the resilience of nature and how the built environment is reclaimed by nature as the human environment is abandoned due to water scarcity, a process we will see accelerate into the future. Professionally I study the impact of drought on natural systems over centuries to millennia, trying to understand the natural response of environments to environmental change. Instead of looking at spatial changes in the environment I look at temporal changes, imagine standing in a spot for thousands of years and watching the world around you adjust as temperature and precipitation changes. These extended observations of places provides perspectives on how nature responds to climate change. By extension it also allows understand the forcing on societies to changes in their natural resources. Where nature might take its' time to shift from forest to desert, society might have to respond quickly to scarcity in the natural capital it depends on. As we contemplate the future and the vulnerability of the built environment, the past tells us that as natural systems adjust, society will change. At least if history is any indication of the future.

Water is not enough:
From the headwaters of the Green and Colorado rivers streams accumulate crystalline, cold, clear waters reflecting the surplus of accumulation in the mountains, the water-towers of the West. As the flow reaches the desert, water is lost through evaporation and infiltration into the soils. In return the desert provides silts, sands, and clays to the flow, redistribution of nutrients from the uplands to the flood plains. The colors of the silty water reflect the geology of the Arid Lands. Many of these lands, old floodplains themselves, being redistributed downstream.

As rivers change color, it speaks to the scattered distribution of rains in the West. Redstone in this drainage, greens from another, tan still another. Each color a weather map. If the river is simply algae green it has not rained. This read of the landscape works only where a river runs free. The upper Colorado Basin shows a myriad of colors, that blend and settle into the delta of Lake Powell. The Grand Canyon really has two colors provided by the Paria and Little Colorado rivers speaking to rains in Utah or Arizona respectively.

The color palette of the Green and Colorado rivers represents the work that the rivers still do, moving material building floodplains creating habitat for flora and fauna. The still waters of the reservoirs do not work. 50 years of still water does not provide shoreside forests of cottonwood and willow trees. 50 years of still water does not protect native fishes. Water is not enough in the Arid West and the work it does is more important than the resource it represents.