

Curatorial Statement “*Between Earth & Sky*”

by Rossitza Todorova

Between Earth & Sky: Exploring the Great Basin through the eyes of Northern Nevada Artists is a group exhibition that celebrates the unique high desert. Through painting, photography, sculpture, and mixed media, thirteen artists capture different aspects of the landscape, revealing their perspectives on its expanse, fragmentation, and distinct vantage points. Featured artists include Galen Brown, Grace Davis, Gerald Lee Franzen, Ahren Hertel, Scott Hinton, Asa Kennedy, Kirsten Mashinter, Melissa Melero-Moose, Elaine Parks, Austin Pratt, Gail Rappa, Rachel Stiff, and Sidne Teske. Each artist brings their unique approach and medium to explore the complexity of the Great Basin landscape, inviting viewers to experience the region in a new way.

Curated by Rossitza Todorova, the 2022-23 City Artist, the exhibition is a tribute to Nevada. Inspired by the high desert's natural beauty, Todorova came up with the idea for this exhibition in 2018 when she moved back to Reno. She reflected on how unique the high desert is and was excited to see many artists creating artwork about the Great Basin. While choosing the artists for this show, Rossitza Todorova concentrated on five elements influencing artists: materiality, documentation, abstraction, metaphor, and depiction. The exhibition aims to showcase the rich artistic heritage of Nevada and to encourage a deeper appreciation of its landscape.

Materiality

Galen Brown, Melissa Melero-Moose, and Elaine Parks explore materiality, using natural elements to express complex ideas. Brown's drawings depict the waves of Lake Tahoe through intricate mark-making, while Melero-Moose's mixed media paintings reflect the Great Basin area's Native American culture. Parks pays homage to the starry skies and the universe, inviting viewers to contemplate their place in the natural world. Together, their works demonstrate the power of art to connect us with nature and inspire us to reflect on our relationship with the environment.

Galen Brown's drawings capture the intricate textures of our complicated environment with obsessive mark-making. Through layers of black lines, his work evokes the waves of Lake Tahoe. While Brown invites us to contemplate the natural flow of water, he explores the physicality and repetitive insistence of human-made marks. The results are mesmerizing meditations on the intersection of nature and human intervention, inviting us to reflect on our environmental impact.

Melissa Melero-Moose's mixed media paintings are a stunning example of how natural materials sustainably harvested from the environment can be transformed into vibrant works of art. With her deep roots in her Numu (Northern Paiute) culture, Melero-Moose's environmentally conscious art reinforces the views of protecting the land.

Each piece is layered with organic objects, sand, and acrylic washes, resulting in a visual representation of the Great Basin and the values of the original caretakers. Through her art, Melero-Moose aims to share the beauty of the Great Basin area, its people, and culture.

Elaine Parks's mixed media installation works are a tribute to the vast expanse of the night sky. Through her art, Parks invites us to contemplate Nevada's starry skies and our relationship to the cosmos. Using materials such as tar, pearls, ceramic, and seeds, she creates sculptures that serve as a point of reflection, connecting us to a time when light pollution did not exist. Each piece brings the vastness of the sky down to a tangible level, providing maps of contemplation that help us consider our place in the universe. Parks's works are a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving the natural world and the awe-inspiring wonders our world contains.

Documentation

Photography can reveal what is challenging to see with the naked eye and what changes are seen throughout the passage of time. The works of Gerald Lee Franzen, Scott Hinton, and Kirsten Mashinter illustrate the power of documentation to capture the essence of Nevada's unique landscape and its transformations. From Franzen's eloquent depictions of the desert's interplay between light and shadow, Hinton's poignant reminders of human impact on the environment, and Mashinter's revealing close-ups of the resilient xerophytic plants, these artists invite us to see the world around us with new eyes.

Gerald Lee Franzen's photography eloquently captures the serene beauty and majesty of the desert. His photographs showcase how changing light can transform the landscape, creating a mesmerizing interplay between light and shadow. Through his lens, Franzen invites us to contemplate the nuanced and sublime of the natural world.

Scott Hinton's photography captures the essence of Nevada's unique places and the interplay between humans and their environment. Hinton's images showcase the landscape while revealing the impact of human presence. His work offers a poignant reminder of the ongoing transformation of the Great Basin.

Kirsten Mashinter's photography sheds light on the often overlooked world of xerophytic plants. As the driest state in the nation, Nevada's harsh terrain may seem barren and inhospitable, but Mashinter's lens reveals the delicate flora that has adapted to survive in these extreme conditions. Her intimate close-ups capture the ephemeral softness of these low-lying plants, bringing attention to the often overlooked subtleties of the desert landscape and the resilience of its plant life.

Abstraction

Austin Pratt and Rachel Stiff use abstraction to explore the desert's essence and the atmosphere surrounding it. Pratt's paintings pull apart the image to reveal the feeling of space, using organic abstraction to capture the micro and granular patterns of the landscape. On the other hand, Stiff's mixed media works use abstraction to capture the essence of a memory's most essential shapes and forms, resulting in layered, textured pieces that explore the ever-changing nature of our perceptions. Both artists invite the viewer to contemplate the complexities of the natural world, creating works full of depth, mystery, and intrigue.

Austin Pratt's abstract paintings are based on organic abstraction, drawing inspiration from the micro and granular levels of rock and plant patterns and textures to the grandeur of the Great Basin landscape's space, sky, and history. Pratt is inspired by the mirage of a horizon line, the time of day, and a location, but he doesn't give the landscape away directly. Instead, he provides many clues that invite the viewer to contemplate the meaning of the work. His paintings vibrate between elusive, near-recognizable images and real physical objects, creating a sense of mystery and intrigue that invites contemplation of the natural world's complexity.

Rachel Stiff's mixed media artworks delve into the ethereal atmosphere surrounding us all. She uses abstraction to capture the essence of a memory's most important shapes and forms. Stiff's creative process involves starting with one idea and ending up with something entirely different, as she allows the artwork to evolve organically. In her process, the initial layers of paint create an underlying history of textures and colors that come through to the surface, altering the piece's meaning. This approach results in works that are layered, textured, and full of depth, inviting the viewer to contemplate the complexities of the atmosphere and the ever-changing nature of our perceptions.

Metaphor

Metaphor is a powerful tool in the hands of an artist, allowing the conveyance of complex ideas through symbolic imagery. Asa Kennedy and Gail Rappa are two artists who use metaphor to explore the relationship between humans and their environment. Through their work, Kennedy and Rappa invite us to contemplate the delicate balance between nature and human intervention and our emotional connections to the places we call home. Kennedy's surrealist landscapes and Rappa's evocative sculpture offer unique perspectives on the intersection of art, culture, and the natural world.

Asa Kennedy's paintings offer a surrealist take on the desert landscape, transforming it through geometry. Kennedy explores the tension between natural and synthetic environments through his uniquely shaped canvases, blending geometric elements with traditional landscapes to create a harmonious yet discordant portrayal of the region. His work invites us to question our relationship with the environment and our impact on it.

Gail Rappa's sculpture and jewelry pieces are adorned with images that capture the essence of Nevada's nature and culture. Her work depicts flying ravens against winter skies, silvery branches seemingly touching the heavens, and silver houses that evoke the nostalgia of the westward homestead are just a few examples. Each piece is meticulously crafted to create wearable sculptures and wearable art that are as meaningful as beautiful.

Depiction

Grace Davis, Ahren Hertel, and Sidne Teske use color to capture the temperature and the essence of the desert. Through abstraction, delicate hues, and bold color choices, they bring to life the subtle and striking beauty of the natural world. Their depictions of the desert showcase how temperature and color can evoke the feeling of being present in the environment, inviting the viewer to slow down and appreciate the nuances of the landscape. Their works are a testament to art's power to capture a place's essence and convey its majesty.

Grace Davis's paintings offer a captivating exploration of the natural beauty of flowers. Through her use of abstraction, Davis bends and diffuses each image, creating an impression that captures the essence of the form through color, texture, and line. The result is a stunning depiction of flora that is both evocative and mesmerizing.

Ahren Hertel's paintings offer a contemplative study of the subtle colors found in the desert landscape. Through his masterful use of color, he invites viewers to slow down and appreciate the nuance and contrast in the region's muted hues. Each piece captures the temperature of the desert, evoking a sense of being present and immersed in the environment. Hertel's work is a tribute to the delicate, understated beauty of the desert.

Sidne Teske is an artist who uses soft pastels to create paintings that reveal the magnificence of the desert. A true master of color, Teske is known for her ability to capture the unique qualities of the high desert landscape. She achieves this by studying the landscape from life, working plein air, and capturing the subtle shifts in light and form. She shows how the high desert light reveals the land through her work, highlighting the individual form of each sagebrush and rock. Teske's bold color is accentuated by her choice to work on colored sandpaper as a textured background, which complements the softness of the silky pastel. She understands that the bright desert light is balanced by deep shadow, and snow is not simply white but bathed in blue. With her expert use of color, texture, and form, Teske's pastel paintings transport the viewer to the beautiful and unique landscape of the high desert.

The works of these talented artists inspire us to see the world around us in new and meaningful ways. Their explorations invite us to contemplate the complexities and beauty of the natural world and our place within it. Their works are a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving and protecting our environment and its many wonders.

As we reflect on their art and the messages they convey, let us be inspired to take action and positively impact the world around us.

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Rossitza Todorova is a professional artist and a Professor of Art at Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. Todorova holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, School of Art at Arizona State University, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Nevada, Reno.

As a child, Todorova emigrated from Sofia, Bulgaria, to the Western United States, where her passion for the desert was ignited. A multidisciplinary visual artist, she works with a range of mediums, including painting, drawing, printmaking, book forms, video, and installations. Her art delves into the concepts of time and transformation, investigating how the perception of the passage of time, space, and memory influence and intersect each other. Drawing on the influence of the Great Basin and the West's boom-and-bust built environment, Todorova's work often uses landscape and geometry, occupying a space between representation and abstraction as she strives to create visual movement in her work.

Todorova's artwork has been featured in exhibitions nationally and internationally and can be found in the permanent collections of various institutions, including the Nevada Museum of Art, the John and Geraldine Lilley Museum of Art, the Tucson Museum of Art, the University of Arizona Museum of Art in Tucson, the Arizona State University Art Museum and the Museum of Painting and Sculpture in Istanbul, Turkey.

She has been honored to be the 2022-23 Reno City Artist and the recipient of the 2015 Phoenix Art Museum Contemporary Forum Artist Grant and was a 2013 Squire Sanders Art Fellow.

Her work has also been featured in several art publications, including *"Create! Magazine," "Superstition Review," "Studio Visit,"* and *"Southwest Contemporary"* magazine. Todorova currently works from her studio located at Artemisia Studios in Reno, Nevada.