

DESERT GRASSLANDS



Artists respond to the fascinating biomes of desert grasslands.

Tucson Museum of Art

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Desert Grasslands

Works by Michael P. Berman, Kate Breakey, Stephen Capra, MF Cardamone, Diane Dale, Dornith Doherty, Matilda Essig, Deborah Springstead Ford, Moira Marti Geoffrion, Heather Green, Michael Haykin, Ben Johnson, Karen Kitchel, Mark Klett, Mayme Kratz, Joseph Scheer, Stephen Strom, and David Taylor

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Curated by:
Julie Sasse,
Chief Curator and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art



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TUCSON MUSEUM of ART
AND HISTORIC BLOCK

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Desert Grasslands

Tucson Museum of Art

Desert Grasslands

To me a town is a prison, and the desert loneliness a paradise. -St. Jerome

Conjuring poetic images of vast tracts of land, lush with the swaying of tall, supple plants beneath soaring skies filled with majestic clouds, grasslands are large, rolling terrains of grasses, flowers, and herbs that can be found throughout the world. Typically found in harsh, dry climates, grasslands are resistant to the ravages of fire and drought. Their survival is due to the fact that grasses grow from the bottom up rather than from the tops of the plants. Comprised of mixed grass and shrub vegetation, desert grasslands occur in the basins and valleys that border the hills and mountain ranges of southwestern North America. Some of the largest grasslands reach far into the Mexican states of Sonora and Puebla. A place of incredible climatic, geologic, and biotic diversity, desert grasslands appear at once sublime and abject.

The sweeping desert grasslands of the Southwest are especially compelling subjects. For example, the Otero Mesa of the Chihuahuan Desert of south-central New Mexico spans more than a million acres of diverse rangeland and is home to countless species of migratory songbirds and other animals. As part of the Upper Sonoran Desert, the Apache Highlands Ecoregion, also known as the Apacherian Savannah, is home to a mixture of succulents, shrubs, and bunch grasses. Just southwest of Tucson, Arizona, the Altar Valley comprises approximately 610,000 acres of Sonoran desert grassland, one of the most biologically rich wilderness areas in the world. Yet there is more to these biomes than wide open spaces and miles of majestic grasses. They are among the most fragile ecosystems in North America, threatened by global warming, cattle grazing, human immigration, mining operations, and encroaching development.

The artists in this exhibition respond to desert grasslands in unique ways. They examine the individual plants through flat bed scanning; interpret the flora in poetic abstractions created with x-rays and cast resin; paint and draw the unique flora and fauna of the region in intimate detail; and photograph both close-up views and broad vistas. Their works reveal the beauty inherent in the microcosm of seedlings and grasses, and the macrocosm of large tracts of land that make up grassland regions. Such works reinforce the grandeur of the land, examine the fascinating details of its flora and fauna, and spark a dialogue about arid land management and other environmental concerns. It has been said that nature is a human construct with a long and complicated history. But nature is also created in the minds of artists who see it through varying lenses in an attempt to find a transcendent place for humanity. As 19th century French poet Charles Pierre Baudelaire writes, "In certain almost supernatural inner states, the depth of life is entirely revealed in the spectacle, however ordinary, that we have before our eyes, and which becomes the symbol of it."

Julie Sasse, Chief Curator and Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, Tucson Museum of Art

Michael Berman

For more than thirty years, New Mexico photographer **Michael Berman** has captured the stark beauty of the desert southwest, including lands damaged by neglect or overuse in Arizona, New Mexico, and Northern Mexico. Using a large-format camera in sharp clarity black and white, Berman follows in the landscape tradition established by Ansel Adams. He often hikes long distances following animal trails to experience the land first-hand. Trained as a biologist and a photographer, Berman concentrates on the concept of the “untrammeled wilderness” as a strategy in mediating human demands on the landscape

In particular, Berman’s photographs of the Chihuahuan Desert reveal the graceful fragility of the land and the ravages inflicted upon it by overgrazing. Often his sweeping panoramas capture grasses thriving among lava and tuff, and the rocky ridges of fossil-laden limestone. The Chihuahuan Desert borders the land outside Silver City, Deming, Las Cruces, and other New Mexico border towns. A passionate supporter of environmental awareness and founding board member of Silver City’s Gila Resources Information Project (GRIP), Berman has advocated for the preservation of threatened resources in the region through artistic expression. To Berman, while at first appearing to be bleak and barren, the fast-disappearing desert grasslands play a key role in the survival of native plants and animals that live in this ecosystem or travel through it.

Berman’s fascination with the land and how people use it grew from his early studies in biology at Colorado College, where he graduated in 1979. There he worked with James Enderson on peregrine falcons and began his initial forays into landscape photography. During a subsequent year taking art courses at the University of Colorado, he realized that photography merged his ecological interests and his need for creativity, and he moved on to Arizona State University, where he earned an M.F.A. in photography in 1985.

Moving to the wilderness area near the Gila River at the New Mexico-Mexico border, he took part in the New Mexico BLM Wilderness Photography Survey in 1996 and became a founding board member of the Gila Resource Information Project in 1997. Receiving a three-year fellowship from the Southwest Center of the University of Arizona to photograph the Gran Desierto on the southwestern border of Arizona and Sonora, Berman culminated the project with his first publications: *Sunshot* (University of Arizona Press, 2006), with text by Bill Broyles, and *Inferno* (University of Texas Press, 2006), with text by Charles Bowden. In 2012, he received a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Berman’s photographs are in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, and the New Mexico Museum of Art in Santa Fe, among others.

Artist website: <http://www.fragmentedimages.com/>

Michael Berman



Kate Breaky

I picked the dead coyote up off the road. It had been hit by a car, probably at dawn that morning. It was surprisingly heavy, but its coat was finer and softer than I had imagined. I had never been this close to a coyote before — it was like someone's docile pet dog, all its wildness gone now, just a quiet corpse. A female. I imagined her pack, maybe even her young, waiting for her, calling her. Road kill, large or small, always fills me with anger and sadness. My heart aches for the loss of an innocent life.

A curious cyclist stopped to watch me loading her in the car. "I just want to bury it," I said. This was not the whole truth, but it was too hard to explain that I was taking her home to make a picture, a photogram. She would become a pale coyote shape against a dark background. She would make her own image, a kind of shadow, which would last long after her body was gone. On the way home I worried she might not fit under the enlarger and that my paper wouldn't be wide enough. And it was going to be hard work digging such a big hole. Maybe I would leave her out in the desert for the buzzards - after all, that would be what nature intended.

In the mid-nineteenth century, William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 – 1877) found that silver salts were sensitive to light and photography was born. Soon afterwards the daughter of a biologist, an English woman called Anna Atkins (1799 – 1871), began a decade-long obsession with collecting and documenting algae and seaweed. These were one of the earliest form of photography — 'photogenic drawings' or 'photograms' — pictures made without a camera, where the subject was laid on chemically treated paper and exposed to light, in this case the sun, using a process known as cyanotype. She self-published this collection in a series of volumes called *British Algae*. They were beautiful, otherworldly images of white amorphous shapes floating on a deep blue background. She labeled them in neat Victorian handwriting with their classifying genus and species.

When I first put a eucalyptus leaf on a piece of photographic paper in the dark, in an art school in Australia roughly 130 years later, my fate was sealed, my own desire to document and chronicle the natural world was set in motion. In my own way, I have devoted myself to that end.

I laid the coyote on the photographic paper and gently stroked the dust and grit off its glossy coat and arranged its tail, I thought about Anna arranging her seaweed with the same care and with the same anticipation. These images are 'contact prints' of the remains of living things — plants reptiles, mammals, insects and birds. Their imprint, a ghostly shadow, is burned directly onto paper with light and with love to make a permanent record, a lasting impression.

— **Kate Breaky**, introduction to *Las Sombras*, published by the University of Texas Press

Artist website: <http://www.katebreaky.com/>

Kate Breakey



Stephen Capra

In 2008, **Stephen Capra** photographed the vast plains of the Otero Mesa which spans more than one million acres of environmentally important native grasslands in the Chihuahuan Desert of south-central New Mexico. Included in the book *Otero Mesa: Preserving America's Wildest Grassland*, written by Gregory McNamee, Capra's photographs capture soaring aerial views, stunning sunsets, majestic mountain ranges, and dramatic skylines, as well as evidence of the effect of the oil industry on the land. Otero Mesa is an ecologically threatened ecosystem, home to pronghorn antelope, burrowing owls, black-tailed prairie dogs, mule deer, mountain lions, and more than twelve species of grasslands birds. It also has rich historical ties to the Mescalero Apache people and is home to more than 20,000 petroglyphs. Underneath the Otero Mesa lies the Salt Basin Aquifer, New Mexico's largest untapped freshwater aquifer.

Capra's *Grass, with the Cornudas Mountains in the Background* (2008) captures the desert grasslands in this area at the peak of its colorful flowering glory. The Cornudas Mountains are in southern Otero County, New Mexico, near the Texas-New Mexico line. The shallow and stony soil in this area supports scrub brush and grasses. In *Looking South Toward Alamo, Wind, and Flat Top Mountains* (2008), Capra freezes a moment in time during a sunset when the angle of the sunlight causes the vast stands of grasses to appear to be set ablaze.

In addition to being a photographer, Capra was Executive Director of the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance from 2004 until 2012. The Alliance is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection, restoration, and continued enjoyment of New Mexico's wild lands and wilderness areas. Ranchers, sportsmen, scientists, tribal and religious leaders, and acequia communities have all been involved in protecting these public lands.

Stephen Capra



MF Cardamone

Blending elements of 18th and 19th century botanical illustrations with the imaginative randomness of Dada and Surrealist collage methods, **MF Cardamone** creates playful interpretations of the intersection of nature, taxonomy, and popular culture. Cardamone collects plant specimens and combines them with images and words that result in complex visual narratives that reveal the science, history, and beauty of her subjects. She first started making art in 1980 under the guidance of Tom Palmore, a noted contemporary Southwest artist who paints highly detailed, yet ironically humorous animal portraits. Through her experiences with Palmore, she became attuned to looking beneath the surface of her subject matter to interpret the world around her from a personal perspective rather than a strictly empirical one. Focusing on the traditional and contemporary folk art of Chimayo in rural New Mexico, she created highly textured and brilliantly colored sculptures.

In 2003 Cardamone conducted research on native plant collecting shortly after she designed a native Pennsylvania wildlife habitat garden as part of her studies at the Barnes Foundation Arboretum School. As a scientific exercise, she created herbarium sheets that document observations of a plant for field notes. Learning about horticulture had a profound impact on the artist. From her studies, she gained a deeper understanding of the inner structures of botany and ecological systems of the natural world. Finding the herbarium tradition an intriguing starting point to address nature as an art form, Cardamone combined her interest in medieval herbals and manuscripts, folklore, traditional Chinese medicine, and Pop art to create lively digital collages. To Cardamone, the anatomy of a plant is part of a larger story that involves historical, medicinal, ecological, spiritual, and mythological elements.

In 2008, Bartram's Garden in Philadelphia, America's oldest botanical garden, discovered her work and offered her an exhibition, intrigued with an artist interpreting nature from an amateur botanist's point of view, much like the Victorian naturalists interest in taxonomy. Since then, she traveled to the Marie Selby Botanical Garden in Sarasota, Florida, to explore and interpret their epiphyte plants, an experience that resulted in an exhibition there in the spring of 2013. Last year, she also visited the Payaca-Samiria National Reserve in the Amazon Basin to meet with a Peruvian botanist and a Peruvian shaman who helped her collect plants and interpret them from both a spiritual and scientific point of view.

Cardamone visited The Nature Conservancy's Muleshoe Ranch in Arizona in 2012, where she collected specimens and walked the trails of the desert grasslands to immerse herself in the environment. She also gathered material culture from nearby Wilcox to gain an understanding of the people who inhabit the region. Returning to her studio in Philadelphia, she conducted research on the history of desert grasslands' use and management, native cultures, and the medicinal aspects of the flora of the region. According to Cardamone, "It never ceases to amaze me how stark the desert landscape appears at first, but how full of life it really is when you take the time to examine the environment and study it in more detail."

Artist website: <http://www.MFCardamone.com/>

MF Cardamone



Diane Dale

Looking for the spirit of a subject, Arizona artist **Diane Dale** paints landscapes, still lifes, and other scenes from her travels and her desert home. At first working spontaneously with sketches and watercolors, Dale allows serendipity to capture the fleeting moments of subjects that resonate with her. She looks for the poetic essence of a subject, but in the course of painting, she finds other hidden qualities. She does not seek out her subjects; rather she lets her subjects find her. Dale sees herself as an observer of nature in order to be an observer of life

Finding nests made of desert grasses in the Tucson foothills that had been blown out of the eaves of houses and from trees, Dale painted her discoveries. As she painted these fragile, exploded forms, she realized that they were dynamic with a sense of movement and abstract in their structure. What Dale finds interesting is the variety of materials that birds use to construct their nests. Some are imbedded with the blossoms of flowers while others combine fluffs of cotton and other fibers. To Dale, nests are a metaphor for the temporality of life. Their presumably stable structure can be dismantled in an instant by a gust of wind, just as life itself is tenuous and fragile. Yet, the nest's inhabitants accept their temporary nature of their home and soon abandon them, moving on to new forms of shelter. As a result of her nest series, she now takes photographs of grasses everywhere, from simple nests of the desert to the grasses of New York City.

After attending the University of Texas, Austin, in the early 1960s, Dale studied art at L'Accademia di Belle Arte in Rome and L'Università per Stranieri, in Perugia, Italy, before returning to the United States. Vacationing frequently in Arizona since 1979, she returned to live in Tucson full-time in 1994 after a visit to see the Dalai Lama. Her work has been shown in galleries and institutions throughout the United States and Italy including the Liberia e Galleria Berg, Livorno, Italy; the Galleria Yanika, Rome, Italy; the Laguna Gloria Museum of Art, Austin, Texas; and the University of Texas, Austin.

Artist website: <http://www.dianedale.com/>

Diane Dale



Dornith Doherty

Dornith Doherty is captivated by the photographic process of collecting and making visible the inaccessible or invisible, be it remote landscapes, past times, or elusive phenomena. Spurred by the impending completion of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, Doherty initiated the Archiving Eden Project in 2008 in collaboration with renowned biologists at two of the most comprehensive international seed banks in the world: the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's National Center for Genetic Resources Preservation in Colorado, and the Millennium Seed Bank at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, England.

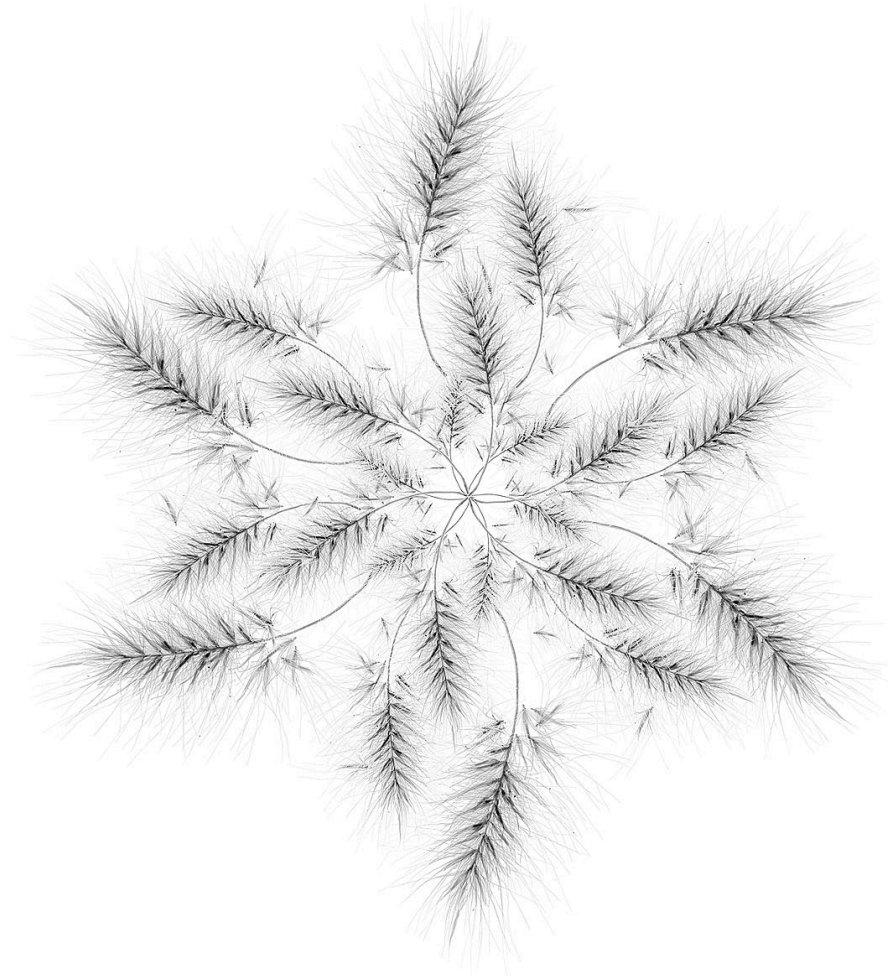
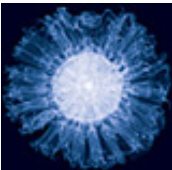
In an era of diminishing agricultural diversity, extinction of natural species, and accelerating climate change, seed banks now have global relevance. Privately and publicly funded seed banks function as a botanical backup system in order to assure the opportunity for reintroduction of species should a catastrophic event or civil strife affect a key ecosystem somewhere in the world. Utilizing on-site x-ray equipment employed by the seed banks for viability research on accessioned seeds, Doherty photographed and subsequently collaged seeds and tissue samples from germination tests and vegetatively propagated (cloned) plants stored in these crucial collections. The x-ray process serves to illustrate her considerations of the complex issues surrounding the role of science technology, and human agency in relation to genebanking.

Doherty's ability to digitally manipulate x-rayed seedlings is both haunting and harmonious. Recalling the photographs resembling finely fashioned iron work of Karl Blossfeldt, who carefully arranged plant forms on stark white backgrounds, Doherty's calligraphic compositions reveal both natural beauty and the human constructs that control the life of plants in a technological world. After conducting research on various plant forms, Doherty discovered that some domesticated plants were derived from native grasses. For instance, the oldest known relative of maize is Balsas teosinte, a large wild grass that grows in the central Balsas River Valley in Mexico. However, corn is a politically-charged plant because it competes with native grasslands for habitat.

A 2012-2013 Guggenheim Fellow, Doherty received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Rice University in Houston and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Photography from Yale University. Doherty is Professor of Photography at the University of North Texas and a member of the Board of Directors of the Society for Photographic Education. She has also received grants from the Fulbright Foundation, the Japan Foundation, the United States Department of the Interior, and the Society for Contemporary Photography. Doherty's work has been featured in exhibitions at the Museum Belvédère, the Netherlands (2012); the New Mexico Museum of Art (2011); the Encuentros Abiertos Photography Biennial in Buenos Aires, Argentina (2010); and the Houston Center for Photography in Houston, Texas (2006). Her works are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas; the Museum of Fine Arts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in Minnesota; and the Yale University Library in New Haven, Connecticut, among others.

Artist website: <http://www.dornithdoherty.com>

Dornith Doherty



Matilda Essig

Matilda Essig is interested in perceptual awakening, in illuminating the subtle biotic diversity that underlies the stability of human civilization. For Essig, the grasses are a metaphor for humanity with their differing characters and codependence in a community. Native species offer lessons of resilience through their adaptations—strategies for survival—as they seek to find balance in an insecure world. Her use of digital imaging technology emerged from her desire to share the experience of seeing in order to convey the same level of connection, intimacy, and mystical union that comes from close observation.

Essig's relationship to art and nature began in the eastern woodlands of Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia, where her family was part of a well known, historical school of realism. Exposed to every form of pictorial representation, from the old masters to abstract expressionism, Essig learned about the making of visual images at home in the studio of her father, an established classical portrait painter who attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in the 1920s.

Influenced by her travels throughout the North American wilderness, Essig first focused on black and white photography because of its ability to capture the immediacy of an experience. As a student of noted photographer Frank Golhke at Colorado College in the late 1970s, she learned how to create visual harmony using light in a composition. Later, as an undergraduate at Reed College, she returned to painting to connect to the greater historical tradition of pictorial realism in art. This interest led her to study for many years with Frank Mason, a traditional oil painter at the Art Student's League of New York, who taught her to grind her own pigments, lead-prime her canvases, and create studies in charcoal before beginning to paint. Moving to the Southwest in the 1980s, Essig fell in love with the Sonoran Desert, and began to work collaboratively with the conservation community as an illustrator in support of various efforts that resulted in international biosphere reserve protection initiatives. Through the book *Night Visions*, she discovered Joseph Scheer, who invited her to do a residency under his direction at the Institute for Electronic Arts at Alfred University to learn about the technology of the high-resolution digital scanner.

In 2005, Essig turned her attention to watershed conservation. She bought five acres of badly damaged grasslands and instituted rotational grazing for cattle to restore native species. Much of her inspiration for portraying these plant characters comes from working with grasses in a living community and watching the process of healing occur. Her art is also informed by her experiences working with ranchers throughout the greater American West, many of them conservationists. To Essig, presenting fine blades of desert grasses on a monumental scale serves to glorify their sheer physical beauty as pillars of the ecological fabric of the earth, while also allowing the viewer the ease of observation without the difficulty of on-site examination. Ultimately, her intimate views suggest a greater awareness about stewardship on a continental scale.

Artist website: <http://home.mindspring.com/~matilda/>

Matilda Essig



Deborah Springstead Ford

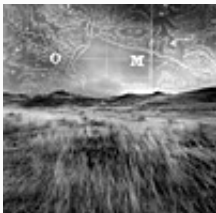
In 2010, Arizona artist **Deborah Springstead Ford** traveled extensively throughout the American West to conduct research and photograph landscapes and geological forms that symbolically represent westward expansion, colonialism, and the search for natural resources. Gathering historical data including maps, letters, and other artifacts from private archives, she sought to understand the roles of women in culture and the economy as well as to examine environmental factors related to mining and land use practices. Ford overlaid maps and other ephemera on to silver gelatin photographs to express the notion of geography as a cultural construct. These works were first presented in 2010 in *Cartography and the Cultural Terrain*, an exhibition at the Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art supported by the Montana Arts Council

In the course of her project, Ford discovered that Coal Bed Methane (CBM) is one of the most contested practices that contribute to resource exploitation in the West. These processes damage habitat including sage-grouse, pronghorn, and other grasslands species in addition to creating environmental scars on the land. This revelation became a catalyst for her body of work to come. Through the ironic juxtaposition of map and landscape image, Ford makes aesthetic and cultural/socio-political statements about our ambivalent attitude toward human impact on the land.

Ford received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Photography and a Master of Arts degree in Photographic Studies and Art Education at Arizona State University; and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Arts at Goddard College in Port Townsend, Washington, in addition to studies at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design. She is currently Professor of Photographic Studies at Prescott College in northern Arizona. Ford has received numerous awards and fellowships including four Arizona Commission on the Arts Grants, and has participated in several artist-in-residence programs including the Ucross Foundation in Clearmont, Wyoming; the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Arts in Redwing, Minnesota; the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology on the Oregon coast; the Joshua Tree National Park in Arizona; the Isle Royale National Park in Michigan; and the Aspen Guard Station in Colorado to name a few. Her work has been included in exhibitions at the Rourke Art Museum, Moorhead, Minnesota; Mount Royal University, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; the Baker Arts Center, Liberal, Kansas; the Minneapolis Art Institute in Minnesota; and the Anderson Ranch in Colorado among others. Additionally, her work is found in numerous public and private collections including the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona; the California Museum of Photography in Riverside; and the Northlight Gallery at Arizona State University. Ford recently completed a residency at The University of Arizona Biosphere 2.

Artist website: <http://www.deborahspringsteadford.com>

Deborah Springstead Ford



Moira Marti Geoffrion

Arizona artist **Moira Marti Geoffrion** is interested in the intersection between art and nature, and how artists respond to environmental issues including the disappearance of the grasslands. In addition, she has long been intrigued by the anthropomorphic qualities of animals, in particular birds. Geoffrion first experienced Midwest grasslands as lush and verdant while living in Illinois in the 1970s. More recently, she visited several ranches in Arizona and New Mexico where she observed that desert grasslands are dryer and less plentiful than the Midwest, and the land more coarse and unforgiving. She also learned about efforts underway by ranchers to eradicate invasive species and return native grasses to the environment. She found that just as indigenous grasses are threatened by mismanagement, so too are many species of birds endangered due to habitat challenges and urban growth.

At the invitation of The Nature Conservancy in Arizona, Geoffrion visited the Muleshoe Ranch north of Wilcox. There she met with Bob Rogers, Muleshoe Ranch Preserve Manager, to identify species of birds found in the region. Some are migratory birds while others are year-round inhabitants of the grasslands. Geoffrion starts with direct observation and then sketches and photographs her subject matter. She then returns to the studio to work from memory, her sketches, and photographs for accuracy of color and details.

While in the course of painting this array of bird paintings, Geoffrion learned that some of the birds she painted are on the endangered list, including Sprague's Pipit, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Long Billed Curlew, Ferruginous Hawk, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Loggerhead Shrike. All in all, Geoffrion painted more than sixty species of birds that call the desert grasslands their habitat. Some of the birds, such as hummingbirds, migrate through the area, while others, such as hawks and owls, reside in the desert grasslands year-round.

Geoffrion's art has been featured in exhibitions at the University of Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico; the Cullity Gallery, Perth, Australia; Northern Arizona University Art Museum, Flagstaff, Arizona; the Snite Museum of Art, Notre Dame, Indiana; the Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana, and the BIS Altes Museum in Germany, among others. Geoffrion is Professor Emeritus at the University of Arizona, and a recipient of a Fulbright grant in India in 1982, the James B. Anthony Outstanding Teaching Award in 2006, and a Distinguished Faculty-Fellow Award recipient in 2005. Her works are in more than twenty museum and corporate collections.

Artist website: <http://moirageoffrion.com/>

Moira Marti Geoffrion



Heather Green

"That the world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life — indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception — is a constant daydream that the miniature presents. This is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely within significance."

— Susan Stewart

Pinpoints of Perception: Portraits of 1,000 Native Bees is a mixed-media installation that moves between the cloistered world of the academic collection to a public art space, visually illuminating the vast bee diversity endemic to southern Arizona and northern Mexico for the first time to the general public. It invites the audience to participate in the discovery of these diminutive and industrious creatures which play such a crucial ecological role as pollinators. Once complete, it will feature 1,000+ portraits painted from photographs of native bee specimens of the larger Sonoran Desert region. This first grouping portrays some of the 404 species associated with the Grasslands of San Bernadino Valley.

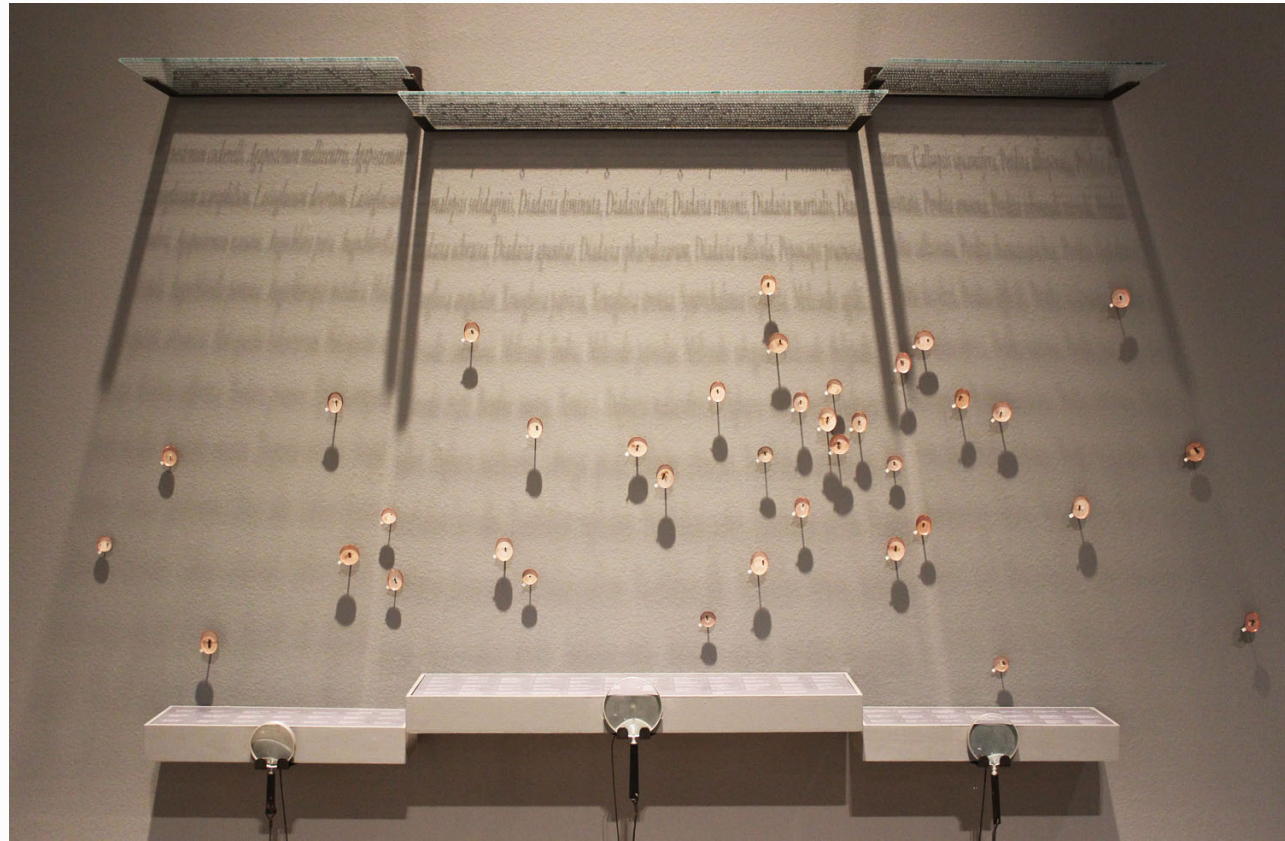
The Sonoran Desert is one of the world's richest areas for bee diversity — scientists believe there are upwards of 1,300 native species. From the woolly buzz-pollinating *Bombus sonorus* to the diminutive 2 mm *Perdita minima* — these bees are manifold, but there are many factors contributing to their decline. Like many places in the world, the dilemma facing the Sonoran desert due to climate change and competition from non-native species has created far-reaching problems.

The portraits — oil paintings rendered inside tiny copper trays — construct a narrative of intimacy and infinity by delicately describing the singular idiosyncrasies of each and every species, soliciting the audience to pause at each specimen with magnifying glass in hand, while allowing their sheer numbers to inspire — even overwhelm. Each painting is numbered, and a key below lists the information found on its label including the scientist, year and place of collection, and the Latin name of the flower it was found on. Specimen collections are becoming increasingly important records in the face of decline and extinction, and as such create an apt message. The process of finding names, borrowing and photographing specimens and labor-intensively painting them essentially captures and recaptures, collects and recollects — an obsessive endeavor that in itself becomes an act against loss.

Pinpoints of Perception: Portraits of 1,000 Native Bees explores the paradox of the portrait: how the laborious capturing of an image becomes both archival and interpretative, creating greater awareness. As a buzzing iridescent blur — which hovers but for a moment — native bees scarcely interrupt our daily focus. A phenomenon known as Baader-Meinhoff or frequency illusion describes how once one is made aware of something, suddenly it is seen everywhere, extending recognition. I hope this project will inspire others to begin to see native bees and actively participate in their conservation — it pays homage to a vast but vanishing natural abundance while simultaneously honoring the species themselves and the scientists who have been profoundly committed to their study and preservation even as they document their decline.

Artist website: <http://www.cartagrafia.com/>

Heather Green

[illegible]

Michael Haykin

Arizona artist **Michael Haykin**'s ideas about painting are inextricably connected to his interest in natural history. Through his work as a realist painter, he examines the natural world by highlighting elements that remind the viewer of the familiar. Hiking in various regions in and around the mountains and valleys of the Tucson area to closely examine the desert, he distills his experiences into thoughtful reveries that capture his impressions of a place through a veiled atmospheric perspective

In particular, Haykin is interested in the idea of water in the desert. As the artist explains, "On an excursion to the desert grasslands and while waiting for the rain to stop, I saw the landscape ahead through the raindrops on the windshield of my vehicle and realized I was looking at the concept for my next painting. I chose to make this painting in the iconic shape of a kimono because this has become a personal glyph for me, one of the ways I've developed to represent the human form in my visual vocabulary." By depicting the desert grasslands as seen through a windshield, he accentuates the barrier of technology between humanity and nature.

Haykin often photographs his subjects to establish his ideas, and then refines the concept in the studio before beginning to paint. He builds the surface of a painting from micro-layers of pigment, which allows for subtle shifts of light and atmosphere and creates a shimmering translucency. Because he is also interested in the changing nature and transience of light and atmosphere, his paintings are often composed in multiple panels. This compositional format reinforces the notion of the passage of time and offers several shifting views of the subject.

Haykin was born and educated in Munich, Germany, while his family was in military service for the United States. Haykin has participated in residency programs in the Studios of Key West in Key West, Florida; Artists in the National Parks Residency, Joshua Tree National Park, California; and the Montana Artists Refuge Residency in Basin, Montana. In addition to gallery exhibitions, Haykin's work has been shown at the Holter Museum of Fine Art in Helena, Montana; the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Montana; the Silver Bow Center for the Arts in Butte, Montana; and the Key West Museum of Art and the Martello Museum in Key West, Florida. In 2005, he moved from Key West, Florida, to Tucson, Arizona. He now splits his time between studios in Boulder, Montana, and Tucson, Arizona.

Artist website: <http://www.haykin.com/>

Michael Haykin



Ben Johnson

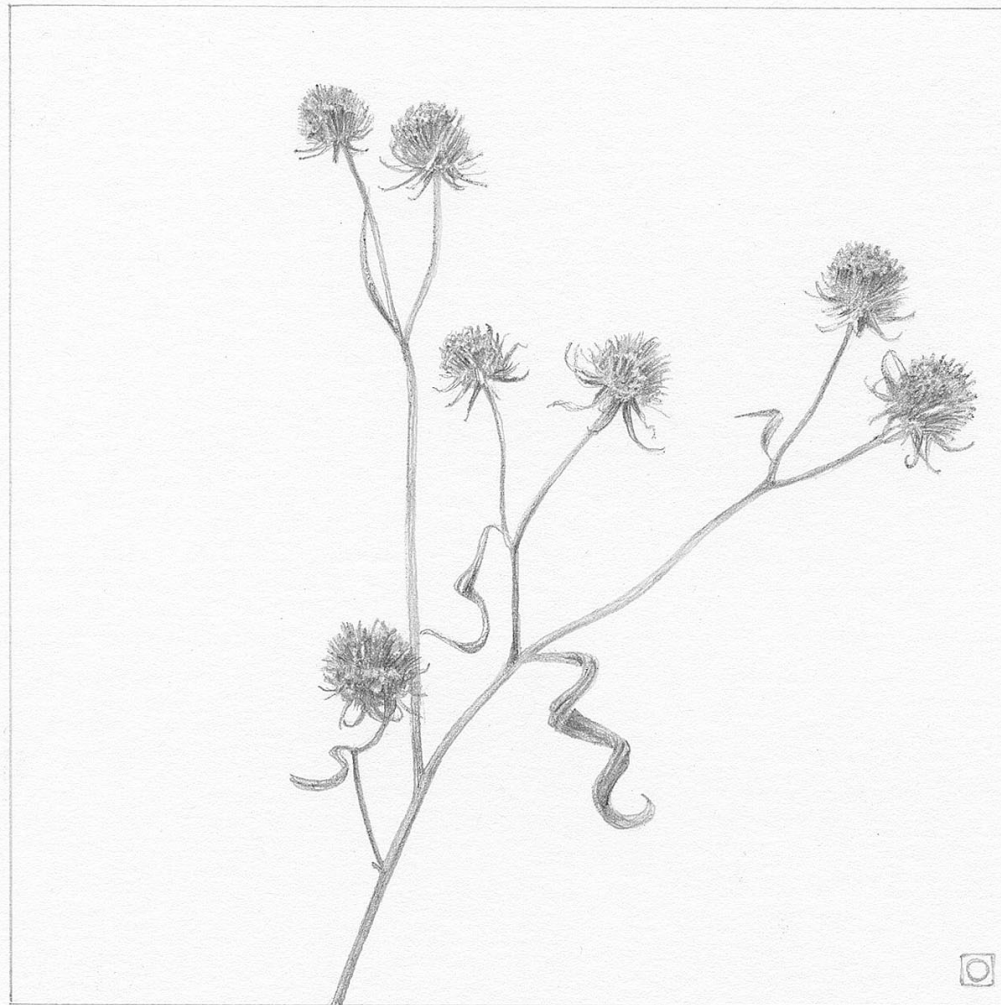
Ben Johnson's overriding fascination with the natural world often prompts him to gaze upwards. Bird watching has led him to produce a broad series of intricate bird paintings and drawings. According to Johnson, "Birds inspire a natural ascension. They're stunningly beautiful, and the act of flight places them directly in the realm of spirituality and mystery. In these works, I'm discovering more about the birds themselves, but simultaneously I'm searching for the vastness of flight as it exists in me. I'm hoping that I also evoke that search for others." Johnson strives to maintain the delicate balance between overt representation and minimalist abstraction. His goal is to create work that provides a ground for thought, introspection, and inquiry.

This series of work is inspired by his fascination with Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, located in Southern Arizona. Johnson notes, "Buenos Aires is contemplative, expansive, and imbued with a pervasive silence. Despite this minimalist beauty, it is a place of great complexity. Located on the Arizona and Mexico border, flanked by the Tohono O'odham Reservation, the difficult realities of politics, economics, culture, and human rights are ever present. As emblem of this difficulty, Baboquivari Peak, regarded as the birthplace of the world in Tohono O'odham cosmology, presides on the horizon above the crisscrossing network of United States border patrol off-road vehicles. Although this is a quiet and remote location, humanity is present here, right down to the grasses. Human settlement has had a great impact on this varied ecosystem, and restoration efforts are underway by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to control invasive species and revegetate the grasslands to their pre-ranching states. A simple non-native exotic grass brought by settlers carries within it a great story. Through drawings and video work, Johnson considers these stories of conservation and change, narratives that are imbued with a deep silence and constancy.

Johnson studied painting at The University of the Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a student, he found an early direction in Impressionist-influenced paintings that focused on the natural world as it expresses itself in urban areas, as well as in the wild. Upon graduation from the Academy's Certificate Program, Johnson began exhibiting with the Artist's House Gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the Field Gallery in West Tisbury, Massachusetts. He has exhibited his work in galleries and museums throughout the United States including the Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the Biggs Museum, Dover, Delaware; the American College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania; the Perkins Center for the Arts, Moorestown, New Jersey; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, Maryland. In 2008, inspired by the beauty of southeastern Arizona and the Sonoran Desert while camping and birding in the Sonoran Desert, Johnson and his wife moved from southern New Jersey to Tucson, where he now works as an artist and as Curator of Exhibitions at Tohono Chul Park.

Artist website: <http://home.benjohnson.com/>

Ben Johnson



Karen Kitchel

California artist **Karen Kitchel** questions how we experience the landscape and strives to create compelling, unexpected paintings of ordinary places. "I am not depicting 'Nature,' explains Kitchel. "Instead, I want to visually and critically examine the history of 'Landscape Painting' and our collective attitudes about it." As part of her research, Kitchel studies and documents plant species with particular attention to both indigenous and invasive species. Because our perceptions of nature are experienced not only visually, but physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, she considers both nature and culture in her work. Thus, Kitchel's intimate impressions of the land include rather than exclude human impact on the wilderness. She sees her work as non-fiction, yet she challenges herself to discover the meaning inherent in the landscape, not just superficial beauty.

Dormant Grass 7 (2010) and *Dormant Grass 8* (2010) are part of the series, "Natural Order: Notes for an Opera," created between 2006 and 2010, that examines the cycle of life in the great basin ecosystem. These two closely cropped paintings of bunch grasses from the banks of Clear Creek in the Powder River basin in Wyoming appear to be dead and without context in a great landscape. However, as part of the cycle of life, organic matter shifts form, and these grasses will soon re-emerge in the spring. In these works, Kitchel continues to pay extreme attention to the landscape. To Kitchel, rather than making romanticized, poetic interpretations of "nature," she intensifies the literal details and specific features of the physical specimens in front of her. While approaching abstraction due to this intimate view, her paintings present and re-present the most ordinary facts.

Kitchel's paintings are included in the permanent collections of the Whitney Gallery of Western Art at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming; the Denver Art Museum; the First Western Trust Bank; the Palm Springs Art Museum; and the Pomona College Art Museum, among other institutions. Her paintings have recently been exhibited at the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE; the Denver Art Museum; Scripps College in Claremont, CA; the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, NV; the Ucross Foundation in Clearmont, WY; and the Autry National Center of the American West in Los Angeles, CA. In the spring of 2010, the Nicolaysen Museum in Casper, Wyoming, presented a thirty year retrospective of Kitchel's work.

Artist website: <http://www.karenkitchel.com/>

Information on the work of Karen Kitchel was derived from correspondence with the artist and from Lisa Hatchadoorian, "Karen Kitchel: A New Experience of Landscape," in *A Relative Condition: The Landscape Paintings of Karen Kitchel*, exhibition catalogue, Casper, Wyoming: Nicolaysen Art Museum and Discovery Center, 2010.

Karen Kitchel



Mark Klett

Arizona photographer **Mark Klett** focuses on concepts of place, culture, history, land use, and the passing of time. Many of Klett's photographs are of the American Southwest, most notably of desert regions and the Grand Canyon. Often in collaboration and interdisciplinary exchange, Klett works with a form of visual research that includes exploration and examination. His most notable photographic works pay homage to the historic photographs of John Hillers, William Bell, and Timothy O'Sullivan, who participated in Western exploratory expeditions in the late 19th century gathering topological and geological information for the United States government. In 1974-1976, following in their footsteps, Klett worked for the United States Geological Survey as a geologist and field assistant. In 1977, coordinating a group of photographers for the Rephotographic Survey Project (RSP) as Chief Photographer, Klett located the original tripod position of dozens of photographs produced by these earlier photographers. The resulting publication, *Second View: The Rephotographic Survey Project* (1984) presented pairs of historic and rephotographed images. By positioning his camera in the same spot as his predecessors had done, Klett reveals what has changed and what has remained the same in the landscape. Interested in the dichotomy between Western historical iconography and home, Klett reveals that the idealized wilderness of the West is now a tamed, domesticated, and commercialized place with unlimited agendas and aspirations.

In *John Muir with his Daughters, Examining an Agate Log in the Petrified National Forest* (2006), Klett rephotographs an image of the naturalist with his daughters. Muir and his family stayed in the Petrified Forest in 1906 to write a series of articles and to avail themselves of the dry desert air for his daughter Wanda's health. Muir and his daughters took some of the earliest known photographs of the park. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt created the nation's second national monument in the southern portion of the current park. The Petrified Forest National Park receives only 9 inches of rainfall a year; however, it is a complex ecosystem known as the shortgrass prairie, a term referred to as an "extreme tension zone." The best examples of the grassland community are found on the loamier soils of the higher mesas in the park that receives more precipitation. Blue Grama is the dominant grass species, with a root system specifically adapted to effectively capture surface water.

Klett received a Bachelor of Science in Geology from St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, and a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is currently Regents' Professor of Art, School of Art, Arizona State University. Author of more than thirteen books, Klett is a recipient of the Annual Governor's Arts Awards in Arizona (2008); a Guggenheim Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (2006); and three National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships (1979, 1982, 1984). His works are included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Center for Creative Photography; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts; the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC; and the Tucson Museum of Art, among others.

Artist website: <http://www.klettandwolfe.com/>

Mark Klett



Mayme Kratz

Fascinated by both nature and poetry, Arizona artist **Mayme Kratz** creates cast resin sculptures and two-dimensional works that examine the relationship between nature, human experience, and psychological states of being. Imbedding in resin such materials as sunflower seeds, the wings of butterflies, bees, cicadas and birds, ocotillo skeletons, lizard remains, hand crafted nests, and cactus parts, Kratz captures moments in time for poetic contemplation. At once haunting and elegant, the detritus from nature becomes elevated to aesthetic levels of consideration by her arrangements and subtle coloring.

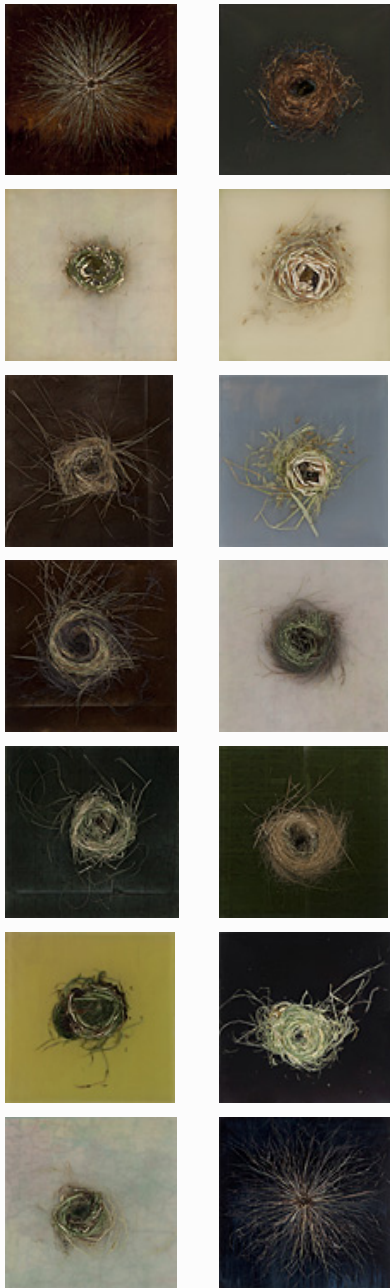
To Kratz, the structure of grass and its roots reveals a form similar to what she observes in the night sky. Such revelations find their way into her dreams and ultimately inspire her poetry and visual art. Kratz often focuses on the overlooked plants, seeds, and weeds that proliferate in both rural and urban settings. By singling out these forms and embedding them in resin, she celebrates their singularity, beauty, and interrelatedness. In this body of work, Kratz focuses on the grasses found in urban landscapes rather than the grasses of the open desert. Many of these plant forms are invasive and thrive in areas where the ground has been disturbed, making it difficult for native species to grow. Just as these grasses are considered invasive, so too are people often seen as invasive to a desert rapidly becoming urbanized. This analogy recalls a line in the Carl Sandburg poem, *Grass*: "I am the grass; I cover all."

To create her "Knot" series, she takes common grasses and hand-fashions them in swirls to resemble nest forms, which makes analogies between nature and home. Other works reveal the explosive beauty of a single splay of grass otherwise overlooked on an abandoned tract of urban land. A simple weed thus becomes fireworks or a constellation of stars. Ultimately, grasses can be considered a metaphor for the passing of time. According to Kratz, "In time, all that we do, if left undisturbed, will be covered over by grass. I remember this to be true from my childhood. I often created special places to play where I buried toys or built forts. If left unattended for a season, grasses would take over and my secret places became hidden, blanketed by grass."

Kratz is the recipient of a 1995 Visual Arts Fellowship from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and a 2010 Mid-career Award from the Contemporary Forum of the Phoenix Art Museum. She has participated in artist residencies at the Ucross Foundation in Wyoming (2010), the Desert Botanical Garden in Arizona (2007), and the Pilchuck Glass School in Washington State (1998). Kratz's works are found in the permanent collections of the Phoenix Art Museum, the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Tucson Museum of Art, among others.

Artist website: <http://www.maymekratz.com/>

Mayme Kratz



Joseph Scheer

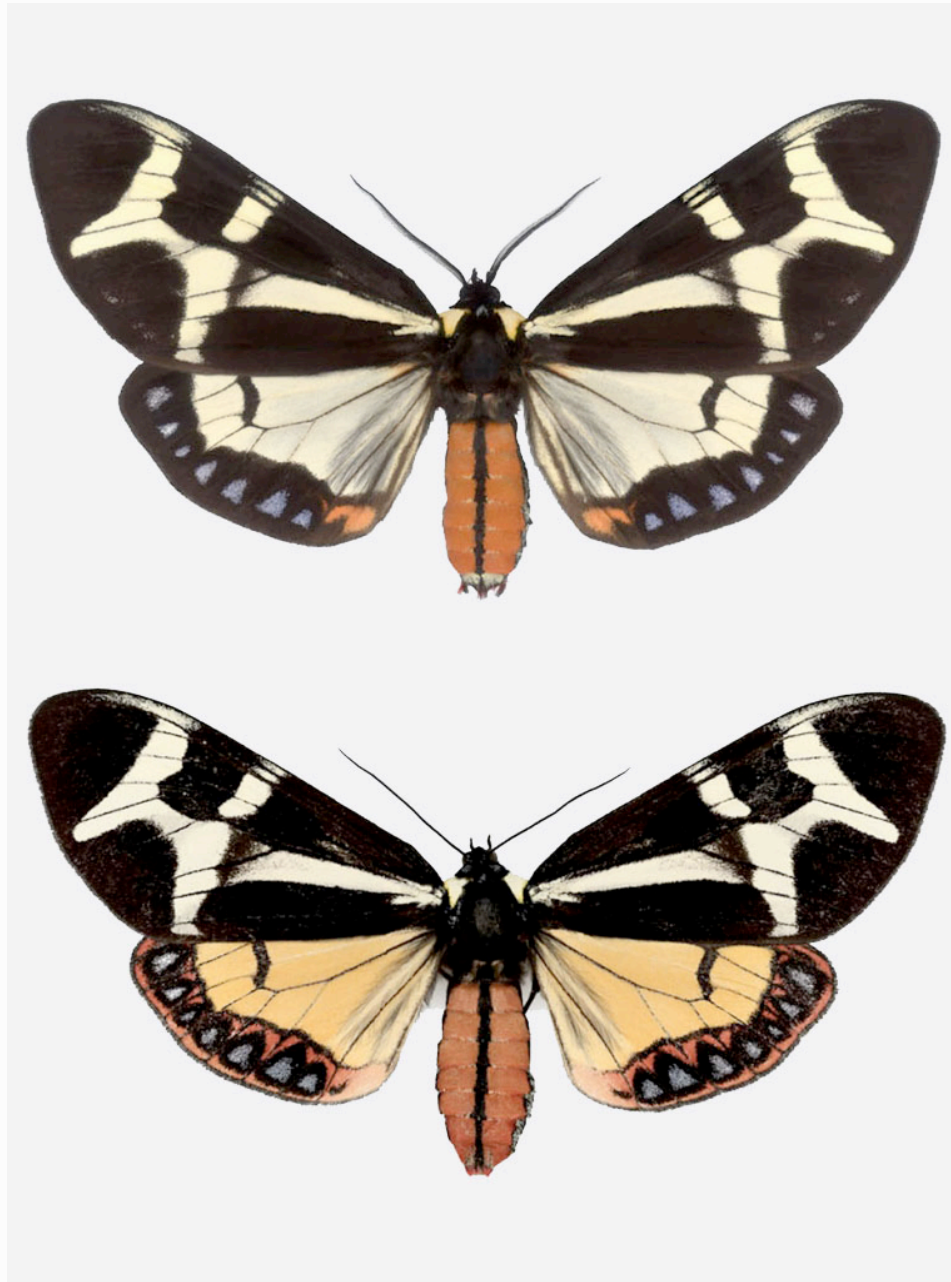
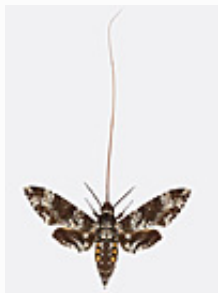
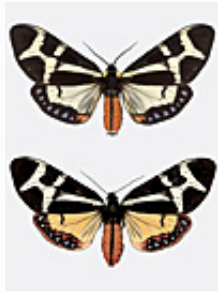
New York artist **Joseph Scheer** finds beauty and metaphoric content in moths, insects that often carry negative connotations. While many species are nocturnal, they are also attracted to bright light generated by natural and mechanical means. Scheer first discovered a passion for the fine details of a moth's morphology when the newly formed Institute for Electronic Arts at Alfred University received its first high-resolution scanner. Asked to test its abilities, he found a gnat nearby and scanned it at maximum resolution only to find it had metallic pearlescent wings with hairs all over its body. Realizing the hidden beauty in this tiny insect, Scheer began to scan numerous other insects including flies, wasps, and bees, and ultimately scanned more than 200 species of insects. Printing out the resulting images with an Iris printer capable of rich saturated color and exquisite detail, he found moths to be among the most intriguing of his subjects. Since his early experiments, Scheer has traveled to more than seven countries in search of unique insects and scanned more than 1,000 species of moths. Over the last five years, Scheer has traveled to Arizona several times to collect moths for scanning.

Sphinx Moths are from the family *Sphingidae* also called Hawk Moths and Hummingbird Moths because of their hovering, swift flight patterns. The common name "sphinx" comes from the behavior of the larvae who rear up, mimicking the pose of the mythical creature. With wingspans ranging from two to eight inches and long proboscis (feeding tubes) of up to 10 inches, they are one of the largest flying insects of the deserts. Unlike many other species of moths, Sphinx Moth larvae change underground into adults and then dig their way to the surface. In the Sonoran and Chihuahan deserts, there may be two broods, one in the spring and another in the summer. Adult Sphinx Moths feed at night on the nectar of flowers. Commonly called the Giant Northern Flag Moth, *Dysschema howardi* is a Tiger Moth in the family *Arctiidae*. A Tiger Moth's bright colors warn predators that it is poisonous. Considered one of the more visually dramatic moths of the southwestern United States, it is also one of the largest Tiger Moths in North America. This moth is found during the monsoon season at both Box and Copper Canyons in South East Arizona.

Joseph Scheer is a Professor of Print Media and Co-Director/Founder of the Institute for Electronic Arts at the School of Art and Design, Alfred University. His current works, which span print media, video, and web-based project, use technology to re-examine nature through interpretive collecting and visual recording. His most recent work has been exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the National Museum of China in Beijing, the National Museum of Sweden in Stockholm, and the Field Museum in Chicago. Scheer has published two books about his work: *Night Visions, the Secret Designs of Moths*, published by Prestel, and *Night Flyers*, published by Nexus Press. He recently received a Fulbright-Garcia Robles Scholar award which allowed him to spend 15 months in Sonora, Mexico, to research moths.

Artist website: **Gallery website**

Joseph Scheer



Stephen Strom

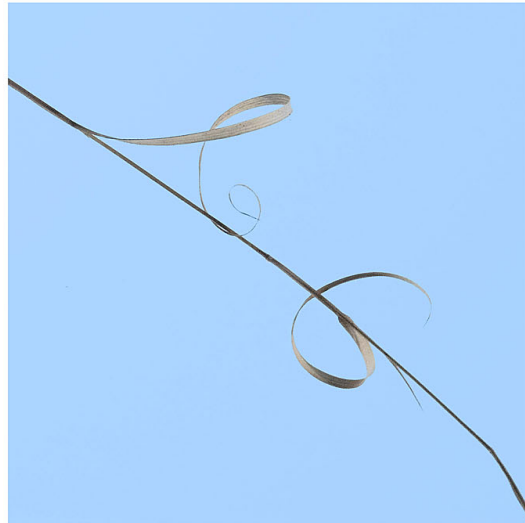
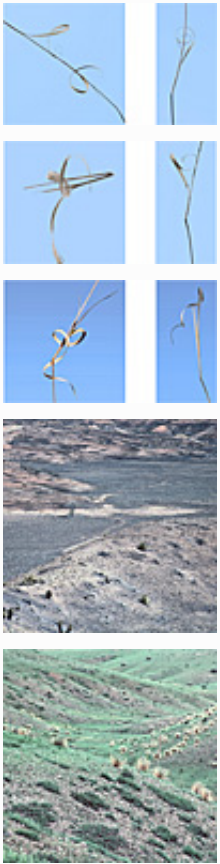
Arizona photographer **Stephen Strom** follows in the footsteps of noted photographers Karl Blossfeldt, Araron Siskind, and Harry Callahan to capture both the subtle details of plants and the majestic complexity of the desert grasslands of the Southwest. In Strom's Grass Gestures series, his keen powers of observation result in the elegant calligraphic gestures inherent in dried grasses set against a blazing blue sky. Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch: Fire-scarred Grassland Recovering after Monsoon Rains (2003) and Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch: Grassland following the 2003 Ryan Fire (2003) reveal the resiliency of the desert grassland region of Sonoita, Arizona, as it responds to the extremes of rain and fire.

Strom has spent nearly forty years as a research astronomer. From 1964-68 he held appointments as Lecturer in Astronomy at Harvard and Astrophysicist at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory. He then moved to the State University of New York at Stony Brook and served for 4 years as Coordinator of Astronomy and Astrophysics. In 1972 he accepted an appointment at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Tucson, where he served as Chair of the Galactic and Extragalactic program. The following 15 years were spent at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst; from 1984-1997 he served as Chairman of the Five College Astronomy Department. In 1998 Strom returned to Tucson as a member of the scientific staff at the National Optical Astronomy Observatory where he carried out research directed at understanding the formation of stars and planetary systems and served as an Associate Director of the Observatory. He retired from NOAO in 2007.

Studying under Keith McElroy, Todd Walker, and Harold Jones at the University of Arizona, Strom began photographing in 1978. His work is in the permanent collections of the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson; the University of Oklahoma Museum of Art, Norman, Oklahoma; the Mead Museum, Amherst, Massachusetts; and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. His photography complements poems and essays in three books published by the University of Arizona Press: *Secrets from the Center of the World*, a collaboration with Muscogee poet Joy Harjo; *Sonoita Plain: Views of a Southwestern Grassland*, a collaboration with ecologists Jane and Carl Bock; and *Tséyi' (Deep in the Rock): Reflections on Canyon de Chelly* co-authored with Navajo poet Laura Tohe. In 2008, he contributed photographs to *Otero Mesa: America's Wildest Grassland*, published by University of New Mexico Press. A monograph of Strom's photographs, *Earth Forms*, was published in 2009 by Dewi Lewis Publishing.

Artist website: <http://www.stephenstrom.com/>

Stephen Strom



David Taylor

In 2007, Arizona artist **David Taylor** began to photograph the monuments that mark the border between Mexico and the United States. His intent was to document each of the 276 obelisks installed by the International Boundary Commission following the Mexican/American War. The monuments describe the border as it extends west, from El Paso/Juarez to Tijuana/San Diego, through highly populated urban areas and some of the most remote expanses of Chihuahuan and Sonoran desert. They are, in fact, situated in both Mexico and the United States simultaneously.

His contemporary project is reflective of a survey conducted by the photographer D.R. Payne between 1891 and 1895 under the auspices of the Boundary Commission (now the International Boundary and Water Commission, or IBWC). While several other people have photographed the border over the years, there hasn't been a full documentation of the monuments in more than 100 years. In the 1980s, Robert Humphrey re-photographed many of them as part of a project that examined vegetation change in desert ecosystems. The original images of the border monuments made by Payne in the 1890s functioned as the baseline for location in Humphrey's work. Payne's documentation was political in its intent and Humphrey's was environmental. Building on their legacies, Taylor's motivations for re-photographing the border markers include environmental and human rights issues, and an examination of our contemporary understanding of borders.

Taylor's series of photographs function as a geographic cross-section of a border in transition. Responses to immigration, narcotrafficking and the imperatives of a post-9/11 security climate prompted more change along the border in the early 2000's than had occurred since the boundary was established. Thus, the completed project exists as a typology, with the incongruous obelisks acting as witness to a shifting national identity as expressed through an altered physical terrain.

Taylor received a Master of Fine Arts degree in Visual Design/Photography from the University of Oregon and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Studio Art/Photography from Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Taylor's monograph *Working the Line* was published by Radius Books in 2010 and has received numerous "best book" and design excellence awards. He resides in Tucson, Arizona, and teaches at the University of Arizona School of Art. Previously, he taught at the Department of Art at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces. Taylor's examination of the U.S. Mexico border was supported by a 2008 fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

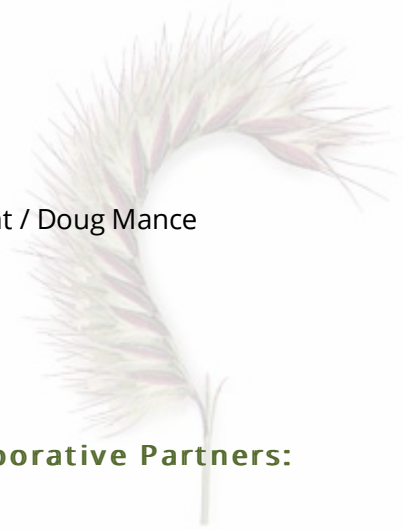
Artist website: <http://www.dtaylorphoto.com/>

David Taylor



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