

*THE FIRST*  
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# THIS WAY WEST



I have lived and worked in Boulder, Colorado since 2002, and during that time explored ideas related to immigration, displacement, and the American West. I have spent the last several years researching, writing, and producing work related to the history of Filipino participation in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, the most famous wild west show that toured throughout the United States and Europe during the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus my interest in curating *This Way West*, an exhibition of works of artists who explore various ideas of what it means to live and work in the American West of the United States, an expansive region stretching from the Dakotas to Texas to California. They live or have lived in Colorado, Wyoming, Nevada, and New Mexico, states with different landscapes and histories, yet, their practice, ranging from site-based to performative to historically rooted, returns them to questions about what it means to live in locations complicated by environment, politics, and history. Each of the artists, Aaron Treher, Patrick Kikut, Motoko Furuhashi, Brent Holmes, and Valerie Arcara, in *This Way West* touches on what it means to live, work, and explore the American West and a region whose complexities are expressed through its diverse populations, histories, and ecosystems.

-Yumi Janairo Roth

The built environment is rapidly expanding throughout the American West. After the South, the Western United States is the only other region to see net population growth. More people mean more houses, more roads, and more infrastructure. Wildlife continue to live inside and along the edges of urban and suburban development. It is at this intersection where Colorado-based artist **Aaron Treher's** practice lies. He reimagines architecture designed and built for birds, bats, and insects, that draws us closer to the more mundane aspects of the urban/wildland interface.



*The Observation Station, 2018, photo credit: Kenna Bruner*



*Street Light Survey Project: Mountain Research Station, 2019, photo credit: Aaron Treher*



*Suburban Swallow House, 2017, photo credit: Sarah McCormick*

Patrick Kikut has spent over thirty years outside and on the road. Traveling in his 1964, 20-foot Avion trailer, known as the *Mobile Research Studio (The MRS)*, Patrick's artistic neighborhood, as he refers to it, stretches from Great Falls, Montana to El Paso, Texas to Dodge City, Kansas, to Reno, Nevada. The road trip, the band tour, even early 19th century covered wagons, are hallmarks of how some have moved through the Western landscape. Patrick's approach though is more contemplative, like Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond, but on wheels. He returns year after year to, "(keep) an eye on things out here. I see development come and go through boom-and- bust cycles. I can see landscapes being encroached upon and in other places development dissolving back into the land."



Kikut Field Drawing, New Mexico, photo credit: Tracey Kikut



top row left to right: *Mobile Research Studio (MRS)*, Kansas, photo credit: Patrick Kikut; *Kikut Field Drawing*, Wyoming photo credit: David Jones; *MRS*, North Dakota, photo credit: Patrick Kikut  
bottom row left to right: *Kikut Field Drawing*, Wyoming, photo credit: David Jones; *MRS*, Texas, photo credit: Patrick Kikut; *MRS*, Utah, photo credit: Patrick Kikut



*Kikut Field Work*, Wyoming, photo credit David Jones

Motoko Furuhashi lives and teaches in southern New Mexico, a landscape both vibrant and parched, near the US's border with Mexico. Trained as a metalsmith and jeweler, she is drawn to the tactile investigation of material. Using a simple roll of transparent tape, Motoko walks atop the line she draws out with the tape, like a tight rope walker who barely hovers over the ground. Her feet press the adhesive into bits of asphalt, dried grass, debris, sand, and rocks. Retracing her steps, she rolls the tape back up, which gathers and spools the physical memory of that site. The banks of the Rio Grande or a mountain stand on equal footing with a parking lot or backyard, each roll revealing to its viewer something intimate about the location.



Motoko Furuhashi



left to right: *Trace (Object) Rio Grande*, tape, road segments, brass, silver, powder coat, paint, 2016; *Trace (Object) Mesilla*, tape, road segments, brass, silver, powder coat, paint, 2016



*On Your Feet*, video still, 2016, photo credit: Demitra Thomludis

The cowboy is the iconic image of the American West, usually pictured as a fiercely independent white man tending to his land and livestock. Nevada-based artist and writer **Brent Holmes** reminds us that African Americans lay equal claim to the image of the cowboy. For example, cowboy Nat Love and lawman Bass Reeves moved out West during the Civil War period to establish new lives for themselves while Bill Pickett, who was born in Texas, traveled throughout the United States showcasing his skills in wild west shows during the early part of the 20th century. Yet, these real cowboys and lawmen have often been overshadowed in both fiction and history. Brent's ink drawings fuse pulp fiction and cinematic images of cowboys with renderings of African sculptures gleaned from fine art magazines and museum catalogs to posit an "imaginary West where African traditions were not lost in the transatlantic slave trade." In doing so, Brent attempts, "to portray a divergent history that moves away from narratives of erasure, exclusion, and oppression into fantastic visualizations."



Abraxis, video still, photo credit: Patrick Silby & Brent Holmes



left to right: Figure 2, ink on paper, 2022; Figure 3, ink on paper, 2023; Figure 1, ink on paper, 2022



Figure 6, ink on paper, 2023

Working in Colorado, **Valerie Arcara**, explores the impact encroaching populations have on the landscape and the image of the “wilderness.” Like many states in the Western United States, Colorado has experienced significant population growth over the last decade, especially along the area known as the Front Range, a 26,000 square kilometer region at the eastern base the Rocky Mountains that stretches from the cities of Pueblo through Denver to Fort Collins. Reflecting on her project *Transplants*, Arcara writes, “The series challenges existing notions of progress and middle class well-being with imagery of new home construction and related signifiers presented in tension between creation and destruction, order and farce. At times employing a melancholic satire, the artist inserts herself into the work through objects and performance, casting herself as part of the problems the work is confronting.”



Part 1: Sunday Morning, 2021, photo credit: Valerie Arcara

