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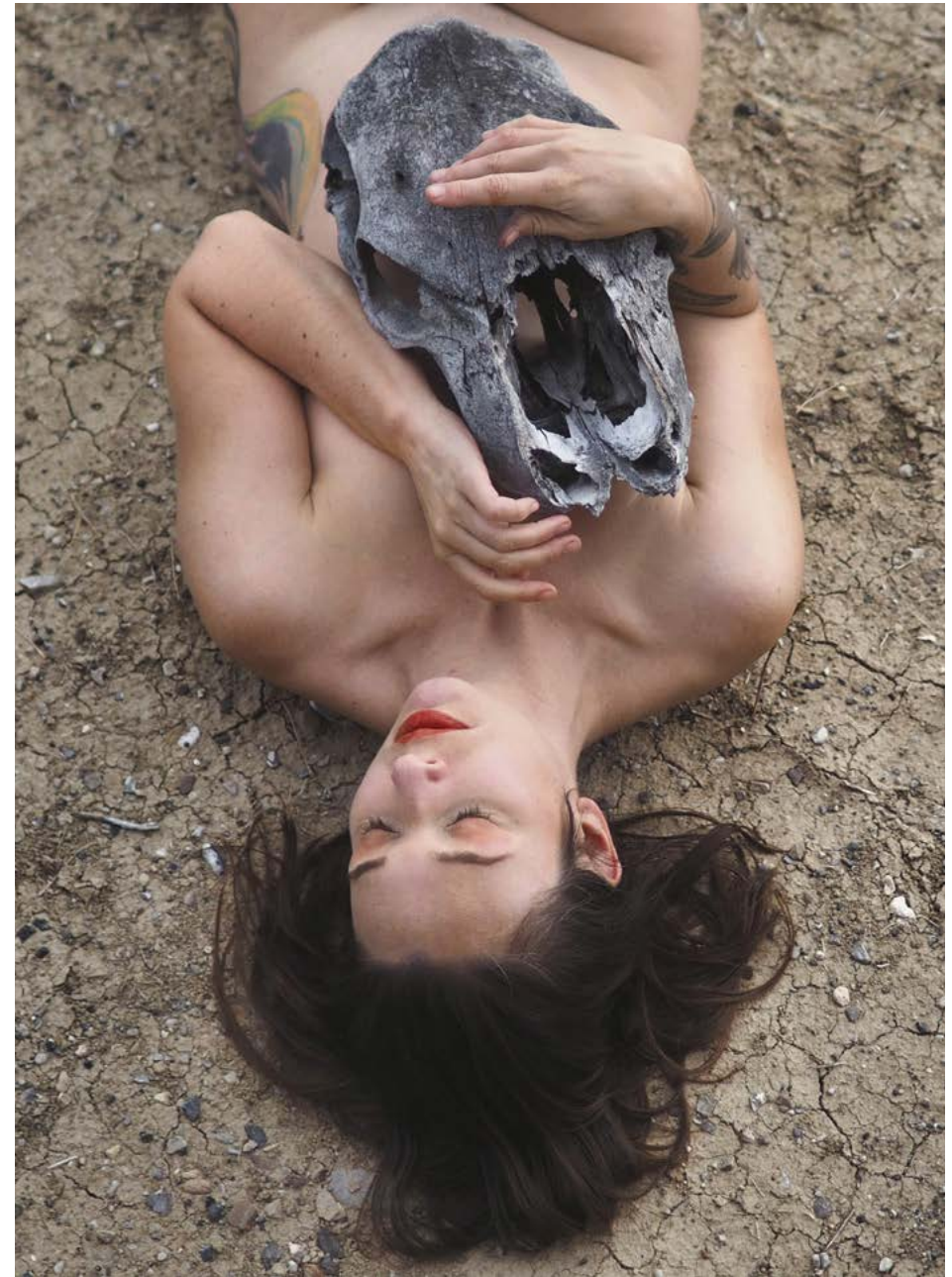


I have been writing about rivers that have returned from the dead—rivers at the edges of cities, fed by shower water and toilet water, that are flowing again after a century of parch. Ninety percent of Arizona’s waterways have gone dry in the last hundred years, lost rivers with names that glint on the tongue: Fossil, Silver, Thunder, Bright Angel. But some of them are alive again, miraculously tenuously, uncannily. I came to the studio to write about their ghosts, their resurrection. But at Montello, my computer battery got glitchy, and my screen full of research went dark. I was left with the expansive sky and my lens and my notebook. Without my usual tools, I felt naked. I used it as an opportunity.

Instead of rummaging through my filed facts, I explored the watershed of myself. I went wandering through braided juniper skeletons and fragrant sagebrush. Where I could not look into a screen, I looked into my self. I stripped down, watched my veins show through skin like green rivers. The self-portraits that I shot at Montello pulled me toward quiet things—ideas percolating like downflowing water, tender connective branches of thought. Like the Great Basin—where rivers flow toward the desert’s heart and do not seek the sea—I turned inward.

But like the Great Basin, the things that moved me and moved in me did not stay small. I tucked my camera against trunks and rocks and programmed it for long timelapses. I sat very still, waiting for big connections to click into place. The sped-up videos revealed muscular forces at work, magnitudes bigger than my little body. Above me, new rivers opened up. Clouds curled and unfurled, darkened and hurried closer, purple and pearly and pink. It began to rain. The sky, like a moving body of water, stormed over Montello. My timelapse videos revealed the original rivers, those moving skyways that flow across distances grander than any one watershed. It rained and rained. Rain that brought a lost family to my door, their truck stuck in the mud overnight. Rain that opened up bright paintbrush buds and pulled perfume from the sage. Rain that pummeled the roof and cracked lightning across the windows, rain so percussive and close that it felt like the storm lived inside of me.

When I left, I carried those rivers with me, and they flow now through my newest work. The quiet rivers I found when I faced my rawest self, my camera lens like a



mirror. The ponderous cloud rivers that only became apparent with slowed time. The enormous stormy rivers that shook me like a tree lifted in a flood. Although my screen stayed dark, desert rivers moved like ribbons of light, within me and without.