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### The Tangled Desert

“The land knows you, even when you are lost.” That’s from Robin Wall Kimmerer’s book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. You can find it on the bookshelf of a thoughtfully curated library, inside the Montello Foundation Artist-in-Residence cabin.

Let me ask *you*, when you’re lost what do *you* do?

Kimmerer suggests we look to the land for help. I wonder though, how do we *ask*?

They say art doesn’t have the answers – that its job is to ask the tough questions. I don’t know... but I think this time art has an answer: the gift of observational drawing. Drawing while on-site, in-response to the natural world, moves you closer to what’s around you – physically and emotionally – it’s reciprocity through proximity.



The result? A map. *And*, a drawing. A page from your psychic field guide. The record of a conversation between you and the physical world. You’re no longer lost. The rich detail highlights new paths. Overlapping and intersecting lines trouble the waters, blurring any distinction between research, art, and play.

A drawing of “nothing” that communicates everything.

In May 2024 I was an artist-in-residence at the Montello Foundation in Northeastern Nevada. It was great. But on that first day, as I drove out into the middle of nowhere, it felt like I was starting a drawing... a drawing on a page I couldn’t see.

How do you introduce yourself to a place you’ve never been to before?

Or, start a drawing, for that matter?

Thankfully, there’s lots of ways! I start by walking – a lot. And that’s what I did in Montello. Every day I waddled out into the sagebrush, looking for stuff. Stopping to draw. I was saying hello. Hello to a thriving community no taller than my socks; an ankle-high ecosystem.

I walked along fence-line. Miles and miles of barbed wire; deadly straight and drawn machine-tight. The thin-as-yarn strands buoy an oblique sense of permeability. Naturally, bits and pieces of errant wire get caught up in the sagebrush. I picked up the snarled leftovers – tangled and rusty – and took them back to the cabin with me.

Considered anew, against the gallery-white backdrop of the studio wall, the salvaged wire took on added meaning. An invitation is bestowed: is there anything *you* would like to offer, it asks?

A walk is a fence is a drawing is a sculpture is wire.

Kinked up and thorny, the poky barbs leapt off the wall, then curled back again in and around themselves. Lit from eight overhead spotlights, duplicitous shadows echo in all directions. Was it a drawing? A map? A record of a conversation?

I ask, what gets caught up? What are the methods we use to interrogate these complex knots? What happens if we resist the urge to straighten out (or up?) and embrace the idiosyncratic methods that bend and twist in an interwoven gesture of reciprocity?

The gift of making art.