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MM: In Glacier National Park, where I've been working these past few months, being off grid is one of the park's most important discussions. Because most travelers have become accustomed to -- and dependent on -- having some level of connection through electric technologies, people come unprepared. This unpreparedness has led to a surge in deaths in the last few years. Yet others visit the park in anticipation of being cut off from the grid, and go there with that intention. They often bring guns, bear spray, survival gear, and of course they fare much better. As an artist and a curator/writer who have both spent most of our lives in major cities, being off-grid anywhere in the US is an unexpected and rarified experience.

SR: Mary and I first met in 2009 when she was working on the Waterpod (which was Mary's first major public art project that introduced 250,000 New Yorkers to sustainable systems on a barge that docked in different waterfront locations around the city over 6 months). I was running New York City's public art program and was assigned to meet with Mary and a group of city representatives to discuss the project's feasibility and need for permits. That summer, she invited me to stay over. This was my first experience as an adult with something that off the grid. My friend, the art critic Eva Diaz and I shared a bunk on the Waterpod, went kayaking in the Bronx River while the Waterpod residents did their daily chores, we ate a breakfast of eggs from the resident chickens and vegetables from the garden patch. The dry compost toilet was a revelation, in part because it made visible the systems we rely on without having to think about them. Ironically, when Mary and I applied to Montello, I don't think we understood the level of off-the-grid-ness. But it made sense for us to have that experience again, this time

without access to the trappings of modern technology.

MM: For our residency at Montello, Sara and I met in Salt Lake City. We stopped for lunch, groceries, drove to Wendover for an early dinner, and from there made our way to Montello, NV. Although we were warned we would have no cell service during our journey from the town of Montello to twenty miles away at the Foundation, I've been in enough off-grid situations where without cell service, GPS will still locate my car in the terrain and I'm able to find my way out of most messes. I was convinced I would have little problem accessing the GPS shadow of Apple Maps and could cull together map screenshots to find our location, even if I couldn't make out the roads on the maps. I was wrong.

Before Sara and I ventured into the maze of rock, mud, and dirt roads without markers that crisscross each other and will bottom a truck out, never mind a Toyota Rav4 rental, we pulled into a ranch to ask for directions and to see if we were going the right way. On day one, we spent the late afternoon learning about the desert antics of artists

Clepsydra, 2021, C print, 30 in x 30 in

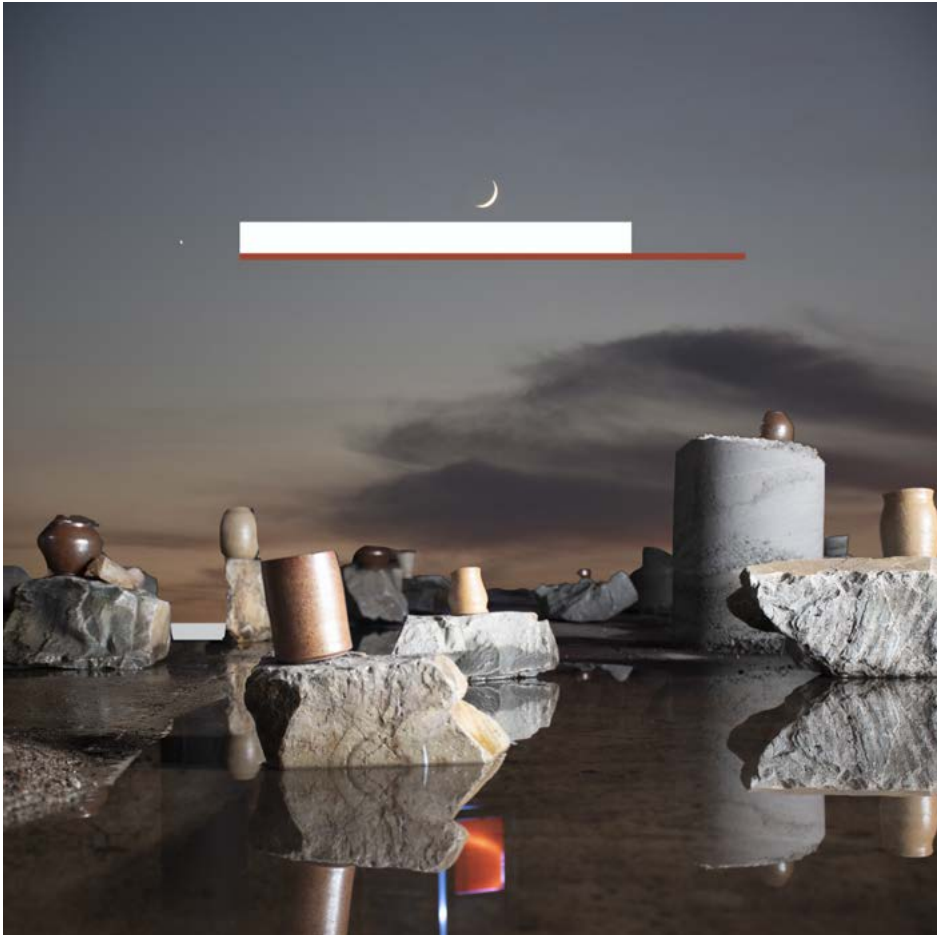


(ourselves firmly included) through their eyes, and finally, noticing a storm on the horizon, we turned back to Wendover. Our Montello adventure was almost over before it began.

SR: In fact, before it all began, we did take a detour to a Motel 6, and then ended up spending part of the day at one of the nearby casinos, The Nugget. For different reasons, Mary and I both needed internet access, and I discovered the pseudo public space of the casino. We were surprised to be able to sit in an atrium that housed a fake desert landscape, where Mary spoke on panel via zoom, and I finished editing an essay. This enclosed, mall-like space (which extended into an adjacent convention center) was a stark contrast to our eventual journey.

MM: In the ensuing days we eventually did carefully make our way out to the Montello Foundation, following Stefan's mile marker directions, tracing and retracing our steps. When we finally did find the Foundation house, it was impossible to think about

Skyline, Labyrinth, 2021, C print, 30 in x 30 in



leaving without having another series of near panic attacks, navigating a car through treacherous desert terrain. Aside from walkie-talkie contact with a neighbor, we were on our own. So we stayed, and we drank, walked, read, wrote, photographed, drew, cooked, and slept. Sara found one bar of cell service about a mile and a half from the house (near a cattle guard). A couple of days in, I finally resigned to my fate of being unexpectedly more off grid than I anticipated and stopped looking. We visited the neighbors. They regaled us with stories about having to rescue almost every artist who has come to visit the Montello Foundation. We learned to keep the hood of the car open so packrats wouldn't move in and eat the wiring, and to look out for badgers who would gladly attack us for fun. We didn't die.

SR: Meeting this local couple and their good friend may have been my first extended exchange with Americans whose world views seemed in opposition to my own. We all treaded carefully on topics like science, survival, gun control, and even a few conspiracies. The remoteness of Montello changed the tenor of conversation (it was probably because our neighbors were so kind), and made a certain kind of understanding possible.