

Nina Elder

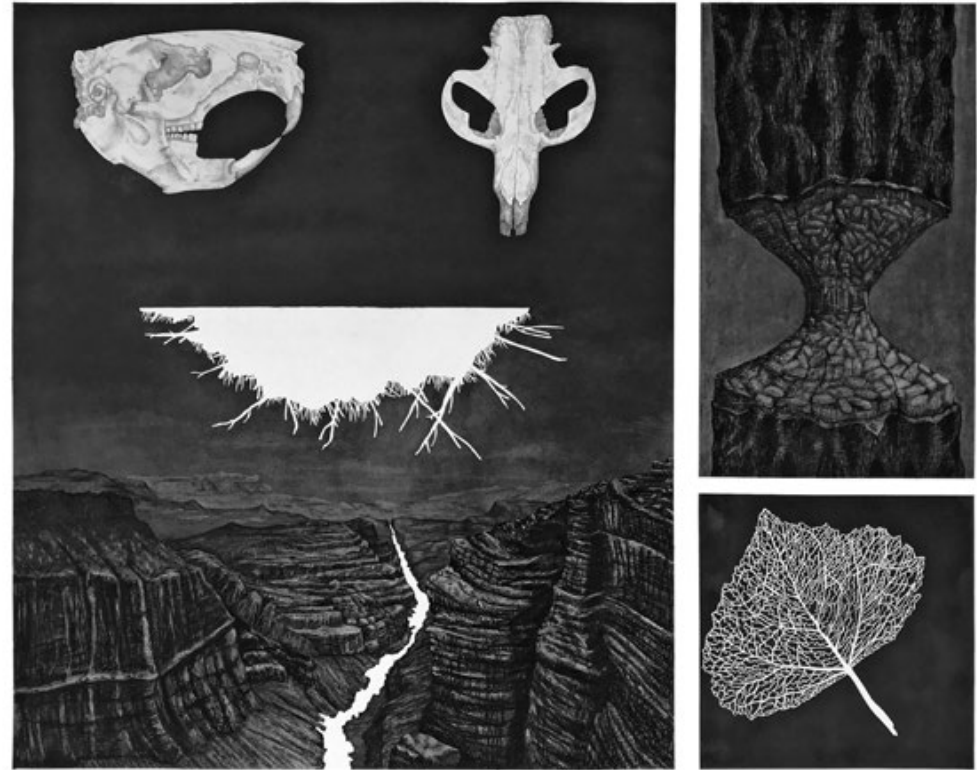
Albuquerque, NM

ninaelder.com



Solitude. Aridity. Independence.

These were my assumptions of what I would experience during my time at the Montello Foundation. After a dry and dusty 48 hours, it became clear that I was wrong. It rained and rained and rained and rained. The sagebrush stewed in vast puddles that never evaporated. The roads were ankle deep in slippery ooze. My dogs and I were encased in mud. My AWD van sunk to the axles, tires shredded on submerged rocks. In this vast place, I wondered about distance and time, both poetically and logistically, as I imagined that I would have to walk out. It is a long story, one that



Interrupted Ecosystem: Beaver and Free Flowing Rivers, 2019
Charcoal, graphite, ash, and dirt on paper, 48 in x 60 in

involves elk steaks and Bud Light and unthinkable generosity, but the sole neighbors came to the rescue in myriad ways. Tony and Lupe, through their profound neighborliness showed me this: I am never alone. Being stuck is a temporary state of being. Wonderful things happen through acknowledging our interdependence.

As an ecological artist, researcher, and writer, I have been focused on what happens when natural systems succumb to human disruption. I am not an optimist. Yet, because of benevolence and patched tires, sodden todays and potentially sunny tomorrows, my time at Montello resulted in an essay about hope that was published by *American Scientist*. The drawings I made there consider resilience. Those two weeks were a shifting point. I have a new appreciation for both the finesse and force that it takes to become unmired, even though it can be deeply unsettling.

My work explores the presence of absence - voids and holes, memories and hauntings, secrets and reliquaries. I am still finding traces of mud in my van, in my studio, in my perception of dry places. The generosity of Tony, Lupe, and the Montello Foundation left a more indelible mark. Thank you.

Nina Elder's article is at americanscientist.org/article/paradox-sunrise-and-a-thirsty-place

