

## Ash Ferlito

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How wonderful to spend a moment on earth at the Montello Foundation. An easy side-step for me to make, out of the stream of influence and internet and into first light in the Juniper patch identifying birds. Sagebrush scented air, always— sometimes wet, sometimes dry, full of song. Listened to the chorus of sparrows, teasing apart the notes and trills and becoming familiar with the who's who in the soundscape, watched flycatchers sally out and back under brash ravens, and every dang time marveled at the impossible electric cerulean streak of a Mountain Bluebird, now hovering, it's mate joining. My vision brought back down by a bright new glowing orange bloom of Indian Paintbrush that emerged overnight, after the 3 days of rain, hail, and bit of snow. A few hours looking around and considering the potential of the plants, what color would sage give, if any? Would the Indian Paintbrush be a good brush? My work has been focused on using plants like this, for their color and for mark, in a combination of natural dyes and acrylic, dipped and pressed onto wet fabric. Stare out, think about how to make a painting here. How can I make something that feels like the sound? It's still way before noon. Walk back to the cabin, catch my reflection, smile at myself. I look a little nuts: recording gear slung across my body, sage sticking out of my pocket, binoculars, a feather behind my ear, shorts, socks, boots, dry skin. It's ok. Eat. Boil up the sack of onion skins and avocado pits I've been collecting for months and brought with me for dyes. Wind calms, attempt some sound



*Harmonics, 2020, sage, dandelion, vetch, low larkspur, beardtongues, buckwheats, desert paintbrush on muslin, 33 in x 43 in, 43 in x 53 in and 42 in x 56 in*

recording. Why does the bird clam up after hours of consistent singing or move so far away the moment I have my parabola microphone in hand? Relax, I'll get it, relationships take work. Calculate how many days I have left. Snip some sagebrush, a bit here, a bit there, slow down, realize that there is an entire universe on each branch, a teaming population of various insects. Be much more careful from now on, slower, vision more sensitive- I actually saw a butterfly, a Common Checkered-Skipper, iNaturalist helped inform me later, clench her abdomen and lay a tiny neon opal egg on a blade of grass. Moved to tears by the act. Wipe my face. Bike somewhere, sun still high in the sky at 7 PM. Return, into the driveway, back to what totally feels like home. Dinner. Make something nice for myself, lick my plate clean, getting off on how little water I can use— save it for the work. The place smells great from boiling sage for dye. Look at the horizon, consult the weather device in the kitchen, decide if it is ok or too windy to put out my moth collecting kit, a stretched sheet and an ultraviolet light— essentially a sail. Do it. I can always take it down, reason that it probably won't get going too far with all the brush around, right? Light the oil lamp. A private ping of joy as I turn down the wick to just the right height where the smoke ceases. It's reflection burning bright mirrored into infinity in the sliding glass door. Read. Get up to check to see what moths have arrived, if any. As I shuffle outside I'm startled by the constellations, the stars so low and big. There are moths, real beauties! Document them. Set my alarm for another mid-night check. After that an alarm for dawn chorus. Do it all again, day after day, activities structured by the wind and the light.

I felt deeply at peace at Montello— loose is the word. Loose and free, elevated by the design and thoughtfulness of the place, warmed by the generosity of it, the library, the care. I laughed at myself when I got stressed for a spell, when worry crept in, the chatterbox questioning if I'd make something good enough, something to show for my time until an afternoon's strong wind pressed me into a chair and forced it's way into my lungs making me breathe deeper, reminding me of my choice of how I want to be, how I want to experience this place, and after.

I took in so much, I got a lot done, I made something I love, I know the names and songs of all the birds around, attracted stunning and surprising species of moths and insects...but really, I could have just watched the weather happen, roll in, and over, in and over, and it would have been an excellent way to spend the time.

