

## Margaret Cogswell

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My drawings are the result of many months of walking, exploring, photographing and filming the landscape of an area I am researching for the development of each of my River Fugues projects. Much like an archaeologist or geologist, I may search for clues to the history of a river, a people, or a place in the enigmatic remnants of their past. While researching Red Hook Harbor Soundings, I became intrigued with the fragmented remains of infrastructure and industry emerging from the Red Hook harbor where the tidal waters of both the Hudson and East Rivers alternately reveal and then conceal the histories of these ruins. Similarly, hikes through desert landscapes in New Mexico and Wyoming, wanderings along the Cao Gong River in the ancient water town of Zhujiajiao, China, and hushed ventures through abandoned steel mills in Cleveland all led to drawings which are often acknowledging loss, paying homage to the defiant traces of a people, their lives embedded in a place - in a landscape – literally, metaphorically, or metaphysically.

Walking along the Ashokan Reservoir in the Catskills today, basking in sun under big skies and surrounded by mountains brimming the horizons, I suddenly flashed back to Montello in the desert of Nevada. Perhaps this is why it felt so familiar there in the Great Basin - even though I had never been there before. The skies, the mountains, the “basin”- though one was wet and filled with water and the other

*Ghost Stories*, 2022, lithograph ink bar rubbing of desert floor, watercolor, colored pencil on Chinese paper, 15 in x 44 in, 2022



*Defiant Landscape*, watercolor, colored pencil on paper, 22 in x 33 in, 2022

dry with a sea of blue-grey sage floating in bleached ochre clay.

I remember stepping out onto the “porch” of my temporary home/studio and feeling the warm embrace of a place that I had anticipated would be parched and hostile-but which instead felt familiar like an old friend. I decided then that I was there to listen and to learn- though what exactly I did not know. Seeking to be more receptive to my environment and minimize my intrusion, I vowed not to play any music during my stay. Instead I was serenaded by cicadas, and mockingbirds, and the clicking of crickets marking time like a metronome. Between early afternoon and sunset, the wind sang solos, joined in interludes by choruses seemingly coming from atop the surrounding ridges.

There was comfort in the powerful sense of time upended- of life having been forever and ongoing despite being weathered and worn. There was beauty in the dancing arms of the “old sage”, in the sculpted rock forms that turned out to be dried elk dung, and in the desert floor which held the memories of everything in its dust, including my own footprints.

And so I painted - intensely focused on the desert floor - perhaps thinking that I would solve some persisting questions about life and living if I was quiet and patient, and just looked and listened hard enough.