

Sasha Petrenko

Bellingham, WA

sashapetrenko.org



I am a media artist, a sculptor, a musician and a teacher. I make experiences. Image stills in this essay are static representations of work that is time based and open ended. I kept a journal and wrote several times a day during my residency at Montello. Selected excerpts follow.

Montello Day 2 - Arrived late last night. The road up to the cabin was at points almost impassible. It took me and my Prius 2 hours to cover 20 miles.. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the cabin. What a rush!

Montello Day 3 - I picked out Marcia Bjornerud's book *Timefulness* to help me relax at night. Critters were announcing themselves and wondering who was the new one in the cabin. The desert comes alive after sunset. Dr Bjornerud's words aligned with a curiosity I had about time, how it seems to happen all at once. I began waking up to see the sunrise.

Montello Day 4 - It is bliss being here. The absolute peace and quiet, the isolation, its a little scary but it wakes me up and makes me feel alive.

Montello Day 5 - It's 5am. Couldn't sleep. Maybe it's whiskey, though I didn't have much last night. Maybe it's just this place, the desert. Ghost winds. Dust devils. Restless lost souls rattling the cabin walls then gone like a dream. Was it a dream?

Montello Day 6 - Late afternoon, it's hot, but just right in the shade. I filled a basin



Lessons from the Forest, part 3, digital video, 5min, 2018

with water and washed my clothes by hand. Looking out across the desert, it felt like time went backwards. As I was any other woman in last 200 years. Am I that different from them, our hopes, our day dreams? Maybe they didn't play electric, but they were likely scrappy, bold, confident, self doubting, dreamers.

Day 7 Montello - Desert Song (play as a shuffle)

E, DD, DE - A, AA, EG - A, AA, EG - C, CC, DD

Danced on the deck at dusk. It remains warm. Stay around the cabin II-6 Without shade, there's nothing to protect you from the harshness. The desert does not care. It exists. Learn to live in it. The roads are turning into sand pits. Rock dissolve in time. Geology is history. The past is present and the present is future. This place shows it. Time happens all at once.

Day 8 Montello - I put water in a basin and put it out on Binky's trail hoping it might lure the pack rats and nocturnal squirrels off the cabin at night. A hummingbird flew by more than once today and I swear it looked at me as if to say, finally!

Day 9 Montello - Today I witnessed the sunrise and the sunset. As usual, I rode my bike to the hill to find cell service (8.4 miles round trip). Dropping the bike to walk 1/4 mile up hill, I heard the wind rustle as if standing in an evergreen forest. That's when I noticed a mature pinyon pine to my right. The closer I came to its needles, the louder the sound. The pinyon localized and amplified the wind like a shotgun mic through a loudspeaker. Wind through the pines reminds me of the ocean along the dunes. Looking across the desert, I imagine the ocean that once was.

Day 10 Montello - Leaving today, before 8AM. My stay was made short by family matters. I brought my amp and guitar up to the viewing pad and played to the sun as it rose above the range. The way the sunrise paints the sky, pours light across the valley, sometimes, even the birds stay silent. God? Universe? Us. We are gods.

Now the road lays ahead. My stay, though abbreviated, has been vital to my creative research.

I am still reflecting on my time at Montello. Time to listen, to dream, feel alive and vulnerable. Despite the challenges (do not attempt the drive in a Prius. Be sure the composting toilet is oriented properly) in the desert I felt a deep sense of time and belonging. You have to work to survive here. Be smart. Conserve water, energy, be wary of the sun. Share resources.