

UTOPIA/DYSTOPIA

Tawni Shuler
Rimrock, AZ

Warrior Rabbits

Collage on paper accordion book created with acrylic, gouache, watercolor, pen, and felt. 4.5" h x 36" w

Statement

Ecotone: the place where forest meets meadow, desert touches river. It's the frontier where communities of humankind and wild animals touch each other. It's that shaky space between who we are and who we appear to be, the gap between reality and mystery, the certain and the imagined. - Joanne Smith from *What Wildness is This*

It is the experience in the tangible details of a place that define it and make it unforgettable. I am inspired by memories of landscape: the life cycles of its inhabitants and plants, the drastic seasons, terrains that possess dual qualities of harshness and frailty. Growing up on a farm in rural Wyoming, I collected and studied bones and the remains of wildlife, gathered assortments of rocks, snail shells, feathers and plants, witnessed the growth of crops from seeds to plants and watched life evolve as eggs hatched from a bird's nest. The authenticity of my memory is subject to scrutiny, as I believe it is constantly changing over time. In turn, my work reflects my evolving memories of these places and events, combining the past with the present, slivers of accurate representations as well as the imagined and embellished counterparts.

As I move through these landscapes, I am constantly stopping to pick up these details: artifacts or specimens, make sketches, take photos, dissect a plant, etc. I don't view or experience the whole scene at once, but rather take in smaller sections or pieces of a place. These "parts" of place become greater than the Whole, lending to the layered history and complexity of these landscapes.

Once back in the studio, I create a large amount of smaller drawings from memory, sketches or photos, edit and sort through them, create piles, study them closely and occasionally break or rip them in smaller pieces to study the parts of the whole before recombining them back into a single piece of work. By working in layers, my process is similar to the way memory functions. Using these layers, I can recall the way the mind orders specifics by pushing the less important elements to the hazy background and bringing the more important features to the foreground. The work mimics my ever-changing memory, with imagery that seems to move through space and time; images come forward and recede, some clearly, others obscurely. Thus, the work becomes the setting for imagery that is balanced between abstraction and representation, sharp or blurred, internal or external, objective and subjective.



“Standing out and standing up or sitting back in the shadows and blending in: both become necessary survival tactics.”

It is my goal to continue to cultivate my ties to this land around me by collecting, destructing, dissecting, studying and lastly re-ordering and rebuilding all the elements into a singular reality. By creating this way, I am able to examine my relationship to these complex places and further understand how a place influences identity.

Biography

Born on a ranch in Wyoming, Tawni Shuler was enticed to paint and draw early on by the art of western painters Frederick Remington and Charlie Russell. She attended the University of Montana, Missoula to complete her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and Arizona State University to complete Master of Fine Arts degree in painting and drawing. She has since served as the Programming Director for the Red Lodge Clay Center in Montana, an Assistant Professor in Watermedia at Utah Valley University and an Instructor of Art at Sheridan College. Currently, Shuler lives and creates in Arizona.

Her work has been shown at the Northwest Art Center, Minot, ND; Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art, Augusta, GA; g2 Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ; Harry Wood Gallery, Tempe, AZ; Zane Bennett Gallery, Santa Fe, NM; Missoula Art Museum, MT; Woodbury Art Museum, Orem, UT; Tucker Cooke Gallery, Asheville, NC; Smith Theatre Gallery, Farmington Hills, MI; Firehouse Gallery, Grants Pass, OR, Oates Park Art Center, Fallon, NV; Washakie Museum and Cultural Center, Worland, WY; Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, MT and was published in Southwest Art's 2005 Annual Emerging Artist Issue. She has been an artist in residence at the Jentel Artist Residency Program, Brush Creek Ranch Artist Foundation and the Ucross Foundation Residency Program in Wyoming.

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