

HABITAT artists' books

Pinkwater Pools

Dive into the fluid landscapes of memory and history, swirl in timeless pinkwater pools, claim and reclaim habitats lost and found.

Broadside: relief and gel plate, Photoshop

ARTIST:

Cerese Vaden

Tucson, AZ

ceresevaden.com



WRITER:

Ann Cummins

Flagstaff, AZ

Artist's Statement

My most recent creative research probes human disconnection from, and abuse of, land. Universal grief over species extinction, exhausted resources, climate change, and human narcissism compel me to create work that calls for accountability and group stewardship of the earth's finite resources. Through romanticized depictions of people, species, locations and self, I scrutinize and present the hubristic history of entitlement that humans have wrought on the land and themselves.

Artist's Biography

Raised on a secluded ranch in rural central Idaho Cerese Vaden's early life was an anachronism. Butter churning, making bread, gathering eggs and feeding bum lambs were among the weekly chores.

Avid reading and family trips across the country allowed her to recognize the microcosm she lived in, but not until post graduate school did she learn to truly appreciate that microcosm.

Jobs in house painting, cake decorating, floral design, greenhouse gardening and advertising supported her educational and artistic pursuits. Her longest lasting job (as Professor at the University of Arizona) came shortly after pursuing an MFA in studio art.

She misses the butter churning, and even the bum lambs.

Writer's Statement

More than ever, in these worried, censorial times, I feel it's important to dive into words, the deceptively safe words, like birth, love and family, or the incendiary words, like race, non-binary, genocide – to say and write the names of things and people and to open doors to their multifaceted, mind-blowing histories, distortions and mutations.

Writer's Biography

Ann Cummins was born in the Rocky Mountain town of Durango, Colorado where, during the 50s, fine pink uranium tailings from the mill that employed her father blew in waves over the town. In the early 60s the mill closed, and her father accepted a transfer to a new mill on the Navajo Nation in Shiprock, New Mexico. Cummins attended grade school through high school in Shiprock, and she ran track around a grassy football field, the grass planted on uranium tailings donated by Vanadium Corporation of America. Uranium landscapes and uranium communities have inspired some of her fiction, including stories in her collection, *Red Ant House*, and her novel, *Yellowcake*. In recent years, she has deepened and broadened her sense of home by exploring her ancestral connections to Welsh coal miners, Irish stonemasons, and western pioneers displaced by the Civil War. She's currently working in hybrid forms that enfold fiction, nonfiction, and memoir.

Content of text included in artwork

As is her habit, a woman dives into a pool of buttons. The buttons in their tin swirl in tidal pools of memory and sensation. She practices blindness, feels her way into disks of all sizes, plastic, wood, wool. Here, a steel eagle from a military uniform pink and green, here, an enameled American Legion, and she lingers a bit in indifference to buttons from wars she never knew but nonetheless inherited. The Great War, and then another, and another and on and on. The dead relatives sing their pithy warnings: My country right or wrong; Love it or leave it.

They are slippery and unprincipled, the buttons, and she never knows when touch will stir an undercurrent.

Today, a pearl, a round moon with a tiny eyelet for a # 11 needle, a teardrop. Without warning, she's drawn into a habitat so old it feels new. She's in her grandmother's closet. With sticky hands, she fingers embroidered cloth on forbidden porcelain dolls. Pearls loose as baby teeth dangle from buttonhole threads, and she can't help herself. She rips one. "As it was then, let it be now," the naughty girl murmurs to her dead grandmother. She floats in waves of shame and delight until she begins to fall into a riptide of distraction, and her eyes flutter open, and she's suddenly blinded by the sinking sun. It reflects off a mirror and into the tin, and like a beam of sunlight through a jackal wall at winter solstice, the glare turns steel military disks into what was hidden. Mercurial eyes of an old warrior with ivory-boned hands tugging a young soldier out of her comfort. The child swears she'll never go in the closet again. Time doesn't like the word never. The child swears she'll never cry again. That's a funny way to laugh.

What's the use. She might button up the sun, steal into the musty closet, play again the exhilarating war game of shame and delight. Or, she might steel herself for the lengthening of days; woman up to the narcotic of do-overs; butterfly up from the slow swirl of secrets.

Sometime between never and might, she opens her sweaty hand and returns the pearl to its ocean of buttons.