Laura Aguilar
Genesis Báez
Teresa Baker
Christie Blizard
Dineo Seshee Bopape
Nancy Holt

Katherine Hubbard
Isuma
Benny Merris
Alan Michelson
Laura Ortman
Elle Pérez

Sondra Perry
David Benjamin Sherry
The Frank Duncan Archive

October 26, 2022
– May 7, 2023

BALLROOM
MARFA
Ecstatic Land is an exhibition and screening series that brings together a multigenerational group of artists whose works explore the intersecting vitalities of the land and self. The word ecstatic comes from the Greek ἔκστασις [ekstasis], meaning “to stand outside oneself.” In nature, and particularly in the vast expanses of the desert, one can experience physical contact with the earth while being emotionally and psychologically transported elsewhere. This affect, present in the artworks in Ecstatic Land, connects material and exterior sites with interior, emotional, psychic states. Land is celebrated as a living force, and the exhibiting artists’ photographs, paintings, films, videos, sculptures, and sounds harmonize the pleasures of seeing what’s around us with those of inward reflection.

Western art-historical traditions of the landscape genre largely focus on the framing of particular views of nature, often as demonstrations of power and control. And while the artists in Ecstatic Land each reference the natural world, they are not creating landscapes per se. Rather than reproducing or framing views, their works reveal new subjectivities and methods for perceiving shared environments. These artworks transport us beyond sight, reconnecting us to the world through embodied experiences. Challenging and expanding single-point perspectives, these artists offer personal views that would otherwise be invisible, intangible or overlooked. Their approaches run counter to the privatization, misuse, and over-consumption of common spaces and resources. Ecstatic Land proposes ways to live dynamically, critically, queerly, and consciously on and with the land.

Ecstatic Land is co-organized by Guest Curator Dean Daderko and Ballroom Marfa Director and Curator Daisy Nam, with assistance from Alexann Susholtz, Ballroom Marfa Curatorial and Exhibitions Assistant.

– Daisy Nam & Dean Daderko
Exhibition Checklist

**Center Gallery**

**North Gallery**
4. Benny Merris
   All works courtesy of the artist. Right to left, top row to bottom row.
   *An Other Another 20*, 2012. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 48*, 2014. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 71*, 2016. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 182*, 2015. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 84*, 2015. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 70*, 2016. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 44*, 2015. Archival pigment print on paper.
   *An Other Another 86*, 2016. Archival pigment print on paper.
10. Katherine Hubbard
    *Four shoulders (how things stack up)*, 2014. Silver gelatin print.
    *Four shoulders (disposition)*, 2014. Silver gelatin print.


**Courtyard**

Thoughts about the artists and works on view

Laura Aguilar (1959–2018) was an American photographer born and raised in the San Gabriel Valley, California. Aguilar’s three photographs from her *Nature Self Portrait* series (all from 1996) are joined by a fourth *Motion #68* (1999), focus on women in the natural world. Aguilar’s self portraiture offered her a way to center and celebrate her identity as a large-bodied Chicana. In *Nature Self Portrait #7*—taken at the Hueco Tanks site near El Paso, Texas—the artist sits with her back to the camera, her body’s form echoing nearby boulders on a hard, stony plain. If she initially appears vulnerable, a sense of meditative calm soon becomes apparent. Aguilar’s exposure under the desert sun produces a sensual, poignant image that feels sheltered and protected, even in its physical and emotional bareness. Aguilar, who passed away in 2018 at the age of 58, left behind a body of work in which she exalted femmes, large, queer, Black and Brown bodies, her own among them.

Genesis Báez (b. 1990) is an artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Born in Massachusetts, Báez was raised in both the Northeast US and Puerto Rico. Genesis Báez’s video *Nubes (Clouds)* (2019) is a meditation on the act of looking and imagination, in nature. While making this film, the artist stood alongside individuals who expressed what they saw in the clouds. Watching Báez’s recording, we are privy to images of this same sky, a document of what has been seen. A pleasurable tension exists between engaging with these recorded stories, and the ability to see what the original participants saw as they cast their eyes skyward: “a duck,” “a bridge between two hemispheres,” “a dog with its tongue hanging out,” or “Napoleon.” Báez’s invitation to engage in visual exploration—to think and dream—ignites viewer’s own imaginative capacities. Viewers may attempt to find what these individuals saw, reading Báez’s moving images for clues of discoverable forms; they may also drift into personal reverie, finding other images in this outdoor projection as they stand under Marfa’s evening skies.

Teresa Baker (b. 1985) Through a mixed media practice combining artificial and natural materials, Baker creates abstracted landscapes that explore vast space, and how we move, see and explore within them. Baker’s lived experience on the vast Northern Plains of the United States, combined with deep appreciation of the cultural traditions of her Mindan/Hidatsa heritage, endows her work with depth and invention. Her tapestry-like Astroturf constructions are elaborated with sewn-in materials including acrylic yarn, spray paint, buffalo hide, bark, solder, and artificial sinew. While Baker establishes conversations
with histories of modern painting, she expands her making to consider how identity and intention can be imbued into seemingly inanimate objects. The dun browns of Good Weather’s (2021) and prickly surface resembles the color of dried grasses. With one curving bottom edge and a top corner that appears to have been lopped off, this shape could easily be viewed as a parcel of land seen from a bird’s eye view. Lengths of yarn, including one interrupted with bits of bark, resemble cartographic markings. Full of presence, Baker’s works reimagine and refresh traditional perceptions of the landscape genre.

**Christie Blizard** (b. 1978) was born in rural Indiana and lives and works in Texas. Blizard’s video works speak to their transformational and ecstatic experiences of terrestrial and extraterrestrial communication. In their digital animation *Cactus* (2020), a body and costume become a permeable and porous vessel that viewers can imagine inhabiting. A disembodied eye roves over, in and out of its cactus-clad boundaries. The work’s otherworldly soundtrack demonstrates the reach of Blizard’s multi-hyphenate talents as a visual artist, musician, maker, and seer. The video *Plant Songs* (2021-22) is an extension of Blizard’s more recent operatic work. It recalls the artist’s psychedelic experience of hearing plants and trees exclaim concerns about the Anthropocene while aiming their collective voices in song towards the sun. *Plant Songs* was filmed live and on-location in the woodland site where this inter-species communication unfolded. Blizard’s original score was recorded and interpreted by renowned vocalist Bronwyn White with costuming created by Blizard. Their collaboration offers an aria of ecofeminist care.

**Dineo Seshee Bopape** (b. 1981) lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa. Dineo Seshee Bopape was born in 1981 on a Sunday. *Lerato le le golo (…la go bloka bo kantle)* is a Sepedi language phrase which translates as “a great love… that has no outside.” Bopape’s contribution to this exhibition is a sculpture-as-incantation that brings together local materials, processes, and builders in the construction of an architecturally-scaled work at the heart-center of Ballroom’s North Gallery. Bopape’s work materially andconceptually grounds *Ecstatic Land*—this C-shaped space offers a place which to gather and reflect, look at and look out from. The soil and sand, the most elemental of materials, are from Marfa and have made their way into a mud mixture fortified with hay and healing herbs, smoothed by the hands of local artisans. It is as much an energy and intention as an object. As Bopape’s title suggests, this structure has no outside, no exclusions. It holds space and offers it freely to those who would use it.
Nancy Holt (1938–2014) is one of the most important figures of earth, land, and conceptual art movements. An innovator of site-specific installation and the moving image, she recalibrated the limits of art, expanding the places where art could be found and embracing the new media of her time. Holt/Smithson Foundation develops the creative legacies of both Nancy Holt and her partner Robert Smithson (1938-1973).

Making artworks that innovated the field of site-specificity and scrutinized systems that structure engagements with built and natural environments, Nancy Holt produced sculptures, installations, earthworks, drawings, and public sculpture commissions. Seen here for the first time since their initial presentations in the United States more than three decades ago, Ballroom Marfa is pleased to present *Electrical Lighting for Reading Room* (1985) and *Starfire* (1986) in its gallery and outdoor courtyard respectively. Holt’s *Systems* works make otherwise invisible forces (like electricity) materially present. She makes evident the varied infrastructures through which light illuminates the gallery: conduit, wiring, and bulbs become her sculptural medium. Holt’s view, more holistically, includes power plants and the coal, oil, or plutonium that fuels them, and by extension, humankind’s often extractive relationship to the natural world. Illumination secures Holt’s contribution as a fully-functioning reading room. Texts on artists and subjects germane to this exhibition are freely available, and the space’s seating is a design by participating artist Katherine Hubbard.

*Starfire* was originally presented in Anchorage, Alaska. Seen here for the first time since its initial presentation, the eight fire pits that are installed in Ballroom’s Courtyard are in the shape of the Big Dipper and the North Star. The work represents, in the artist’s words, “Far away suns brought down to Earth in flames. At the strike of a light fires fly up from below ground, brightening the twilight in an all-consuming blaze. Heat waves quiver, sparks soar, and long streaky flames stab the atmosphere. After a while, the fiery combustions begin to diminish, slowly burning down to a few flickers, and finally extinguish into darkness, leaving black holes in the bare land awaiting illumination.”

Katherine Hubbard (b. 1981) uses photography, writing and performance to plumb photography’s continuing significance. In her 2014 series *Four shoulders and thirty five percent everything else* Hubbard uses her body to demarcate the camera’s field-of-vision while exploring the device’s represen-
tative limits. *I/eye*, a photograph centering one of the multiple 4x5 cameras Hubbard used while on location in Utah, suggests the image’s capacity to look back. *Untitled (same sight invert)* records what happens when a camera is rotated vertically 180 degrees and its negative is double-exposed. With its slipped symmetry, the resulting image is simultaneously grounded, sensible, and disorienting. Hubbard’s investigation exposes photography’s technology, reach, and sublimity. She creates intimate images not only of what the camera sees, but *how* it sees: its capacity to record and its limits. In three additional silver gelatin prints, Hubbard uses her own body, posing before the camera—or multiple cameras—to push at the edges of their fields-of-vision. Frontal, front and back, side to side, still, moving. Hubbard appears in the center and at the margins of these conical intersections of vision, pushing at their limits.

Originally from Missouri, **Frank Duncan** arrived in the Big Bend in the early part of the 20th century, where he lived in Terlingua, Presidio and, eventually, Marfa. In 1916 he opened the Duncan Photography Company and produced thousands of images of the region, especially landscapes and ranching scenes. An archive of his work held by the Marfa and Presidio County Museum includes 2,200 panoramic and glass plate negatives that Katherine Hubbard studied during her 2016 residency at the Chinati Foundation; she selected the untitled photograph by Duncan included in *Ecstatic Land*. It appears to record a group of 22 soldiers standing at attention in an orderly line in front of a storage facility. More granular inspection of this print reveals that all is not what it seems: these men’s shadows and (almost im-)perceptible shifts in their heights reveal that they were positioned in a bowed line, an arc of a circle. Duncan would have created this image with a motorized panoramic camera that rotated as it exposed a long negative. It demonstrates his creativity, and reveals the photographer’s interests in the camera’s capacity to faithfully (or not) reproduce the world.

**ISUMA**, meaning ‘to think,’ is a collective of Inuit-owned related companies based since 1990 in Igloolik, Nunavut with a southern office in Montreal. *One Day in the Life of Noah Piugattuk* (2019), a feature film directed by Zacharias Kunuk of the collective Isuma, weaves a tapestry of space and place, time, belief, and conflict. The story reenacts a meeting between a group of seal hunters and a Canadian government official, who attempts to convince them to move into government settlement housing. This conversation between Piugattuk and Boss is brokered by an Inuit translator whose own restatements
reveal the tensions—and occasional humor—between ways of being in the world that are at odds. Shot on location in the same Kapuivik winter campsite where the original story unfolded on a spring day in 1961, the re-creation offers what Kunuk calls a vision of “truth and reconciliation as 21st century media art from the Inuit point of view.” With its layered temporalities, One Day highlights Inuit vision and resilience against the bleak backdrop of an assimilationist government agenda.

**Benny Merris** (b. 1978) is a New York-based artist from Boise, Idaho. In his ongoing series *An Other Another* (2012-present), Merris creates abstract paintings on his forearm that he documents in a range of natural settings. His excursions have taken him through forests, up mountains, into lakes and oceans, across verdant or snow-covered meadows, and into sun-baked deserts. Merris twists, poses and gestures with his arm, reaching out to interact with nature. Using his free hand to operate a camera, he snaps pictures of his painted skin in moments commemorating his embodied connection to these places. In *An Other Another 71*, irregular shapes in yellow ochre, white, orange, and olive-green jostle against each other atop the darkly-painted ground of his arm. Stretching upward from the bottom edge of the photograph, Merris’s splayed fingers echo a Joshua Tree’s leafy green spikes, and his forearm mirrors its trunk. Combining painting, photography, and performance, Merris amplifies and celebrates the relationship between place and self.

**Laura Ortman** (b. 1973), is a soloist musician, composer and vibrant collaborator, creating work across multiple platforms, including recorded albums, live performances, and filmic and artistic soundtracks. For *Ecstatic Land*, Ballroom Marfa’s North Gallery is periodically filled with Ortman’s musical compositions *Someday We’ll Be Together* (2011), *THE DISREMEMBER DANCER/DIG YOUR EYES* (2018), *SLIP SIP* and *RIVERS PIERCING TWIRL* (both 2020). An accomplished violinist and vocalist, Ortman “draws from noise, jazz, and classical music as much as it references avant-garde soundscapes and field recordings.” By turns ethereal, visceral, and atmospheric, Ortman’s compositions are transportive, an invitation to an energetic dimension that conveys the vastness of unencumbered spaces, and attention to the details that unfold in them: the whisper of wind through pine needles, plaintive cries, and festive gatherings where music is inevitably part of collective celebrations.
Alan Michelson (b. 1953) is a New York-based artist, curator, writer, lecturer and Mohawk member of the Six Nations of the Grand River. Michelson exposes invisible and under-recognized histories, foregrounding his ecological and Indigenous perspectives to address the lasting harms of settler colonialism. Michelson’s video *Wolf Nation* (2018) reinvents footage of a webcam video of a pack of red wolves. Native to the southeastern United States, but once common throughout the eastern and south central U.S., red wolf populations were decimated by modern predator control programs and the degradation and alteration of their natural habitats. Today, just over a dozen red wolves roam their native habitats in North Carolina, making them the most endangered wolves in the world. Michelson transforms surveillance footage of a pack of wolves on a low bluff, creating a wide format projection inspired by wampum belts. Traditionally beaded in purple and white, Michelson’s projection is “a wampum belt for the digital age, with its moving black and purple pixels standing in for beads.” The digital howls of *Wolf Nation*’s soundtrack were composed by Laura Ortman, whose work is also included in the exhibition.

Elle Pérez (b. 1989) lives and works in New York City. Pérez’s photographs bear witness to their interactions with individuals and moments of wonder they’ve found in the world, which they document in visceral, telling detail. The corporeal suggestiveness of *slip curve* (2021) suggests the coming-together of two (or more) bodies. Though its subject matter is heaped stones, the grazing of sunlight and shadowy indeterminacy of the image’s lower left corner establish palpable textures and temperatures that seem to invite touch and bodily analogue. Pérez’s sensual approach to image making is equally evident in their portraits. In the silver gelatin print *José Gabriel* (2019), the eponymous subject is submerged to their nose in a natural pool. Fixed by a piercing gaze, the figure’s interlaced fingers are distorted by the water’s reflective surface, and their legs fade into near obscurity in the water’s depths. Once again, Pérez delivers an evocative sensory scene: the warmth or coolness of the water, and the sound of rustling leaves or possible splashes draw us deeply in.

Sondra Perry (b. 1986) was born in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Perry’s video *imakelandartnow.com* (2015) is a precise, intentional riposte to the largely hetero-patriarchal, White male field of the movement Land Art that emerged in the 1960s and 70s and its attendant mythos. Perry’s video opens with a view of sun-drenched desert buttes and their surrounding scrublands.
Accompanied by Art of Noise’s 1985 ambient electronic track *Moments in Love*, the audio she’s chosen is anodyne and anticipatory. Soon, viewers notice a minute object floating and twisting through the blue sky. As it draws close, it becomes clear that this spinning white rectangle is a Facebook post excised from its digital page. Soon, the posting becomes legible as one authored by Sondra Perry, shouted in all caps: “I MAKE LAND ART NOW. PUT ME IN YOUR ALL WHITE MALE + NANCY HOLT LAND ART SHOW NEXT SPRING.” Perry’s video deftly argues that Land Art (and the landscape genre more broadly) are equally the domain of artists whose contributions have been historically excluded or overlooked.

**David Benjamin Sherry** (b. 1981) is an artist working to challenge and reinvigorate the American Western landscape tradition by examining our complex interconnection with the natural world, with an emphasis on queer identity, magic and color. Sherry’s large-scale monochromatic photographs celebrate protected landscapes in the American West. Interrogating historical lineages of landscape photography, Sherry proposes an inventive revision: rather than making traditional black-and-white images commonly associated with the medium, Sherry identifies a single resonant color to take the place of black. Vibrant color becomes a celebratory channel that “weaves in my sense of otherness as a queer person, and symbolically represents those who have been historically left out of the American West’s mythical narratives of rugged (straight, white, male) individualism.” With his saturated teal and violet images of Muley Point, Sherry expands the spectrum of photographic representation. *Ghost* (2022) signals the artist’s shift into painting. *Ghost*’s abstract composition references the celestial and geologic forms that have long captivated the artist. Rendered in carefully orchestrated hues, *Ghost* is indicative of a new and compelling direction for Sherry’s celebrations of the natural world.
Curator Biographies

Dean Daderko is a curator whose artist-centric approach is guided by their queer and feminist ethics. From 2010-2020, as Curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, they presented exhibitions with LaToya Ruby Frazier, Joan Jonas, Paul Ramírez Jonas, Nicolas Moufarrege, Wu Tsang and Fred Moten, Gina Pane, Haegue Yang, and others, often accompanied by new commissions. Their 2020 Curatorial Fellowship from the Étant donnés: The French American Fund for Contemporary Art supports ongoing research on the artist Claude Cahun and Bouchra Khalili. Ecstatic Land is the first exhibition in their multipart series The Weather Inside.

Daisy Nam is the Executive Director and Curator at Ballroom Marfa. Previously she was the assistant director at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University where she organized exhibitions, publications, and public programs working closely with artists to engage with the campus community and public at large. Curatorial residencies and fellowships include: Marcia Tucker Senior Research Fellow at the New Museum, New York (2020); Bellas Artes, Bataan, Philippines (2020); Surf Point in York, Maine (2019); Gwangju Biennale Foundation, Korea (2018). She holds a master’s degree in Curatorial and Critical Studies from Columbia University and a bachelor’s degree in Art History and Cinema Studies from New York University. She has taught at RISD, and lectured at Lesley University, Northeastern, SMFA/Tufts, SVA as a visiting critic. She co-edited a publication, Best! Letters from Asian Americans in the arts with Paper Monument in 2021.
Courtyard Screening Fall Schedule

**October 26–29, 2022**

**November 2–5, 2022**

**November 9–12, 2022**


Cast and Crew:
- Bronwyn White: the Singer and vocal arranger
- Ilse Mascorro: the Astronaut
- Alexzandria Turley: the Flower
- Justin Ferrell: Camera 1, set design, and costume assistant
- Christie Blizard: Camera 2, writer, director, props and costumes, editor, and composer

Indoor Screening:
Spring 2023 at Marfa Public Library


Written & Directed by: Zacharias Kunuk
Norman Cohn, Director of Writer, Photography, Editor
Jonathan Frantz, Producer, Co-Director of Photography, Co-Editor
Lucy Tulugarjuk, First Assistant Director
Susan Avingaq, Production Designer
Carol Kunuk, Production Supervisor
Samuel Cohn-Cousineau, Production Manager
Michelline Ammaq, Costume Designer
Featuring:
Apayata Kotierk as Noah Piugattuk
Kim Bodnia as Isumataq (Boss)
Benjamin Kunuk as Evaluarjuk (Ningiuq)

Spring 2023 outdoor screening schedule forthcoming.
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