

Widening the Lens: Photography, Ecology, and the Contemporary Landscape

Episode One: The Archive

VENUS WILLIAMS:

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Welcome to *Widening the Lens: Photography, Ecology, and the Contemporary Landscape*. I'm your host, Venus Williams.

I want to start by asking you to take a look at the photos on your phone.

Go ahead: give them a good scroll.

Amidst the selfies, the pictures of friends, kids, memorable meals, memorable 'fits, or maybe a great piece of art you saw at a museum, I'd wager to say that there's some form of landscape photography in there, too.

Maybe you've taken pictures of a recent vacation or a road trip, bikeride, or hike. Maybe you've taken pictures of your neighborhood. Or your friend's neighborhood. Or a highway. A skyline. A sunset. Or a local park.

When you think about the term "landscape photography," these might not be the first things that come to mind. And it's true: our everyday images of the places we see and the places we've been to may not be on a par with the sweeping, heroic landscapes you've seen in museums, or in, for example, photographs of Yosemite National Park by Ansel Adams. But I'm here to tell you that *your* landscape photographs count.

And that *you*, my friend, are a kind of landscape photographer, too.

This should actually come as no surprise. Just think about the quote "landscape" orientation of the camera on your phone—the long, wide frame meant to accommodate pictures of long, wide places. Places you've marveled at, or wondered about; places you fear might be disappearing; places you'd like to hold onto in some way.

For me, this includes the tennis court with the local flora of Miami or Wimbledon or wherever I happen to be, visible beyond the net. But also quiet moments on the beach. And places and experiences I want to remember from my travels: like the canals of Amsterdam winding through the city; the rocky shoreline of Sardinia; or the relics of the temple of Venus in Pompeii.

Beyond that landscape orientation, there are also an array of apps that are designed to help people take more quote “precise” landscape photos: apps to help you get a perfectly straight horizon line; apps that teach you about golden-hour-lighting for landscapes; and apps that create filters designed to mimic classic black-and-white film photography.

Indeed, with greater—and quicker—access to camera technology today than ever before, we *all* play a role in how land is visually represented and the kinds of stories those images may tell.

Because the other thing we need to talk about right off the bat here is that no picture of a place is neutral. Someone *chose* to take it. And that person behind the camera exists in their own historical and cultural context that influences how they see and record the world.

The stakes in all of this are actually pretty high. Because the connection between land and photography goes much deeper. And, in a lot of ways, much darker.

Photography has helped shape our natural world quite literally—especially here in the United States. It has helped those in power expel peoples, extract resources, and claim space for development and industrialization.

And in doing so, photography has also helped lay the groundwork for some of our most daunting ecological crises today.

There is, of course, a conservationist streak in all of this, too.

Landscape photography has created more awareness about the impact of human activity on the environment. It has helped us see and hopefully start to understand new places that move us, or that need our attention and care.

Landscape photography has also created a critical record of what we have lost. And maybe even asks us not to take for granted how fragile the environment is—and how powerful our actions really are.

But how does one begin to parse all of this? And if photography helped *get* us here, what role might it play in helping us envision where we might go next?

This is where we can turn to artists—artists for whom the tradition of landscape photography is an archive to be unearthed and disrupted, and a practice to be evolved, dismantled, and remade.

Artists are reframing things—quite literally. They’re posing new questions. And they’re drawing on their talents, their lenses, their communities, their memories, their fantasies, their journeys, their research, their personal archives, and *a//*their senses to chart the past, present, and potential futures of this complex relationship between photography, ecology, and land.

In these six episodes, you’ll hear from some of the artists whose forays in and around the land have caught our attention. But also from some of the writers, scholars, and scientists who have inspired their work.

First, let’s hear from two historians who consider the origins of landscape. And how it became such a central part of photography and, subsequently, the United States.

Rachael Delue: My name is Rachael DeLue. I'm a professor at Princeton University, and I am jointly appointed between the Art and Archaeology Department and the Efron Center for the Study of America. So that means I'm an art historian and a scholar of American studies, and I work mostly on material in the 19th century. I also spend a lot of time thinking about the intersection between the history of science and the history of arts. And of course, I have written a lot and I teach a lot about landscape representation.

Rachael Delue: I think humans are curious creatures and that curiosity manifests in wanting to see and wanting to go places and look. And I think images of place arise from that. And I think they also arise from the fact that people really do develop strong senses of place and connections to the places where they grew up, to places where significant events happened. And so this happens on a local human level. It also happens on a regional and national level.

Rachael Delue: Regions, nations, cultures develop really strong associations with place, and those places come to take on, those landscapes come to take on, a certain set of meanings. And I'm really interested in those meanings in and of themselves, but I'm also interested in how artists translate those meanings, translate those deep associations—individual, regional, national—into images of the landscape. And also what happens in the act of translation because it's never a one-to-one translation. I'm really interested in the transformations that come when someone takes a landscape with these deep associations and makes a picture of it.

Rachael Delue: Photography as a technology, when it came into being in the 19th century, was received in a really interesting way. People thought it was a marvel. But people also found it mysterious and odd and strange and weren't necessarily convinced at the outset of photography that it was a scientific or objective medium that would show the world as it really was—that idea came a little bit later. But I think photography with regard to landscape is interesting precisely because there's a sense that a photograph of the natural world shows the

natural world as it is. It is objective, it shows simply what it is there. And of course, that's not the case. A photograph produces an illusion of the real, but photographs often distort the real, and sometimes they're pure fictions.

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Rachael Delue: In the years after the Civil War, so in the 1860s and the 1870s, the U.S. government sent several surveys to Western landscapes, what it understood to be its public lands to figure out what was there, who was there and how it could be used, both to expand settlement, but also to utilize and exploit resources to amass capital. In the case of several of those expeditions, photographers were on board.

VENUS WILLIAMS: These photographers included Timothy O'Sullivan, who accompanied geologist Clarence King beginning in 1867 on an expedition surveying eastern Colorado to the California border. And William Henry Jackson, who, in 1871, accompanied geologist Ferdinand Vandeveer Hayden to what is now Yellowstone National Park.

And the photographs they took of these mountains, rivers, and lands *are* striking.

But they were also taken—and composed—with a particular agenda in mind.

Rachael Delue: And so the photographs they made were choreographed in order to tell a story. And that's really, in the end, what I find interesting about the relationship among photography, landscape, and the environment is the fact that a photograph can tell a story about landscape and sometimes that story is true, sometimes it's not, sometimes it's somewhere in the middle.

And that means photography I would say probably from the 1860s and 1870s on, photography has been a really useful social, political, and economic tool. And it's related to environmental history because as a social and political and economic tool, it made a case for the exploration and the settlement and the development of Western landscapes. And it did this under a veil of objectivity. And that veil of objectivity allowed the lands to be described as welcoming, as inviting, as habitable, and also empty. Which of course they weren't, because there were hundreds of thousands of people, indigenous communities, living in them, but by and large, the photographs didn't show those communities. So photography told a story in the 19th century about western landscapes, which ultimately created the conditions of, let's just say it, environmental catastrophe that we're facing today.

VENUS WILLIAMS: And by that, DeLue means development and extraction on a massive scale on and into the lands that European-American settlers used those photographs to claim.

Rachael Delue: Photography played a really decisive role in getting Anglo Europeans out West. And when the Anglo Europeans went West, they built things, and they dug up things, and they

blew up things, and they destroyed things. They also created a lot of really wonderful things, right? I mean, we can't talk about the history of the United States as only a trauma, although there was a lot of trauma involved.

But the things that folks did in the West, the development, the creation of railroads, the mining, the fishing industry, the transportation industry, all of these things drastically changed the landscape and in many cases changed it for the worse, at least in terms of the environment. Rivers were polluted, landscapes were decimated and those people who were caretakers of the landscape were displaced.

VENUS WILLIAMS: It wasn't just the existence of these photographs—and the perceived authority of those behind the lens—that gave them so much power. There was something specific happening in the aesthetics of these images that accounts for their outsized impact, too.

This is tied to the history of art more broadly. And the power of images to tell stories, to establish and bolster empires, and to dehumanize, vilify, and in some cases even justify eradicating those standing in the way of territorial expansion.

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Tyler Green: My name is Tyler Green. I'm a historian, author, critic. I produce and host the Modern Art Notes podcast. And I'm the co-founder and director of the Dark Water Project, a non-profit that works to create, enable, extend anti-racist investigations of art made in the United States.

I'm always flabbergasted by people who approach art as not having influence in fields outside art, or who approach art primarily as a commercial product, when the entire history of Europe and the United States, at least, tells us that art has impacts in the short, medium, and long term, and that's true here, too.

Tyler Green: In the United States, photography has played a key role in constructing the idea of the American nation. Photography has played a key role in constructing American memory. And very often, photography has played a key role in shaping the physical and legal construction of the American nation. Across the history of photography, particularly in 19th century photography, to see a place and to hold it in your hand was to imagine how your people, your nation, could engage with and ultimately control it.

Some of the pictures I think about a lot are made by Carleton Watkins—

VENUS WILLIAMS: Carleton Watkins was probably the most famous photographer working in the U.S. in the 19th century. He established himself by photographing Western lands for

potential mining and timber operations, and he was supported on expeditions throughout the region by his various patrons.

Watkins journeyed to and photographed the Yosemite Valley throughout the 1860s and 70s, creating now-iconic images of the site's mountainous terrain, sun-kissed, with shimmering freshwater streams below.

These Yosemite images circulated widely—including to the East Coast and, almost certainly, to Abraham Lincoln, who signed the Yosemite Valley Grant Act in 1864, which designated Yosemite as California public land to be preserved for, quote, “resort and recreation.” It became the third national park in 1890, following Yellowstone and Mackinac in the Midwest.

Tyler Green: Watkins' pictures of Yosemite convey this unusual sense of limitless possibility in one direction and topological drama in the other, in a way that has no precedent in the Eastern American experience. And it's this collision of openness and confinement that is to some degree the beauty-driven pitch for why Yosemite should be preserved.

VENUS WILLIAMS: But the sweeping vistas of Yosemite that Watkins captured tell us another story about the history of California, too.

Tyler Green: Historians typically regard the California Genocide as having run from 1846 to 1873. It's a process by which the largest and most diverse Native American population in North America was reduced by as much as 95 percent, possibly more.

When Watkins goes to Yosemite in 1861, he does a number of things and makes a number of pictures that will ultimately inform and motivate, for that matter, the federal government's preservation of Yosemite in 1864. And among the ways his pictures are impactful upon that process, in ways that extend and enforce the genocide, are he makes a picture in 1861 showing two structures in which Native American people, in this particular area traditionally the Ahwahnechee and other Southern Sierra Miwuk-speaking people, lived.

The last wave of European American violence that ran through Yosemite Valley early in the conduct of the genocide was a U. S. Army unit, in 1852. I think that almost certainly, when European American tourists start going to the valley in '54 and '55, they are worried about encountering Native Americans, but so far as we know never did. Watkins goes there in 1861, sees Native people have either returned or never left the valley, and there's a picture in which we can see their dwellings. Many other Watkins pictures show signs of anthropogenic burning, the ways in which the Ahwahnechee and their predecessors for millennia had maintained the Yosemite Valley to maximize it for agriculture, for hunting, for other life ways.

There's one picture of I think Cathedral Spires that has in the right foreground of the picture a burnout stump, except for it's taller than a stump. It's maybe eight feet tall, six feet tall.

VENUS WILLIAMS: This is a Carleton Watkins photograph of Cathedral Spires from 1861. If you look it up online on the Getty museum's website you can see, in the right foreground, what Green is talking about.

Tyler Green: In a number of these pictures, you cannot miss the signs that fire had happened in the place. But you can also tell from the pictures that the fire happened at a limited and specific scale. It was not the product of what we now readily understand as an out of control western wildfire. And of course what the Ahwahneechee and their predecessors in the Yosemite Valley were doing was maintaining the landscape in a way that allowed for the maximum production for their own use of flora and fauna, but were also preventing large-scale fire. That was part of the point.

Over the next couple years, thanks to Watkins's pictures and his relationships with other European Americans involved in the Yosemite idea, they realized Native people were back. And I say back because I think we should assume that they thought the Native people have been eradicated from the site. And they were worried about the impact that the Native American return to Yosemite Valley would have on the place. They saw all of those signs of burning and thought, 'oh, those people are burning this place down and destroying the beauty that we hold dear. We have to claim and reclaim this land for the United States, so we can keep them from doing that.' And we know this because Frederick Law Olmsted says so in his landmark report defining the National Park in 1865.

So here we have Watkins acting as an agent of the oppressing state, indirectly, of course, in making pictures that dehumanize Native people. And then in pictures of the land in Yosemite that are understood to show the impacts Native people had on the land, impacts that were threatening to European Americans and which will motivate the United States to create and enforce a new national pattern on that land, the National Park.

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VENUS WILLIAMS: For Professor Rachael DeLue, Watkins's photographs are also a kind of case study. They show us how landscape photography can prompt us to ask important questions. And how, when looking at *any* photograph, we have to be—as she puts it—smarter than the picture.

Rachael Delue: Photographs can tell us a lot, but there's a way in which photographs only give us the surface and not the depth. They don't give us the depth of history. They don't give us the depth of the many voices that inhabited that space. So when I look at a photograph by Carleton Watkins, I'm interested in what he's showing me, the viewer, but I'm also interested in that landscape itself. Where is it? Who lived in it before Watkins was there? Who lived in it after Watkins was there? What happened to it after Watkins was there?

So that's the 'what' part. And then the how part is how did the person who made the picture of the landscape go about doing so? What choices were made? What was included? What was left out? Was more attention drawn to a certain thing in the picture than that other thing?

Rachael Delue: I think it seems counterintuitive to think of a landscape as being choreographed or a photograph of a landscape being choreographed because, of course, you can't move mountains around, but you can do other things. The photographer can choose where that photographer stands. So the angle of vision from where the photograph is taken is really important.

But photographers in this period also doctored their images. We think of doctored photographs as a 20th or 21st century phenomenon. But that's not the case. Photographers, if they didn't like the clouds in the development process, they would eliminate them. If the sky was too dark, if the sky was too light, they would fix that as they were developing it. So they did have their own version of Photoshop.

And then the final part is the 'who'. Who made it, and what might—given who made it—the motivations of that making have been? So Carleton Watkins photographed the Columbia River Gorge for a certain set of reasons, and if we know who made a certain photograph, and it was Carleton Watkins, we have a sense of why it was made. Somebody else might photograph the Columbia River Gorge for a whole set of other reasons. And so knowing the 'who' is really important.

Another way to think about this is: who makes the picture and who didn't make pictures. In the 19th century, those were people in power, by and large, white people, not people who were enslaved, not people from indigenous communities. These were people who had a relationship of power formed by capital to the landscape. And so it's really important to think about who didn't contribute to this tradition and whose perspective and point of view and ways of seeing weren't included in this tradition. And that again brings us to contemporary photography, which tries to reformulate landscape from an alternative point of view, from a perspective not always represented in this habitual format that has come to be known as landscape capital 'L' in the U.S.

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Sky Hopinka: My name is Sky Hopinka. I'm a filmmaker, a writer and a photographer. And working in those different mediums has really allowed me to explore the different possibilities of indigeneity, of my cultural background and my language and my family, and trying to find the most appropriate way to look at these different forms and look at these different concepts.

I think photography was one of the first things that I really got into, sort of. I think I got into a lot of things, throughout my life, where it was like music in my teens. And when I first went to community college when I was 18, just out of high school, I took a black and white photography class. But I dropped out after the fourth or fifth week, so I never really learned how to process

and develop film. But it was something that really stuck with me, just thinking about composition and lighting and all these different elements.

And so I would take photographs a lot with just, you know, like a point and shoot camera or whatever. Throughout like my 20s, and it was using one of those point and shoot cameras that had a video function and I shot my very first short film on that. And that led me into filmmaking. And after years of working on short films, experimental films and using different cameras, I decided to return back to photography as a way to just have a different relationship to the camera. And that was really enjoyable. I got a 35 millimeter camera and I just shot a bunch of photographs. It wasn't until I got a Hasselblad and started shooting medium format—

VENUS WILLIAMS: Medium format meaning a camera that takes a larger negative, which can capture more detail and more tonal range than a 35 millimeter camera. It also has a square format as opposed to that wider, rectangular frame we've been talking about.

Sky Hopinka: —that I started to think more of how the photographs themselves exist in my larger body of work while looking at landscape and the history of landscape photography.

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Sky Hopinka: So I'm Ho-Chunk and Pechanga. I'm Ho-Chunk on my dad's side and our traditional homelands are in Wisconsin—the central part of the state, we call it the Weyauwega. And my mom is Pechanga from Southern California, Temecula, which is, inland in the mountains from San Diego. But I was born in Washington State and it was that being born in Washington in tribal homelands that weren't my own, you know, around cousins and family who were Lummi, and that's their homelands, and the sort of relationship that I developed and understood about being a visitor and a guest in different homelands was present from the start.

And even moving to the Coachella Valley, you know, those are Cahuilla lands and Chemehuevi lands. And had family that are part of those tribes. So in some ways, There's a strong sense of community in these different homelands and family that you have, friends that you have, but then there's also this feeling that these aren't my homelands, you know, and how then do you like seek out these communities? But then also how do you recognize yourself as a guest in these different places?

And so even returning to Wisconsin or spending time down in Temecula, it was, I don't know, it was a really good feeling. It was really a strange new feeling in some ways, you know? And you know, spending time with like, you know, my grandmother and my aunties in Wisconsin was really important and hearing stories about great grandparents that were born over here or over there, and this is where they lived, and this is like where we're from, you know, I think I really appreciated that connection. Or like even the life that I was living up to that point, moving around to a lot of different places, doing a lot of wandering, being a bit nomadic, all of that made me appreciate the experiences that I had visiting my family in Wisconsin.

And that's informed a series of works following. There's a film that I made called *Jáaji Approx, Jáaji Approximately*, that is me, with my camera, driving from Wisconsin to Seattle, then Seattle down to California, California back to the southwest up to Wisconsin, so this giant loop around the western part of the United States. And as I was filming these landscapes, as I was driving and wandering through them, the connection was made for me by the cassettes that I was listening to, these recordings of my dad singing songs that he made for me, just so that, you know, I could learn them too.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM *JÁAJI APPROX*.

Sky Hopinka: As I was listening to this music while driving, the connection between this idea of this person that I wasn't super close with felt palpable. And the landscape became an approximation for a shared relationship that we both had, maybe some 30 years apart as he was driving around the country, going from powwow to powwow, like here I am doing the same thing, listening to his music. And so in that way, the landscape became a vector or a relationship to a person or an idea of a person. And the same thing with the recordings, too. Like you can have a relationship with the landscape in these recordings and sometimes that serves as a proxy for the relationships that you wish that you had with people that might not be here anymore.

Part of the relationship that I have to the landscape too is also my relationship to how I hold a camera and how I move through the world with a camera. There's always something about this expectation that documentarians have, you know, placed on them to get the shot. Just like whatever you do, just try to get the shot, you know, maneuver your body and whatever, which way and put the camera in someone's face or just, yeah, I get the shot. And I was never comfortable with that because it just isn't part of, like, my personality, you know, it isn't part of who I am. And in some ways the filming landscapes and people at a distance is reflective of like my values or the way that I move through the world.

And I think that that presence and that absence or just that sort of distance then allows me to go deeper into the things that are about who I am and where I'm from. And the way that I was raised and the way that I view a camera and the way that I view people. And the way that I try to frame and try to compose.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM *JÁAJI APPROX*

VENUS WILLIAMS: As this recording of Hopinka's father plays, we see a variety of interstates and landscapes unfolding—sweeping views of mountains, valleys, blue sky, glass-like sheets of water. And we're never quite on solid footing. Unlike the 19th century landscape photographs we talked about earlier—images that assert themselves as objective, stable—Hopinka's images are intentionally *unstable*, sometimes even upside down. We sense his presence constantly—as he pans the view, as the camera moves with his body along a rocky path.

Sky Hopinka: I like the handheld shot. I don't use it all the time, but, like, when I do, I think about how that small movement, even if it's of a landscape, points to me behind the camera. And color is also very important to me. I like to have saturated colors and just like find whatever the white balance is that makes sense to the piece and really make things vibrant.

Part of that is just this relationship to the history of ethnographic film and the way that natives have been portrayed or this idea of ethnographic flatness, you know, like things have to be very flat in order to be viewed objectively. But I'm, I don't know, I'm very subjective in my positions around these things, and I'm not a documentarian, I'm not a journalist, and I really want to have vibrancy shown in these images that I make and have color shown.

Like, I like to think that I color-correct to how I remember things. And like that relationship to memory and the vibrancy of it aids in not only the actual memory of it, but in relating my experience that I have or had had to these different places or people to an audience that might be viewing them.

The history of landscape art, poetry, painting, photography, whatever, it's often very beautiful, you know, and it's very striking. It's a lot of the undertones and the context around it that is problematic and that is challenging when you think about how much of it is based on ideas of manifest destiny, and ideas of trying to capture the wilderness before it's gone, you know, the natural world that is Eden-like, that will be defiled by humans, or whatever it is.

It's loaded, and it also doesn't really account for the history of Native peoples in these lands, and also the care that Native peoples have had in maintaining and nourishing these lands. Settlers would go to California and think these are like pristine, beautiful lands made by God, you know, but no, there's like Natives clearing the lands and tending to them and doing controlled burns to make sure that the system was sustainable for, for food and for living and everything.

And so it's just, there's a lot of the romanticized relationships to not only the landscape, but Native peoples that are embedded in how we tend to view or understand landscape art, so it's like those histories that I'm also interested in working through with my own work or responding to, or even like neglecting in some ways, you know, and it's just like, how then do people live here now and how is that reflective of the values, but then also the histories, that they experienced.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM *FAINTING SPELLS*

Sky Hopinka: There was a film that I made called *Fainting Spells*, which, there's this one section of it where I'm with my friend Jordan and I film him walking through this controlled burn in Grand Ronde. And so the landscape is just burnt, you know, like there's nothing there. There's like fires burning and smoldering and I filmed him walking through that space and that wasn't important for me thinking about, you know, the fires in the West and in the North and, you know, how important land management is, you know, it's like the fire, the landscape looks

devastated, but it's not, you know, this is a controlled burn done by the tribe in order to like maintain a healthy forest and ecosystem.

And so I think about that scene a lot and even like when I went back there like a few years later, it's just totally green and beautiful and there's trees growing and everything and it's just how important it is to remember that as well as just the stewardship of the land by Native peoples and the land that they live in and how much of that is needed right now, especially with so much changing in the climate and in the world around us.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM *THE ISLAND WEIGHTS*

The Island Weights: *Wijirawaséwe. I was sad the other day, looking for the Island Weights. The earth is an island that has gone taut against the tethers holding it in place. And the weights are tired. They're old and they're gone, going to the place where the river swallows the lake. River child sings a song and we drop our prayers into the blue-black water. What will you make of my body? What will you make of my body? Someday, eventually, we'll find the others, alone and along the dark shores.*

Sky Hopinka: I've been thinking about *The Island Weights* for a long time. It's part of our Ho-Chunk creation story. And these beings, these water serpents, and the role that they play in keeping the world steady. There's four of them in the north, the south, the east, and the west, and it's like our four directions. And there's these water spirits that were placed there to help maintain a sense of balance in the world after creation. And I was thinking about them while driving around Wisconsin and I ended up writing this poem titled *The Island Weights* about seeking them, about searching for them. And I filmed in these different locations in Wisconsin, along the Mississippi. And all that came together in such a way where it was this sort of poetic movement through these different landscapes, looking for the Island Weights, seeking them out and seeing how they're doing, where they are. And, in some ways, it's a prayer, it's a hope to rejuvenate them. Maybe they've been missing or maybe they've been old and maybe they've been ill, I don't know. But a way to try to restore some sort of balance or try to understand the sort of chaos in the world that we're living in right now.

The Island Weights: *Still again, the surface is calm and an Island Weight emerges. And tells you: I'm tired of being temporary. I'm tired of an eventually.*

VENUS WILLIAMS: *The Island Weights* is a video work set mostly to Hopinka's narration. In it, we see two sets of visuals unfold side by side as we follow Hopinka's search for these ancient water serpents throughout Ho-Chunk nation and beyond. The journey crosses land and water and, in one sequence, America's biggest mall. Hopinka created a series of related photographs, called *Cowboy Mouth*, that literally frame some of these views. He etched text from the poem on top of the images in ways that once again remind us that any photograph is a subjective view—something framed and authored; and, in Hopinka's case, something deeply personal, too.

Sky Hopinka: In *Cowboy Month 1*, there's an image of these rocks along the ocean. I have the text etched around the edge of the image in the middle of the left hand side, and kind of going around the bottom, and then up around this rock. And so, it's outlining this rock that's in the foreground, this large rock, but it's also protecting it in some sort of way.

I don't know. I mean, that's like how I think about it. I don't know why, but that's like what comes to mind when I think about what the text is doing on the image. And in another one in *Cowboy Mouth 2*, it's of a forest in the Northwest, and it's like a, I don't know, it's like a dark photograph with, with, in that really beautiful sort of gray Pacific Northwest kind of way, you know, like I mean I love the grayness of the Northwest in the rain, and it's kind of foggy in the backgrounds, and in that too I have the text going around the edge of the frame but then I also have it going down two different tree trunks and its roots into the ground. And that for me, like offers another way of connection to the photograph or the image or the subjects, which is this forest in these trees. And ways to literally inscribe them with these words that I was writing. Cause you know, they're at an angle and they're kind of like not aligned perfectly.

And I like that too. Like how it's just my shorthand, you know, handwriting, I'm not trying to make it too pretty or too perfect. It's just like how I write cursive and that quickness as well, like offers, you know, some sense of legibility, but also unintelligibility. You know, it's like it's hard to turn your head upside down and read this text that's written kind of small, but it's also available in the text of *The Island Weights* too if you want to understand what it is or what it is that I'm writing.

AUDIO EXCERPT FROM *THE ISLAND WEIGHTS*

The Island Weights: *The vault of the sky is held down by four points, canvas stretched further than you or I or they could see. Yet it flails now. As the earth began to shake again, so have the firmaments. Flustered and anxious for death to come again. The eldest lies, waiting for our hearts to become full again. They ran away and we ran away, chasing a history forgotten but not forgiven. Grating against those old quarts pillars by a subterranean dreamer. Not yet woken by our pleas, nor devotion.*

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Sky Hopinka: I think in the world that we live in, we're nothing if not aware of much weight and baggage and problems there are and the ways that the technologies that we have, the ways that we view the world, the things that we talk about, and the things that we don't or try to ignore. All that can be contained in a photograph. The question is like, what do you want to do with that? It's like with anything, like a photograph can be just a photograph, but it's how we contextualize it and how we support it or deconstruct it that gives it meaning.

Like in these films, I don't want just like one pretty image after another. You know, that's not where the strength or the beauty of the image lies. It's in the ways that it's supported by other narratives that help counteract those expectations that an audience might have when they're

looking at a film or looking at a video and just see something beautiful. You know, it's like, how do you make it ugly? How do you make it complicated? And how do you make it have weight and meaning? I think that's like where these things can contain more.

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VENUS WILLIAMS: Thank you all so much for listening to our very first episode of Widening the Lens. And many thanks to Professor Rachael DeLue, Tyler Green, and Sky Hopinka. You heard excerpts from Hopinka's films *Jáaji Approx*, from 2015, *Fainting Spells*, from 2018, and *The Island Weights*, from 2021. You can check out a new essay by Professor DeLue in *Widening the Lens: Photography, Ecology, and the Contemporary Landscape*, a publication from Carnegie Museum of Art. And Tyler Green's publications include *Carleton Watkins: Making the West American*, published by University of California Press. His book *Claiming Yosemite: The Civil War, the California Genocide, and the Invention of National Parks* is forthcoming.

Widening the Lens: Photography, Ecology, and the Contemporary Landscape is a production of the Hillman Photography Initiative at Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. For more information on the people and ideas featured in this episode, please visit carnegieart.org/podcast.

I'm Venus Williams. See you next time.