

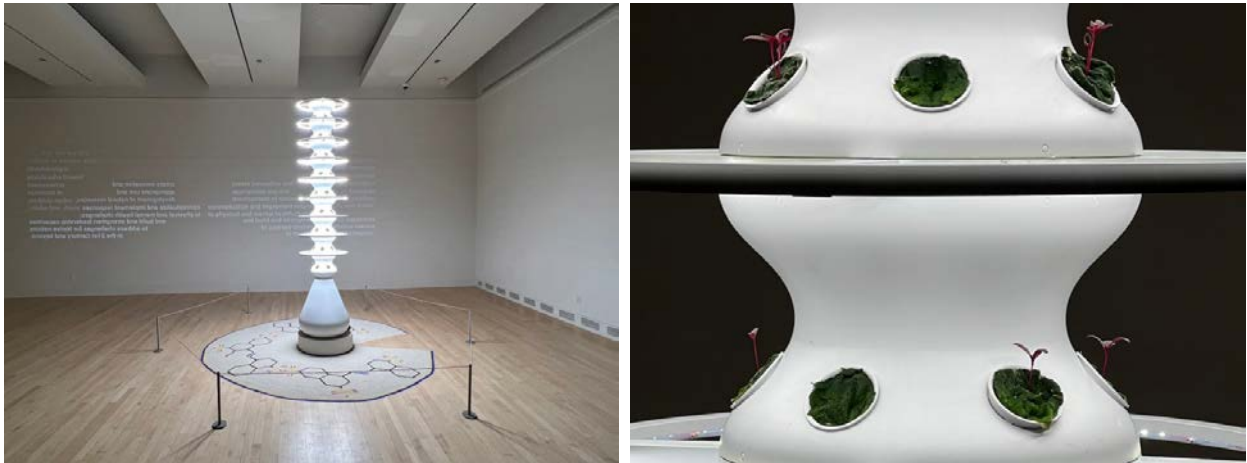
# HYPERALLERGIC

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## New Generation of Land Artists Embodies a Call for Action

From sites to studios to systems, the nature of earthworks has changed since the 1960s and '70s.

[Lynn Trimble](#) July 14, 2022



Steven Yazzie, “Yuméweuš” (2022), hydroponics tower, plants, sand, video (photo Lynn Trimble/Hyperallergic)

TEMPE, AZ — A monumental hydroponics tower by interdisciplinary artist Steven Yazzie (Diné/Laguna Pueblo) glows with a bright white light inside a gallery space at Arizona State University (ASU) Art Museum, where its spiral form echoes Robert Smithson’s renowned “Spiral Jetty.” It’s been just over half a century since Smithson created his earthwork sculpture on the northeastern shore of the Great Salt Lake in Utah, where it remains a marker for the ecologically focused Land Art movement launched during the 1960s.

Titled “Yuméweuš” (2022), Yazzie’s tower bears amaranth plants grown using seeds sourced from [Native Seeds/SEARCH](#) in Tucson. Working inside the museum, which is located on the university’s Tempe campus, Yazzie surrounded the base of the totemic cylindrical garden with a sand painting that combines Native American and scientific imagery. On a nearby wall, he’s projected excerpts from the land acknowledgment used by ASU and Tempe, alluding to the violence of settler colonialism and its impacts on Indigenous cultures.

Yazzie is one of eight artists featured in *New Earthworks*, an exhibition that brings historic, cultural, social, and economic underpinnings of contemporary Land Art into three gallery spaces, allowing visitors to explore connections between human activity and changes to the earth without directly encountering monumental works of traditional Land Art in their natural settings. The exhibition includes primarily sculpture, photographs, videos, and drawings, along with texts and objects created by artists in their studios. All were created during the last decade, providing a glimpse into how artists have interfaced with ecologies since early Land Art days.

The exhibition is curated by Mark Dion, a New York-based artist whose multidisciplinary practice incorporates scientific methodologies, and Heather Sealy Lineberry, curator emeritus for ASU Art Museum. They present works in three broad groups: research-based installations, works addressing the ways people claim or reclaim space, and projects facilitating concrete actions towards ecological justice.



Installation view of Hope Ginsburg, Matt Flowers, Joshua Quarles, “Swirling” (2020), video installation with sound, in *New Earthworks* (left), and David Brooks, “Death Mask for Landscape” (right), April–September 2022, Arizona State University Art Museum (photo by Tim Trumble)

Artworks demonstrating strong connections to field research lay the foundation for the exhibition. On three large projection screens hanging in a triangle around three small wooden stools, and a smaller monitor nearby, a diver is shown swimming in the ocean with a white plastic laundry basket filled with coral. Titled “Swirling” (2020), the four-channel video is the work of Virginia-based artist Hope Ginsburg, diver and videographer Matt Flowers, and composer Joshua Quarles. While showing the practice of coral farming and reef restoration, they suggest cooperation between species as an essential element of resiliency for all life forms and ecosystems.

Also in this first gallery space, Sam Van Aken’s “Peach Strand” (2017), comprising 1,000 peach seeds on cotton thread, hangs on a white wall next to the New York-based artist’s “Herbarium Specimens” (2015–2021), which includes fruit tree specimens shown in horizontal display cases or shelved in black boxes. The artist has also planted and sculpted a peach tree on the ASU campus as part of the exhibition.

This gallery houses several works by another New York-based artist, David Brooks, who explores biodiversity in the Amazon forest using drone footage that captures the impacts of extraction. Five aluminum cast sculptures from his series “Death Mask for Landscape” (2022) are among them. Grouped into floor installations, the pieces capture portions of the Amazon just before they were removed, speaking to the disappearance of additional landscapes at the hands of humankind.

Climbing a flight of concrete stairs, viewers reach a large gallery on the top level of the museum, where they’re confronted by artworks that set an entirely different tone. The size and materiality of Scott Hocking’s “Arkansas Traveler” sculpture (2020) connotes the scale of environmental and cultural destruction wrought by the drive for westward expansion. The Michigan-based artist built his piece with a 40-foot-tall steel windmill and fiberglass fishing boat, which he covered in a black paint made with charred animal bones. Carolina Caycedo’s “Milk” sculpture (2018) made with materials including a tar-dipped artisanal fishing net hangs near a small opening to a more intimate part of the gallery, where additional works by the Los Angeles-based artist are on view.



Installation view of Scott Hocking, “Arkansas Traveler” (2020), found steel and fiberglass (left) and Desert ArtLAB, “Mobile ECO-STUDIO” (2013–2022), vehicle, plantings, tools, uniforms, video, text (right), in *New Earthworks*, April–September 2022, Arizona State University Art Museum (photo by Tim Trumble)

In this space, Caycedo’s single-channel video titled “Apariciones/Apparitions” (2018) shows Brown, Black, and LGBTQ+ dancers filling a historically White space, the Huntington Library, Art Museum and Botanical Gardens near Los Angeles, with movement culled from African and Indigenous dance. The piece is particularly effective in highlighting the ways contemporary artists are raising awareness about the intersections of ecological and cultural destruction, while broadening conceptions about the nature of earthworks.

Before heading down a flight of concrete stairs on the opposite side of the museum, viewers see a timeline of Land Art installations spanning over 50 years, which sets the exhibited artworks in their art historical context.

A third gallery contains works that focus directly on taking action. In addition to Yazzie's hydroponics tower, the space holds Mary Mattingly's "Ecotopian Library" (2020–2022) conceived as a tool kit for reimagining futures amid climate change. The library includes books, video, oral history, artifacts, and more. The gallery also houses the "Mobile ECO-STUDIO" (2013–2022) installation by desert ArtLAB, a Colorado-based arts collaborative including artists April Bojorquez and Matt Garcia, whose work centers the practical application of Indigenous and Chicana knowledge to food sovereignty and ecological justice.

Desert ArtLAB will present educational performances in Phoenix neighborhoods during the exhibition's run, and the "Ecotopian Library" will continue to expand as artists, Indigenous knowledge holders, scientists, and others in the region contribute their stories, digital files, and objects. After the show closes, Yazzie plans to donate his hydroponics tower to [Phoenix Indian Center](#), a nonprofit that serves the American Indian community.

The artists included in *New Earthworks* are embodying a call to action included in the Desert ArtLAB installation, where bold text on the wall is described as "Huehuetlatolli/Words of the Elders." The last thing viewers encounter as they exit the gallery, the words read in part: "Act! Take care of the things of the earth."

*New Earthworks continues at Arizona State University Art Museum (51 East 10th Street, Tempe, Arizona) through September 25. The exhibition was curated by Mark Dion and Heather Sealy Lineberry, ASU Art Museum curator emeritus.*

Lynn Trimble is an award-winning writer based in Arizona who specializes in arts reporting and arts criticism for regional and national publications.