

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

BEN SCHOENBURG, MFA, PRINTMAKING
UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Through printmaking, I confront colonial narratives of the American West. Maps of specific, geographic sites along with sketches and notes from my experience in those places inform my inquiry. I engage with maps to intervene on the narratives they create and validate. American expansionist maps and their modern iterations support the narratives of Manifest Destiny, often by imposing names and boundaries onto the land they purport to represent. I create maps that subvert these narratives by holding space for omitted histories and ecological perspectives that upend the authoritative status of maps, in turn allowing the opportunity for new narratives to emerge. Similarly, my prints are layers within the inexhaustible possibilities of a place which question the dominant stories of heroic expansion into the American West. Woven into each print is an account of my own experience in a place, providing an emotionally vulnerable first-person narrative that examines my own racism, masculinity, and privilege. This account counters the patriarchal, racist, and extractive capitalist narratives of American westward expansion.

My work is rooted in printmaking and I have begun to incorporate objects made from natural materials. For example, the construction of hats from plants facilitated my larger investigation of place weaving together history, ecology, and the personal. The experience of creating an object in a specific place spurs me to make prints. However, the creation of an object in a particular place is only one layer. I additionally weave layers of commentary on the history of the American West and the ecology of the place I am working. The 'how to' component of my prints invites viewers into an open-ended web in which they are free to connect the disparate ideas for themselves. I see my prints as maps that support the viewer in their own narratives as opposed to the dominant maps which seek to put forward one perspective.

In *how to make a hat part 1*, I sewed a 'cowboy' hat from the leaves of elkweed while on the Land Arts of the American West program in the Valle Vidal National Forest located in northern New Mexico. The print contains an assemblage of ideas and emotions I experienced while making the hat. *How to make a hat for a future (water harvester)* is a response to my time in the Gila National Forest under the same parameters of a 'how to' guide. I harvested and processed yucca fiber and weaved them into a hat. The functionality of the yucca hat led me to think about how I could learn to respond to drought, erosion, and hotter, drier conditions from this arid-adapted plant. The final piece in the series, *how to make a hat part 3*, reflects on my time spent in the Chiricahua Mountains in southeastern Arizona. Lastly, I created *Notes from El Camino Diablo* after a bike trip along a route of the same in southwestern Arizona. Although from different locations and times, both prints tie into the Mexico/US border and include narratives I created from the viewpoint of more-than-human beings; the Sonoran Pronghorn and Agave Palmeri. In each, I delve into my own fallible understanding of borders as objective and static demarcations. I engage with Baudrillard's claim that "it is the map that engenders the territory" in order to undermine the maps and narratives that obfuscate fact and myth regarding the Mexico/US border.¹ Through printmaking, I rethink the role of mapmaking in the narratives of American expansion that unquestioningly presents the border with Mexico as a natural boundary.

¹ Jean Baudrillard and Mark Poster. *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

HEMISPHERE



Ben Schoenburg, *how to make a hat part 1*, 2019, *Frasera speciosa*/Elkwood leaves and thread.

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Ben Schoenburg, how to make a hat part 1, 2019, lithograph.

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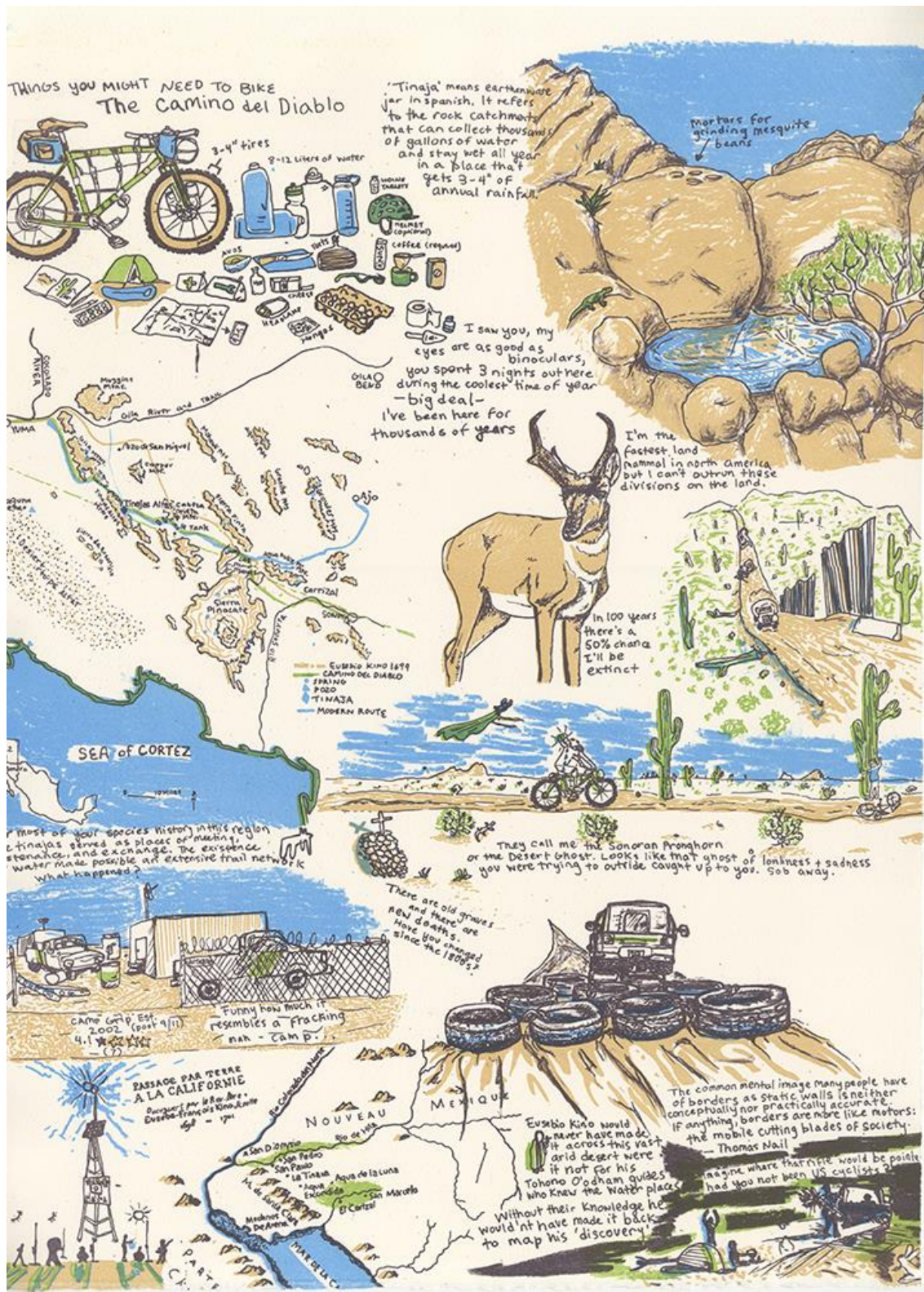
Ben Schoenburg, *how to make a hat for a future (water harvester)*, 2019, lithograph.

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Ben Schoenburg, *how to make a hat part 3*, 2019, lithograph.

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Ben Schoenburg, Notes from El Camino Diablo, 2020, lithograph.