

Curators and Director Statements for *Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande* Contemporary Artists Respond



With visual arts, music, performances, stories, and conversations, informed by science and Indigenous ecological knowledge, *Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande* offers a regional model of building bridges (not walls) across nations, peoples, disciplines and creative practices—to address a global crisis—the crisis of biological annihilation, which includes human-caused extinctions, die-offs and massacres of nonhuman kin with whom we share this Earth. It is arguably the most expansive (if you count casualties) and the most challenging (if you consider mitigation) crisis of our time. This region-wide initiative is situated in the fabled Rio Grande basin and the associated Mexico-US borderland, which is one of the most biologically diverse and culturally vibrant places in North America, and at the same time, one of the most endangered, facing numerous threats, including climate breakdown, ongoing fossil fuels capitalism and nuclear colonialism, and the proposed expansion of the border wall. These and other drivers are causing, contributing to, and threatening to amplify the ongoing biological crisis. *Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande* aims to raise public awareness about ecological vitality and the biological crisis, acknowledge past and present injustices, and inspire collective actions for multispecies justice.

— Subhankar Banerjee, Co-Curator
Lannan Chair & Professor of Art & Ecology, University of New Mexico



Welcome to *Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande*, an exhibition and series of public programs in the region of the Rio Grande watershed. Developed by 516 ARTS in partnership with the Art & Ecology Program at the University of New Mexico, this expansive project explores how the river connects us across borders and disciplines, and is designed to provide education and spur dialogue around pressing ecological issues of our time. The global biological crisis is described in a recent [UN Report](#) warning that species extinction rates are accelerating at an alarming pace. In response, a [New York Times editorial](#) emphasizes, “Biodiversity—a word encompassing all living flora and fauna—is declining faster than at any time in human history,” estimating that “around 1 million species already face extinction, many within decades, unless the world takes transformative action to save natural systems.” Centering around the exhibition at 516 ARTS—subtitled *Contemporary Artists Respond*—the regional collaboration features an array of ways to engage, from forums to performances, presented by partner venues across the arts, science, technology, and activism. Bringing all of these components together represents an effort to address in meaningful ways the crisis that is rapidly changing life as we know it. Please join us!

— Suzanne Sbarge
Executive Director, 516 ARTS

Thinking Regionally

Albuquerque
Carlsbad
Ciudad Juárez
Denver
El Paso
Jemez Pueblo
Las Cruces
Marfa
Roswell
Taos



Species in Peril Along the Rio Grande began as a discussion about how to approach organizing an art exhibition addressing species that are in crisis. We wanted to focus our efforts specifically on species rather than delve into the larger causes and impacts of climate change.

Initially, the project was conceived as way to explore species loss on a national and global scale but we realized that our efforts would have more impact if we engaged with local artists, focused on our own geographic area, and made the process collaborative and interdisciplinary. Rather than select solely existing work, we invited a group of artists who live in the Rio Grande region to participate in a series of discussions that brought together curators, artists, scientists, community groups, nonprofits, and professors. Despite the overwhelming scientific information that is available, many people simply are not aware of what is happening in our own backyard. The bird die-off in the Pecos, the loss of wildflowers in Colorado, and the threats to species due to barriers being built on the US-Mexico border are just a few examples.

Together we grappled not only with the scientific studies but also the environmental, and emotional toll that the rapid decrease of species and biodiversity has taken on us and the planet. Our approach is unique in that we are supporting local artists and asking them to really engage with species loss in a way that will turn the studies into stories, which invite viewers to become more aware of what is happening to the living world around us. Our goal was to facilitate the process in such a way that the artwork produced would not simply be a documentation of the species themselves, but would serve as larger reflections on the crisis as it is embedded in art, culture, history, politics, and of course science. We hope that by raising awareness, the alliances and networks that were formed through this project will be vehicles through which to build the kind of acknowledgement and understanding that can lead to action.

— Josie Lopez, Co-Curator
Curator of Art, Albuquerque Museum

ARTISTS:

Michael P. Berman
Kaitlin Bryson & Hollis Moore
laura c carlson
Agnes Chavez
Suzi Davidoff
Catalina Delgado Trunk
Marisa Demarco, Dylan McLaughlin & Jessica Zeglin
Nina Elder
Jaque Fragua
Jessica Gross
Cannupa Hanska Luger
c marquez
Ruben Olguin
Zeke Peña
Daisy Quezada
Nicasio Romero
Marcia I. Santos
Janette Terrazas
Mary Tsiongas & Jennifer Owen-White