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# Aestheticising the Blackfoot Valley (Montana, USA), or How to Reconcile the Mining Frontier and the Eco-Frontier

Sylvain Guyot and Gabrielle Saumon

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## Introduction

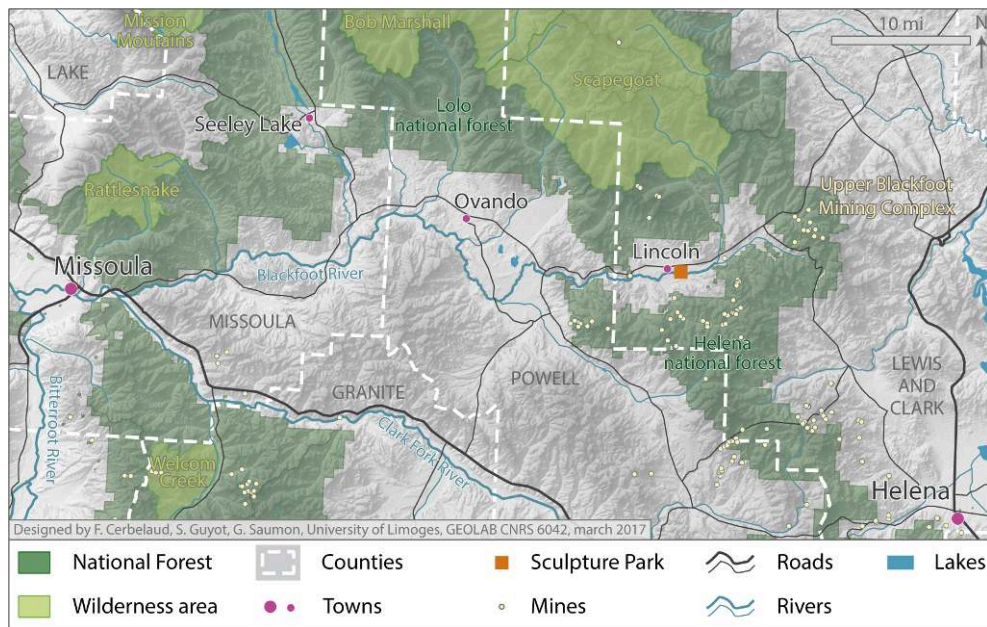
- <sup>1</sup> This article concerns a mountainous area, the Blackfoot Valley in western Montana<sup>1</sup> (in the United States), which is typified by a problematic tension between extraction and protection that is also found in other mountain areas elsewhere in the world (the Andes, the Alps). The mountain societies caught up in such antithetical processes are divided and marked by social oppositions that are detrimental to a peaceful management of the territory. The hypothesis presented here is that a process of *mise en art*, defined as a process of site-specific artistic creation and installation harmonised with the mountain space (Guyot, 2015; see also Guyot's introduction to this issue), makes it possible to forge new socio-political connections between seemingly irreconcilable activities. *Mise en art* makes it possible to transform, whether marginally or more profoundly, the negative representations of particular mountainous areas ("grazing mountain", "stricken valley", "degraded area") by re-investing them with aesthetic qualities, as was done in the mountains of France's Auvergne region with the

*Horizons Arts-Nature en Sancy* project and in the backcountry of Digne-les-Bains with the *Refuges d'Art* project (see introductory article).

- 2 Art may thus be a tool for calming or inflaming conflictual situations, as well as a means for raising awareness and recognition of interrelated natural and cultural heritage in mountain areas and revitalising them. We will use the concept of “frontiers” (Guyot, 2012) – in this case, mining and ecological frontiers – to shed light on the ways in which different uses of nature clash in space and over time.
- 3 The concepts of mining frontier and eco-frontier are integral to the notions of frontier and wilderness and have particular resonance in the western United States (Guyot, 2011). In the 19th century, Western conquest was fed as much by mining as it was by the fascination for untamed nature that led to protective measures as early as the 1870s: Wilderness and the frontier are fertile grounds for American identity (Turner, 1920; Ridge, 1991; Nash, 2001; Lewis, 2007), and the pioneers’ conquest of the West lies at the heart of the nation-building process. These two notions are intrinsically related: The wilderness is what remains of untamed nature on the other side of the frontier (Saumon, 2016 and forthcoming). Although wilderness and frontier, which originate in the halting first steps of the history of the American West, are always central to territorial dynamics, mining and eco-frontiers are cyclical and have experienced periods of opening and closure (Guyot, 2012 & 2015). The Blackfoot Valley mining frontier peaked in the 1940s but seems to persist (post-mining management, new demands); the eco-frontier, despite an initial cycle early in the 20th century, has been booming the past 20 years. Consequently, the American West has undergone considerable change rooted in how the environment is being re-invested today, going from a natural resource for extraction according to a productivist perspective to a landscape to be promoted, in a post-productivist perspective. This re-interpretation of the nature of the West is the basis for the “Old West’s” transformation into the “New West” (Power & Barrett, 2001; Travis, 2007; Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010), meaning the new attraction of a territory that is once again being conquered by newcomers and gentrifiers (Saumon, forthcoming). The *mise en art* process, materialised by the *Blackfoot Pathways, Sculpting the Wild* initiative, is in line with the New West’s post-industrial logic but builds bridges of memory and heritage between the relevant actors, as well as with the Old West. While it does allow spatial reconciliation of the mining frontier on the path to heritagisation and the thriving eco-frontier, does it really foster the reconciliation of mountain populations with the wide range of socio-economic trajectories?
- 4 The first part of this paper addresses the Blackfoot Valley as a mountain valley in transition, symbolising the Old West but becoming an icon of the New West, between frontline and shared space. The second part is devoted to *mise en art* as a factor of territorial reconciliation of the Old and New Wests.

## The Blackfoot Valley, part of the Rockies in transition

- 5 The Blackfoot Valley is in the northern Rocky Mountains on the western side of the continental divide, between Missoula to the west and Helena to the east (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The Blackfoot Valley (Montana, United States)**

Designed by S. Guyot, G. Saumon, F. Cerbelaud, Université de Limoges, GEOLAB CNRS 6042, march 2017.

- 6 While it is less known to foreign tourists than Glacier National Park farther north, it was the setting for Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* (1976), adapted into a film by Robert Redford (1992). A genuine driver for amenity migration, fly fishing has become a full-fledged tourist industry following the success of these nature tales. A major site for mining, logging and cattle ranching, the valley's environmental amenities are now attracting a new, well-off population with high cultural capital.

### A valley emblematic of the Old West

- 7 Mining, logging and ranching are the three pillars of the Old West. These activities led to the emergence of a mountain settler society that is very attached to raw materials coming from the soil and sub-soil (Travis, 2007) and sustained by cowboy stories.
- 8 The 1865 discovery of gold in the valley set off a boom in the vicinity of Lincoln, but the mining frontier in this part of the Rockies was mainly focused on zinc and lead, found in the upriver portion of the valley (the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex). Mining in the area peaked in the 1940s because of the manufacture of missiles and ammunition for the war. After that, mining was repeatedly halted and restarted, with minimal precautions for watershed protection. Mike Horse Dam, built in 1941 to contain polluted mine tailings in an artificial lake, was breached on 19 June 1975, which led to severe pollution of the Blackfoot River. Management of this pollution and the dismantling and redevelopment of mines is still a current issue, as attests the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's March 2016 decision to launch the mining complex's "final cleanup".<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s, another major mining project, the McDonald Gold Project, hit the headlines and resuscitated the local mining frontier spirit amid much controversy.

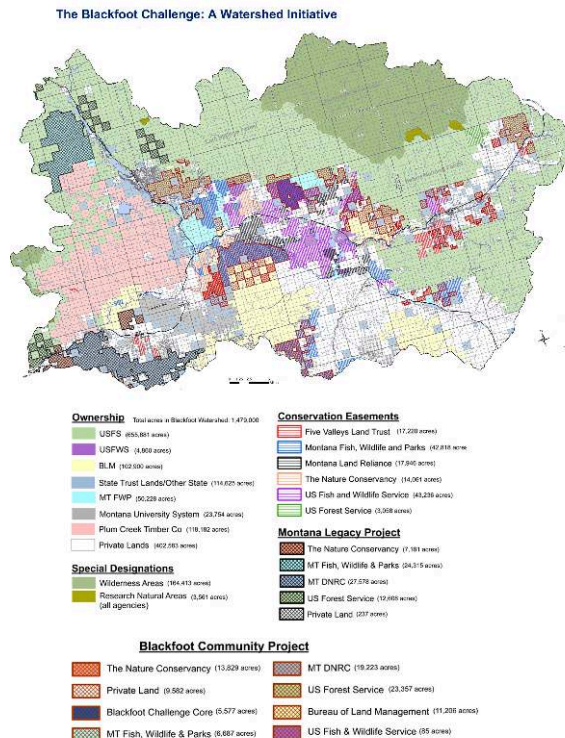
- 9 Logging (both harvesting and milling) accompanied mining in the Helena and Lolo National Forests, which the federal government established in 1906. Along with it came massive sawmills that have mostly since closed, although Blackfoot Timber Products was recently re-opened using wood brought in from elsewhere.
- 10 Cattle rearing developed into a significant business on vast ranches located in the middle of the valley, near Ovando. Some are still in operation to this day, although most have been converted into amenity ranches<sup>3</sup> (Gill et al. 2010; Woods, 2016) owned by gentrifiers motivated by a desire for environmental amenities and their protection.
- 11 The imprint of these three activities is still considerable on the landscape, residents and mindsets in the Blackfoot Valley, even if they appear to be waning. With the creation of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area<sup>4</sup> in 1964 and the Scapegoat Wilderness Area in 1972,<sup>5</sup> along with residents' growing awareness of the river's pollution in 1976, more environmental thinking has taken root in this part of the Rocky Mountains, in step with a steady arrival of new populations bearing renewed images of the land and environment.

## A valley emblematic of the New West

- 12 There has been a radical demographic shift of the American West, well-documented in academic literature: Compared with the national demographic growth rate of 13.2%, the 11 Western states grew 20% in the 1990s, meaning 10.2 million new arrivals, predominantly in non-metropolitan counties (Travis 2007). This trend holds true in Lewis and Clark county, which contains the upper Blackfoot Valley: +16.25% between 2000 and 2014, with a distinct over-representation of higher socio-professional categories in relation to the rest of the country (45.1% as compared with 36.4% nationwide; Headwaters Economics, 2016). This mobility is related to back-to-nature movements dating to the 1970s: In the late 1980s, Laurence A.G. Moss developed the concept of amenity migration to describe such mobility motivated by the search for environmental amenities (Glorioso & Moss, 2011).
- 13 If the Old West is associated with the mining frontier, the New West corresponds to the eco-frontier. Amenity migrants are a category of eco-conquerors seeking to bring together quality of life, environmental consciousness and local landscape and ecosystem conservation (Guyot, 2015).
- 14 The top-down eco-frontier, launched with the creation of a national forest in the valley in 1906 and advanced with the establishment of wilderness areas in the 1960s (according to federal and statist logics), was replaced by an eco-frontier guided by a combination of new valley residents, public authorities and national and international environmental non-governmental organisations NGOs. It has gone through several steps, offering a variety of initiatives. The maps illustrate the local eco-frontier's expansion, or how nature conservation became the leading factor in the re-conquest of this mountain valley (Figures 2 and 3). This frontier's pioneering phase was 1975-1992, before it took real shape in 1993 with the creation of Blackfoot Challenge (see map) and its ultimate consolidation in the 2000s with the participation of major NGOs, including the Nature Conservancy. This eco-frontier was born of the serious pollution of the Blackfoot River following the breach of the Mike Horse Dam, which contained contaminated water from the Upper Blackfoot Mining Complex. The residents realised that such pollution would have a severe impact on fishing and hunting (due to

poisoning and the consumption of poisoned wildlife), activities that are shared by all categories of residents, as well as tourists. It also raised public health problems for valley residents.

**Figure 2: The eco-frontier in the Blackfoot Valley today**



**SOURCE: BLACKFOOT CHALLENGE.**

- 15 The first initiative was the adoption of a recreation management plan for the Blackfoot River in 1976, followed by the creation of the first conservation easement in the state of Montana. These programmes<sup>6</sup> allow private landowners to convert all or part of their property into ecosystem protection areas, preventing the construction of new buildings on the protected lots in return for access to a conversion subsidy and significant tax benefits. Non-profit groups and federal programmes (Five Valley Land Trust, Montana Land Reliance, Fish and Wildlife Service) coordinate these easements. These programmes help prevent the subdivision of lots (65 ha minimum in Powell county, mid-valley) and are a tool for maintaining the valley's ecological integrity. The system of advice, expertise and inspection established by the coordinating organisations also transmits the values of truth and discipline inherent to the eco-frontier's governmentality (Foucault, 1978; Fletcher, 2010; Guyot, 2015). Many of the interviewed residents emphasised the role that discussions with neighbours and NGO representatives played in changing their minds. Some newcomers protect environmental amenities as financial investments with immediate consequences on rising property values, since the new relationship to land in the New West makes recreational landscapes worth more than lands serving as a productive resource. Another effect is to halt the construction of new housing in great numbers, thus socially selecting the social categories of new arrivals.



- 16 In 1989, the NGO American Rivers declared the Blackfoot the most endangered river in the United States.<sup>7</sup> This declaration came on the heels of the 1987 founding of the Big Blackfoot chapter of Trout Unlimited<sup>8</sup> by a group of landowners, with the objective of “restor[ing] and conserv[ing] the cold water fishery of the Blackfoot River and its tributaries”. The question of the river’s fate had finally reached the national level. In 1993, as a result of this dynamic and following the attention drawn by Redford’s film the previous year, a local non-profit organisation named Blackfoot Challenge<sup>9</sup> was created to forge ties across the spectrum of residents (be they long-term locals, newcomers, farmers, loggers or retirees) and the declared environmental issues in the Blackfoot watershed. Association statutes declared that the president must be a local private landowner. The association follows the “80/20 principle”: Move forward on the 80% of issues on which its members agree and constructively discuss the remaining 20% of issues that are problematic, such as wildlife and mining. For example, the Wildlife Conflict Reduction Program tries to negotiate the presence of wolves (12 packs) and grizzly bears (50 head), which some see as pests. Blackfoot Challenge’s office is centrally located in the valley, in Ovando, and is less than an hour’s drive from the homes of most of its 1,500 members. Some ranches would no longer be viable if it were not for the Challenge, which coordinates payment of financial supplements related to nature protection programmes.
- 17 The eco-frontier grew in intensity and stability following the founding of Blackfoot Challenge. Between 2004 and 2015, it established programmes with the Nature Conservancy for the conversion of privately owned forest lands lumbered by the Plum Creek Company into protected areas: the Clearwater Project<sup>10</sup> and the Montana Legacy Project.<sup>11</sup> From this same cooperation emerged the Blackfoot Community Project<sup>12</sup> in 2004, through which local landowners jointly manage forestlands, pasturelands and wetlands for sustainable cattle rearing and ecosystem conservation. In addition to these initiatives, since 1996 the state of Montana has run a “block management”<sup>13</sup> system that compensates landowners for allowing people to hunt and fish on their lands, provided that they agree to observe the rules on environmental ethics. But regardless, many landowners manage their lands in an environmentally aware manner without necessarily participating in the aforementioned programmes. The question remains whether this environmental conversion produces a conflictual frontline that is incompatible with the logics of mining.

### Frontline or shared space?

- 18 The Blackfoot Valley is crossed by economic, social and territorial divisions that recurrently lead to conflict.
- 19 The corollary of the emergence of a New West economy is the decline of the Old West economy. In recent decades, prices have collapsed for the raw materials produced by the mining, forestry, farming and ranching industries that were central to the American economy in the West for 150 years, compounded by the gradual exhaustion of resources, technological advancements and regulatory and policy changes. It should also be stressed that the academic literature gives a prominent place to what it terms a “post-productive” economy in the changing American West, which has come to be based on environmental amenities rather than resource extraction (Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010).

- 20 From a social perspective, some authors interpret the New West as home to a new form of class struggle. J. Dwight Hines interprets the opposition between the middle and upper-middle class newcomers and a working class local population according to how the residents conceive of their surrounding landscape and how it should be used: Class conflict manifests itself between an industrial interpretation of land use (through agriculture, mining and forestry) and a post-industrial view of the landscape as a medium for recreational and creative experiences (Hines, 2010). This is quite evident in Lincoln (in the upper valley), where a high percentage of lower-income households is sometimes affected by unemployment, but less so around Ovando, mid-valley.

**Figure 3a: The valley's landscape: near Lincoln**



**PHOTOGRAPH BY S. GUYOT AND G. SAUMON.**



**Figure 3b: The valley's landscape: near Ovando****PHOTOGRAPH BY S. GUYOT AND G. SAUMON.**

- 21 In addition to being economic and social, divisions are also territorial. The Blackfoot Valley is split into three counties (from west to east, downriver to upriver: Missoula, Powell, and Lewis and Clark), each administered from a city located outside of the watershed (Missoula, Deer Lodge and Helena) (Figure 1). Seeley Lake, Ovando and Lincoln, which are “census-designated places” rather than independent towns, are run from their county seats by an elected commission. This division does nothing to facilitate public watershed management. The three parts of the valley differ in landscape and socio-economic profile. The Seeley Lake area is given over to tourism and recreational activities, Ovando’s open spaces are highly sought after by amenity ranchers won over to conservation easements, and Lincoln’s upriver end of the valley is still influenced by mining and an above-average presence of national forest lands. The frontline between mining and environmental conversion is moving upriver in the valley, as the increase in conservation easements in the Lincoln area (Figure 2) attests, and it corresponds to the previously mentioned socio-economic divisions.
- 22 These frontlines favour the cyclical re-appearance of conflicts between actors. From 1992 to 2000, plans for the McDonald Gold Project gold mine east of Lincoln created a rift between valley residents, and even in some families. The project was cancelled after a statewide referendum in 1998, when “the environmental community sponsored Voter Initiative 137, banning the use of cyanide to separate gold from ore in all new mines, and the initiative was passed by Montana voters”.<sup>14</sup> The finances of the joint venture behind the mine project also contributed to its loss of mining rights.<sup>15</sup> Such conflicts regularly divide Lincoln residents, so it is no coincidence that the *mise en art* project *Blackfoot Pathways, Sculpting the Wild* was located nearby, touching the frontline between mining and environmental conversion.

## Mise en art to reconcile the Old and New Wests? The Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild project

- 23 Lincoln's sculpture park is not the only artistic project in the Blackfoot Valley,<sup>16</sup> but it does seem to be in line with the variety of territorial identities discussed in the first part of this article. Its site-specific dimension makes it a process of *mise en art* that is visible to the greatest number of people, and it is not connected to any commercial endeavours. How is the upriver portion of the river valley "made into art"? What impact does such a project have on the divisive logics running through the watershed? How does this example of *mise en art* contribute to the process of resolving the previously mentioned conflictual situations?

### The *mise en art* process between actors, territories and networks

- 24 The *Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild* sculpture park was founded in 2014 on the initiative of Kevin O'Dwyer,<sup>17</sup> an Irish metalsmith and artistic director, and Rick Dunkerley,<sup>18</sup> an American metalsmith (knifemaker) who had been living in Lincoln for 30 years. Their 2011 meeting at an artistic residency program on steel in Seattle led to the idea of finding land near Lincoln to create site-specific works that would resonate with the valley's environmental and mining history and ensure the participation of local residents and international artists who work in comparable natural and industrial settings. The *mise en art* process had four objectives: to unearth extractive history and promote it artistically and as heritage; to raise awareness of the valley's environmental vulnerability and diverse ecosystem; to include residents, especially children, by means of educational trips; and to develop tourism in the upper Blackfoot Valley, which visitors usually only pass through on Route 200.
- 25 Rick Dunkerley began work on community involvement before having Kevin O'Dwyer come in 2013 to officially launch the project. It is important to stress the grassroots nature of this initiative, which was not supported by the county, the University of Montana or state cultural authorities, at least not at the beginning, because of its allegedly trivial character. Local, national and international donors made it possible to bring in artists from around the world and remunerate them for their work. Kevin O'Dwyer had already developed a post-industrial *mise en art* process in Ireland,<sup>19</sup> and this experience, combined with his well-developed international network, helped him to convince internationally known artists<sup>20</sup> (such as Chris Drury and Brandon Ballengée) to come to Lincoln. This, in turn, made it possible to publicise this marginal and relatively isolated area nationally and worldwide. They also intended to improve the image of the upper Blackfoot Valley, which is better known for its mining scandals and environmental disasters. As one resident we met put it, it is "[a] huge step for Lincoln, a bit of boost and a signature". The non-profit organisation that manages the sculpture park primarily comprises valley residents and actors.<sup>21</sup> Since we first went to the field site in 2015, it has incorporated several members of Blackfoot Challenge<sup>22</sup> in order to forge ties with other parts of the valley, especially Ovando's gentrifiers. There have been five artists-in-residence since the sculpture park opened in 2014, and a dozen site-specific works have been installed in the wooded lot the association rents from the school, comprising 28 hectares that had initially been intended for the

expansion of the school in the early 2000s, in anticipation of the opening of the McDonald gold mine. The aim of reconciling the Old and New Wests in the valley seems clear at the scale of the sculpture park and its location,<sup>23</sup> but what about the scale of the works of art and residents?

### Art in the service of a three-part mediation process

- 26 The Blackfoot Valley's *mise en art* involves the in-situ creation and installation of semi-permanent works of art (expected to last about a decade) to serve territorial, environmental and social mediation processes.
- 27 Territorial mediation through art consists of making elements of the Old and New Wests more visible and bringing them into artistic resonance. The work entitled *Montana Memory: Re-Imagining the Delaney Sawmill TeePee Burner* (Figure 4), made in 2014-2015 by Kevin O'Dwyer, is a good example of this goal:
- 28 Once so ubiquitous in Montana and the Northwest, the TeePee Burners were testaments of a once thriving timber industry. This iconic piece of industrial heritage has all but disappeared from the landscape and with it the cultural heritage of generations of community members. *Re-Imagining the Delaney Sawmill TeePee Burner* preserves one of the remaining Lincoln area landmarks and uses contemporary art practice to invoke community memories and transfer knowledge to future generations.<sup>24</sup>
- 29 With its imposing size (75 feet high, 45 feet in diameter), it is the sculpture park's centrepiece and has become the emblem of the entire project, as well as its logo. It had been used to burn wood refuse at a local sawmill that had been abandoned since its closure in 1971. It was dismantled and reconstructed in the new art space and equipped with lighting to give it an orange glow that recalls the days when it was in operation. As a component of local mountain heritage, the work reminds the oldest residents of a bygone time and helps new arrivals to internalise the historical depth of the place. Since the summer of 2015, the TeePee's interior has been used as an educational and performance space for tourists and valley residents alike.

Figure 4. *Montana Memory: Re-Imagining the Delaney Sawmill TeePee Burner*, 2014-2015. Kevin O'Dwyer (Irelande)



**HEIGHT: 75 FEET; DIAMETER AT BASE: 45 FEET. FUNDED BY THE TIPPET RISE FUND OF THE SYDNEY E. FRANK FOUNDATION & MONTANA HISTORY FOUNDATION.**

Photograph: S. Guyot, G. Saumon.

- 30 Another work aims for this goal of territorial mediation: *A Gateway of Change*, made by Danish artist Jorn Ronnau in 2014. It represents a seat, an inscribed portal (photograph on left), and a golden village (photograph on right) (Figure 5):

Thus, creating a gateway, an opening into a new experience.

14 meters from the Gateway, facing the opening I placed a high chair with steps spiralling up to it. All made from the tree trunks.

Opposite the gateway, and visible from the chair, is now a small village with golden roofs, also carved out of the tree trunks. On one side of the forest, nature... and you go up five steps to a seat. On the other side is a vision, a village of dreams, of art, of initiative, a Utopia, or whatever is your personal "golden village".

If you go through the narrow gateway, you might experience a change, a small jump in your perception. If you study the quotes you might enhance that feeling. "Today start singing back you [sic] beauty" (Montana based Native American Poet Jennifer Green).

A Gateway of Change is an environmental art installation for the visitor to engage in - in more ways than one.<sup>25</sup>

- 31 The work evokes three essential dimensions of the valley: the mountainous nature of Montana (local pine was used as the artistic medium), nature writing and the mythical golden village that Lincoln could be. This figurative contemporary work can be appropriated by all kinds of publics in the valley or by passing visitors because it shows that a gateway can open to multiple frontiers that may co-exist. Thus far, it is the only work that refers to Native Americans, as the inscriptions on the portal were translated into the Crow language.



Figure 5a. *A Gateway of Change* (gateway and high chair), 2014. Jorn Ronnau (Denemark)



**MATERIALS: PONDEROSA PINE, GOLD LEAF, STONE. HEIGHT: 5 METRES; LENGTH: 30 METRES; WIDTH: 10 METRES.**

Photograph: S. Guyot, G. Saumon.

Figure 5b. *A Gateway of Change* (golden village), 2014. Jorn Ronnau, (Denemark)





Photograph: S. Guyot, G. Saumon.

- 32 Environmental mediation through art consists of using an artwork to raise public awareness of the importance of an environmental issue that would lack visibility without such intervention. Brandon Ballangée's *Love Motel for Insects*<sup>26</sup> (Figure 6) illuminated a single butterfly-shaped surface with fluorescent light at night to attract endangered monarch butterflies<sup>27</sup> that would not be seen if it were not for the choice of this artistic medium. The artist, a biologist and environmental activist, passed his message on to schoolchildren and residents during his weeklong artist's residency in the valley in June 2015.

Figure 6. *Love motel for insects*, Brandon Ballangee (USA)



Photograph: S. Guyot, G. Saumon.

- 33 Lastly, social mediation through art consists of engaging the local community during the installation of a work of art in order to allow a variety of residents to meet and appropriate an object that makes sense to them together. This kind of participation has been sought several times at the sculpture park, such as for the building of American artist Steven Siegel's *Hill and Valley* in 2014 (Figure 7).
- 34 Connecting art-making and environmental processes, he builds impressive sculptures out of large quantities of pre or post-consumer materials that reflect the deposit and decay cycle that underlines the making of the land. Siegel's work prompt [*sic*] dialogue about society, landscape and form - all with an eye for nature's processes.<sup>28</sup>
- 35 For the installation, a group of local residents recovered 30,000 pounds of newspaper from printers and manually placed them around 28 lodge poles of local pine with 400 pounds of nails, a veritable allegory for the human and natural dynamics found in the valley. Likewise, most works present in the park contain two or three mediatory functions.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 7: *Hill and Valley*, 2014. Steeven Siegel (USA)



**MATERIAL: 30,000 LBS OF NEWSPAPER, 28 PINE LODGE POLES, 400 POUNDS OF NAILS**

Photograph: S. Guyot, G. Saumon.

- 36 Such a project makes it possible to locally associate the heirs of the extractive frontier (working in wood, metal and stone) with new residents seeking environmental amenities and cultural content. Regardless, several residents we met were openly sceptical of a time-consuming and costly project that – for the time being – has not drawn new tourists. Others make the opposite argument, worried by the idea that such a sculpture park could bring too much publicity to the valley and attract more new residents looking for land and housing, in addition to tourists. They randomly cite Whitefish, Bozeman and the Bitterroot Valley, all highly sought-after places in Montana, as examples of what should never happen to the Blackfoot Valley. There seems to be a success story between these two opposition types, which are in the minority, although it is too soon to assess the actual effects. Other *mise en art* processes in marginal spaces that the same authors have studied in France (Guyot 2015) and South Africa (Guyot & Guinard, 2015) have shown stronger oppositions among their local populations. One trait of the Blackfoot Valley may be local actors' ability to put energy and money into shared objectives and identify and minimise conflicts (like Blackfoot Challenge), although such conflicts might re-appear overnight, as happened with the unexpected emergence of an extreme-right militia in the valley in 2015. Likewise, the inauguration of Donald Trump, whose political and economic programme is highly favourable to extractive activities, runs the risk of endangering the environmental balance that is the basis of social calm in the valley.



## Conclusion

- 37 The *mise en art* of the Blackfoot Valley is establishing itself as a temporary tool for resolving socio-spatial conflicts and offering a blueprint for a peaceful transition from the Old to the New West, using new forms of narrative hybridisation (between narratives of the extractive past and contemporary art), environmental resources (buried, extracted and amenities to be protected) and mountain spaces (the upper valley around Lincoln, the mid-valley by Ovando, and the lower valley near Seeley Lake). By offering territorial, environmental and social mediation, the sculpture park in Lincoln provides an opportunity to give a more aesthetic and positive image to the frontline that still exists between an extractive past and an environmentalising present. Although such a new project can bring national and international media attention to the Blackfoot Valley (and Lincoln in particular) over the short term, it has yet to address the long-running issue of indigenous identity and heritage, as the project is still very “white” and no native artists have participated thus far. It also raises questions about the ability to promote local artistic training and promotion. As a process reconciling the mining frontier and the eco-frontier, as well as a dynamic hybridising the Old and New Wests, this *mise en art* will require prolonged future investment to produce a genuine, lasting and sustainable territorial transformation.
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## NOTES

1. The authors conducted fieldwork in June 2015 under the auspices of the French ANR programme IRGENT (Rural Gentrification in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States). The methods were predominantly qualitative, consisting of approximately 30 semi-structured interviews with a variety of actors (landowners, residents, activists, those commissioning expositions, artists, artisans, elected officials) whom the authors selected to have contrasting representations, practices and ideologies.
2. <http://deq.mt.gov/Land/statesuperfund/ubmc/virtour>, accessed 10 June 2016.
3. New arrivals sometimes contribute to the creation of a farming ideal, staging their conception of neo-rurality. This leads us to explore the existence of a form of agricultural gentrification related to the arrival of more affluent social categories that engage in small-scale farming activities, not to earn a living from it but to contribute to the production of their desired landscape and enjoy the amenities offered by the area.
4. The National Wilderness Preservation System, created by the 1964 Wilderness Act, is today composed of 765 “wilderness areas” that are managed by four federal agencies (Forest Service,



National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service). These sites are devoted to nature conservation and are considered to be biologically intact. As such, they manifest the American imaginary of untamed nature.

5. <http://www.fs.usda.gov/attmain/flathead/specialplaces>, accessed 10 June 2016.
6. <http://www.montanalandtrusts.org/memberdirectory/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
7. Every year, the NGO American Rivers publishes a report entitled “America’s Most Endangered Rivers for [year]” to encourage public policy for the protection of especially vulnerable sites.
8. [http://bbctu.org/Home\\_Page.php](http://bbctu.org/Home_Page.php), accessed 10 June 2016.
9. <http://blackfootchallenge.org/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
10. <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/montana/stories/clearwater-blackfoot-project-1.xml>, accessed 10 June 2016.
11. <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/montana/placesweprotect/montana-legacy-project.xml>, accessed 10 June 2016.
12. <http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/montana/blackfoot-community-project.xml>, accessed 10 June 2016.
13. <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/hunterAccess/blockman/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
14. <http://www.montanariveraction.org/big.blackfoot.river.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
15. <http://missoulanews.bigskypress.com/missoula/the-end-of-the-gold-rush/Content?oid=1131945>, accessed 10 June 2016.
16. Such as the Norman Maclean festival in Seeley Lake <http://www.macleanfootsteps.com/>, or Alpine Artisans (<http://www.alpineartisans.org/tourofthearts/>), an association promoting a network of local artists.
17. <http://www.kevin-j-odwyer.com/the-artist.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
18. <http://www.dunkerleyhandmadeknives.com/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
19. <http://www.loughboora.com/sculpture/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
20. <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/artists.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
21. <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/staff-directors.html>, accédé le 10/06/2016.
22. See local newspaper articles from 2015: <http://bvd.stparchive.com/Archive/BVD/BVD06192015P06.php> et <http://bvd.stparchive.com/Archive/BVD/BVD07022015P04.php> , accessed 10 June 2016.
23. See a map locating the project: <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/map.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
24. <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/re-imagining-the-delaney-sawmill-teepee-burner.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
25. <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/jorn-ronnau.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYdakdRjv2U>, accessed 10 June 2016.
27. <http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/>, accessed 10 June 2016.
28. <http://www.sculptureinthewild.com/steven-siegel.html>, accessed 10 June 2016.
29. In another work entitled *East West Passage* (2015), British artists Mark Jacobs and Sam Clayton represent the connection between the crossing of the east/west frontier that is symbolised by the continental divide and the local use of wood in building. It resituates Lincoln at the nationwide scale as a place of both transition and residence in the heart of a mythical forest.

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## ABSTRACTS

This article presents a Rocky Mountain valley in the state of Montana (USA), a central symbolic space of the American West that is heavily marked by the identity-charged notions of “wilderness” and “frontier”. With a rich history in mining, logging and ranching benefitting pioneers, the Blackfoot Valley today is an excellent example of the frontline between this extractive history (which is not entirely past) and nature conservation, a genuinely active eco-frontier initiated at the federal, state, local and individual levels. Varying representations and appropriations of mountain areas tend to create socio-economic divisions in the valley’s population. An entirely private, site-specific art project (*Blackfoot Pathways: Sculpture in the Wild*) creates the possibility of offering an alternative resource to be shared by eco-gentrifiers and a local population adjusting to a post-extractive order, and indeed its site-specific works resonate with both the valley’s mining past and its untamed nature. Does this project mean that there are shared values in this rural space undergoing strong social change? And although it does make it possible to spatially reconcile a mining frontier on its way to heritagisation with a vibrant eco-frontier, will it really help reconcile mountain-dwelling populations with very different socio-economic trajectories over the long term?

## INDEX

**Keywords:** eco-frontier, mining frontier, mise en art, reconciliation, Rocky Mountains, Montana, United States of America

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