

Thesis Proposal
“America and Our Keystone Species”

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Pacific Northwest College of Art, Willamette University
Professor E. Doughton

The wolf is known as a keystone species located in the United States. A “keystone species”⁵ is any species that other plants and animals within an ecosystem largely depend on. If a keystone species is removed, the ecosystem would drastically change, and in some cases, collapse. Although extremely important to the wellbeing of our ecosystems there are little to no protections for these animals, plants, and insects in the United States. Some projects such as reforestation are taking place to restore habitats and save the keystone species, but not many. These lack of protections are attributed to the world's consumption of and continued intentional dependence on fossil fuels. In America fossil fuel companies do not pay taxes and receive subsidies from the federal government.⁶

In 2020 I lost a dear friend and brother by the name of Anthony “Wolfie” Wolfsmith in a devastating car accident.³ Wolfie was an actor, artist, and trapped working under capitalism in a 50 hour week at a Tesla factory. The same year Wolfie passed I closely followed OR-93, young male gray wolf that roamed the same areas my best friend did. From Northern California to Montana to Oregon, Washington and Idaho. He traveled further south than any wolf that has been tracked all the way to Fresno California. He was also the first wolf spotted on the central coast in more than 300 years. This rare wolf felt like some kind of spirit guide showing me my friend had moved onto a more free life. For a whole year I watched for updates on the iconic animal until news suddenly stopped. On November 24, 2021, almost one year exactly after the death of Wolfie, The Center for Biological Diversity⁴ made a press release stating OR-93 had been murdered in a vehicle strike. When I heard the news I couldn't believe it. He was struck near the same place my friend died. I howled in grief and thought “All this and for what? The auto industry? This is what America does to its youth, this is what America does to its artists and keystone species, it runs highways through their home then wonders why they were in the road.”

There are other keystone species in the United States that are treated the same way as the wolf. The wolf is in the predator category of the trophic pyramid and often under the public eye. Being under the public eye comes with a sort of celebrity status. There are several other categories of keystone species such as prey, ecosystem engineer, and mutualist that are not as publicized or adored. These animals include the starfish, beaver, hare, saguaro cactus, sea otter, willow tree, and shark. Many other keystone species exist outside the USA and are developed to their special environments. These environments located both in the USA and beyond are ocean, desert, boreal forest, tundra, and tropical rainforest.⁵

The ways in which these important animals are being destroyed is shocking (see appendix. Page 12.) Just like our artists America also treats women, the disabled, children, seniors, minorities, the working class, migrants, and its First Nation people as disposable with

their needs put last. These marginalized identities are always first to be affected by global climate change. 80% of biodiversity is protected by indigenous people when they are less than 6% of the population.¹³

As a way to explore the grief I feel for Wolfie and OR-93. I created a casted glass wolf head with a long steel rod protruding from its face. I made it as a representation of what America does to its keystone species as well as what America is doing to our youth and artists like Wolfie. Mounted over a cracked piece of wood it's barely holding it together-much like what's happening to our earth and youth, who are the cornerstone of life. I called this work "What America does to its Keystone Species."

For my thesis I would like to create eight of these glass animal mounts from each environment and keystone species category. A shark (Ocean/Predator), a wolf (Boreal Forest/predator), fig tree (tropical rainforest/mutualist), beaver (Wetlands/environmental engineer), and snowshoe hare (Tundra/prey), a saguaro cactus (Desert/ecosystem engineer), and an otter (Ocean/predator). I would present the glass heads much like a hunter would, only with obvious evidence of how they were murdered. This evidence will be based on what environmentalists and activists have proved to be happening. The shark will have a mesh net infused in the glass, the beaver will have its ankle tied with a chain, etc. The wolf will be renamed "OR-93", the shark "Bycatch," the willow "canker fungus", each name echoing the problems environmental destruction and humans have caused them.⁷ They will be small like the original wolf head, considered statuettes at 4 inches tall excluding the base. There will be 8 statuettes in total.

In addition to creating these keystone species mounts I would like to create a mixed media work, posters using street art methods like stenciling, plaster cast paper clay, and one additional glass statuette that ties to the keystone species and the artist, woman, mother, and colonization. This includes mixed media paintings of my family Dawes Rolls Registry number and hunters ear tags with hunting license. Connecting the tagging of animals to the certification of First Nation people. I have a belly mold from when I was due to give birth in 2010. I would like to cast it with paper and tie the declining birth rate and possible extinction of us to the extinction of animals. I would also like to cast a glass fist with key protruding from it representing what women are told to do to protect themselves.

Gathering inspiration from my own personal tragedy, "Natural History Museums", and being active in the environmentalist movement I felt compelled to make these works to educate others through art. In order to create these mounts I am going to sculpt or 3D print the initial sculpture, create a plaster mold of it, and complete the whole lost wax process to cast the final piece out of glass. The lost wax process is an ancient technique used by many famous sculptors

such as Remington. The Indus Valley civilization was also known for this process⁸. In addition to lost wax casting I will be using a process known as pate de verre. Pate de verre is a technique used with laying glass frit into an open face glass mold. I first integrate the metal piece into the wax cast before melting it from the mold and casting it in its final form of glass. The item that was lodged in the wax will remain in the glass for the finished statuette. I will then mount the finished work onto its respective mount.

The works of Christina Bothwell² inspire me with their duality. The themes she explores are themes I also have a compulsion to explore such as grief, death and the after life. Her use of mixed media also intrigues me. I am always left wondering what skill methods she uses for her creations. Bothwell seems to push the boundaries of glass and stone, often combining the two in one work of art. Her works made me want to combine mediums and inspired me to use different techniques for my process.

Silvia Levenson's¹⁰ works explore motherhood and femininity in glass. I see her work as taking things that are normally soft and turning them into hard permanent objects often with spikes protruding from them. I think her table cloth piece "I see you're a bit nervous II" is the perfect example of what it's like to serve an unhappy audience as a woman. Her work with the high heel perfectly encapsulates my experience as a woman working in an office environment where dressing up was praised.

The underlying theme in my project deals in my own ideology. I am considered a radical leftist or anarchist. Artist Sue Cole⁵ inspires me with her to the point messages she meticulously carves out of lino blocks. Her animal activism series is particularly meaningful for me and my thesis work. She does not hold back with the often jarring imagery of the animal product industry, capitalism, and the ruling class. When looking at her physical self she may seem like any other elder in our community but her art shows otherwise. I respect her deeply for her unrestrained expression of hatred pointed to the government and all its evil industries.

Keystone species are animals or organisms that play a disproportionately significant impact on their ecosystem much like artists. This project is meant to show the world what we do to them and in turn our own keystone people. The keystone species usually goes unnoticed unless they are removed. To protect our future we must protect them and our artists, mothers, minorities, and First Nation People.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgement

"We acknowledge that Portland rests on the traditional village sites of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tualatin, Kalapuya, Molalla, bands of the Chinook, and many other Tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River. Multnomah is a band of Chinooks that

lived in this area.

We also acknowledge the systemic policies of genocide, relocation, and assimilation that still impact many Indigenous/Native American families today. As settlers and guests on these lands we respect the work of Native Nations, leaders and families, and make ongoing efforts to center Indigenous knowledge, creativity, and resilience.”⁹

Budget and Timeline

September

Week 1- create sketches

Week 3- purchased two molds

October

Week 1- soak and pour wax molds with glass lab wax

Week 2-open molds - melt bunny? Questioning this. Pour two molds.

Week 3-Start Slide Show

Week 4-Pour Otter. Order more molds or better start building, MAKE DECISION \$\$, start
slideshow Due 10/29/2024

November

20th at 2pm Defend! Room 310

December

Make an apt with documentation studio to photograph works for slideshow
12/10 final thesis paper due!/slide presentation.

Work Samples



Yvette Kinyon, *Sitting with Grief*, Lost Wax and Fused Glass 2021



Yvette Kinyon, *What's Left*, Fossil Vitra Fused glass and Fern, 2024



Yvette Kinyon, *Growing Around Grief*, Fused Glass, 2023



Yvette Kinyon, *What America Does to its Keystone Species*, Mixed Media Glass 2024

APPENDIX Detail on Keystone Species

BEAVER/Environmental Engineer/Wetlands

Beavers for example are killed for their furs and oil. They are strangled and often crushed in body-gripping (or “Conibear”) traps—large, rectangular devices with metal bars designed to slam shut on an animal’s body, much like a giant mouse trap. Beavers are also ambushed with steel-jaw leghold traps that smash and hold their feet and limbs. Some traps are designed to hold beavers underwater until they drown.

SHARKS/Predator/Ocean

Sharks are killed for their fins in a practice called Shark Finning and accidentally ensnared in commercial fishing nets totalling 100 million a year. This is called “bycatch.” According to the International Fund for Animal Welfare shark finning “involves catching sharks, removing their fins, and discarding them back into the ocean, where they often die slow, painful deaths. Shark fins are in demand due to their monetary and cultural value. An estimated 23 to 73 million sharks are finned each year.”

WILLOW TREE/Mutualist/Wetlands

The Willow tree is an important mutualist in the wetlands. In exchange for pollination they feed butterflies and give them a place to lay their eggs, host their caterpillars, and chrysalis. Habitats are experiencing extreme drought due to global warming. The drought is making them susceptible to willow blight. This is a canker fungus that creates black lesions in the willow’s soft wood.

WOLF/Predator/Boreal Forest

The wolf is a boreal predator in the USA. The most common cause of death in wolves in the USA was traumatic injuries associated with vehicular collisions and human activity. Human activity includes hunting, starvation due to lack of land access and illegal poaching. The wolf upholds ecosystems by eating deer that overeat baby plants in one area. The wolves hunt the deer causing them to migrate and forage elsewhere giving smaller prey animals a chance to eat and live there. The smaller prey in turn feed smaller predators who do not travel as far as the wolf.

HARE/Prey/Tundra

The hare is a prey animal in the arctic tundra. They feed many large and small predators throughout the winter months. Due to climate destruction the hare's environment is being destroyed. The winter's are now shorter with less snow and the hare cannot hide and the rates of predation caused mortality increase exponentially. They are also unable to access proper foods due to drier, hotter, summers killing the gentle sprouts.

OTTER/Predator/Southern Ocean

In the ocean the otter eats sea urchins who eat all the kelp. The kelp is an important part of the ocean ecosystem as it feeds krill and other small crustaceans that feed a vast majority of ocean life. They also pull down and store vast amounts of carbon in the southern ocean. Otters are mainly being killed by parasites from usually warm weather, as well as oil in our waterways.

SAGUARO CACTUS/mutualist/Desert

“The saguaro is a keystone species that provides food and shelter for many desert animals. Saguaros have hundreds of flowers that bloom several per day from late April to early June. The flowers open at night and close the following afternoon. Lesser long-nosed bats visit the flowers at night. Birds, mostly white-winged doves, and insects, mostly honey bees, visit the flowers the following morning. The fruits mature in June and early July. The rind splits into three or four sections that peel back to expose the juicy red pulp embedded with up to 2,000 tiny seeds. The fruits ripen during the peak of drought in the early summer and are about the only moist food source for many birds, mammals, and insects during this part of the year. Saguaros make excellent nesting places for many birds. Gila woodpeckers and gilded flickers both excavate nest holes in the fleshy stems. The woodpeckers usually excavate new nest holes each year giving other birds like elf owls, house finches, ash-throated flycatchers, and purple martins an opportunity to occupy old woodpecker nests. Red-tailed hawks and other large birds nest in the angles between the main stems and the arms. Tall saguaros make good hunting and resting perches for many birds. They are being threatened by prolonged dryness and invasive species competition.

BATS/ecosystem engineer/Tropical rainforest

“The bats of Pennsylvania play a critical part in maintaining the state's ecosystems. All of Pennsylvania's bats feed on night-flying insects, including many agricultural pests. As the primary predators of night-flying insects, bats play a significant role in controlling insect

populations. As such, they can be considered keystone species for their enormous economic value as biological control agents of insects, valued in the multi-millions of dollars each year just in the Commonwealth. Bats are also facing unprecedented conservation threats, ranging from new emerging diseases to anthropogenic agents such as wind turbines, pesticides, and timber harvesting”

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Yvette Kinyon
Thesis Abstract
Spring 2025

Disappearing Stories

Disappearing Stories refers to the unseen impact we have when we lose individuals in our lives and nature. When an animal loses a loved one it impacts them in similar ways we are impacted. They fall into a depressive state, they mourn, and hold ceremony. We have seen this when wolves cry out in the night after a loved one passes. We see it in elephants who have funerals and even honey bees.

When these individuals are gone even the ecology of the area the animal lives in is also deeply affected.

We call these animals “keystone species.” A “keystone species” is any species that other plants and animals within an ecosystem largely depend on. If a keystone species is removed, the ecosystem would drastically change, and in some cases, collapse.

Although extremely important to the wellbeing of our ecosystems there are little to no protections for these animals in the United States.

which has become even more apparent as we move deeper into 2025 with the removal of wolves from the 2025 endangered species list, open season announced on beavers, and unregulated fishing that affects our sharks.

And what exactly is a keystone? There are a few definitions: an actual brick keystone is used to peak stone of a brick archway. I heard the word keystone dropped a lot during the election season “Pennsylvania is keystone state”.... So a keystone is the main support of a structure holding it all together, keystone states determine the outcomes of elections and keystone animals are the main parts that keep ecosystems intact. These animals are diverse and widespread...they’re wolves, beavers, sharks, insects and elephants. We also have keystone people and that’s you and I artists, teachers, parents, and workers. We are each a keystone in our own lives if we are removed our families fall apart.

Yvette Kinyon
Artist Statement
Thesis Final
Spring 2025

Disappearing Stories

The wolf is known as a keystone species here in the United States. A “keystone species” is any species that other plants and animals within an ecosystem largely depend on. If a keystone species is removed, the ecosystem would drastically change, and in some cases, collapse. Although extremely important to the wellbeing of our ecosystems there are little to no protections for these animals in the United States.

In 2020 I lost a dear friend and brother by the name of Anthony “Wolfie” Wolfsmith in a car accident. That same year I closely followed OR-93, a rare young male gray wolf that roamed the same areas my best friend did. From Northern California to Montana to Oregon, Washington and Idaho. He traveled further south than any wolf that has been tracked all the way to Fresno California. He was also the first wolf spotted on the central coast in more than 300 years. This wolf felt like some kind of spirit guide showing me my friend had moved onto a more free life. For a whole year I watched for updates on the rare animal until news suddenly stopped. On November 24, 2021, almost one year exactly after the death of Wolfie, The Center for Biological Diversity made a press release stating OR-93 had been murdered in a vehicle strike. When I heard the news I couldn’t believe it. He was struck near the same place my friend died. I howled in grief and thought “All this and for what? The auto industry? This is what America does to its youth, this is what America does to its keystone species, it runs highways through their home then wonders why they were in the road”

Disappearing Stories refers to the unseen impact we have when we lose individuals in our lives and nature. When an animal loses a loved one it impacts them in similar ways we are impacted. They fall into a depressive state, they mourn, and hold ceremony. We have seen this when wolves cry out in the night after a loved one passes. We see it in elephants who have funerals and even honey bees.

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Yvette Kinyon
Thesis Oral Presentation
Spring 2025

Hello!

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Yvette Kinyon. I'm originally from a small town in Northern California called Clearlake. I moved to Portland in 2013 with my daughter, Maggie who is now 14!!! I'm a sculpture major here at PNCA. I transferred from PCC with my degree in social sciences in Fall of 2021 with an emphasis on women's and gender studies. I decided I needed to continue with my education at PNCA after I got very sick in 2018 with pneumonia and thought I wasn't going to make it. I was in and out of the hospital and could not rest due to my job at an oral surgeon's office being so intense. When I recovered I had the urge to reconnect with things that brought me joy in the past, environmentalism, ecology, urban planning, and architecture. One of those things was art, particularly sculpture.

My thesis project combines some of my passions especially: art, ecology, architecture and design while exploring themes I like to express through my art. Like grief, death, and political effects on nature. My main mediums at this point are glass and ceramic. Which I have integrated into my thesis. I have been working with glass since Crystal Schenk introduced me to it in her mold making class in spring 2022. I have always been drawn to glass as an artform being from northern California it is a popular medium. My grandma made lamp work glass animals like dragons and cats.

For my thesis project I wanted to create a work of art that people can learn from and see as a type of ode to nature, an altar and even a warning. *Disappearing Stories* refers to the unseen impact we have when we lose individuals in our lives and nature. When an animal loses a loved one it impacts them in similar ways we are impacted. They fall into a depressive state, they mourn, and hold ceremony. We have seen this when wolves cry out in the night after a loved one passes. We see it in elephants who have funerals and even honey bees.

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And what exactly is a keystone? There are a few definitions: an actual brick keystone is used to peak stone of a brick archway. I heard the word keystone dropped a lot during the election season “Pennsylvania is keystone state”.... So a keystone is the main support of a structure holding it all together, keystone states determine the outcomes of elections and keystone animals are the main parts that keep ecosystems intact. These animals are diverse and widespread...they’re wolves, beavers, sharks, insects and elephants. We also have keystone people and that’s you and I artists, teachers, parents, and workers. We are each a keystone in our own lives if we are removed our families fall apart.

In 2020 I lost a dear friend and brother by the name of Anthony “Wolfie” Wolfsmith in a sudden and tragic car accident. He was trapped in the rubble for over 24 hours and lost all his blood. They had to repave the section of road he died on because the blood was so thick.

Wolfie and I were not related by blood, but we were in the same pack. We lived in a trailer park our whole lives right across the way from one another. We could basically see each other from our windows. Our mothers were severe alcoholic drug addicts and we spent our childhood together navigating the responsibility of caring for our mothers and younger brothers. When the state came to take our families away, which they often did, Wolfie and I stuck together, hid our brothers and tried to run away. When they eventually found us we held onto each other and didn’t let them separate us. We made sure we got home and stayed with our brothers no matter what. We hid our moms alcohol and took their keys when we knew they shouldn't drive.

The same year wolfie died, I closely followed OR-93, a rare young male gray wolf that roamed the same areas my best friend did. From Northern California to Montana to Oregon, Washington and Idaho. He traveled further south than any wolf that has been tracked all the way to Fresno California. He was also the first wolf spotted on the central coast in more than 300 years. This wolf felt like some kind of spirit guide showing me my friend had moved onto a more free life. For a whole year I watched for updates on the rare animal until news suddenly stopped. On November 24, 2021, almost one year exactly after the death of Wolfie, The Center for Biological Diversity made a press release stating OR-93 had been murdered in a vehicle strike. When I heard the news I couldn’t believe it. He was struck near the same place my friend died. They even released a statement much like they did when Wolfie passed. Almost one year later to the

day we held Wolfie's zoom wake. I howled in grief and thought "All this and for what? The "convenience" of cars? This is what America does to its youth, this is what America does to its keystone species, it runs highways through their home then wonders why they were in the road"

This incident sparked a deep curiosity for these majestic creatures we call wolves. I learned more about how important they are to our overall ecosystem, how they hold everything in place and how wolves are not the only ones who support us in this way. Not only do humans not realize their importance until they are gone, we are realizing they have stories to tell us that are disappearing as they do. The wolves' stories tell us they hunt the sick animals to protect the herd and keep the deers moving to stop them from hogging all the food and eating the forests bare. Keeping our wolves' stories intact means we can keep other creatures' stories intact all the way down to the seed of the flower the bird eats.

In Spring 2024, I created a lost wax cast glass wolf head with a long steel rod protruding from its face as a representation of what America does to its keystone species as well as what America is doing to our keystone people. I made this work to honor wolfie too and it felt very healing to create. I wanted to expand on the idea so I created this visual representation of keystone bricks with a keystone animal at the top. If the top keystone is removed the structure will topple.

This work is made to stand independently with interaction from humans. It was initially meant to be much larger so that a person could walk under it safely. Which obviously didn't work out quite as I'd hoped.

When in the process of creating this work I failed A LOT. I started out with a concept and it took a very different turn. In the beginning I made free standing statues and experimented with techniques and around midway I decided I didn't want to continue in that direction and pretty much abandoned 3 full statues and some printed media. One statue was a large four foot wolf made of wire mesh, foam core, plaster, fiberglass and hydrocol white. One statue was a burlap rabbit I had sewed and another was a wooden bear (I still really like that guy.)

I decided on my final concept later than I'd like. My first attempt at this keystone arch was 3x as large, measuring closer to 22 inches tall and 16 inches wide per brick. With one large glass keystone like we see here. The total size would have been closer to 110x80 or 9 ft wide by 6 ft tall with 3 ft logs on each side. The size was important to me...like I said I wanted people to be able to walk under it to add a human element.

Everything that could have gone wrong did!! I struggled with funding which meant materials were hard to come by, I spent a lot of time sourcing materials, driving all over portland, and asking for funding from grants, borrowed department materials and had to ask my friends/family to support me financially.

Once I decided on making a model version or salesman's sample of my grander idea. We ended up with what we see here the piece itself measures 70 inches wide. The glass is 2,930 grams of glass and was done in a pot melt method. I created a dam with bricks and fire paper, filled it with coarse glass frit, clear glass chunks then placed an aperture (in this case a small terracotta pot) over the dam and filled it with glass. I then used a fire schedule from a company called Glass Campus. I programmed the kiln myself with 6 segments. It went up to 1700 degrees fahrenheit and took about 16 hours to fire and another 10 hours to cool.

In my research I found that artists are an important part of helping understand the delicate nature of our ecosystems. In fact some of the most digestible and easy information I found on understanding the keystone species were illustrations found on various websites. These would have been commissioned works by places like OMSI or The Portland Children's museum that would have done an artist call for folks like us to create. It felt inspiring to know other artists of different mediums have helped educate people on the importance of these animals.

Just from looking at these 2D mediums and intensely researching I learned about other keystones and chose to focus on the wolf as my family connection and the connection wolves have to the Pacific Northwest.

Looking at movebank (movebank is a website run by a team of biologists and environmental scientists that tracks tagged animals they use for research) you can see a 3d rendered map of where scientists have tracked keystone species. This helps you see what's missing as well. I hope my work can be easily interpreted by anyone who comes across it. They may not make the connection between people and these animals like I can but just them interacting with it is enough for people to feel the weight of this subject.

Some other inspirations for my design and thesis were obviously nature and teaching, but also large public mourning exhibits like Duane Linklater's *my mother's side reviewed: Public Displays of Grief* which was displayed in 2023 in Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art. Through sculpture, photography, film and video, installation and text, Linklater makes visible notions of cultural loss, amnesia and family identity.

Also the work of Christina Bothwell largely informs my art. She works in clay and glass. More specifically, one piece I admire so much of hers is *Seasons*. A ghostly glass deer with large antlers lifts like a spirit out of a stoneware deer laying lifeless on the ground.

In an ideal world I would like this work to be much more in depth depicting more detailed animals and I hope it could be displayed in parks outside. I always admired the art around the lodges of national parks and know that those environments impacted this work for me. Outdoor public installation. I would like to explore the role of Artist as ecologist.

Coming to PNCA has helped me meet and connect with like minded individuals and see what working in the art world looks like. I plan to continue to make glass works of art and expand on this idea. I really hope one day I can be commissioned by the city of Portland to create more sculptures honoring our keystone people and keystone animals. Such as David Eckard .

In Precarious Lives, Judith Butler suggests that, by submitting to the pain of mourning for others, we agree to “be changed, possibly for ever” by it. The “full result” of this transformation “we cannot know in advance” but we do know it is not the same as we are now.

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Resources:

Please follow link:

 [researchnotes](#)

Yvette Kinyon
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