

INTRO to me

- Hello everyone— welcome to the presentation of my thesis project, “Field Notes from the Forest” and thank you all for being here!
- Before we dive into talking about my project, let me just share a little bit about myself.
- My name is Newt, I’m from Oakland California, I’m a sculpture major, and I love bugs_____.
- Whether I was spending a week camping in the mountains, _ hiking through the Oakland hills, _ or looking for salamanders in my backyard, _ I’ve just always loved spending time outside, getting to know all the different plants and animals—
- Of all the ecosystems I’ve gotten to know so far, my favorite ones are the forests in the Sierra Nevada Mountains-----
- When it comes to my experience with making art, nature has always been the main source of my inspiration. Some of the first things I remember making as a kid were colored pencil drawings on printer paper of my favorite animals that I hung around my room.
- Over time my paper drawings have evolved into ceramic and fabric sculptures.

Project Overview

- My inspiration for this project comes from the ecosystems and geography of the Stanislaus National Forest— and from the time I’ve spent camping there.
- The Stanislaus National Forest is located in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range, just north of Yosemite National Park.
- This mountain range extends over 400 miles long on the eastern edge of California from Mount Shasta in the north to Sequoia National Forest in the south.----- The range is home to 3 national parks, 26 wilderness areas, 10 national forests, and 2 national monuments. —
- As my title for this installation may suggest, I see this project as my field notes from the time I’ve spent in the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Home and Place

- Throughout the process of making this project, something that’s remained important to me is that my work gives the viewer an understanding of the Sierra Nevadas **and** what this place means to *me*.
- So, with this installation I’m trying to communicate a sense of place.
- Now, you may be wondering, what does place mean to me?
- Place, as a noun, is defined as “a particular position or point in space”.

- While this defines the actual word 'place', I'm more interested in looking at the defining characteristics of individual places.
 - Briefly, I invite everyone to close their eyes and picture a place that is important or meaningful to you...
 - What about this place itself makes it memorable? _____
 - What are the characteristics of this place that you think of first? _____
 - When I think of the Sierra Nevadas, the first thing that I picture is a forest of towering pine trees and giant sequoias, with sunlight breaking through the canopy and speckling the ferns and lupins that carpet the forest floor.
 - The next thing that comes to mind is the way it smells. The mountain air is fresh and warm, and it smells like moss and pine with a hint of vanilla from the Ponderosa Pines.
 - Then I think of the sounds. The babbling sound of water flowing over smooth rocks in a nearby creek, ___ the croaking of Pacific Chorus Frogs, ___ the gentle hum of cicadas, ___ and the chirping of birds.
 - While the sights, smells and sounds of a place are what define it, a place is made special and memorable through the experiences I've had there.
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- Encapsulating the experience of a place in an installation can be tricky. ___
 - I looked at a project by Anne Olsen Daub and Eugene Daub fittingly titled "A Sense of Place" that aims to draw attention to the natural spaces around San Dimas and act as an entry point to encourage people to explore these spaces. ___ Their project "A Sense of Place" highlighted the parks, walking paths, and hiking trails in the area through 4 large bronze sculptures of walking sticks and 7 ceramic relief tiles that feature animals native to the surrounding region.
 - I think their project did do a good job giving the viewer a sense of the characteristics of the place, but it's lacking something.
 - With my project, I want to go beyond just showing you the Stanislaus National Forest, ___ I want to communicate how much this place truly means to *me*.
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- To put it simply, I love these forests because they feel like home. ___
 - My grandpa is someone I've always looked up to and he's always been there for me. ___ When I was a kid, he shared his love for the Sierras with me by taking me camping in Yosemite, which is one of his favorite places. He would show me around the valley and tell me stories about his visits to the park in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. ___ It didn't take long for me too- to fall in love with these mountains— **and** through our camping trips to Yosemite their forests began to feel like home—
 - When I say that the forests in the Sierras began to feel like home, what do I mean exactly?

- Home can be defined as “the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household” .
- While I don’t permanently live in the Sierras, when I’m there I do feel like I’m a part of a community formed by the people, plants, and animals around me.
- I’ve spent many years getting to know the plants and animals of this region— forming connections with each of them, so that when I see them it feels like I’m greeting a friend_____
- As I mentioned earlier, I love being outside, hiking, and learning about the world around me.
 - On one of our camping trips to Yosemite when I was around 12, my grandpa bought me a copy of a book called *The Laws Field Guide to the Sierra Nevada*.
 - Published in 2007, this field guide was written and illustrated by John Muir Laws who is an artist, a naturalist, and an educator who leads workshops in nature journaling.
 - The 368 page guide showcases some of the more commonly seen wildlife in the sierra nevasdas through watercolor illustrations.
 - This was the first field guide that I could actually bring with me on my adventures and I instantly fell in love with identifying and learning about what was around me.
 - Inspired by *The Laws Field Guide* I started carrying a sketch book with me to document my own observations. And it was through the process of drawing what I saw that led me to noticing more little details of the bugs, plants and animals in front of me.
 - At first, I didn’t really do anything with the sketches of my observations, but now, I use these sketches as a starting point when I’m planning out my ceramic pieces.

Process

- For this project, I worked with three distinct mediums: clay, fabric, and digital.
- Despite the resulting pieces from these processes being inherently materially different, they all started in the same way- with a sketch.
- Each piece is a different way for me to share my experiences in the Sierras with you.
- The zine showcases my field notes in a more traditional way, while the ceramic sculptures and the quilt bring these field notes off the page and into a physical space.

- Now let's dive into exploring the processes individually that I used to create this project.

Ceramic Pieces

- Each ceramic piece is inspired by a specific plant or animal I've encountered in the Stanislaus National Forest.
- When designing these pieces, I used my photos and sketches from the time I've spent in the Stanislaus as references.
- When planning these pieces I also looked at the work of the artist Katherine Eksuzian who is a ceramicist based in Minnesota that makes intricate sculptures of plants, insects, and animals on her hand thrown jars. I examined her process videos to learn some techniques for working with extremely thin pieces of clay, like those used to form the legs of insects.
- For my pieces, I hand built each one using ceramic paper clay. I chose this clay because of its strength and durability as greenware which comes from paper pulp in the clay. The strength and durability of this clay allowed me to sculpt tiny and thin details without having to worry as much about them cracking during the drying process.
- I started each sculpture by roughly forming the general shapes of each piece then leaving them to sit covered for 24 hours. After sitting for 24 hours, I refined the general shapes and as the piece reached the leather hard stage, I added details by carving the surface using an exacto knife, a wire brush, and a needle tool. Carving these details at the leather hard stage allowed me to get the most definition. Each piece took me around 8 to 12 hours to sculpt.
- After I finished sculpting them, I let the pieces slowly dry for 1 to 2 weeks before loading them into the kiln for their first firing.
- For the majority of these pieces I only used underglaze and oxide washes to finish them, with the exception of the rocks. I knew that I wanted the rocks to look like granite because of the prominent granite formations in the Sierras. So, through some testing, I found that if I modified a glaze recipe I found online to add two different meshes of granular ilmenite, I could achieve a glaze that looks surprisingly spot on.
- The process of glazing these pieces took me around 2 to 6 hours each.
- I began construction of the ceramic pieces in early October and I completed the glazing process in mid December, totaling a little over 2 months of nonstop work.

Quilt

- Now if I can draw your attention over to my quilt.
- When planning out what I wanted to make for this installation, I knew that in some way I needed to include a map.
- I've always loved the physical maps that are handed out at the entrances to national parks, but I wanted this map to be more than just an image on paper.

- I began researching other artists whose work involves map making and I found the artist Kate Tarling. She is a fiber artist who quilts maps of places she finds that have interesting topography.
- When I saw Tarling's work I knew that a quilt was right for this project.
- With a quilt, you can have a tactile interaction with the map, feeling the stitches that form the rivers, lakes, and roads.
- Also quilts are often a source of comfort which parallels the comfort and belonging I feel when I'm in the Sierras.
- For this piece I used cotton fabric, batting, and thread, that I assembled using a sewing machine.
- To design the quilt I digitally drew the border of the Stanislaus National Forest. and then I added the lakes, rivers, and highways that run through the region.
- I split this drawing into 64 pieces that I printed to make my pattern.
- I began construction using a technique called surface applique to affix the green fabric that forms the forest onto the white background.
- Then I sewed these 64 pieces together to form the quilt face.
- After this, I again used surface applique to stitch the blue fabric which represents lakes and the teal fabric which represents wild and scenic river areas onto the quilt face.
- Then I top stitched the highways across the face using a red thread.
- At this point I stacked my backing fabric, batting and quilt face together and stitched the rivers with blue thread using a free motion quilting foot.
- Finally I added dark green fabric around the border of the quilt to finish it off.
- I began sketching my design for the quilt in November 2025, I began sewing the quilt in January 2026 and I completed it in mid March, totalling a little over 4 months of work.
- And to connect some of the ceramic sculptures to the physical locations where I've seen the animals that inspired them, I placed different colored pins on the map.

Zine

- In order to explore the place, plants, and animals that inspired my ceramic pieces and my quilt, I decided to create a zine
- This zine is inspired by the sketchbook I carry with me through the mountains and by the little booklets and pamphlets you can find at state parks and trailheads.
- The zine is a collection of my photos and illustrations of my observations from and places in the Stanislaus National Forest along with my notes about these observations and places.
- To make the zine, I began with sketching out each page digitally in Procreate.

- Once I was happy with my rough sketch of the layout, I added photos, edited the text, and added color and details to my drawings.
- I began working on this part of the project in January and completed in late March, totaling 3 months of work.

Material Usage

- When originally proposing this project, I had planned to include two pieces in addition to the ones you see here today. The way I had proposed to make them included using a 3D printer to make a topographical map and using foam, acrylic paint, and paper mache to make the trunk of a tree. I received the feedback from my panel that I should think about what my material choices communicated. Including the tree and the 3d map in the way I had proposed would have meant using materials that were not environmentally sustainable, which opposes the meaning of the work. While I could have changed the materials I planned to use in constructing these pieces, I decided instead to cut these two pieces in order to dedicate more of my time and energy into crafting the other elements of my project.

Environmental issues

- With my project, I'm inviting you to take a moment to care about the forests of the Sierra Nevadas, a place that is very important to me. But beyond that, I'm asking you to care more about protecting these forests and the environment as a whole.
- Now you may ask, why am I asking you to care about protecting these spaces and what can caring about these spaces do?
- First the why-
- On a global scale ecosystems are under constant threat from habitat loss, pollution, and natural disasters made worse by climate change.
- In California specifically, the risk of devastating forest fires has increased drastically due to climate change. The warming climate has caused winters to be shorter, warmer, and drier, which makes water an even more finite valuable resource.
- Severe droughts caused by the changing climate turn once lush, and thriving forests into a tinder box ready to go up in flames from a single spark. Forest fires can wreak havoc on the land, displacing animals, destroying habitats, and decimating plant life. In addition to being dangerous for human populations that reside in the fire's path.
- But it's important to remember that not all fire is bad, some trees, like the Giant Sequoia, require fire to reproduce. The heat from fire dries out the cones of the Giant Sequoia which allows them to open and release their seeds.
- The practice of igniting controlled burns reduces the buildup of flammable materials, prevents overcrowding of underbrush, and improves the overall health of the forest.

- So, what can you caring do?
 - By asking you to care about the environment, I'm asking you to respect it, take care of it, and protect it.
 - To respect and take care of the environment you can practice the principles of leave not trace.
 - You can learn about policies that affect the environment and speak out against those that aim to harm it and in support of those proposed to protect it.
 - You can choose to support organizations that work to protect the environment both locally and globally.
 - And you can even help with research currently being done through documenting the plants and animals you observe and uploading photos to inaturalist. inaturalist is a community based science site and app that allows users to share their observations and to work with the community to identify them. Scientists then use this data to help them monitor the status of different species which helps in conservation efforts.

AUDIENCE

- A question I kept asking myself while making this project was- who I'm making this work for. At first, I thought I was just making this project for myself- as a way to bring the place I love with me wherever I go. But, as I made more pieces and had more time to think I realized I was also making this project for anyone who has ever taken a deep breath and savored the smell of petrichor as it rains, and anyone who has found comfort in listening to birds singing,----- for anyone who has ever watched the sunrise over the mountains, and anyone who has ever flipped over a rock with the hope of seeing a cool bug-----. I also made this project for anyone who has ever cared deeply about a place, an animal, a plant, or for another person.----- I made this project for anyone who cares and everyone who chooses to listen-

Conclusion

- This project is the result of my lifelong passion to explore outside and to make things. And I'm going to continue to spend time in nature, so I'm going to continue to make things. And I'm going to continue to use what I make to share my love for nature spaces that are meaningful to me and to advocate for the protection of these spaces and the environment as a whole.

- I want to thank you all again for being here today and I hope that my work inspires you to find a place in nature you **can love** and to **fall in love with**. Whether it's a forest in the mountains, a rocky coastal beach, a grassy meadow, or even a city park, get to know the plants and animals there, share your love for this place with others, and find a community of people who will love and protect that place too----- Thank you.