The Artist-In-Residence Program
At The
Taft-Nicholson Center
The Artist in Residence program at the Taft-Nicholson Center is the realization of Melody Taft’s dream to inspire artists through a residency experience in the solitude and beauty of Centennial Valley. A gifted artist herself, Melody understands how the artist’s muse can be awakened when given space, time, and the inspiration of the natural world.

Melody said it best, while explaining why she and John invested such great energy, imagination, and resources to bring Lakeview, Montana back to life:

“Our world, as we all know, is in trouble, and this place gives people a soul back. That may sound funny, since we’re in the middle of nowhere in Montana, but I think it can happen. And if we built this from where it started, it can go on to something grand.”
Artists that come to the Center enjoy their own private residence, thanks to the restoration of a historic structure by the Tafts and the generous support of the Frank Carter family of Bozeman, Montana. The Carters have given generously to the Center to maintain the artists’ residence, both through ongoing operational support and by establishing an endowed fund for that purpose. The artists’ residence is named in their honor in recognition of their generosity.

Melody Taft understood from the beginning what a unique environment the Center could be for artists. At her urging, one of the buildings at the Center was dedicated for a residence for a visiting artist, and another for a studio in which they could work. And from the beginning, Melody has made it possible for artists to create, and to share their work with others in Centennial Valley, through her generous support and through her encouragement of others to join her in doing so.

Seeing the breadth and beauty of the art created at the Center, Melody was inspired to make certain that the Artist in Residence program remains a permanent feature at Lakeview. Her remarkable endowed gift for that pursuit will ensure that artists in residence and arts programming remain at the heart of the Center for generations to come.
Precious is life and precious will our time always be helping to establish the artist in residence in the name of my grandmother and all mothers at the Taft Nicholson Center.

We will always carry the magic that is Centennial Valley with us and will share it with our children always... grateful.

— FRANK CARTER IV

Every afternoon I would put down my books and close my laptop and walk up the road, sit on the same rock overlooking the valley and then walk down the road to the pond. This was my ritual. This was the way I would get out of my academic mind and into my wilderness. Some of my greatest insights would find me in these moments of visceral connection with the earth underneath me and the subtle winds around me.

— LOUISA CARTER
VICTOR DANIEL

The apex of my experience was hiking up Sheep Mountain to get an aerial perspective of the Red Rocks Lakes. The breathtaking views of the coral-green lake below provided me with the perfect grandiose scene for the crescendo of my film.

SUSAN BURROWS DABNEY

I am a plein air painter and was totally prepared to immerse myself into the landscape of the Centennial Valley. What I had not counted on was the delight of conversation and crossing over with professors and students. I had some powerful interludes and exchanges that I will cherish forever. The Valley allows us—even dictates—honesty and courage to look beyond the normal and into the sublime.
Being at the Taft-Nicholson Center, I realized the importance of setting in my writing. I also rekindled my love for wild places. Through thoughtful reflection during daily walks and late-night conversations, I came closer to the essence of my work and myself.

— BECKY HALL
“Foraging Sandhill Cranes,” Ewoud de Groot

“Trumpeter Swans,” Ewoud de Groot
MISSY DUNAWAY

I have attended eight art residencies around the world, and the Taft Nicholson Center stands out as the gold standard. The solitude, scenery, facilities, and staff made my month in Lakeview an unforgettable experience that continues to inspire me today. I am deeply grateful to everyone who made my month at the Taft Nicholson Center so special, especially Melody Taft.

“Artic Grayling, Odell Creek, Montana,” Missy Dunaway

WAYNE GEARY

Almost every afternoon it would cloud up; sometimes there would be rain, more often not. But the light and color displays were spectacular, like none I’d seen before. I would watch slowly shifting, bright to subdued shades of green and dazzling yellows, perfectly horizontal bands of glowing colors framed by the often-dark shadowed mass of the mountains behind.

“North Coast, Iceland,” Wayne Geary

“Centennial Valley, Looking North,” Wayne Geary
“A woman must have...a room of her own if she is to write fiction,” Virginia Woolf tells us; a natural expansion to any form of art and creativity follows. The Taft-Nicholson Center gifted me with this room of my own. My writer’s soul had been awaiting a spatial and temporal shift—had needed this landscape—to unfurl and claim its place in my life...I was at once cocooned and unshackled. I moved from cabin to schoolhouse to the small workroom overlooking the valley, pen and journal in hand, mind and body and spirit given only a single task: to absorb, to inhale, and to incorporate all that was bestowed upon me. My being swells with gratitude for this interlude.

For a writer, the opportunity to spend time at the Taft-Nicholson as an artist-in-residence is a gift of unmeasurable value. Beginning with the exit off the interstate, time begins to dissolve and blends into the landscape and the landscape blends into the natural world. At once, freed from the everyday trappings of a different world full of bills and politics and stale ritual, I began to dream and imagine the essential questions and responsibility I have to the craft of writing. As an artist, we paint, we write, we photograph, and we explore because it is a necessary part of who we are and it is in our bones. Bathed in the broad shoulders of the Centennial Valley and the sweeping panoramic vistas I was reminded of the wild that exists in all of us.
SHELLEY McCARL

My month as Artist in Residence at the Taft Nicholson Center shines brightly in my memory as one of the few times in my life when I’ve had the luxury of focusing solely on my work, undistracted by the daily responsibilities of family and teaching.

DEKE WEAVER

My time at the Taft-Nicholson Center was spent working on BEAR—the fourth performance from The Unreliable Bestiary. This life-long project is presenting a performance for each letter of the alphabet, each letter represented by an endangered animal or habitat. Working in the Centennial Valley was perfect. A cup of coffee and the slow quiet sunrise started each day of writing, dreaming, drawing, and walking.
Bathed in the broad shoulders of the Centennial Valley and the sweeping panoramic vistas I was reminded of the wild that exists in all of us.

—JEFF METCALF
All indifferent decay, made during the Taft-Nicholson Center for Environmental Studies Residency, contrasts images of sweeping vistas with interior imploded landscapes. This work does not offer a vantage point upon which to survey the landscape; multiple views of the mountains that circled the valley are collapsed into a single image. These images mirrored my experiences navigating the secluded valley of the residency program.

While at the Taft-Nicholson Center, we journaled, shot video, and recorded tremendous amounts of audio field recordings in different ecological areas. We learned from the landscape and people and came to better know ourselves and our creative practices in the process. Inspired by the richness of the Centennial Valley’s environmental soundscapes, we developed an album of audio collected during the residency which will be released as an LP later in 2022.

“All indifferent decay,” Caroline Clerc

RACHEL LIN WEAVER & LESLEY DUFFIELD
Odell Creek is an origin stream of the Missouri River, one of the great water highways of Manifest Destiny. For thirty years, my place-based installations have focused on how the United States has been manifested and the marks left on the landscape as we have “unsettled” this country...

My experience at Taft-Nicholson set me on a trajectory in creating more art made by walking, through landscapes that continues in my work today.

“Moose,” Shawn Skabelund

“Thistle,” Sara Tabbert

“Fort in a Fire,” Sara Tabbert
GRETCHEN HENDERSON

EXCERPTS FROM “HEADWATERS”

Storms chase up the valley and rattle the earth. Summer to winter, dawn to dusk: weather and light in the big sky over the Centennial Valley cannot help but shift the rhythm of a heartbeat…

In a place as remote as the Centennials, a person is aware of interdependence. Year-round and seasonal residents have different livelihoods but share stakes in the Valley. Over decades, creative partnerships have developed, formally and informally, to care for each other and for the ecosystem. The complex relationships make even a short-term visitor aware of their interdependence with places farther afield…

To imagine the reach of this place—and the ripple effects of what starts here—requires care to follow a meandering course. Remote from human centers, places like the Centennials may seem isolated, impervious to injuries like extractions. But their biodiversity may keep all of our hearts pulsing, air oxygenating, water streaming, replenishing resources farther afield. As the world is torn apart, what ripple effects might happen when communities near and far pull together to protect the volatile and vulnerable wonders of our planet?

MARIN ABELL & GREG STEWART

Our project is designed to engage these various interconnected valences of the Centennial Valley (rhizomes, aspens, sapsuckers, and beavers) with an austere aesthetic. We sculpted fallen aspen branches into forms akin to door knockers, and installed hundreds of these knockers throughout multiple clonal colonies across the valley. These knockers resemble and mimic the sapsucker, and are crafted by whittling, a democratic fabrication process that reminds of the beaver.
LAUREN CAMP

“RECKONING”
(FIRST PUBLISHED IN SPLIT ROCK REVIEW)

When it became clear the world would continue—others would cull, cook, drive nails, run serum to veins, spray weeds, peel and measure, trawl and scrape, would blast and repair broken bridges—while I was a mess of exhaustion, I left. Right out of it. Came three days indirect to where fish circuit in silence for a long time in the pond. Birds skate leaves, getting fat on fruit. The fish shift. I am lucky to watch them. All that exists is the rapture of turning. Or rather, hours not rushing. The light pitches the same field I hiked in. I lie into it, feel the soft give where my feet make their shape. Empty doesn’t have to be a loss. Maybe a simple form of beginning. Above, the greedy raptors circle and drift. Nothing between us but dandelions leaping on their long stems.

JORGE ROJAS

Two-dimensional encaustic color-field paintings on sandpaper inspired by the colors and textures I observed during my hikes, canoeing, and birdwatching in the wilderness of Montana’s Centennial Valley.

‘Color Score #1,” Jorge Rojas
‘Color Score #3,” Jorge Rojas
‘Color Score #2,” Jorge Rojas

CR: Simon Blundell
"Concurrent," Stephanie Rose

"Parked Wagon," Claire Remsberg
I had the great luxury to spend my days working in the studio. And, to complete it, my nights were spent having dinner and talking with highly educated and generous-minded people about their areas of study and mine, discussing what we learned and sharing our experiences.

“Gentian (Centennial Valley),” Bob Armstrong
Clara and I collaborated to film a short video about the benefits of hiking slowly and mindfully. In the film, we share different ways that each of us have learned to connect with our natural surroundings, through nature sketching, creative writing, and animal tracking. We are in the final stages of editing and refining the film and hope to enter it into some environmental film festivals once complete.

FROM “THE VALLEY”
Assume they are here. In the mist. In morningtide.
Eventide. In exchange of their day for ours, the one with shadows.
It seems wrong to disturb them in their transition from grazing to pause, the climb from threshold to higher elevation.
Two white-tailed deer are kneeling as they pass under a barbed wire fence. Like meeting quietude, their bodies perfectly coordinate. I hear the clack of cranes in the distance, their wooden rattles accompanying their far-fetched dance.
I am not yet too old that I can’t hear the geese flying above me.

“Trumpeter Swan Flight,” Rosalie Haizlett
"Breathing in the Autumn Aspen Grove," Stephanie Rose

"Lower Red Rock Lake Entry," Shawn Slabeland
In a leap of the imagination in 2005, friends John & Melody Taft and Bill & Sandi Nicholson decided to purchase and renovate the historic buildings of Lakeview, Montana. In doing so a ghost town was reborn as center for environmental education, the arts, and the humanities. It took them twelve years to complete the renovation with the result of sixteen beautifully landscaped acres and twenty-four fully renovated and furnished buildings, including a dormitory, private guest cabins, spaces for meetings, presentations, and research.

The product of their imagination is a unique community set in one of the most significant natural landscapes in Montana, with expansive wetlands, towering mountains, and a haven for wildlife from Trumpeter Swans to Arctic Graylings – part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Thanks to the generosity, labor, and imagination of the Tafts and Nicholsons, students, faculty, artists, and humanists from throughout the West gather to advance scholarship, create art, and allow a better understanding of our natural environment to inform and infuse their work.
FRANK & AMIE CARTER

Frank and Amie Carter saw in the Taft-Nicholson Center Artist-in-Residence Program an opportunity to provide artists a supportive and transformational environment to further their creative development. Through a generous endowed gift, the Carter family maintain the artist’s residence, a private one-bedroom house with a living room, kitchen, wood stove, and study area. The Carter Family Artist’s Residence sits right beside a small, restored schoolhouse with a beautiful view of the Centennial Valley that serves as work and exhibit space. Here visual artists, composers, writers, dancers, photographers, filmmakers, playwrights, and textile artists turn creative imagination into the tangible works of art.

“Carter Sign,” Frank Carter IV
Taft-Nicholson Environmental Humanities Education Center