

RUSSO ▲ LEE GALLERY

Artist Statement

The West Yet Glimmers

This body of work began during the Pandemic when wildfires in the Northwest clouded the air, and political unrest created a feeling of claustrophobia and dread. I had been working the prior 4 years on a stop motion animated series called "Western Edge". Short films of political satire, slapstick comedy and ecology themed pieces. I would collect interesting sticks along the banks of the inner-city Willamette River from which I would fashion crude sometimes grotesque puppets. I would coax them into little Shakespearian tragedies where they would go about the business of creating, celebrating and destroying themselves. This work helped me to cope with the anxiety of the time, but it was difficult to find an audience and I had a hankering to do large-scale work.

I've long been interested in the "hero's journey" and the narrative potential of a road trip. To go forward with this new body of work I imagined myself wandering across an unpeopled desert landscape searching for clues to a lost civilization. As my journey continues, I gather my findings, bones, skulls, broken parts, strange tools and chain. It is these "imagined" objects that I've carved from wood and assembled into the sculpture for this exhibition. I made tree-shaped anthropomorphic pieces as an homage to my memory of hikes along the pacific coast and the Sitka forests. And other pieces that mimic the undulating motion of dust devils on the arid plains. A dead cowboy fashioned from cow skulls as an elegy to a familiar archetype that once roamed the area. The "Western Bouquets" are carved from wood and mounted to the wall. I think of them as 3- dimensional journal entries, a record of my travels. They are "object poems" that perhaps function as talismans wording off dangerous encounters on the road.

"The West Yet Glimmers" is at its heart an American Neo-Gothic Dystopic Western in the form of an art installation. I first set out to make work that referenced Greek myths, such as Sisyphus and Icarus. In fact, began a piece that was a hybrid of both. But I wanted something closer to my own experience. That turned out to be the Hollywood western and specifically the "cowboy archetype". For all of the "Greek myths, are in some way or another played out on the American frontier. I grew up on Westerns, and was both a Boy Scout and, absurdly, an Indian Guide. Just as the process of making work, is one piece suggesting another, my imagined journey is the accumulation of small discoveries adding up to a larger truth.

J.D. Perkin - 2025