



In *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (1986), J.B. Jackson challenges the traditional notion that a landscape is simply a piece of land that is visually legible at a glance. He states that “a landscape is not a natural feature of the environment, but a synthetic space, a (hu)man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community.”

From Source to Mouth explores the ever-evolving landscape that is Monument Creek by probing the various ‘systems of spaces’ that overlay and intersect its

physical borders. In doing so, the exhibition uncovers the multiple communities the creek serves and asks questions about the nature of that service.

Developed by artist and curator Erin Elder and sponsored by Creativity & Innovation at Colorado College, *From Source to Mouth* represents one aspect of The Monument Creek Project, a multi-year, community-sourced creative research project that considers an essential—but sometimes overlooked—waterway. Simultaneously a natural feature and a highly engineered public resource, Monument Creek provides local drinking water, offers a habitat for many plants and animals, serves as a recreational area, and is home to a growing population of unhoused people. The Monument Creek Project engages elements of geology, hydrology, ecology, land use, history, personal memory, and sensory awareness to explore the multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory perspectives about the creek. By placing diverse voices in dialog, the project considers how this often-overlooked landscape has been constructed, restored, shaped, used, revered, protected, and made public.

From Source to Mouth features a set of Elder’s field drawings that depict the creek’s various aqueducts, overpasses, drains, pipes, canals, and monitoring stations to explore the infrastructure that defines the creek’s many uses. The images are presented with a soundscape created in collaboration with Iddo Aharony, Assistant Professor of Music at Colorado College, and excerpts from oral histories Erin collected from local creek stewards. Taken together, these elements render visible and imagine what is unseen, forgotten, or removed from view while illuminating an interconnectedness that can inspire care for water, land, animals, the past, the future, and each other.

—Jessica Hunter, Director of Creativity & Innovation at Colorado College

From Source to Mouth is made possible by Creativity & Innovation at Colorado College, where Erin Elder is an Innovator in Residence (2021–2023), and by the Colorado College Cultural Attractions Fund.

Erin Elder is an artist, writer, and curator guided by interests in land use, experimental collaboration, and non-traditional modes of expression.

Her research-driven projects take highly participatory forms, working with a broad definition of art to bring audiences into a direct experience of particular places.

Underscoring Erin’s work is a commitment to the creative process and direct support for artists. From 2009–2013, she cooperatively founded and directed PLAND, an off-the-grid residency program near Tres Piedras, NM. From 2012–2015, she was the Visual Arts Director at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Santa Fe, where she curated 50+ exhibitions and many public programs. Under her direction, the program worked directly with artists on exhibitions of new work, designed specifically for the unique gallery spaces at CCA.

She has also produced curatorial projects with a variety of institutions including the Museum of Capitalism, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Creative Time, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, International Symposium on Electronic Arts and the City of Albuquerque. Her writing has been published by University of Minnesota Press, University of Houston Press, and various regional magazines, including a self-published blog and two self-published books.

Erin’s drawings have been exhibited throughout the Rocky Mountain West and in Canada. Her creative work has been supported by various residencies and awards. She was a 2017–2019 research fellow with the Center for Art + Environment at Nevada Museum of Art and from 2021–2023, she is in residence with Creativity & Innovation at Colorado College.

Erin lives on ancestral Tiwa lands in central New Mexico. Her home, just outside the city of Albuquerque and on the banks of the Rio Grande, is also a community-nurtured farm and a refuge for traveling artists.

As a product of Erin’s time at Colorado College, *From Source to Mouth* is an opportunity to reconsider and reconnect with her hometown of Colorado Springs.



Creativity & Innovation at Colorado College

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From Source to Mouth

A CREATIVE SURVEY OF MONUMENT CREEK

“They say that time is like a river.
I’d say there is no time like our creek.”

—Erin Elder





This exhibition is about a specific place: **Monument Creek**. It is also about the smaller places that comprise the creek and the city through which it runs.



I'm learning that this creek is a distinct body. It is an individual, a character. It may even have, for lack of a not-so-human word, a personality. It is unique and changing and very much alive.

This creek is older than we know.

I have walked as much of this creek as I can reach. And because I am a person who enjoys movement more than stillness, I have observed the creek in motion.

Photographs and sound recordings have stopped me temporarily, those moments—or even minutes—captured and immortalized through digital devices.

Back in my studio, I have made field drawings from those photographs. Ironically, the time spent making those drawings far outlasts the time I stood looking. However, my looking is contemplative, prolonged, detailed. Drawing is a way to look longer.

The places I've drawn are now changed. The season is different and the weather has shifted. But also: the grasses have been cut, the graffiti has been covered over, construction is now complete. Is it the same place if everything about it has changed?

I'm also learning that sound is change. Sound is caused by movement—it is waves in motion—and is therefore



temporary and fleeting. The sounds in this exhibition no longer exist. And yet there are other sounds constantly being made.

Is a thought also a relic of time? In my conversations with creek stewards, I have noticed the endurance of certain ideas, the shifting of values, the dissolving nature of a changing mind. With hours poured over these oral histories, I recognize that even our beliefs are subject to time.

I am grateful for this period at Colorado College and in my hometown and with the creek. This gift of time has allowed me to give my attention to these things in a very focused way. In fact, you might see this exhibition as an accumulation of those attentions.

And while this exhibition will one day end, I sense that something will go on.

Because time not only erodes, it also amasses, gathers, and expands.

Monument Creek is not the same entity as when I began this project; neither am I. My curiosity about this creek has moved into new dimensions of my life and brain. I'm fascinated to continue learning it, even as it changes. Even as I change.

They say that time is like a river. I'd say there is no time like our creek.

—Erin Elder

