

A CONTINUUM OF PLACE: the Fort Ord Public History Project

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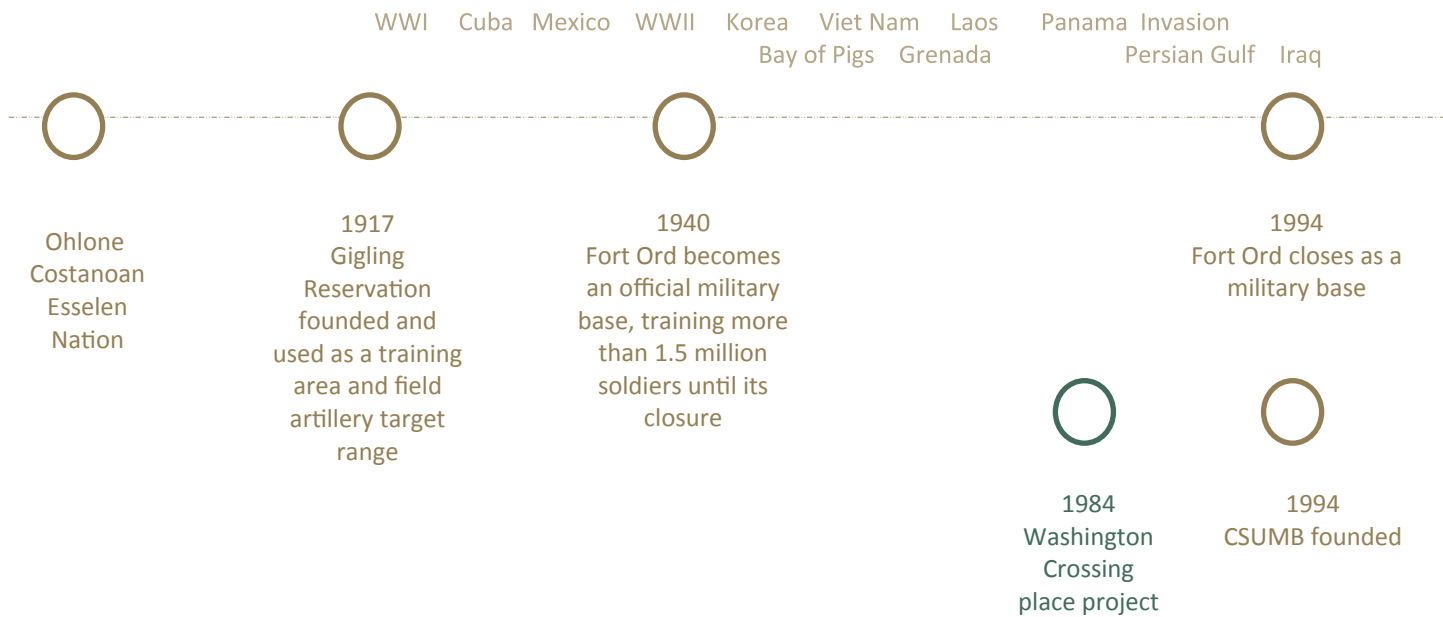
A CONTINUUM OF PLACE: the Fort Ord Public History Project

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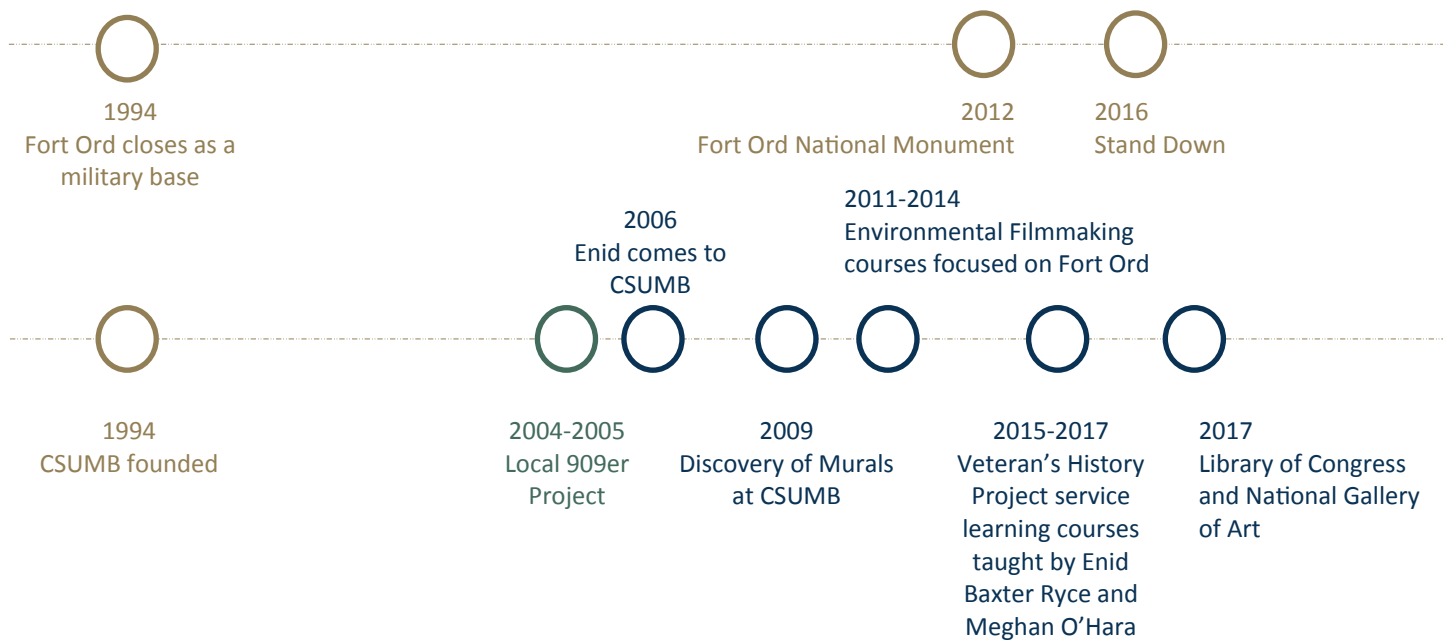
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A CONTINUUM OF PLACE: the Fort Ord Public History Project



2017
Library of Congress
and National Gallery
of Art

In March of 2017, 57 CSUMB students and U.S. military veterans shared their films and stories with military leaders, government officials, and Congressional representatives in Washington D.C. What started as a small scale art project to document the landscape, ecology, and history of Fort Ord —the largest decommissioned army base in the Western United States—found its way to the official U.S. Army archives of Fort Ord, the Library of Congress Veterans’ History Project, and the National Gallery of Art.

How did they get there?



1984
Washington
Crossing

This project really began in 1984, when Enid Baxter Ryce was growing up in a Revolutionary War town along the Pennsylvania Border. Each year on Christmas, Enid’s hometown of Washington Crossing re-enacted the famous crossing of the Delaware River by General Washington in the Battle of Trenton. Enid worked in a general store, a 1700s Quaker re-enactment, living and experiencing the “performance of history” — a “Euro-centric, sanitized version of a single conflict,” and at the same time experiencing “the destruction of place and memory” by a local mining company who practiced mountain-top removal. Around age 11, Enid began to document the remnants of the place that she knew, to preserve what was real about that place in her heart. Conducting a community inventory, Enid documented cinder block homes with aluminum roofs and no hot water. In what felt like a race against time, she chronicled everything she could about the houses and the people who lived in them amidst a backdrop of shrinking farmland, Northeastern sprawl, and contaminated water.



2004-2005
Local 909er Project

Years later, as a professor at the Claremont Colleges in southern California, Enid similarly began the process of documenting community in the face of change. This time her project, the Local 909-er, chronicled existing neighborhoods, housing, and people in the Inland Empire of San Bernardino County during the early stages of the real estate boom. As planned and gated communities replaced vacant orange groves, vineyards, train yards, and rock mines. Her work just preceded the 2008 market crash.



Washington Crossing—housing as Enid knew it.
Untitled. Oil on Linen, 5' x 4.5' 2012.
Image courtesy of Enid and Walter Ryce



“There are murals in the buildings. . .”

2009

Discovery of Murals
at CSUMB

So it is not too surprising that in her first years at CSUMB, Enid Baxter Ryce sent her students out onto the campus of what was once the largest army base in the West, to see the landscape. It started with an Introduction to Video class. Enid was fascinated with the history of Fort Ord, having grown up with the re-enactments and military history of Washington Crossing and witnessing large scale landscape changes as a child. At the time, many of the abandoned buildings of the old Fort Ord did not have restricted access, and students could explore the old fort and barracks. In so doing, they discovered what they would eventually determine to be thousands of murals, a legacy left by soldiers across decades and multiple wars. Murals that chronicled ideas and propaganda of the military, murals that were artistic expressions, and murals that reflected soldiers memories. Some of the murals were *palimpsests*—murals begun by an individual or unit and added to or changed by others over time. Together they chronicled an astonishing history of more than 40 years of military life.



Found mural images in the historic Fort Ord buildings. Images courtesy of Enid and Walter Ryce

Once the murals were discovered, one thing led to another, resulting in what has now become a lengthy list of accomplishments and means to engage students and veterans in the exploration of place and the expression of their experiences. Through courses, workshops, exhibits, and films, Enid and her collaborators have amassed a large body of work to document Ford Ord's history. These include:

- More than 200 oral histories of veterans, archived in the Library of Congress Veterans' History Project
- More than 50 homeless veterans Oral Histories are permanently archived at the Library of Congress with their portraits. Their portraits were also part of a film that screened at the at the National Gallery of Art and an exhibition at the Library of Congress
- A feature-length experimental film titled 'A Land for War,' which premiered at the National Gallery of Art and has shown at the 2017 Philip Glass Days and Nights Festival
- Integration of university students via two continuous course offerings and many supporting grants
- Exhibitions at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History and the Monterey Museum of Art
- A permanent display of Fort Ord paintings at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Veterans' Transition Center in Marina, and the Monterey County Free Library in Seaside
- More than 100 lectures on the project
- More than 6 million visits to the Planet Ord website.



Home Page from PlanetOrd.com
Image courtesy of Enid and Walter Ryce



“There were thousands of murals. Thousands.”

2009
Discovery of Murals
at CSUMB

After the murals were discovered, Enid received a CSUMB grant to work with students to inventory all the murals. They discovered more than 1,000 murals in the buildings, displayed these in two exhibits, and through this process have connected with thousands of veterans. Enid describes many of the images as “terrifying, sad, and haunting.” She recounted one hallway where the soldiers had signed their paintings, “which was unusual, because being a soldier isn’t really about yourself.” She was able to match multiple names with multiple murals in this company, “and they were really good.” The images are displayed on the Planet Ord website. Organized as you would experience the place, from the building exteriors as they are today, to the interior murals, to wondering and showing through archival images what life was like in the time of their making, these images have touched many veterans. Enid described a veteran who was recovering from PTSD and when he saw the mural: “He gave me an interview, and I met his whole unit, and they made me an honorary member. I documented their reunion, and 9 flew in from Afghanistan, including the commanding officer,” for the opening at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. When the website first went live, it generated more than 45,000 hits in a single weekend. Since that time it has received more than 6 million visits.



2011-2014
Environmental
Filmmaking courses
focused on Fort Ord

But Enid’s work has also been about the ecology of Fort Ord. Through the environmental filmmaking course, she has taken students out into the back country of what is now a national monument. Working with the Bureau of Land Management who oversees the 14,000 acre parcel with more than 44 species of rare plants and animals, she helped students also to see the natural landscapes at Fort Ord. “So it was a project about the ecology, the built environment, and also the critical wilderness that Fort Ord became.” Members from the local Sierra Club chapter would also camp out in the wilderness, and Enid would share the monuments former history with them. “We would be talking long into the dark of night.” The course began with an introduction to some of Enid’s works: the Local 909er project, a Water, CA multimedia project about the challenges of water in California, and Planet Ord. Enid introduced students to ways of seeing their everyday environment through John R. Stilgoe’s 1998 book *Outside Lies Magic: Regaining History and Awareness in Everyday Places*, and by walking the campus and the monument lands.

*“The whole concatenation of wild and artificial things,
the natural ecosystem as modified by people over the centuries,
the built environment layered over layers,
the eerie mix of sounds and smells and glimpses neither natural nor crafted —
all of it is free for the taking, the taking in.”*

John Stilgoe, *Outside Lies Magic*, 1998, p.2

In the environmental filmmaking course, students developed photo essays, researched the place—its people and natural history—and mapped overlays, seeing and layering ideas as they learned. The course then provided a mix of environmental readings and films as students learned to deepen their sensibilities of how the layering of landscape, place, and significant environmental issues can tell important stories. Through contemporary and historical issues, they explored art as a means of remediation, of healing, of the landscape and sometimes, its emptiness. Until the students emerged at the end of semester with their own final projections. Student films have covered a wide range of topics including water pollution on the former military base, water contamination at a nearby migrant community well, native plant remediation on Fort Ord, relocation of Army landfills, innovative waste management in nearby Marina, land development and reuse on Fort Ord, Sudden Oak Death, sheep as invasive plant remediators on Fort Ord, wild pigs of Fort Ord, Landscape and PTSD and Landscape and Memory.



2015-2017
Veteran's History
Project service
learning courses

Along the way, Enid also began leading art workshops at the Veterans' Transition Center in Marina. The show at the Monterey Museum of Art featured the art of homeless veterans. And it pushed Enid down a path of a new CSUMB course, in partnership with the Library of Congress' Veterans' History Project. This service learning course engages students in collecting veterans' stories—veterans from Fort Ord, from the local community, and from their families. Because many of the students also have family members who were veterans, and for some, it was the first time they had really spoken to their family members about their service. This course interweaves photo essays, social justice, and Fort Ord's environmental history. Students collected oral stories from veterans and used them as starting points for their own interpretive films. These have been shown at the Monterey Museum of Art and ultimately, this past year, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.



Veterans tell their stories at the 2016 Stand Down (see page 10). Image courtesy of Enid and Walter Ryce

“And the ash was raining down from the sky. . .”

In the summer of 2016, the Veterans’ Transition Center, in partnership with Stand Down, held a 3-day event on the historic Fort Ord grounds. Stand Down is a national veteran-run non-profit organization that stages temporary military installations where homeless veterans can sleep in barracks, receive medical, dental and legal services, take a shower and get a hair cut, eat a meal, and find respite. During the 2015 service learning course, students had the idea to pilot a collection of homeless veterans’ stories. No one had ever chronicled these for the Library of Congress—the process was unknown for getting these stories into the federal archives.

Over the weekend of the Stand Down, on the same grounds of historic Fort Ord, there was an austere car show juxtaposed with the Soberanes fire, a devastating wildland fire in Big Sur, and a portable military base, set up for homeless veterans for three days.

So we became a service provider at the Stand Down, and we recorded close to 50 stories, which is a lot, it’s an elaborate process. . . We made portable recording booths made out of blankets . . . And the ash was raining down from the sky from the fire, and the yellow jackets had been displaced from Big Sur. It was intense. We were the first to set up and the last to tear down our tents. It was so hard to see [the veterans] go.

The stories, collected by community members, students, faculty and staff, have been curated into different exhibitions and they are available online. Enid also took portraits of all the homeless veterans, and other veterans who wanted to be photographed. “It made me realize how photography, which is so ubiquitous to us, is just so special. And it’s a way to tell them that they’re special.” These portraits are featured in Enid’s film as well, an experimental film which shows the murals, archival footage, the days at Stand Down, the demolition of structures at CSUMB, and the land’s wildness. “It is an account of the erasure of place, a metaphor for the people.”



“Students have learned to see themselves as part of a much larger continuum.”

2017
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of Art

And so it was that in 2017, 57 students and veterans made their way to Washington, D.C. Many of the students had never been on a plane or stayed in a hotel before. Enid describes that it was hard to convey to them the magnitude and importance of the experience. She worked tirelessly to gather friends of friends’ frequent flier miles and supports so that everyone could go and have this experience. In her own youth, Enid did not have the funds to attend her own gallery exhibit in D.C., and so it was personally important to make this happen. Enid curated a collection of student films from her classes, both environmental filmmaking and the service learning class. Students received a formal tour of the Library of Congress, met Congressional representatives and military officials, witnessed the screening of Enid’s feature length film on the veterans, and saw their own films screened, too. The students described a sense of wonder at the experience:

They describe a sense of wonder at seeing something that was invisible to them before. And the other thing that is invisible to them is this cohort of people that are about their age who are off

fighting these wars that we've been fighting for years. . . It's very powerful to understand this part of our society.

In Washington D.C., students spoke about their experiences—sharing feelings of humility, connection, and honor. They were moved not only by the stories they heard but through their enhanced understanding of what it means to be a veteran. Many students spoke of the silence that surrounds veterans who normally do not talk about their experiences, even with their family. They spoke about how the process helped them to see not only the *soldier* but also the *person*—who they were before, who they were after, and how the experience of serving changed them. The veterans also confessed that they rarely talked about their service to anybody, and they were all really excited to share. They spoke of the importance of hearing history from the perspective of combatants, and that the Veterans' History Project provides such a historical account.

“We hear about the Library of Congress, and we know that that is important, but until you walk into this building, you really don't have an understanding – you are collecting something that is historical from veterans, and you are putting it in a place that is so important to our country. And I think that's an amazing program to have.” - Jaeson Amarillas, class of 2016¹

These projects will leave lasting legacies, not only in the archives of Washington, D.C., but in the hearts of veterans who are heard, and students who develop confidence and a sense of pride in what they did. Because of the work, “students have seen themselves as a part of a much larger continuum.” A continuum of place and time, no longer invisible for those who have learned to see.



Enid with her son in 2009, at an exhibition of works at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History
Image courtesy of Enid and Walter Ryce

This working paper was developed by Victoria Derr in collaboration with Enid Baxter Ryce, through an interview in August 2017 and document review.

¹ As recorded by CSUMB student Marina Martinez at <https://www.facebook.com/marinadmartinez/videos/1369727893048929/>

Enid Baxter Ryce

Enid Baxter Ryce (nee Blader) is an artist, filmmaker and musician. She grew up in a strip-mining town that was also a Revolutionary War reenactment park. Her works have exhibited internationally at venues including the National Gallery of Art and Library of Congress, Washington, D.C; the J.P. Getty Museum, Director's Guild of America and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Location One and Academy of Art and Sciences, New York City; Sundance, Park City UT; The Kunsthalle Vienna; The Arnolfini in London; Center for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow; CCA Andratx, Mallorca

Enid's work was featured in the Getty Museum's retrospective of *California Video, 1952^a -present*. Her animation, *Olive's Backyard Concert*, has screened in film festivals internationally and regularly on California PBS. A collection of her filmic art works, *A Film is a Burning Place*, was released by Microcinema International on the Aurora Video Label.

Enid's work has been written about in *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Artreviews*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Bitch Magazine* and many other books, journals and magazines. She has exhibited in and curated several museum exhibitions based on her projects *Water, CA* and *Planet Ord* including one sponsored by the Irvine Foundation at the Crocker Museum (2011), one NEA-funded at the Armory in Pasadena (2012) and one funded by Cal Humanities at the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History (2014). She curates participatory arts and science projects for the biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference, Sacramento.

In 2008, Enid founded the Monterey Bay Film Society was awarded a Federal Stimulus (ARRA -BTOP) grant to fund an ongoing community program of film workshops for over 2000 at-risk, incarcerated and migrant youth annually. She has received grants from the California Council of the Humanities, Durfee Foundation, Kodak, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Community Foundation, and others. She has won awards for her work as an artist and arts educator from government agencies and non-profit festivals.

Enid has been the Community Director for Philip Glass' Days and Nights festival since 2013. She also works with the US Army and the Library of Congress to create materials for their archives about Fort Ord

Enid received her BFA from The Cooper Union (1996), was a fellow at Yale University (1995) and received her MFA with a fellowship from Claremont Graduate University (2000). She is Professor of Cinematic Arts and Environmental Studies and Interim Director of the Salinas City Center for Arts, Culture and Humanities at California State University Monterey Bay.

She lives and works on historic Fort Ord, with her husband Walter and their children.

Enid Baxter Ryce: Additional Select Works

Watershed mapping and interpretation

City of Salinas 2006 - 2008

Enid Baxter Ryce and her students embarked upon on a semester-long walking tour of the Salinas, CA watershed. After investigating the community, history and ecology of the watershed, they made a film on the Carr Lake Project (a public urban open space/land and water remediation project) that was distributed by the City of Salinas. They made a second film, describing ecological and cultural sites connected by the Salinas watershed for the Return of the Natives restoration and education project.

Environmental Arts/Science Communication/Interpretation: Water, CA

Water, CA is a series of 22 contemporary projects engaging the history, mystery and challenges of California's Water, co-directed by Enid Baxter Ryce and Nicole Antebi, Water, CA is a multimedia experiment in geography that incorporates mythological and playful understandings of complex histories. Water, CA is a website and traveling exhibition featuring essays, painting, photography, video animations, essays and a California water timeline. The project became two Museum exhibitions. The first "Liquid Assets" took place at the Crocker Museum 2011 -2012 (supported by the Irvine Foundation).

Sea Change: Exhibitions, interpretive materials and participatory experiences

At the invitation of the Women's' Environmental Artist Directory, Enid Baxter Ryce curated a site specific exhibition, interpretive materials and series of programs on the subject of Sea Level Rise at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in 2013. Enid also created a participatory art project and interpretive materials on the subject for First Night Monterey during which participants sprayed a wax model of the local watershed with water to simulate precipitation and flooding while defining the watershed. Enid painted a series of maps depicting sea level rise projections for that watershed that flanked the activity.

Military and Veteran Affairs Artworks and Interpretive materials

Enid Baxter Ryce created a series of oil paintings that are on permanent exhibition at the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs. An interpretive booklet that she wrote and designed contextualizes the paintings. 2014

East Garrison, US Army

Enid Baxter Ryce was invited by the U.S. Army to create an archive of photographs of the East Garrison neighborhood for Fort Ord. 2016

Toponymy and Hidden Histories

Toponymy is the study of place names. As part of an Irvine Foundation grant project for the Monterey Museum of Art, Enid Baxter Ryce chose 20 paintings from the museum's permanent collection representing places in Monterey. Ryce painted a large oil painting mapping these locations. After conducting ecological and historical research into each site, Enid wrote brief histories centering on the place name's relationship to hidden histories.

Devil's Half Acre

Devil's Half Acre is Enid Baxter Ryce's comprehensive historical and environmental research project exploring a unique phenomenon in American toponymy—more than fifteen unusual places in the United States are - or once were - named "Devil's Half Acre."

Enid Baxter Ryce: Additional Select Works

Current Creative Institutional Projects

In August 2017, Enid was appointed the Interim Director to lead the creation of the new Center for Arts, Culture and Humanities at Salinas City Center for California State University, Monterey Bay. The mission of the Center is to enhance and promote informed and creative community engagement with the arts, culture, and humanities in Monterey County through participatory public programming, exhibitions, and educational opportunities.

Philip Glass' Days and Nights Festival

Since 2011 Enid Baxter Ryce has been the Community Director creating free experimental and community-based programs for Philip Glass' Days and Nights festival annually. The festival is presented by the Philip Glass Center for Arts, Science and the Environment. It's mission is to gather the world's leaders in the fields of art, science and the environment for a broad array of interdisciplinary activities including performances, seminars, and education programs that inspire and motivate the public to become engaged with matters vital to the future of the natural environment and the quality of human existence.

War and the Weather

'War and the Weather' is a new experimental feature film exploring the Atmospheric Rivers, directed by Enid Baxter Ryce and featuring the music of Philip Glass. The film will be developed at Philip Glass' Days and Nights festival and is produced by Honest Engine Films.

A Land for War

Artist Enid Baxter Ryce has been documenting the lands and the ruins of the historic Fort Ord decommissioned military base where, for over a decade, she has lived and worked. *A Land for War weaves together hundreds of long-hidden murals painted by former soldiers stationed at the base, archival training footage from the Vietnam War era (when Fort Ord was active), wind-swept landscapes from one of the last stretches of California coastal wilderness, and portraits of homeless veterans occupying the land today. This nearly silent and hauntingly poetic documentary portrays the impact of the military on the land and the people. Original musical score by Lanier Sammons.*

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The mission of the Environmental Studies Program at California State University Monterey Bay is to develop students and communities with the knowledge, skills, and compassion to promote social and environmental justice and sustainable communities.