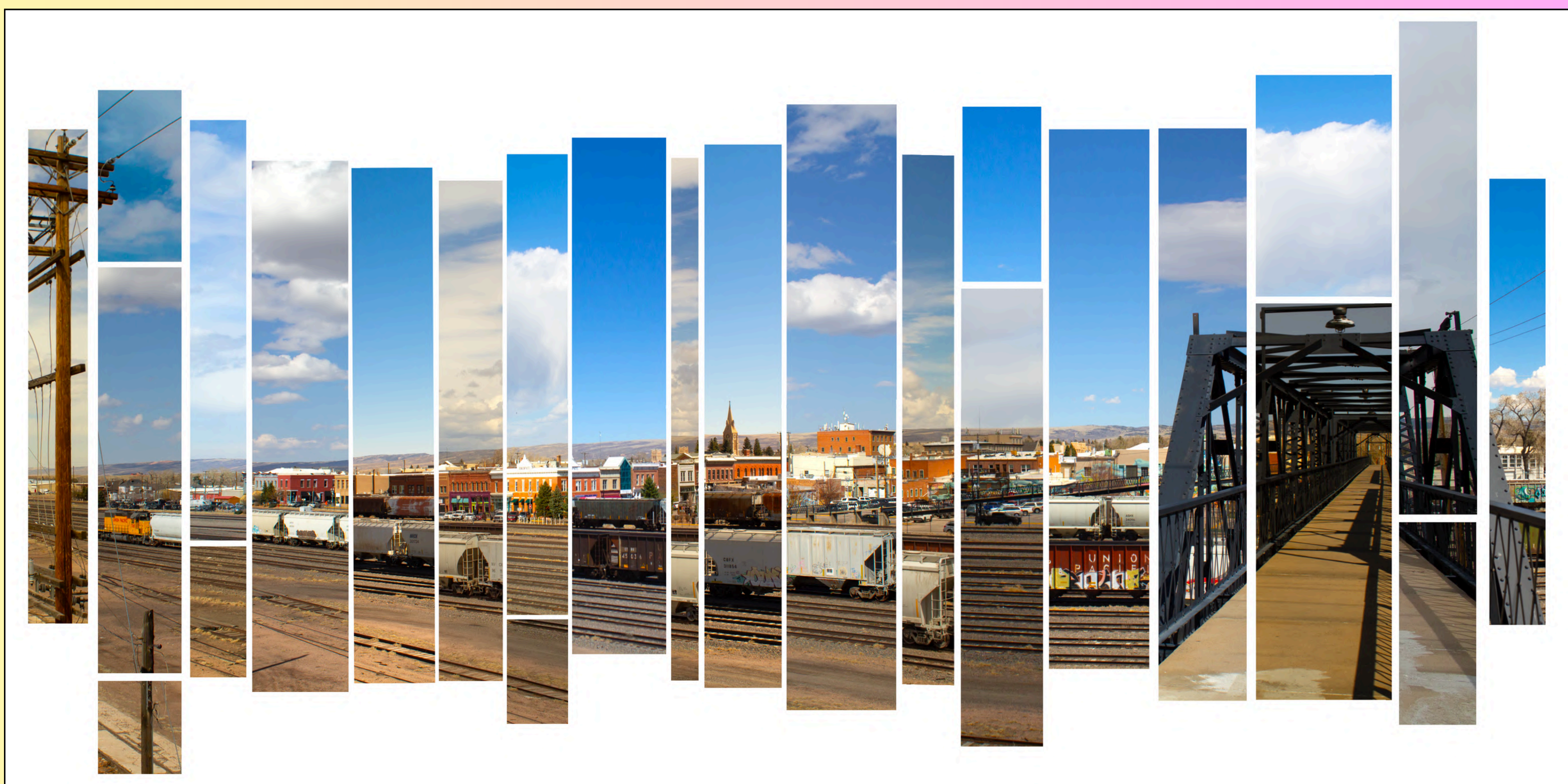


# American Studies

## Porchlight



*Time-Sliced Laramie: A month of moments captured in a single panoramic collage by Max Umurzakov, 2025.*



# Letter from the Director

It has been a great year for our American Studies program despite the challenges I will just refer to as the “War on Universities.” With African American and Diaspora Studies, Gender and Women’s Studies and Latina/o Studies being dissolved into what will now officially be called the American Cultural Studies department (which will also include Native American and Indigenous Studies), we are mourning the loss of these units as we are building a new future with our thriving BA and MA degrees in American Studies. In this process, we are gaining faculty members, one of them being Dr. Sam Vandermeade; you can read about her accomplishments in the following pages.



We just graduated five MA students – Georgie Mullins, Lubomir Kochanskyj, Samson Olaoye, Ernest Ewalefoh, and Gerald Lovato. For the Fall, we have admitted eight new MA students, who will be joining us from the UK, Vietnam, Nigeria, Iowa, Texas, Wyoming, and Colorado. This will bring the total numbers of our MA program to 17 students with 15 being fully funded. We continue to rely on the excellent affiliate faculty from other units on campus to make our graduate program work with very few faculty lines.

We also continue to enjoy working with our Cooper House colleagues in both the Wyoming Institute for Humanities Research and the Wyoming Humanities Council (the latter of which unfortunately lost its director, our MA student Shawn Reese, due to budget cuts). We have had a number of great events at the Cooper, among them an inspiring artist talk from Eric “Christo” Martinez. Our own Gerald Lovato also turned his defense into the hugely successful pop-up art exhibit for suicide awareness “Wyoming Unite” at the Art Museum. He will be joining the PhD program in American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin in the Fall.

Again, I would like to thank our students Cara Barclay and Max Umurzakov for working on this newsletter, and I wish everyone a great summer!

Ulli Adelt



# Welcome Aboard Dr. V



Dr. Sam Vandermeade (she/her) is an interdisciplinary feminist, critical race, and critical Whiteness scholar whose research examines rhetorics of belonging, citizenship, White femininity, and (anti)racism among both progressive and regressive social movements in the 20th and 21st century United States. She has researched and written about pro- and anti-immigrants' rights movements, feminist and antifeminist movements, political rhetorics surrounding transgender rights, queer labor organizing, rural political organizing, and feminist pedagogies. Publications on these subjects include an article titled "The (White) Child and the Dustin Inman Society: American Ethnonationalism, Masculine

PotECTIONism, American Ethnonationalism, Masculine Protectionism, and Racialized Citizenship" and a book chapter titled "Pedagogies of Hope, Resilience, and Resistance: Teaching Indigeous and Transnational Feminisms at the University of Wyoming." She has two forthcoming book projects: a co-edited collection titled "Teaching Transnational: Meanings, Methods, and Experiences" and a monograph under development tentatively titled "American Hauntings: Citizenship, Futurity, and the White Child."

In addition to her work as a scholar and a researcher, Dr. Vandermeade also thoroughly enjoys teaching undergraduate and graduate courses at all levels. Her Introduction to American Studies (AMST 2010) course takes students on a deep dive into the rhetorics, cultures, histories, and arts-based activism of three U.S.-based social movements: feminism, the long Civils Rights Movement, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) movement. She also regularly teaches a course titled Institutional Violence (AMST 3600) that examines historical and contemporary examples of how various social institutions--such as education, science and medicine, public health, mass media, religion, foster care, and the criminal justice system--have perpetuated violence and harm against minoritized communities. Dr. Vandermeade also offers several upper-division courses, including Rural Subcultures (AMST 4610/5610) and Wyoming, Race, and the Archive (AMST 4500/5000), both of which introduce students to the hidden histories of women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ folks in rural places such as Appalachia and the Rocky Mountain West.

When not researching and teaching, Sam enjoys sewing and crafting, walking and bike riding, and the challenge of high-altitude vegetable gardening. She lives in Laramie with her wife, daughter, two dogs, and two cats. If you'd like to get to know Dr. Vandermeade, you can usually find her in her campus office, at Night Heron Books & Coffeehouse, or at Washington Park with her daughter or her dogs!

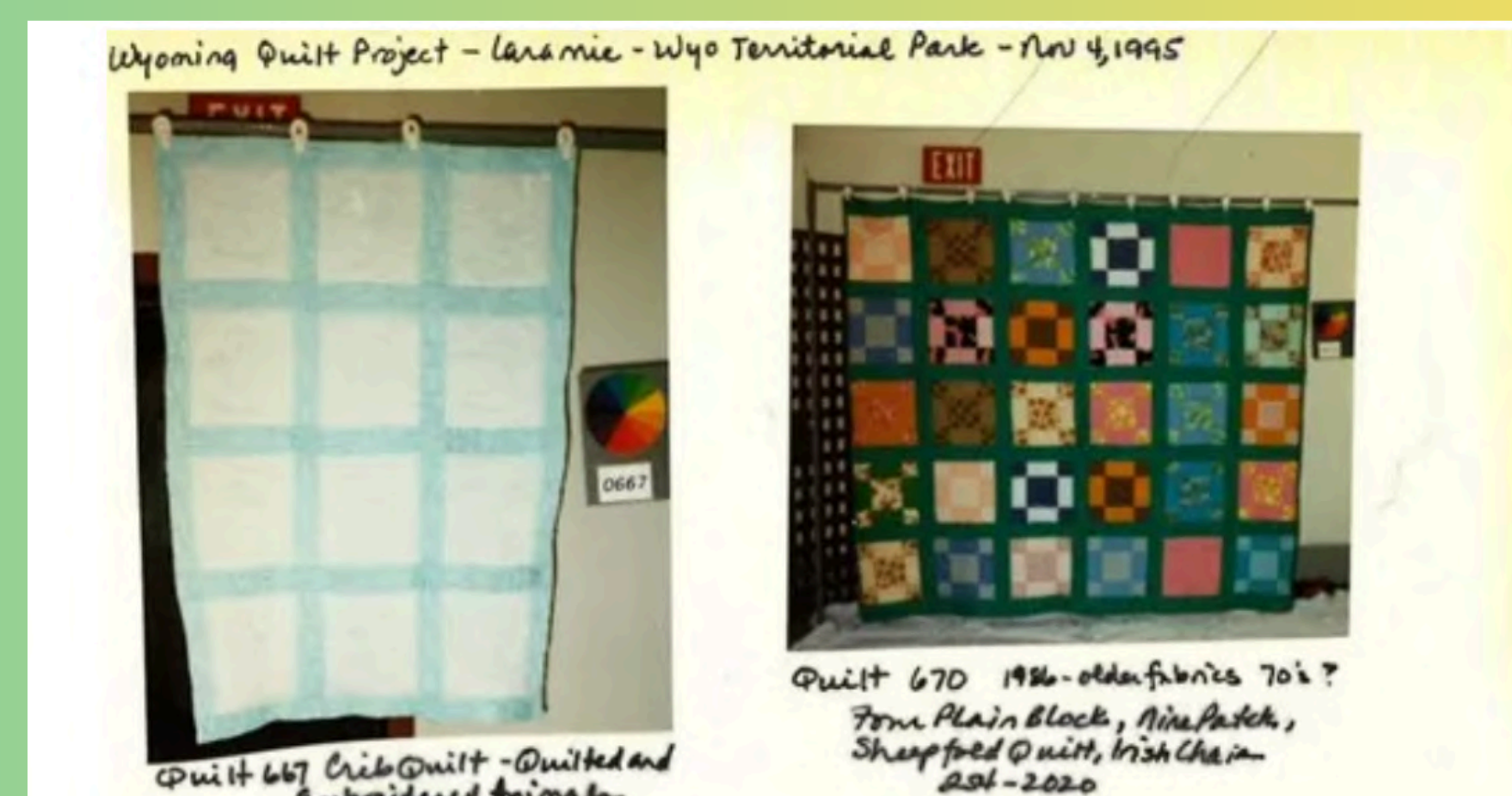


# Congratulations to Harper Pachel on her wonderful blog for the AHC about Wyoming Quilt Project



We are happy to celebrate our MA student's recent blog publication, "The Wyoming Quilt Project: Preserving History Through Quilts," featured on the American Heritage Center's blog. Harper has worked as a graduate research assistant at the American Heritage Center of the University of Wyoming for the fall and spring semesters.

The Wyoming Quilt Project, established in 1994 by a dedicated group of women — including Tammy Au-France, Anne Olsen, Wendye Ware, Kathleen Bertoncelj, and Brett Selmer — aimed to photograph and record details about quilts made in or residing in Wyoming.



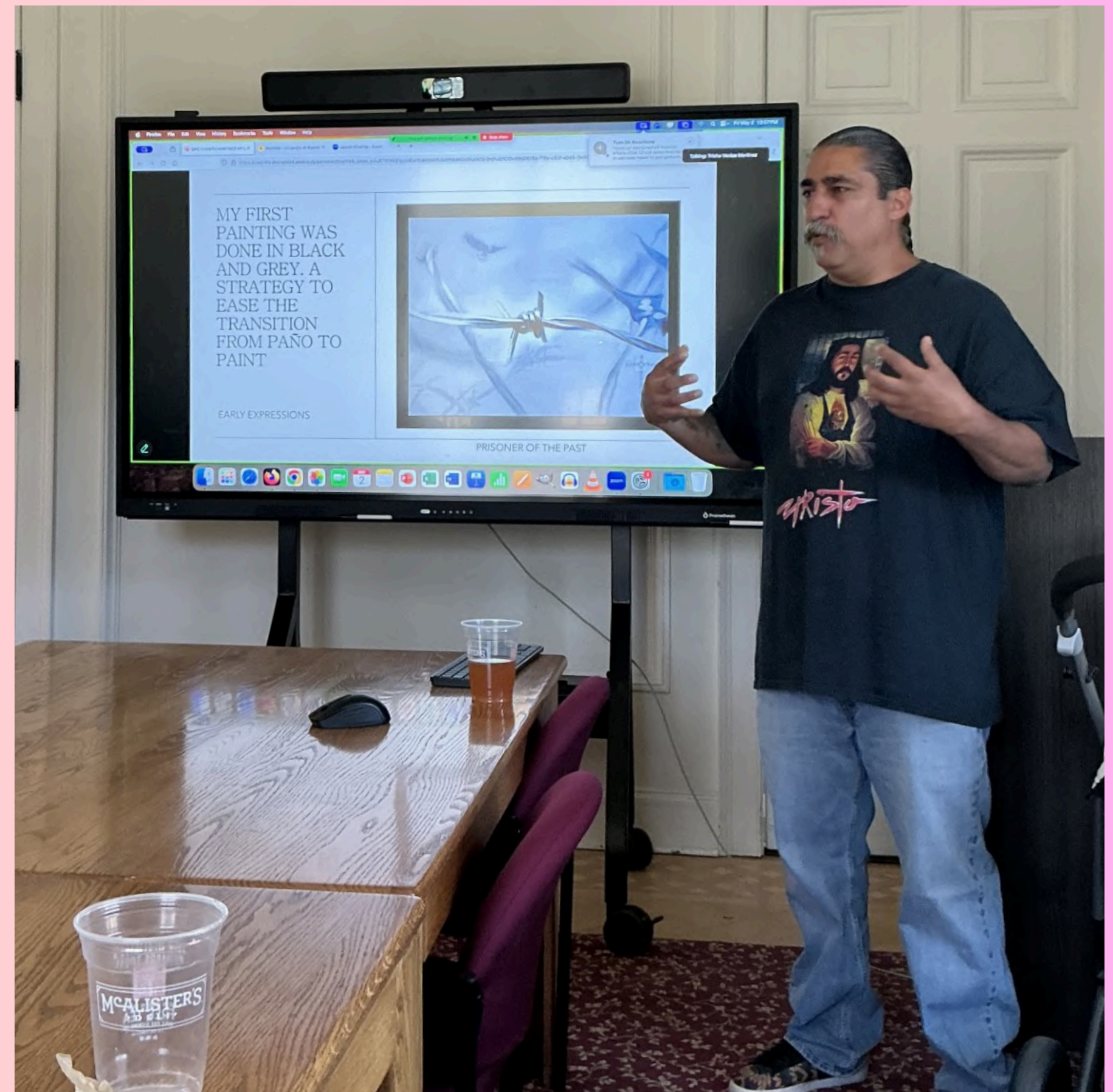
Her insightful research delves into a remarkable grassroots initiative that has safeguarded Wyoming's cultural heritage through the meticulous documentation of quilts. We are proud that her research has contributed to the America Heritage Center and got published as a blog post for the AHC.





# Eric “Christo” Martinez talk

On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Cooper House held an artist talk with Eric “Christo” Martinez on ‘The Allegory and Art Theory.’ A nationally recognised artist, his work is currently displayed at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. Martinez discussed how he transformed trauma into creativity. His artwork ranges from portraits to murals. Martinez’s talk was engaging and impactful, illustrative of how art can be a tool to heal.





# Wyoming Unite - A Study of Suicide in Wyoming by Gerald Lovato

The Wyoming Unite pop-up thesis exhibition was intentionally designed as a one-day event to maximize its impact and disrupt the conventions of the elitist contemporary art world. This decision is rooted in a deliberate rebellion against the capitalist frameworks that often dominate art exhibitions, where the primary focus lies in commodifying art and catering to buyers rather than prioritizing the transformative potential of art for community engagement and impact.

The University of Wyoming Art Museum served as an incredible partner for this event, providing me with a space to host an unconventional thesis exhibition. I am truly grateful to the museum director Nicole Crawford for believing in me and giving me the opportunity to do something outside the box. By breaking away from the standard month-long or longer exhibition format, which typically serves the transactional goals of the art market, the pop-up structure challenges the idea that art's value is tied to its saleability. Instead, it emphasized art as an immediate, communal experience—something to be felt, shared, and remembered in the moment. This ephemeral nature heightened the urgency of the exhibition's message, encouraging viewers to be fully present and engage with the works and the issues they addressed. I aimed to create a type of, “you had to be there” kind of experience.

This fight for mental health has been a “Forever War” in American culture. In reminiscence of Kapadia’s Insurgent Aesthetics ‘art as resistance’ style framework, the Wyoming Unite exhibition sought to reimagine the role of the art exhibition as catalyst fighting for social change rather than a mere showcase of objects for purchase. In this way, the pop-up format becomes a radical act of resistance against a system that often excludes marginalized voices and reduces art to a luxury commodity.



It aligns with the ethos of Artivism, using art as a process to foster dialogue, healing, and solidarity—not as a product.

By rejecting the depersonalized frameworks of the medical-industrial complex, which prioritize pharmaceutical and profit-driven interventions over community-based care and interventions, Wyoming Unite emphasized the power of collective storytelling and creative expression in a nonclinical approach to humanize the experiences of those impacted by suicide.

This approach also created a sense of accessibility and inclusion, removing barriers often associated with traditional museum gallery spaces. The exhibition wasn't about selling art; it was about sharing stories, addressing trauma, and building a collective sense of purpose around a pressing social issue. By prioritizing community impact over commercial success, The Wyoming Unite pop-up thesis exhibition exemplified a reimagining of how art can serve the public good and how exhibitions can transcend their physical spaces to create lasting emotional and cultural resonance. In a way, it was my gift to Wyoming for allowing me the time here in their great state.



After months of dreaming, planning, and preparation—it was finally time. Mid-April had surprised us with unusually warm weather for Wyoming, as if nature itself had aligned with the vision. Everything seemed to be falling perfectly into place... until, suddenly, Wyoming reminded us who's really in charge. A snowstorm swept in like a plot twist, wind gusting through our expectations with icy defiance. I was shaken—not just by the storm, but by the realization that some of my family, traveling from New Mexico and Denver, wouldn't make it. My daughter and son-in-law were among them, and their absence stung. But as they say—the show must go on because in Wyoming the snow will go on.

On that cold, windy, snowy night, people of Wyoming gathered—braving the storm—to unite through art. We began with a blessing from some of my extended family who made it from Denver: Kalpulli Mikakuika, a traditional Aztec dance group, performed a ceremonial danza that stirred the spirit of the space. The powerful sound of the conch shell trumpet “quiquiztli” and Mexica drums cracked through the winter air like a heartbeat, transforming the museum into sacred ground. Their energy didn't just bless the room—it ignited it.



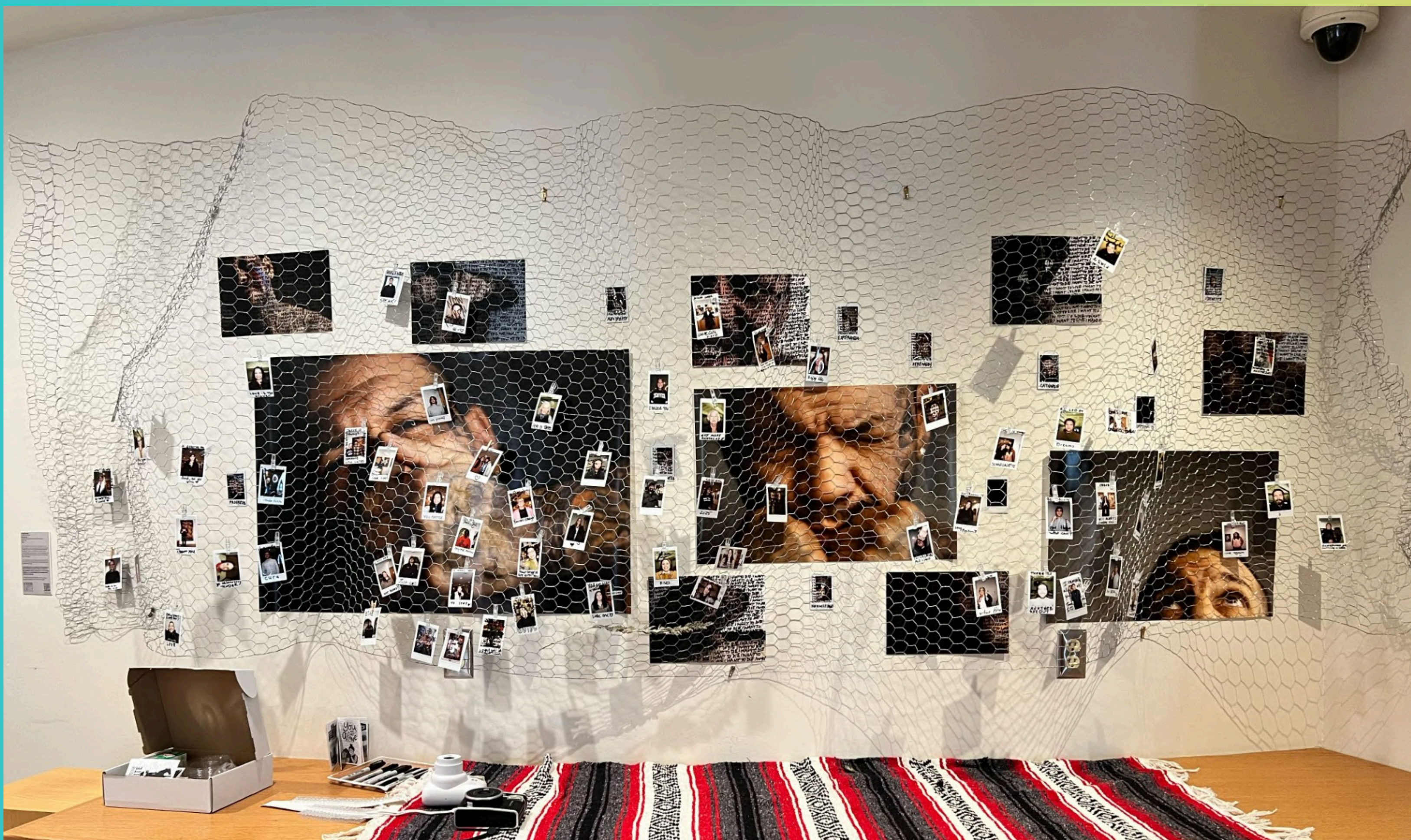
As the echoes of ceremonial drums faded, I cued a heartbeat track through the sound system—a nod to Burque Unite, but also my own way of grounding this moment in Wyoming, as if pressing two fingers to its wrist to feel for a pulse. The air vibrated with anticipation.

Pizza was laid out in an informal buffet—a kind of communal offering, like a neighborhood pizza party gathering. And just as people settled into this rhythm, the performance broke through.

It began with a yell—raw, unfiltered my voice projected deeply through the museum: “I woke up this morning, with the dark side of myself...”

At first, some people didn't know what was happening. But as soon as I stepped forward, all dressed in white, something shifted—the crowd instinctively gave me space. A thick blue tape stretched across the glossy concrete floor, outlining a stark 15-foot boundary—like a silent warning: Do not enter. This is the area of pain and struggle, the zone of violence and vulnerability. It marked the space where the fight would unfold, where pain would be performed. The line didn't just set the stage—it heightened the tension in the room. It told the audience without words: You can watch, but you can't intervene. You can't save him. I wasn't just talking; I was confronting the room, performing something real and uncomfortable. The tension was real. I was fully in it, channeling something raw, trying to hold up a mirror to everyone there.





I was a little nervous about how the performance would land, especially in a museum setting. The contrast between the clean, quiet gallery space and the intensity of the violence in the performance felt risky. I worried it might trigger or offend someone. But as I looked around during the performance, it seemed to connect with people in a deeper way. The audience wasn't turning away—they were leaning in—shedding tears.

I fed off their energy, watching their reactions, reading their body language as tears dripping down my face. It helped guide my movements and tone. To do this piece, I had to go to a dark, vulnerable place within myself, and it was emotionally overwhelming at times. But I stayed with it because it was cathartic and it reminded me of the metaphorical place I would go during a hard fight. It felt like the edge of death and somehow I would always survive. My students and I delivered a powerful, one-of-a-kind performance—flawless in its execution and unforgettable in its impact. It was one of those rare, electric moments where everything aligned—a you had to be there kind of experience that can't quite be replicated, only remembered. When it ended, there was this huge roar of applause. It felt like the crowd had been hit with something unexpected—like a knockout punch they didn't see coming.





I went to change back into my formal professional clothes and prepared for my thesis defense presentation. When I stepped out, I was genuinely surprised by the number of people already seated, waiting for the defense to begin. The Director of American Studies shared that this was the most well-attended thesis defense the program had ever seen—a comment that left me deeply humbled. The room buzzed with anticipation. I had spent weeks rehearsing—running the speech over and over with friends and mentors, preparing for this moment. And now, it was finally here.

Something unexpected happened as I began: I barely needed to glance at my notes. The words flowed with ease, as if the material had fully settled into my bones. I was confident, grounded. To my own surprise, I even found moments of humor mixed into the delivery—something rare for someone who usually keeps things serious and internal. It felt like the strongest public speaking performance I had ever given. I was charismatic, composed, and—for the first time—I truly felt like a leader people wanted to follow. I'm proud of how it went.



The Q&A was equally strong. I've always felt more at home in conversation than in scripted speech, and that showed. Even when a few curveball questions were thrown my way, I was able to respond with clarity and care—always circling the discussion back to the core of my work: suicide, mental health, and the urgent need for dialogue. The whole experience left me feeling fulfilled, seen, and heard. Time moved faster than I expected. One moment, I was fully immersed in the performance—and the next, I looked up to see a museum staff member gesturing about the time during the Q & A. That's when I realized we had gone over. What felt like a brief, intense exchange had already run past schedule. We had to end things quickly, even though the energy in the room felt like it could have carried on for much longer.

After the event, people approached me—eager to connect, to reflect, to share. But I couldn't speak to everyone. We were already in the middle of cleanup, and our time in the museum space had run out. It was hard to step away from that moment of community, knowing it had resonated so deeply.

When I got home, a familiar sensation settled in: the soreness, the fatigue—the kind that comes after a fight. Not just in the body, but in the spirit. My hypothesis had proven true. Artistic intervention does create space for shared vulnerability. It does make room for creative resilience to emerge—not just as theory, but as lived experience. It was a night no one in that room will soon forget.



# Congrats Grads!



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**Lubomir Kochanskyj** “Hard Rock and Heavy Metal: A Social and Historical Analysis from the 1960s to the 1980s”

**Ernest Ewalefoh** “The Role of Fashion in Shaping Afropolitan Identity Among Africans in the Diaspora”

**Samson Olaoye** “From Policy to Reform Pushback: The Struggles of Transgender Military Personnel During the 2015-2017 Transition Period of Gender Policies”

**Gerald Lovato** “Wyoming Unite: A Study of Suicide in Wyoming”

**Georgina Mullins** “Wyoming’s Land-Grab: Education for All, Geographies of Responsibility, and Land-Grant University Revenue for Indigenous Students”

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