

## Eric Ziegler & Aaron Ellison

[www.ericziegler.com](http://www.ericziegler.com)

### Artist Statement:

The unique aesthetic qualities of 19th-century photographs printed from collodion dry-plate negatives reinforced contemporary assumptions about landscape and evoked excitement for exploration just as the “frontier” was closing. Glass-plate photography, associated with geological surveys and the nascent transcontinental railroad, conveyed through its limited spectral range (near-ultraviolet to yellows) supported the notion that the West remained an unpopulated terra nullius. These photographs convinced the European colonists and their descendants that Native peoples—even when they were included in the images—were but monuments to the past, like the massive cliffs and boulders dotting the vast landscape, all on their way out as the lands were “open for business.”

We re-use the same 19th-century photographic materials to evoke similar contradictions in 21st-century narratives of preservation and Earth’s sixth mass extinction. We reclaim the aesthetics behind the myth of the “American Frontier” to record modern ecosystems deemed healthy only because we’ve left them alone. The economic progress flowing from the Industrial Revolution has, ironically, created the context for preservation of “old-growth” forests—tiny islands of “nature” within the vast ocean of unchecked “development.” Like Indigenous reservations, old-growth reserves are akin to botanical gardens or theme parks: they point to an ideal while decaying before our eyes.

### Biography:

Aaron Ellison is a Brighton-based photographer, sculptor, writer, member of Artisan’s Asylum, and Senior Research Fellow Emeritus in Ecology at Harvard University. Eric Zeigler is an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Toledo. Working together, they use 19th-century collodion emulsions on large-format glass plates to recall the construction of the terra nullius, re-enliven forests, and re-envision and re-interpret them as foci for decolonization and re-integration of traditional knowledge with modern existence.

### Exhibitions:

#### Eric Ziegler:

- 2023 Montgomery Photo Festival, Stonehenge Gallery, Montgomery, Alabama (juried by Richard McCabe).
- 2023 *Landscape 2023*, Glasgow Gallery of Photography, Glasgow, Scotland.
- 2023 *Landscape Constructed and Wild*, Site: Brooklyn, Brooklyn, NY (juried by Alexxa Gotthardt).
- 2023 *Natural Wonder*, Decode Gallery, Tuscon, AZ (juried by Holly Hart).
- 2022 *Believe*, Helsinki Photo Festival, The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki, Finland (juried by Stefan Bremer, Curt Richer, Rafael Rybczynski, Naoya Yoshikawa, Moritz Neumüller, Stig Marlon Weston, Emanuela Mirabelli, Alexa Becker).

Aaron Ellison:

- 2022 *Sidewalk Conversation*; photograph in juried exhibition *The Poetry of the Ordinary*, PhotoPlace Gallery, VT.
- 2021 *Death for Some is Life for Others: A Biophilic Exploration*; photographs, workshop, and writing with Eric Zeigler; CICA-NMAC, South Korea.
- 2019–2021 *Untitled #17 (Beige Series)*; Wall painting, 25' × 8'; Fisher Museum, Harvard Forest.
- 2019–2020 *Novel Ecosystem Generator*; temporary sculptural installation in group exhibition *Art's Work in Biotechnology: Shaping Our Genetic Futures*, North Carolina State U.