

**William T. Carson** // Santa Fe, NM

*Coal Sound Sculpture, coal, salt and water, 2021*

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“In November of 2014 I studied coal development in the area where my family has lived and ranched for the last forty years. Situated along the Tongue River and Custer National Forest, the land supports cattle ranchers, farmers, an Amish Community, and the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. A new coal mine was slated to be developed in the area about 10 miles from our ranch, near the confluence of Otter Creek and the Tongue River. 90 miles of railroad tracks would be built along the Tongue River, in order to connect the coal to existing lines. Eventually this coal would be shipped by rail across the Pacific Northwest and loaded onto freighters bound for China. The railroad would condemn thousands of acres of fertile, family-owned, farm and ranch land. In order to witness this place and listen to the thoughts of the people most directly impacted by the proposed mine and railroad, my father and I rode the entire route of the proposed railroad on horseback, the expedition covered the 90-mile route in 9 days. I began experimenting with coal as an artistic medium in direct response to this expedition.

Through my artwork I am searching for new ways to value coal. We often appreciate the earth’s natural resources for their economic value, but what if we look beyond that? What if we were to appreciate coal for the way it reflects light? Or the way it sounds when water flows through it? What if we were to admire coal for the way it reminds us of deep time and the millions of years that led to our existence? Through painting and sculpture, I aim to promote a relationship with coal that is based in gratitude. In my time creating art with coal, I have developed a fondness for the qualities of the material that I had previously overlooked, which I hope to share with others through my work.”

The Space of Hope: A Collective Response

