

THE ANTI-URANIUM MAPPING PROJECT

SHAYLA BLATCHFORD

JAN 16, 2024 - JUN 1, 2024

COMMUNITY GALLERY





Content

- 1 - 2 **Curatorial statement**
- 3 **Artist's Statement**
- 4 **Artist's Biography**
- 5 **Invitation to Create**
- 7 **Behind the Scenes**
- 8 - 14 **Selected Works in the Exhibit**
- 15 - 17 **Additional Resources**
- 18 **Thank you**

Curatorial Statement

The Life Magazine and internationally known Magnum photographer, W. Eugene Smith (1918 - 1978) thought of his final photo essay and book as a warning to the world about the effects of heavy metal poisoning when it was published in 1975. Titled *Minamata: A Warning to the World*, his photographs expose the long-term effects of mercury contamination on the residents and the landscape of a small Japanese fishing village. While nearing the end of the project that he had dedicated over 4 years of his life to, Smith and other activists were attacked and badly beaten by the local Chisso factory workers. The photographer sustained permanent damage to his eyes, leaving him with limited eyesight. Smith wrote: "Photography is a small voice, at best, but sometimes – just sometimes – one photograph or a group of them can lure our senses into awareness. Much depends upon the viewer; in some, photographs can summon enough emotion to be a catalyst to thought." (<https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/society-arts-culture/w-eugene-smith-minamata-warning-to-the-world>).

The world has not listened.

Nearly fifty years later, Dine' photographer and activist Shayla Blatchford, is also documenting the effects of heavy-metal poisoning and radiation on small communities. Since 1871, Uranium mining in the western United States has left generational scars – the long-term visible and invisible impacts on human-health, the danger of eradication to our next-to-human kin, the contamination of water, and debasing of public and private lands. According to the Center for Biological Diversity, "All phases of uranium development — exploration, mining and milling — can pose unique threats to species, ecosystems, and human communities. From habitat destruction and disruption of wildlife to bio-accumulation and irreversible pollution of waters, today's [mining] boom threatens to build upon uranium's legacy of environmental and social harm." (<https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/>)



Curatorial Statement

In fact, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (<https://www.iisd.org/>) begins their discussion on how to advance sustainable mining with this quote: “Still only one earth: Lessons from 50 years of UN sustainable development policy.” IISD goes on to say “The extractives or mining industry cause some of the most dramatic impacts on the natural environment and human health. The footprint of mining operations is often visible from outer space, with large areas of excavation standing out in a sea of green forest.”

Extractive mining leaves scars anywhere it is practiced, many of those scars are left on “Invisible” communities, places out of the public eye, places not easy to reach without 4-wheel drive or heavy equipment, places most often inhabited by Indigenous peoples. Photographers carrying cameras have spent a lot of time traveling to and living in no-longer isolated places. Shayla Blatchford is one of those photographers. She has spent 20+ years working with the inhabitants of small communities to empower people to tell their stories – stories both beautifully poignant and deeply disturbing

In alignment with Appalachian State University’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for 2024 – 2029, *Climate Literacy and Response-Ability: Cultivating Resilient and Just Communities*, the Turchin Center for the Visual Arts is honored to present Shayla Blatchford’s *Anti-Uranium Mapping Project*. No matter where lands are mined, here in the southeast where you are viewing this exhibition, or out in the southwest where the images were made and the oral histories collected, or in any number of small Japanese fishing villages, the stories resonate – community by community there are stories of loss. The legacy of extractive mining destroys both people and the planet. We all have a responsibility to let these photographs summon enough emotion to be a catalyst for action.



Artist's Statement

The Anti-Uranium Mapping Project is an interactive audio/visual storytelling exhibition and website designed to create an efficient way to educate audiences about the environmental issues of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation and surrounding lands. The various components of the project provide an immersive multimodal learning experience. This project serves as both historical documentation of the uranium mining era as well as a platform for storytelling and community building. My goal is to bring people together from different backgrounds who have all been affected by uranium mining and to share their experience on the issue through photographs and video interviews. As the demand for uranium increases with nuclear power being pitched to the world as the next “clean energy” solution, old sites of uranium mining could be resurrected. Bringing different perspectives to the conversation provides access to the information needed to make an educated decision about the future of uranium mining and other extractive practices.



Not everyone has the same learning style; I want to be able to reach as many people as possible. If enough people can be educated, I envision not just conversation, but bold action in support of how the Navajo People decide to produce clean energy, how they choose to access natural resources on their land, and how that could influence and inspire the rest of us.

– Shayla Blatchford

Artist's Biography



Growing up in Long Beach, California, Shayla Blatchford had little exposure to her Native heritage; this sparked a curiosity that continues to propel her work today. Her mother's genealogical investigation was a launching pad that started Blatchford's journey to establish a connection with her ancestors and their ways of life. Often, we don't know how to share our stories. It can be difficult to take a vision from paper to finished project. Blatchford has the ability to help people tell their stories and believes providing that service is a way to share instances of beauty with the world. Photography is about capturing moments. It is about seeing the smallness in the bigness of the world. Blatchford wants to subtly craft these moments into art while allowing her images to foreground the voices of her subjects over her own.

Invitation to Create



Shayla Blatchford's work encourages us to:

- + be mindful of storytelling methods
- + understand what it means to be sensitive to someone else's story
- + question how we share our own stories through media

Consider an experience you've had that you feel is important to share. Have others had this experience, too? How might you go about creating artwork that conveys a shared story?

...dig deeper



To learn more about local extractive issues and their impact on communities, visit these resources:

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

[United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#)

[Appalachian Voices](#)

Behind the Scenes



Selected Works In the Exhibit





Shayla Blatchford

Leona Morgan, co-founder of the Nuclear Issues Study Group, and a dedicated nuclear activist since 2007, passionately advocates for Indigenous rights and environmental justice with a focus on the impacts of uranium mining on communities,

2023 Archival digital inkjet pigment print

ED 1/1

Courtesy of the artist



Shayla Blatchford

Leaching ponds contain a mixture of low-grade uranium ore and an acidic drip system, which eventually isolate uranium minerals into a radioactive sludge known as "tailings," 2023

Archival digital inkjet pigment print

ED 1/1

Courtesy of the artist



Shayla Blatchford

Outside Chris Shuey's office, numerous file cabinets hold research studies and data related to issues stemming from uranium mining, 2023

Archival digital inkjet pigment print

ED 1/1

Courtesy of the artist



Shayla Blatchford

Youth from the surrounding communities of contaminated uranium mills near Church Rock, NM understand their health is at risk from being exposed to cancer-causing elements and are beginning to speak out against mining corporations, 2023 Archival digital inkjet pigment print

ED 1/1

Courtesy of the artist

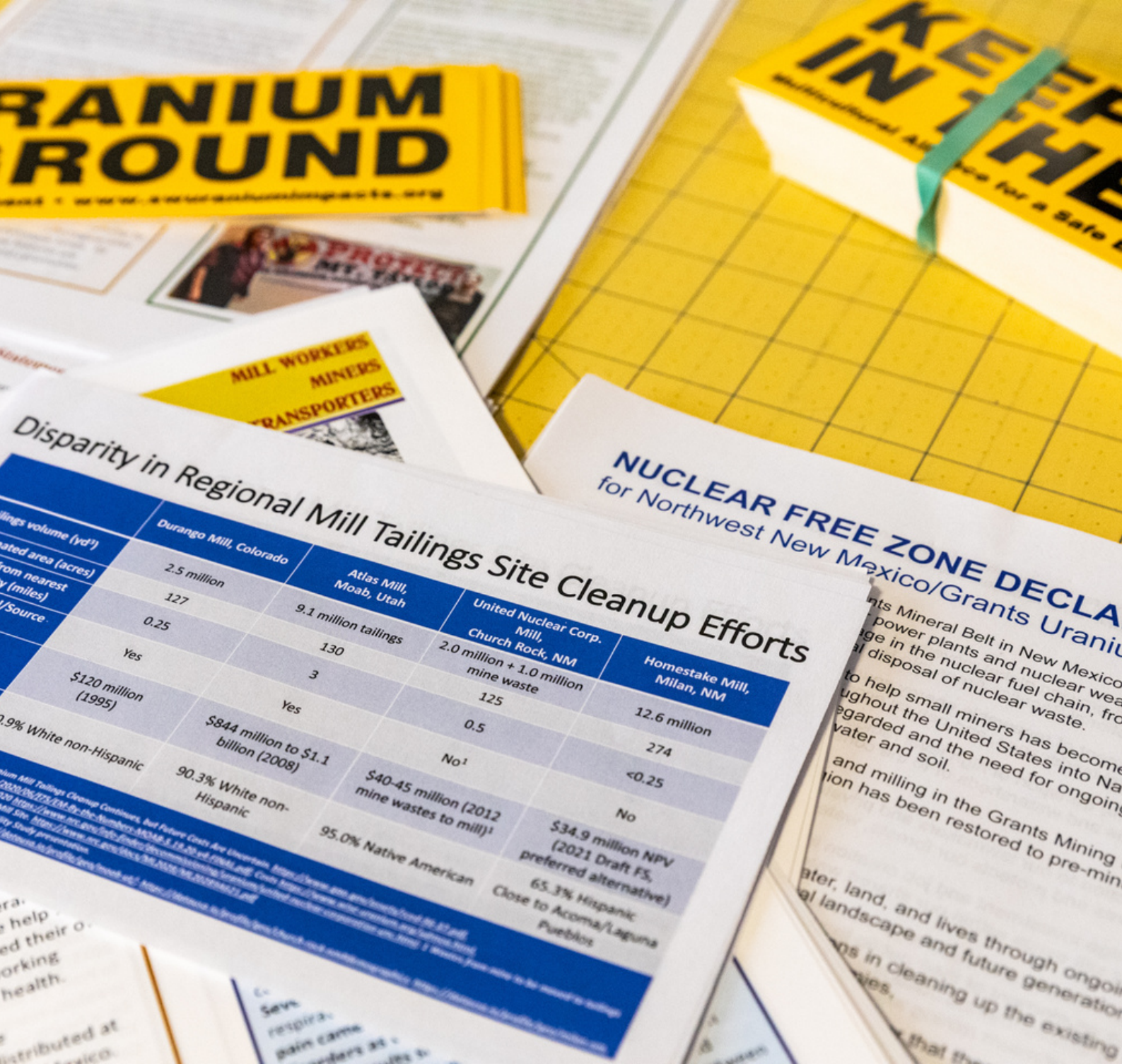


Shayla Blatchford

Civil rights and criminal defense attorney Mariel Nanasi is licensed to practice in both the state and federal courts and serves as the Executive Director and President at New Energy Economy, which strives to resist fossil-fuel and nuclear energy extraction, 2023

Archival digital inkjet pigment print ED 1/1

Courtesy of the artist



Disparity in Regional Mill Tailings Site Cleanup Efforts

Millings volume (yd ³)	Durango Mill, Colorado	Atlas Mill, Moab, Utah	United Nuclear Corp. Mill, Church Rock, NM	Homestake Mill, Milan, NM
Estimated area (acres)	2.5 million	9.1 million tailings	2.0 million + 1.0 million mine waste	12.6 million
Distance from nearest town (miles)	127	130	125	274
Distance from source	0.25	3	0.5	<0.25
Remediation status	Yes	Yes	No ¹	No
Estimated cleanup cost	\$120 million (1995)	\$844 million to \$1.1 billion (2008)	\$40-45 million (2012 mine wastes to mill) ¹	\$34.9 million NPV (2021 Draft FS, preferred alternative)
Demographic	99.9% White non-Hispanic	90.3% White non-Hispanic	95.0% Native American	65.3% Hispanic Close to Acoma/Laguna Pueblos

Shayla Blatchford

Susan Gordon's background of working with federal agencies like the Department of Energy, Labor, Health & Human Services, as well as the Nuclear Regulatory Agency, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has given her the experience and knowledge it takes to effectively navigate agencies and corporations when representing communities impacted by the nuclear weapons complex, 2023 Archival digital inkjet pigment print ED 1/1 Courtesy of the artist



Resources



[Shayla Blatchford Photography](#)



[Shayla Blatchford Instagram](#)



[Anti-Uranium Mapping Project](#)



[EPA: Navajo Nation: Cleaning Up Abandoned Uranium Mines](#)



[The Navajo Times: 1979 Church Rock spill a symbol for uranium dangers](#)



Resources



United States
Nuclear Regulatory Commission



Federal Register:
United Nuclear Corporation; Church Rock Uranium
Mill Site



National Library of Medicine: The Sequoyah
Corporation Fuels Release and the Church Rock Spill:
Unpublicized Nuclear Releases in American Indian
Communities



Source NM: Navajo Nation pushes for radioactive
waste remnants to be fully removed



Resources



Town of Boone Sustainability Goals



Town of Boone Sustainability Committee



New River Conservancy



Blue Ridge Conservancy



The Watauga Riverkeeper



THANK
YOU

FROM THE TURCHIN CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS

The Turchin Center for the Visual Arts at Appalachian State University engages visitors from the university, community, nation and beyond in creating unique experiences through dynamic and accessible exhibition, education, outreach and collection programs. These programs inspire and support a lifelong engagement with the visual arts and create opportunities for participants to learn more about themselves and the world around them.

SHARE YOUR WORK WITH US AT #TCVAATHOME !

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