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## Four Rocks

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# Four Rocks

Ema Erikson

Advisor: Megan Vossler

Department of Art and Art History

April 15, 2020

Rock wools, water fans, earth scale, mouse ears, dust,  
ash-of-the-woods.  
Transformers unvalued, uncounted.  
Cell by cell, word by word, making a world they could live in.

-Jane Hirshfield, *For the Lobaria, Usnea, Witches Hair, Map Lichen, Beard  
Lichen, Ground Lichen, Shield Lichen*

## **Abstract**

*Four Rocks* integrates a community of moss and lichen onto four large-scale drawings of coupled figures drawn to resemble the basalt boulders of the Columbia River Gorge. These organisms obfuscate the divisions between the figures, embodying the inextricable role our relationships play in the formation of self. The four diptychs can be reconfigured into various combinations. Physically changing the work's composition disrupts the figures' realism, replicating the necessary discomfort of being known intimately by others. The work's basis in a specific geography rendered from memory interrogates memory's influence on our conception of self and our ability to connect with others.

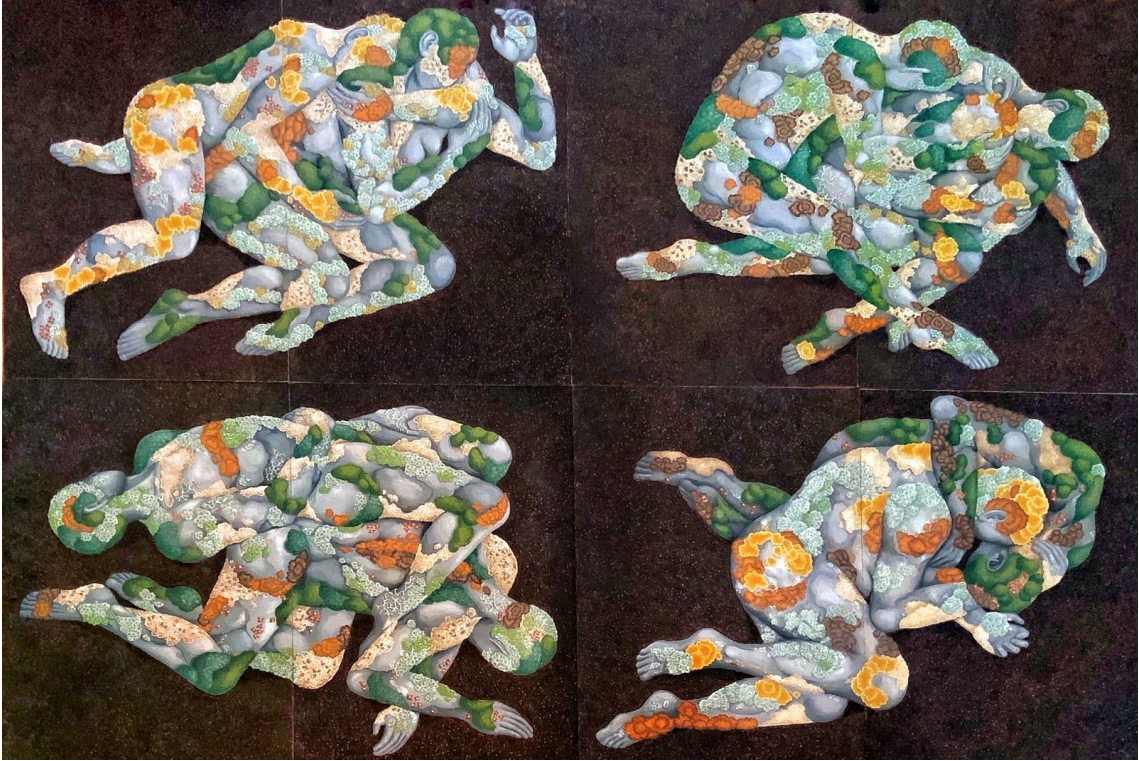
## Artist Statement

On an expansive hill on the Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge, four basalt Boulders stand in a tight formation. The smallest is roughly the size of a compact car. The largest would completely fill my bedroom. While these boulders have sat unchanged since the cataclysm of the Missoula Flood, their surfaces—alive with countless varieties of lichen and moss—are in constant flux.

The rocks' dual nature as both individual objects and communities of organisms lead me to interrogate the concept of the self as entirely separable from the other. In *Four Rocks* I seek to examine the contradictory nature of self identity by representing each of these four boulders as a diptych of an embracing couple. The embracing figures reference the themes of sensuality common throughout my figurative work, but here serve to embody the inextricable role relationships with others play in the formation of the self. The distinction between the two figures in each diptych is obscured by the communities of mosses and lichens overlaying them. The unique character of my oil pastel medium visually unifies the figures' stone texture with that of the moss and lichen— further obfuscating the division between the drawings' individual elements.

The concept of identity as a site for growth and change extends to the drawings themselves. As diptychs they can be reconfigured into myriad combinations. In these new configurations the figures move further away from strict realism, fitting together in new and sometimes strange and visually challenging ways. The process of physically changing the work's composition both reinforces and premise of identity as constantly changing and also embodies the necessary discomfort and strangeness of being truly and intimately known by others.

I have lived the majority of my life within easy walking distance of the four boulders that inspired this work. When drawing these pieces I worked intuitively, relying solely on my memories to capture the feel of the rocks. The drawings that resulted are in no way perfect representations of the boulders. Rather, they are a portrait of the impression they have left in my personal self-formation. The figures in these drawings are roughly to scale with my own body. Through the act of making them I felt like an active participant in the formation of a self, one both intimately familiar and totally other. This process enabled me to directly experience the idea that inspired this body of work: that contact with others forms changes us irrevocably.



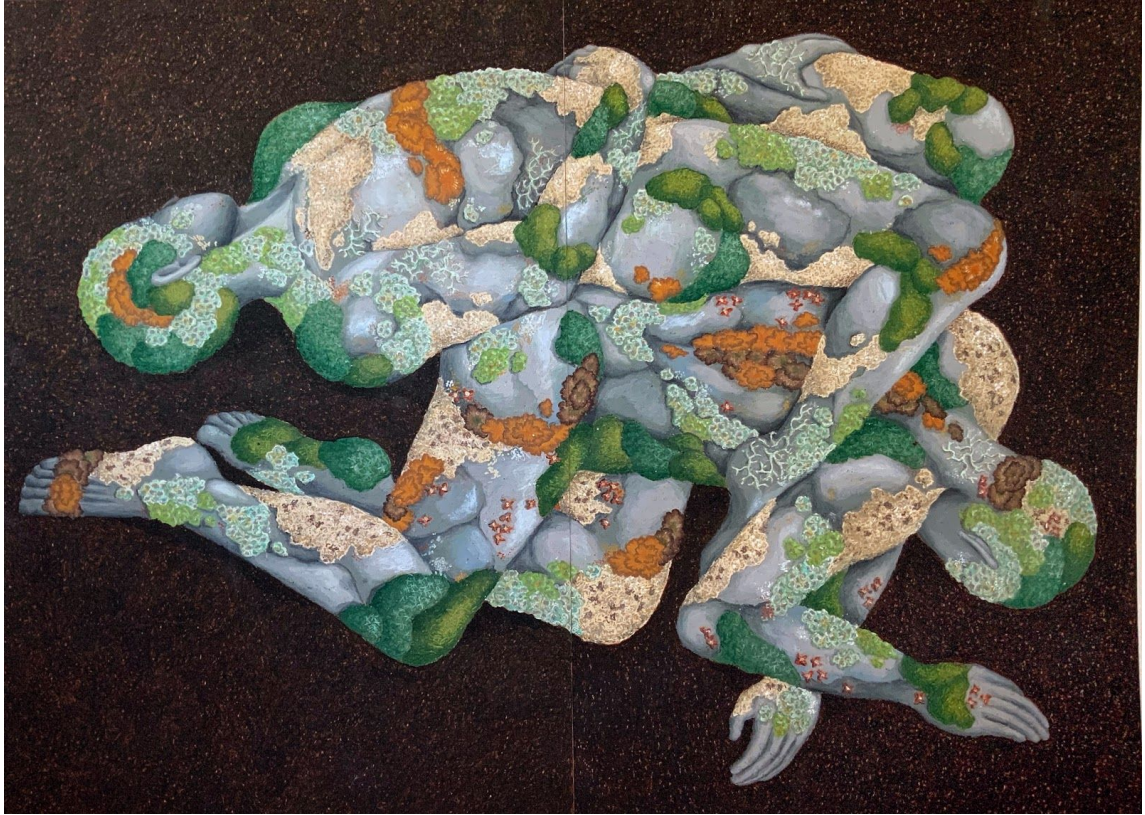
Four Rocks  
Oil Pastel on Chip Board  
76" x 104"



Rock 1  
38" x 52"



Rock 2  
38" x 52"



Rock 3  
38" x 52"





Rock 4  
38" x 52"



Rock 1 (Detail)



Rock 2 (Detail)



Rock 2 (Detail)



Rock 3 (Detail)



Rock 3 (Detail)



Rock 4 (Detail)



Rock 2, 1





Rock 1, 4



Rock 4, 2



Rock 1, 3



Rock 4, 3



Rock 4, 2 (Detail)



Rock 3, 4 (Detail)



Rock 2, 4 (Detail)

## **Works Cited**

Hirshfield, Jane. *Come, Thief*. Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2011.