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UNEARTH: ARTIST'S STATEMENT - SEPTEMBER 2017

Coal has a reputation that precedes itself. Whether mining coal from the earth, debating its future in the political arena, using the electricity it generates, or simply breathing the air around us, coal affects all of us. While coal has an impact on everyone, many have never seen the material in person. The paintings and sculptures in this exhibition are meant to present the viewer with coal in its raw form.

The coal in this exhibition is roughly 60 million years old. What began as organic plant matter has been transformed into a flammable black rock through pressure, heat, and time. This coal was mined at the Wolf Mountain Mine in Decker, Montana, which is near my childhood home on my family's cattle ranch.

I began experimenting with coal as an artistic medium during the winter of 2015 in response to time I spent studying coal development in Montana's Powder River Basin. Since childhood I had seen coal from a distance; gazing at the seams of black rock in the mines near our home, looking on as thousands of black-capped railroad cars hauled it away, and watching news reports on the mining industry and climate change. However, I had never taken the time to simply observe coal. I had never broken the stone apart to discover the way it cleaves, felt the soft powder of its dust between my fingers, or twisted it in my hands to watch the way it plays with light. I had never considered coal to be beautiful.

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? I had not considered coal to be a beautiful material because I saw it through a strictly political lens: one that emphasized its economic value and minimized its other qualities. If not a fuel, what is coal?

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?

If we deem that coal is no longer a viable fuel source, perhaps we can begin a new relationship with this rock. Through painting and sculpture, I aim to promote a relationship with coal that is based in gratitude. Coal is the bedrock of modern civilization; we owe a great deal of our abundance as a species to the technological advances made possible by coal. In my work I intend to express respect for the magnitude of coal's significance in human history and gratitude for all those who have given their time and health to provide for society by working with this rock.

I invite those who visit *UNEARTH* to approach coal with curiosity in an attempt to reframe their relationship to the material, if only for a little while. 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 the paintings and sculptures in this exhibition.