



International Summer Research or Residency Award

Nika McKagen, 2025

Residency at Cow House Studios in rural Wexford County, Ireland Art

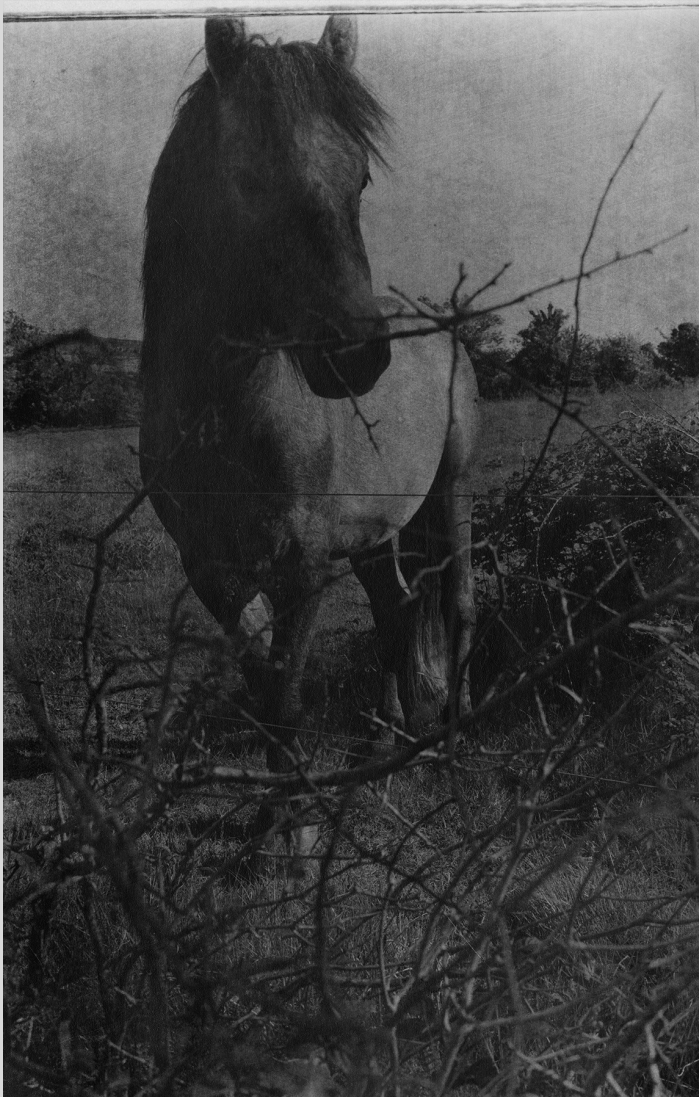
Thanks to funding received through the UW-Madison School of Education International Summer Research/Residency Award, I was able to spend three weeks in Ireland this summer. I was a resident at Cow House Studios in rural Wexford County, Ireland for two weeks, and spent an additional week traveling around the island by car visiting abandoned mining sites which pertain to my research.

Cow House Studios, run by Rosie O’Gorman and Frank Abruzzese, is an artist residency converted from Rosie’s family farm. In addition to hosting international residents, Cow House also hosts a parenting residency, a gap year residency, and engagements with local youth and community members in County Wexford. While at Cow House, I met other residents from all over the world, and was able to begin a long-term collaboration on a play with Alec Galambos, a composer and choral director from New York City. At the residency, I completed work on a photobook from my last large scale photography project, *Karst*. I was also able to spend much of the time at Cow House in their traditional wet darkroom, where I created several new works and made leeway a new project about mining, pieces from which are currently on show at the SRO Gallery in Lubbock, Texas, and at the Miller Art Museum in Sturgeon Bay, WI.



*View from the studio at Cow
House Studios.*

My research is predominantly concerned with what happens underground and at the thin boundary between aboveground and subterranean worlds. I am currently interested in researching mineral and coal mining practices, specifically the marks and craters left in the land after a mine is abandoned, and environmental efforts to backfill these mines. I was able to travel around the island for a week prior to the residency, during which time I visited and documented several abandoned mining sites, some show caves, and a show mine. This documentation forms the basis of my thesis project, which will be on view at Art Lofts Gallery in Madison, WI in February 2026.



The Castle of the Cormorants, 4x6" silver gelatin print made at Cow House Studios, currently on view at the Miller Art Museum in Sturgeon Bay, WI.



Photograph taken at Allihies Copper Mine Museum in Allihies, Ireland.



Photograph of the tailings around Ballinafunshoge Mines in County Wicklow, Ireland.