

## **Artist Statement**

Emily Stokes

I create allegorical spaces to explore the tension between preserving what is familiar and confronting the new. As a transplant to Sioux County, Iowa, home to more factory farms than any other county, I am surrounded by both agricultural bounty and the environmentally degenerative impact of this bounty. Each neatly pruned acreage reads like a Grant Wood painting – innocent and quaint, representative of a deeply ingrained way of life. But the quest to achieve high yields and sustain family farming dynasties comes at the expense of natural resources. In a region where so many stake their identities on ag, I wonder if and how this community, and the many others like it, can reconcile livelihood with reality. Such is the question that fuels my visual work.

To create my work, I pluck images from my surroundings to build a symbolic language with plurality of meaning. I stage these symbols against invented backdrops that are rooted in the real, yet unidentifiable. Monuments, animals, pavilions, ribbon cutting ceremonies, and townspeople appear as recurrent elements, and although I reference my immediate environment, I purposefully generalize it to invite a broader scope of viewers. Fragmented narratives meander through landscapes that alternate between realism and abstraction. The resulting images are questioning, lonely, or hopeful.

I use a combination of painting, printmaking, drawing, and digital imaging. Sometimes I mount prints – relief, screen-print, lithography, digital – onto organically shaped wood to create two-dimensional objects not easily discernible as print or painting. In my *16x12* panels, I screen-print recurrent iconography onto glossy, airbrushed surfaces. In my *The Great Reveal* series, I fabricate wooden boxes that open to reveal fold-out narratives on paper. The companion *Trail Series II* consists of interlocking wooden panels that unite as a winding and, as of now, unending panorama. My intention is to facilitate curiosity toward the undercurrents of change coursing through places once defined by stability – perhaps most notably in rural areas, where wide swaths of land simultaneously foster and isolate communities, and the winds of change are not always welcome.