



MEAGEN SVENDSEN | Artist Statement

Cliff swallows inspire me. They are intelligent. They are resilient. They help one another. And they have found ways to benefit from the human impact on their habitats.

I enjoy spotting their mud nests on underpasses near rivers and lakes, and seeing them dart through the air as they collect insects for their young.

The nests of one colony of swallows can number up to 3700. Each one built on the wall of another. Historically, cliff swallows built their massive communities of mud nests on the rocky cliff sides along bodies of water. Then we came along and started building bridges over the water. The swallows found these concrete structures to be an optimal spot for their nests. The concrete didn't crumble and they were more protected from the elements. Soon their babies were born to the sound of passing cars. And semis. And when they flew from their nests, many of them got hit.

Thirty years ago, a couple of scientists started collecting fallen swallows on the highway. Recently, they discovered that many swallows today have shorter wings than the ones from thirty years ago. The scientists think the shorter wings might allow the swallows to turn more quickly and avoid getting hit by cars. They believe this to be an example of human-impact evolution in the animal world.

According to a recent report by the United Nations, upwards of one million species face extinction in the next few years. We humans are responsible.

Not everything is a cliff swallow.