

BRANCH TREES IN AMERICAN ART



BRANCH: *Trees in American Art* was presented at The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, June 12, 2026 – January 23, 2027.

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Art Bridges

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FRONT: Henry Ary (American, 1807–1859), *On the Hudson* (detail), 1850. Oil on canvas, 27 ½ x 33 ½ in. (69.85 x 85.09 cm), Lebanon Valley College Fine Arts Collection, Gifted by Hilary Peery Vesell, 2020.1.36

PAGE 2: Edward Weston (American, 1886–1958), *Juniper at Lake Tenaya*, 1937. Silver print, 14 ⅛ x 13 ⅞ in. (35.8 x 35.2 cm), Ron Perisho Collection

PAGE 4: Andy Bale, installation photograph of *BRANCH: Trees in American Art*, The Trout Gallery.

PAGE 8: Pierce Bounds, American sycamore, Academic Quad, Dickinson College.

BACK: Charles Lyman Pond (American, 1832–1891), *The Pioneers' Cabin* - 32 ft. diameter, published by Thomas Houseworth & Co., c. 1860s-1870s. Albumen silver print on stereoscopic card, Ron Perisho Collection

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Shannon Egan

Organized to coincide with national commemorations of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, *BRANCH: Trees in American Art* uses the motif of trees to explore how American artists visualize relationships among land, identity, and power. Bringing together artworks from the nineteenth century to the present, this exhibition and catalogue demonstrate how depictions of trees function as cultural signifiers embedded within broader narratives of colonization, resource extraction, environmental stewardship, and spiritual connection. Ultimately, *BRANCH* considers how trees operate as “arboreal witnesses” to American history—markers of expansion, occupation, and conservation—while also serving as powerful metaphors for personal and collective identity.

This exhibition follows art-historical scholarship and other recent exhibitions that center ecocritical methodologies and environmental perspectives in the history of American art, but *BRANCH*’s focus on a single motif offers a narrower lens for understanding the multilayered narrative of the United States.¹ The exhibition and catalogue are rooted in how specific places are valued and represented across the United States. From the Ichetucknee River in Florida to the white pine forests of Maine and the giant sequoias in Yosemite, the sites depicted in the artworks provide an opportunity to reflect on the diversity of species, regions, and cultural viewpoints. In this way, *BRANCH* mirrors a complex ecological system and asks viewers and readers to reconsider national identity through an expanded, more inclusive environmental lens.

We are grateful to all the artists, collectors, and donors who have loaned their works to us, some traveling farther distances than others. We thank artists Zoë Charlton, Amer Kobaslija, John Ruppert, and Sam Van Aken. Much gratitude goes to Ron Perisho, Claudia Volpe at the Petrucci Family Foundation, Jim Gerenscser and the Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections, and the Art Bridges Foundation. We also appreciate Barbara McNulty and Kristine Larison from the Suzanne H. Arnold Art Gallery at Lebanon Valley College for the loan of paintings from the Hilary Peery Vesell Collection. We offer many thanks to Mark Dion and Lisa Smith at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, Ken Gonzales-Day and Brianna Bakke at Luis De Jesus Gallery, and Lehuauakea. Donors to The Trout Gallery, especially Eric Denker ’75, Michael Moses, and Mrs. Charles Service who donated works included in this exhibition, as well as our many Friends of the Trout Gallery, make our acquisitions and exhibitions possible.

Additionally, this exhibition, catalogue, and our related programming are focused on an understanding and appreciation of our local resources on the Dickinson College campus and in the Central Pennsylvania community. All the faculty, staff, students, and community members who came to our “Branch Brainstorm” day at The Trout Gallery shared their time and expertise: Jim Gerenscser, Stacey Cornmen, Hanna Roman, Gene Wingert, Andy Bale, Anthony Cervino, Sarah Sterner, Elizabeth Lee, Heather Plumridge, Adrienne Su, Siobhan Phillips, Sheela Jane Menon, Mariana Past, Kerri Thauby, Nicky Tynan, Amy McKiernan, Amy Ward, Yalcin Ozkan, Jorden Hayes, Ben Edwards, Antje Pfannkuchen, Suzanne Hartley, Andrea Crouse, Allie Gonzalez ’26, Claudia Colaprete ’27, and Maddy Hull ’24. The content of this exhibition catalogue developed from the rich and varied conversations among all those who stopped by the Gallery offices to talk with us. We are especially grateful to the faculty members who continued these conversations through their wonderful essays that follow, each sharing

their insights and disciplinary expertise: Heather Plumridge, Anthony Cervino, Maggie Douglas, Jorden Hayes, Elizabeth Lee, Sheela Jane Menon, Sarah Sterner, and Adrienne Su. Emily Pawley, Darren Lone Fight, Pete Sak, and Marcus Key also offered welcome advice and feedback. We are thankful to Lindsey Lyons, Jenn Halpin, Lane Whigham, and Hanna Roman for their encouragement and for making introductions and connections to important community partners in conservation, sustainability initiatives, and environmental education.

One of the key programs developed in conjunction with this exhibition is *Branching Out: Exploring Trees through Art and Science*, a self-guided tour of trees on Dickinson College's campus that connects different tree species to selected works of art on display in The Trout Gallery. The tree tour was co-written by Maddy Hull '24, Post-Baccalaureate Fellow in Museum Education, and Trout Gallery interns Claudia Colaprete '27 and Allie Gonzalez '26. We are indebted to many campus and community partners who contributed initial suggestions for this tree tour and provided scientific knowledge, history about local trees, and environmental insights. Sarah Sterner, Visiting Instructor in Environmental Studies at Dickinson College, and her student assistants Cara Kamoie '26, Rachel Hoffman '26, and Theodora Duane '26 created an earlier inventory of campus trees and enthusiastically generated ideas for this project. Suzanne Hartley, Community Tree Specialist at the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources was an invaluable resource, providing not only key information about local trees, but also identifying creative connections between these trees and the specific works of art in our exhibition. Gene Wingert shared his profound and meticulous knowledge of the ecology of South-Central Pennsylvania. Associate Professor of Environmental Studies Maggie Douglas thoughtfully advised Trout Gallery staff in selecting prints illustrating invasive species by Mark Dion and provided invaluable feedback and suggestions at several important stages in completing the tree tour. Early formative conversations with Anna Yelk, Jesse Price, and Peggy Fogarty of the Central Pennsylvania Conservancy kindly contributed productive ideas for community partnerships and programming. Pierce Bounds and Claudia Colaprete took the beautiful photographs of the trees for the tree tour, and Ryan Burke, Web Development Specialist at Dickinson College, guided us through the creation of the interactive ArcGIS map and webpage.

In our community, Ashley Gogoj at the Carlisle Area School District helped us coordinate professional development opportunities with area teachers in both the arts and sciences to make this exhibition and related programming accessible to K-12 students. Additionally, the early enthusiasm and support of the America250 Cumberland County Planning Committee and the Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau, including Stacy Snyder, Stacey Cornmen, and Sharon Filipovich, has brought wider attention to the exhibition and programs.

We are profoundly grateful for the Art Bridges Foundation, who not only loaned three incredible works of art to The Trout Gallery for this exhibition, but also awarded a generous Learning and Engagement Grant to the Gallery, which made the tree tour and related programming possible.

Antje Pfannkuchen and Anthony Cervino, co-directors of The Clarke Forum for Contemporary Issues at Dickinson College, found significant ways to expand the ideas presented in the exhibition to larger audiences. As part of the fall schedule of programs at the Clarke Forum, Beronda L. Montgomery, biologist, writer, and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Grinnell College, will speak about her recent book *When Trees Testify: Science, Wisdom, History, and America's Black Botanical Legacy*. At another Clarke Forum lecture, William (Ned) Friedman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, will present how a first-year seminar focused on trees weaves together study of science, literature, and history and fosters personal relationships with nature.

The Department of Art and Art History is providing an opportunity for students,

faculty, staff, and the community to learn more about the art and artists represented in the exhibition by inviting Mark Dion to deliver the Jane L. and Robert H. Weiner Lecture in the Arts. We thank the Department and the Weiner family for their generosity.

At The Trout Gallery, I am lucky to work with an amazing team, especially Heather Flaherty, Curator of Education, who develops creative educational programs and leads our beloved team of Trout Gallery student interns. Both our outgoing and incoming Post-Baccalaureate Fellows in Museum Education, Maddy Hull '24 and Georgia Mantione '26, respectively, as well as our interns Allie Gonzalez '26, Juniper Bates '27, Claudia Colaprete '27, and Beatrix Bond '27 have worked tirelessly on research and writing. We are in awe of their dedication to writing wall labels, the tree tour, lesson plans, and activity guides, as well as creating relevant art activities, and delivering exhibition tours and excellent summer camp experiences to children in Carlisle. It is always a pleasure working with James Bowman, Collections Manager and Exhibition Designer, who beautifully designed this exhibition. Jen Marsh, Administrative Assistant for The Trout Gallery, attends to all details, large and small. I am glad that our museum visitors are always warmly welcomed by Jolene Gregor and Sue Russell. Finally, Ayumi Yasuda's innovative graphic design allows all the various branches of this project to flourish.

1 See for example, Karl Kusserow and Alan C. Braddock, *Nature's Nation: American Art and the Environment* (Princeton University Art Museum, Yale University Press, 2018); Annette Blaugrund, Betti-Sue Hertz, Elizabeth Hutchinson, and Dorothy M. Peteet, *Shifting Shorelines: Art, Industry, and Ecology along the Hudson River* (Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University in the City of New York, 2024).



BRANCH: AN INTRODUCTION

Shannon Egan

In the late afternoon of June 30, 2025, a massive summer storm rolled through Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The sky turned white, as torrential winds whipped the rain sideways. Roads flooded, and over 5500 power outages were reported. To make matters worse, several magnificent trees on the Dickinson College campus were fractured and felled. As damage was assessed, debris was cleaned, and trees removed in the aftermath of the storm, the idea for this exhibition was born. Students, faculty, and staff were curious about the histories of the fallen trees. Some colleagues asked if furniture or art could be made from the trunks and branches. Others expressed concern about the relationship between extreme weather and the climate crisis. Along the sidewalks of our campus and throughout the community, a shared refrain emerged: wonder at nature's immense power coupled with concern for the fragility of our surrounding landscape.

In my own reflection on these powerful experiences, I realized that trees have a variety of stories to tell—about the environment, local history, and the diverse responses, concerns, and questions that relate to how and where we live. *BRANCH: Trees in American Art* uses the tree as a lens for understanding the cultural, historical, political, personal, and spiritual branches that comprise the vibrant and ever-evolving tree of American life. Timed to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in the United States, the exhibition offers an opportunity to reflect on how this moment of national commemoration can be acknowledged and celebrated.

According to Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer, trees “show a capacity for concerted action, for unity of purpose that transcends the individual. They ensure that all stand together and thus survive.”¹ Kimmerer’s botanical and ecological reflections reenforce the differences between Indigenous and non-Native approaches to the environment. Whereas trees were seen as a profitable natural resource to be exploited by the earliest colonists to North America, for Indigenous communities, in Kimmerer’s words, “The trees, especially, we recognize as our teachers.”² Trees are central to the livelihood, cultures, and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples living in the United States, but their lessons of reciprocity were not always shared by European settlers. In 1524, Giovanni da Verrazzano, the first European to document his travels to North America, commented on the density, beauty, and fragrance of the forests on the continent.³ Not long after that initial encounter, English colonists, particularly in the wake of deforested lands in England, harvested timber in what is now the United States to support the construction of its expanding naval fleet. Historian Eric Rutkow recounts this history to underscore a particular form of American exceptionalism: the uniquely influential role that trees and forests played in the nation’s settlement, growth, and identity. As he observes, “No other country was populated because of its trees quite like the United States.”⁴

From the Sons of Liberty to Johnny Appleseed, and from the capitalist demand to fuel furnaces and forges to the preservationist impulse to create national parks, trees are indeed central to the major moments and motives in American history and culture. Rather than simply creating a forest of singular perspectives on this theme, this exhibition invites visitors to consider the various ways trees highlight relationships. A range of works by American artists provide an opportunity to draw connections among strands of American history and reflect on how the tree, as subject and symbol, actively

makes meaning and shapes history. For instance, nineteenth century paintings by Hudson River School artists reveal how timber played a central role in the colonization and exploitation of the land. These paintings are intentionally presented alongside works by Indigenous artists that emphasize reciprocal relationships with the natural world. Taken together, the works in the exhibition highlight how artists use trees to express national, cultural, spiritual, and personal identities in the United States.

In the early winter of 2026, when the surviving trees on Dickinson's campus were bare, The Trout Gallery hosted a "Branch Brainstorm" day, where we extended a wide invitation to students, faculty, staff, and community partners to look at a selection of works of art that would be included in the exhibition. We asked all the participants to share their stories, interests, ideas, experiences, and disciplinary expertise about trees. The insights and enthusiasm of this diverse group encouraged me to broaden the exhibition's selection of works and cultivated a richer, more nuanced understanding of trees as viewed through a wide range of disciplinary, professional, and lived perspectives.

This exhibition catalogue is a document of that day. One of our earliest conversations was with Maggie Douglas, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, who guided our selection of prints by contemporary artist Mark Dion. Drawing on her expertise, she explained the threats posed by invasive insect species to Pennsylvania's forests – an issue vividly explored in Dion's series *The Life of a Dead Tree*. Douglas's essay in this catalogue connects the imagery and information presented by the artist to the losses of trees seen on the Dickinson College campus. Sarah Sterner, Visiting Instructor in Environmental Science, offers an interpretation of a painting that is similarly rooted in the local landscape. She takes the *Valley of the Cumberland*, a painting by Henry Boese made c. 1847, as a starting point for seeing not simply a pastoral scene of a winding creek in the green fields of Central Pennsylvania. Sterner explains how this painting represents a more complex ecological picture of humans' impact on the environment. In finding the details of an eroded creek bank, a smoky sky, and deforested cow pastures, Sterner sees ecological history and consequences unfolding over time.

Somewhat similarly, Sheela Jane Menon, Associate Professor of English, writes about a work in the exhibition, Lehuauakea's *Nā Akua Mana Loa (The Great Powerful Gods)*, that acknowledges the relationships between humans and the environment. This contemporary kapa (barkcloth) artwork, however, expands beyond the physical limits of nature to reflect Kānala 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) cosmologies. Drawing on their ancestral knowledge of traditional processes, Lehuauakea makes tangible the connection between the material (the inner bark of a tree) and its cultural, spiritual, personal, and political significances.

Heather Plumridge, Associate Professor of Environmental Studies, also highlights the sacred significance of land. She focuses on national parks featured in Rick Silva's video *Western Fronts*. Produced in 2017, the video responds directly to President Trump's decision to reduce federal protections for lands sacred to the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Pueblo of Zuni, Ute Indian Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, making those areas more accessible for resource extraction. Like Menon's discussion of the competing scientific, spiritual, political, and touristic interests surrounding Lehuauakea's *Nā Akua Mana Loa (The Great Powerful Gods)*, Plumridge underscores the complex and often conflicting values embedded in the landscapes Silva depicts. Considering the mineral resources required for a transition beyond fossil fuels, she reads *Western Fronts* as an invitation "to explore terranean and sub-terranean conflict and beauty."

One can picture Jorden Hayes, Associate Professor of Geosciences, identifying the imagined minerals of Silva's landscapes, as she considers the relationship between what is above and below the ground throughout her scientific research. In her essay on Edward Weston's photograph *Juniper at Lake Tenaya*, Hayes explains how "Trees and rocks are not separate actors occupying the same scene." For Hayes, the monumental juniper tree in the photograph reveals an intense, persistent, millennia-long collaboration among root systems, wind patterns, rainfall, and the slow transformation of

rock to soil. As a geoscientist, Hayes has worked over the past decade at a field site in the High Sierras, very near where Weston ventured with his camera. This shared study of the same landscape – by both artist and scientist across a century – embodies the potential for disciplinary differences to dissolve when one’s attention turns to the trees that thrive in seemingly improbable places.

The remarkable tree central to Professor of Art History Elizabeth Lee’s contribution to this catalogue, the Grizzly Giant photographed in 1861 by Carleton Watkins, tells the story of American expansion, Indigenous erasure, environmental conservation, and tourism. Over 200 feet tall and nearly 3000 years old, this tree proves nearly impossible to photograph in its entirety. Conservationist Galen Clark stands at its base as proof of its scale and as partner to the efforts that led to its protection. Because the age of the tree was a topic of speculation among nineteenth-century viewers—in a moment of heightened anxiety as the nation entered the Civil War—Lee argues that the giant sequoias in Yosemite provided a connection to a historical past at an uncertain moment in the present.

Anthony Cervino, Professor of Art, observes that a tree can bear witness to a distinctive form of temporality—one entwined with chance, divine providence, and artistic transformation—in John Ruppert’s *Split Strike* 37° 21’04.5”N, 105° 06’22.2”W. After encountering a tree marked by the extraordinary force of a lightning strike, Ruppert recast its form in aluminum, creating what Cervino describes as a work that “suggests a nearly supernatural transmutation.” In Cervino’s close reading, the tree becomes more than a conduit for electricity. Suspended between a natural event and artistic intervention, the sculpture can be seen as powerfully signifying the more elusive phenomena of alchemy and luck.

Finally, Adrienne Su, Professor of Creative Writing and Poet-in-Residence, astounds with “Resistance,” a new poem created for the occasion of the exhibition, inspired by Joyce Tenneson’s photograph *Wise Tree*. In five stanzas, Su’s work is both rooted in the world and evokes a picture of a fabricated, fantastical forest. She warms her reader with humor and confesses a vulnerable, honest encounter with trees, as a writer, reader, and artist.

All of these contributions profess both disciplinary specificities and shared commitments to understanding the natural world, as seen and experienced, through trees. Taken together, the essays and artworks in this catalogue resemble a great tree: rooted in a shared subject, yet branching outward into diverse intellectual, creative, and personal terrains, their connections meeting in a common canopy of understanding.

From various species represented across diverse ecosystems and historical environments, the artists and professors each reflect their own unique perspectives on knowledge, belonging, science, art, and wonder in the broader American landscape. We are fortunate that this one place where we are gathered—The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA—provides the nurturing ground for these ideas to come together, be shared, and to exemplify the idea of “mutual flourishing” Kimmerer and others cultivate and celebrate.⁵

1 Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Council of the Pecans,” *Orion Magazine* (September – October 2013), <https://orionmagazine.org/article/pecan-trees-indigenous-land-rights/>.

2 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Milkweed Editions, 2013), 18.

3 Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation* (Scribner, 2012), 5. See also Giovanni da Verrazzano, “Letter to King Francis, 1524.” <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/amerbegin/contact/text4/verrazzano.pdf>.

4 Rutkow, pp. 5-7, 14-15. While Rutkow briefly acknowledges in his book that early European settlements were established on lands that had been cleared through burnings and tree felling by Native American peoples, his study of the industrial, political, and cultural roles of trees largely overlooks Indigenous lives and ways of knowing.

5 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* (Scribner, 2024).

CONDUCTING LUCK

Anthony Cervino

The saying “struck by lightning” can apply to everything from love at first sight, to an “a-ha” moment of profound realization, to randomly winning the lottery. While the idiom implies shocking improbability, this moment of success and good fortune is perhaps understood more in relation to its rarity than to any beneficial outcomes such as love, knowledge, or financial gain. *Split Strike* 37° 21'04.5"N, 105° 06'22.2"W, John Ruppert's metal casting of a section of a tree that was struck by literal lightning, tangibly conjures this same sense of remarkable luck.

In the woods near Cuchara, Colorado, Ruppert discovered a spruce tree trunk—towering at over nine-feet tall—that had been dramatically damaged in an electrical event. Cast in aluminum by capturing the negative shape of the trunk in special compacting casting sand and then filling that void with molten metal, Ruppert faithfully replicates this naturally found form. Because of the exquisite details captured in the casting process, one might mistake the aluminum sculpture for a real, violently broken bough simply painted silver. This hyper-realistic outcome of the alchemical-like casting process shapes the romantic narrative of the limb's nearly supernatural transmutation, especially related to the implication that the artwork was made in collaboration with an “act of God.” Coupled with the impressive scale of the sculpture, Ruppert's arborescent artwork presents as equal parts material mastery and conceptual prowess.

Though included in the exhibition primarily because the sculpture literally mirrors a tree—the central theme of *BRANCH: Trees in American Art*—lightning itself could just as easily find a place in this exhibition. Often described in vocabulary associated with flora, lightning frequently can be of the “branching” variety, where a central bolt splits into successively thinner streams that transition outwards—visually resembling the dendritic growth pattern of roots and limbs.

This lightning-as-tree allusion is not lost on Ruppert, who strategically leaves the razor-thin and appropriately jagged edge of flashing—a metal “fin” that can form in the narrow space where the two halves of his sand mold meet—as part of his finished work. Often removed after casting, the flashing's delicately serrated edge here reveals the technical process required to make the aluminum replica of the wooden original. And, perhaps more importantly, this detail conveys a palpable sense of electricity. It can be understood as a visual representation of lightning that intersects with both the compelling form and the evident meaning of the sculpture.

With more than one million trees in the United States struck by lightning annually, Ruppert's sculpture questions the validity of the implied rarity and luck associated with a metaphorical “lightning strike” event. It could even be argued that, by faithfully reproducing the original limb damaged in the lightning strike, the artist has helped nature defy the odds—symbolically striking the same location (object) twice. Further, by putting this proverbial “lightning in a (tree-shaped) bottle,” the artist has accomplished something more extraordinary than simply documenting in metal a moment of good fortune or divine intervention. Ruppert has created a monument to growth through skill and determination, evoking a different idiom altogether: to make one's own luck.

John Ruppert
(American, born 1951)

*Split Strike, 37° 21'04.5" N 105°
06'22.2" W*

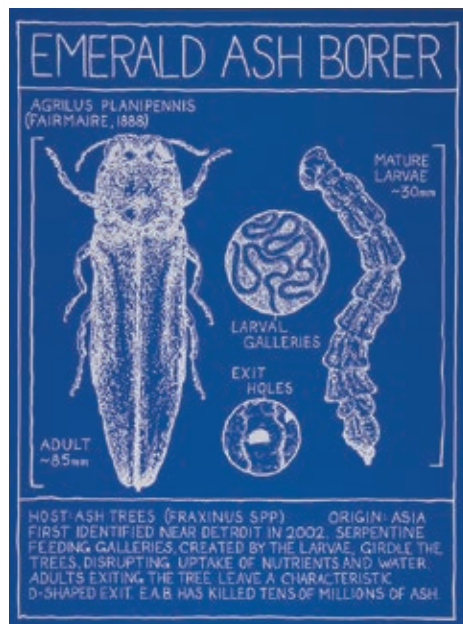
1995

Cast aluminum

112 × 12 × 10 in. (284.5 × 30.5 × 25.4 cm)

Courtesy of John Ruppert





REFLECTION ON THE LIFE OF A DEAD TREE

Maggie Douglas

Mark Dion
 (American, born 1961)

*The Life of a Dead Tree -
 Emerald Ash Borer*

*The Life of a Dead Tree -
 European Gypsy Moth*

*The Life of a Dead Tree -
 Hemlock Woolly Adelgid*

2019

Silkscreens on paper (ed. 11 of 20)

24 x 18 in. (60.96 x 45.72 cm) (each)

Purchase of the Friends of The Trout
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Trees are among the biggest creatures we share the planet with—the rooted dinosaurs of our age. A green ash tree begins as a seed weighing a fraction of a gram, and over its lifetime transforms air, sunlight, and water into a behemoth millions of times as large.¹ This fantastic transformation unfolds so slowly and so quietly that many of us tend not to notice trees in our surroundings, a phenomenon dubbed “plant blindness.”² It is against this backdrop that I’m fascinated by Mark Dion’s installation *The Life of a Dead Tree*, which placed “a massive, fully grown, deceased white ash tree, along with its inhabitants” into a gallery of Toronto’s Museum of Contemporary Art in 2019.³ Seeing this enormous tree sectioned and horizontal inside a human-built gallery accentuates its presence, demanding our attention and inviting us to grapple with our relationship to this impressive creature and its demise.

Dion’s installation doubled as an investigation exploring the tree as home to a wide variety of life, including the insects that proximately caused its death. Despite being the most diverse and numerous animals on Earth, insects are also frequently overlooked, perhaps for the opposite reason—they are so small.⁴ Insects feature prominently in another part of Dion’s work, originally installed alongside the dead tree. His precise silkscreen prints show us insect bodies as we might see them under the microscope, their strangeness and beauty magnified. The prints illustrate several of the characteristics that have made insects such a dominant force on the landscape. We see the delicate combs on the antennae of male *Lymantria dispar* (now known as spongy moth), an exquisitely sensitive organ the male uses to detect the scent of its flightless female mates.⁵ We see the pale, worm-like larva of *Agrilus planipennis* (emerald ash borer), which lives entirely inside an ash tree before transforming into the radically different adult beetle that can fly half a mile per day.⁶ And finally, we see the alien *Adelges tsugae* (hemlock woolly adelgid), whose miniscule body is usually obscured by a shield of cottony wax, under which the insect uses its straw-like mouth to feed like a vampire on the sap of hemlock trees.⁷

These three prints of invasive insect species could serve as “most wanted” posters for forest pests of Pennsylvania. Here on Dickinson’s campus, a recent tree survey revealed that we lost over 40% of our eastern hemlock trees and at least 90% of our green ash trees since 2012;⁸ similar losses have been felt across the country.⁹ It is tempting to make the insects the villain of the story, but it is people who brought them here. In their native ranges in Europe and Asia, at least two of these species are kept in check by a combination of plant defenses and their own predators,¹⁰ the result of a long coevolutionary dance. Their harm to our forests, neighborhoods, and parks is a consequence of their out-of-placeness in our ecosystems.

So, what should we do? It is not a simple question, because while these invasive insects are incredibly destructive, many options for suppressing them also carry significant risk. Consider spongy moth. It was accidentally released in Massachusetts in 1869 by Léopold Trouvelot, an artist, astronomer, and amateur entomologist interested in using the moth in silk production.¹¹ About a decade after its escape from his backyard, caterpillars began devouring the leaves of nearby trees, a phenomenon that grew to affect hundreds of tree species and millions of acres of forestland a year.¹² Meanwhile, the U.S. Forest Service was only born in 1876—one hundred years after the country’s founding and several years after the moth’s escape.¹³ Early efforts attempted to eradicate the species using crude tactics like drenching the landscape with lead arsenate,¹⁴ an insecticide

that impairs the spongy moth brain and ours too. Fast forward to the present, and pest management has thankfully evolved. Since the 1990s, the U.S. Forest Service and many state agencies collaborate in an effort called “Slow the Spread,” named to reflect the reality that eradication is unlikely.¹⁵ Each year, agency staff conduct extensive monitoring to find the leading edge of the moth’s population, then suppress it primarily with a technique called mating disruption. By flooding the area with the manufactured scent of female moths, the males become confused and have difficulty finding a mate. Because the scent is only perceived by male spongy moths, this strategy is exceedingly safe to us and other species. It is also highly effective, reducing the rate of spread by 87%.¹⁶

The American relationship to trees, insects, and other creatures is a story that continues to unfold, equal parts hubris, well-earned humility, and ingenuity. On this 250th anniversary of the nation’s founding, I grieve the green ash and other forms of life we have lost or are rapidly losing. Simultaneously, I thank the generations of public scientists who have developed creative strategies to give our forests a fighting chance. And I am grateful to Mark Dion for encouraging us all to reckon with our role in this story, by bringing trees and insects more fully into human view.

1 A green ash seed weighs about 0.03 g: “NPGS Ash Conservation Project,” USDA Agricultural Research Service, accessed June 11, 2026, <https://www.ars.usda.gov/midwest-area/ames/plant-introduction-research/home/npgs-ash-conservation-project/how-to-collect/>. The largest green ash on Dickinson College’s campus in 2024 was estimated to weigh 6303 kg based on equations in J.C. Jenkins, D.C. Chojnacky, L.S. Heath, and R.A. Birdsey, “National-scale biomass estimators for United States tree species,” *Forest Science* 49, no. 1 (2003): 12-35.

2 J.H. Wandersee and E.E. Schussler, “Preventing plant blindness,” *The American Biology Teacher* 61, no. 2 (1999): 82-86.

3 “Mark Dion: The Life of a Dead Tree,” Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, accessed June 9, 2026, <https://www.tanyabonakdargallery.com/exhibitions/302-mark-dion-the-life-of-a-dead-tree-museum-of-contemporary-art-toronto/>.

4 D. Grimaldi and M.S. Engel, *Evolution of the Insects* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

5 Y. Gong and E. Plettner, “Effects of aromatic compounds on antennal responses and on the pheromone-binding proteins of the gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar*),” *Chemical Senses* 36, no. 3 (2011): 291-300.

6 J.R. Muirhead, B. Leung, C. van Overdijk, D.W. Kelly, K. Nandakumar, K.R. Marchant, and H.J. MacIsaac, “Modelling local and long-distance dispersal of invasive emerald ash borer *Agrilus planipennis* (Coleoptera) in North America,” *Diversity and Distributions* 12, no. 1 (2006): 71-79.

7 “Hemlock Woolly Adelgid,” New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, accessed June 12, 2026, <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/animals-fish-plants/insects-and-other-species/hemlock-woolly-adelgid>.

8 Personal communication with Sarah Sterner, Instructor in Environmental Studies, in June 2026, based on a campus tree survey she led in summer 2025.

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ROOTED IN ROCK

Jorden Hayes

Edward Weston
(American, 1886–1958)

Juniper at Lake Tenaya

1937

Silver print

14 1/8 x 13 7/8 in. (35.8 x 35.2 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection

When I look at Weston's *Juniper at Lake Tenaya*, I find myself drawn to the tree and its relationship with the stone beneath it. I've always found it beautiful the way that trees sometimes wrap their roots around the rocks as if in embrace. I wonder sometimes if it is the trees way of welcoming the rocks to the surface or perhaps an expression of gratitude toward the Earth.

This photograph invites us to see tree and rock as companions. Yet their relationship is much more than meets the eye. Beneath our feet, they are engaged in a slow and intimate conversation that has been unfolding for, in the case of the juniper, centuries. As a geologist, I see these trees as sophisticated miners of the plant world. The granitic rocks of the Sierra Nevada contain essential nutrients—calcium, potassium, phosphorus, and others—that every tree and forest requires. But these nutrients are locked away within crystalline minerals, inaccessible until the rocks begin to break down.

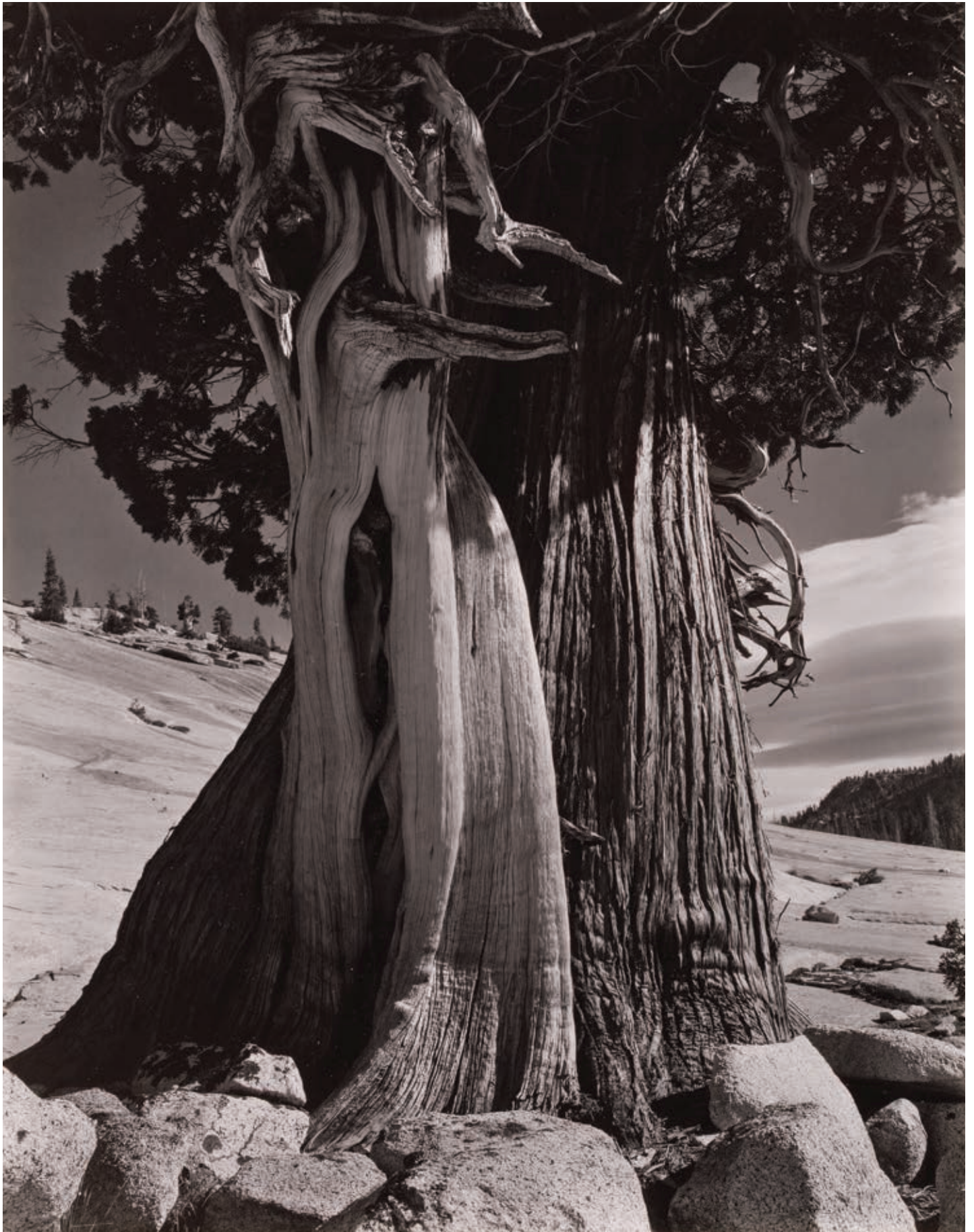
Trees, it turns out, are not passive recipients waiting for geology to do its work. They are active participants in the transformation of rock into soil. Many of us have seen sidewalks buckled by roots and assumed that the root growth alone split the cement. But roots often exert too little force to fracture rock and cement directly. Instead, the tree itself becomes a lever. As wind moves the tree back and forth, the entire root system shifts ever so slightly, prying open existing cracks. You can see some of these cracks in the background of the photograph.

Year after year, storm after storm, the fractures propagate deeper into the bedrock. As the cracks widen, water infiltrates them. Chemical reactions can begin. Minerals dissolve. Nutrients are released. Roots follow the pathways opened and reach farther and farther into the rock. The nutrients support further growth, producing larger roots and greater leverage. Wind strengthens the tree; the tree opens the rock; the rock feeds the tree. Thus describes a feedback loop between atmosphere, biology, and geology. In this way, trees help create the very soils they inhabit.

For the past decade, I have worked at a field site not far from where this photo was taken. My colleagues and I study the processes by which solid rock becomes living landscape. We seek to understand the relative roles of chemical weathering (water-rock reactions) and physical weathering, including the subtle but persistent effects of tree sway.

What we have found reinforces what Weston's photograph seems to suggest. Trees and rocks are not separate actors occupying the same scene. They are collaborators. The forest depends on the chemistry of the bedrock beneath it, while the future of that bedrock depends, in part, on the trees rooted above. Together they create soil, sustain ecosystems, and slowly sculpt the landscapes we inherit.

Perhaps that is why I am moved by images like this one. What appears at first glance to be a tree growing on a rock is, in fact, a portrait of relationship and a stunning reminder that even the most enduring stone and the most transient living things are bound together.



PICTURING THE GRIZZLY GIANT

Elizabeth Lee



One immediately striking aspect of this photograph by Carleton Watkins (1829-1926) is the extent to which the frame struggles to capture its subject, the California sequoia known as the “Grizzly Giant,” then the largest known tree in the United States. Its expansive girth, measuring thirty-three feet in diameter, is underscored by the diminutive presence of the figure before it, who appears as a human measure against the enormous scale of the tree. The man pictured is Galen Clark, caretaker of the Yosemite giant sequoias. From this up-close image of the Grizzly Giant’s base, we can only imagine its trunk and branches soaring above at more than 200 feet—another view with Watkins photographed in 1861. Clearly, however, no single image can fully represent this gigantic tree.

Watkins built a special camera to take to Yosemite and Mariposa Grove, one that could produce a glass plate—and by extension a negative and photographic print—significantly larger than any existing camera at the time. It became known as the “mammoth plate” camera. This was befitting given the scale of his subject, but it also spoke to Watkins’s ambition to produce photographs rivaling painted works of art which could hold their own displayed on a wall (as well as in a photographic album, which was a more typical destination for landscape photography at the time).¹ Working on this scale required larger glass plates, far more chemicals, and of course a portable dark room, among other supplies—a moving operation of more than 2,000 pounds—which Watkins and two assistants carried from San Francisco by steamship, stagecoach, and mules to Yosemite Valley.² Beyond Watkins’s own photographs, the Grizzly Giant was later published by I.W. Taber as a stereograph, providing viewers with an intimate and immersive three-dimensional experience of the tree.

Carleton Watkins (American, 1829–1916)

Section of the Grizzly Giant, Mariposa Grove, Yosemite

Albumen silver print

Photograph published by Isaiah West Taber
(American, 1830–1912) on a stereoscopic card

3 7/16 x 6 15/16 in. (8.7 x 17.6 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection

European-Americans first encountered the giant sequoias in Mariposa Grove around 1855 at a time when the California landscape was seen more in terms of its extractive potential than as a site of awe-inspired wonder. Art historian Tyler Green explains, “Watkins’s work repeatedly, insistently urged America to see not just ore and timber but beauty, to discover new species of trees, a new topography, newly discovered glaciers, and agricultural potential.”³ Watkins’s photographs helped create an environmental consciousness around Mariposa Grove, which in 1864 became the first natural area to receive government protection from private development, more than two decades before Yosemite became a national park. At the same time, these photographs by Watkins—“the name that is associated with a definitive understanding of the area,” art historian Elizabeth Hutchinson writes—attracted new visitors, including botanists and geologists eager to study the landscape as well as industrialists with economic interests in development and, ultimately, the millions of tourists who visit Yosemite National Park annually today.⁴

Early travelers enjoyed speculating on the age of the sequoias. When the New York City newspaper editor Horace Greeley visited the grove in 1859, he imagined the trees had been alive in the Old Testament days of King Solomon and during the time of the Trojan hero Aeneas.⁵ On a visit the following year, Reverend Thomas Starr consulted scientists who counted the rings in a section of the trunk of one of the Big Trees, concluding they were not quite so old, but were giants during the Crusades and predated the earliest Gothic cathedrals.⁶ Regardless, these trees offered a new timeline for thinking about American history, one that preexisted the arrival of European explorers by centuries and turned attention to the landscape itself. In 1861, as the nation entered into a traumatic Civil War, Watkins’s Grizzly Giant provided a reassuring image of a tree literally and metaphorically rooted in a distant past.

1 Tyler Green, *Carleton Watkins: Making the West American* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 84.

2 Green, *Carleton Watkins*, 85, 86.

3 Green, *Carleton Watkins*, 7.

4 Elizabeth Hutchinson, “They Might Be Giants: Galen Clark, Carleton Watkins, and the Big Tree,” in *A Keener Perception: Ecocritical Studies in American Art History*, ed. Alan C. Braddock and Christoph Irmscher (University of Alabama Press, 2009), 119.

5 Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (C. M. Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860), 311-312.

6 Thomas Starr King, *A Vacation Among the Sierras: Yosemite in 1860*, ed. John A. Hussey (The Book Club of California, 1962), 31.

ABUNDANCE AND BELONGING

Sheela Jane Menon

There is a mesmerizing quality to *Nā Akua Mana Loa* (*The Great Powerful Gods*). Diamonds, triangles, and lines repeat and proliferate, emerging in relief—deep black and rich ochre against the textured kapa (barkcloth). In Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) tradition, kapa is made by harvesting certain trees (often the *wauke*, or paper mulberry), stripping the bark as a single piece, and then soaking and beating it, embedding a distinctive watermark. Onto this unique canvas the artist, Lehuauakea, crafts an intricate, geometrical design, one which draws the eye into and across each section of the pattern. Triangles (in ochre) face both upwards and downwards in slim strips, creating mirror images replicated in the positive and negative spaces left by the ‘ohe kāpala—the traditional bamboo printing implements Lehuauakea uses in their process. Narrow rows of diamonds alternate with the larger ochre triangles. They appear in the negative space formed by smaller, stacked triangles—a stark contrast of wildfire charcoal against the kapa. The finesse with which the artist wields the ‘ohe kāpala produces seemingly straight edges for each section of pattern. Crisp lines emerge at almost exactly the same angle from the top right corner of the barkcloth to the bottom left. And yet, this parallelism is quietly undermined by the kapa itself. Its beaten textures emerge under and alongside the stamped shapes, and the uneven borders of the kapa unsettle the regimented replication. While the play of pattern, color, and texture is intriguing, so too are the contradictions they produce. The tessellation of diamonds and triangles appears almost limitless. Yet, they are bounded by the parallel borders of each section of pattern and by the outer borders of the cloth itself. We are left contemplating multiplicity and its limits, precision and disruption, order and chaos.

The tensions here are fitting given the title—*Nā Akua Mana Loa* (*The Great Powerful Gods*)—and the view of the cosmos that inspires it. Lehuauakea writes, “In my culture, we acknowledge a multiplicity of deities, and it is said that we have 4, 40, 400, and 40,000 gods, otherwise noting an infinite number of spiritual embodiments within the Kānaka ‘Ōiwi worldview. This piece honors these deities through two alternating motifs that create a current of pattern across the surface of the kapa.”¹ I am struck by the sense of abundance that is at the heart of Lehuauakea’s reflection,

Lehuauakea
(Hawaiian, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, born 1996)

Nākua Mana Loa (The Great Powerful Gods)
(detail)

2024

Wildfire charcoal and red ochre on kapa

32 x 13 in. (81.28 x 33.02 cm)

Purchase of the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2026.4

and of Hawaiian theology. The divine is expansive, innumerable, omnipresent—qualities which are echoed in the pattern’s inter-twined repetition. That hypnotic plenitude emerges both through the patterns’ intricate placement and through the artist’s selection of materials. Lehuauakea gathered the wildfire charcoal from Oregon, and the red ochre from Hawai‘i, choosing colors with significant cultural resonances. They write, “black alludes to cycles of creation, rebirth, and destruction, especially with this pigment being gathered from a devastating wildfire in Oregon in 2020. The red ochre is an embodiment of [the goddess] Hina, nodding to her power over fertility and procreation.”²

Taken together, the pigments and patterns speak to a cosmology that affirms the intricate ties between the divine, the human, and the environment. The Kumulipo, the Hawaiian creation chant, celebrates this interconnectedness. As kumu hula (hula master) Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahale explains, “The Kumulipo articulates and reveals the connections of the sky and earth, the ocean and land, the land and man, the man and gods and returns again to repeat the cycle with the sky and earth, who are the gods. The Kumulipo recognized that the interrelationship of all things is an everlasting continuum.”³ Spanning 2102 lines, the chant records the origins of the world and the infinite relationships that sustain it. Transmitted across generations through oral tradition and still recited today in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language), the Kumulipo is “our genealogy connecting mankind to earth and sky” (Kanahale). In form and materials, *Nā Akua Mana Loa* evokes this sense of expansive interdependence: triangles reflect their mirror images; contrasting shapes emerge in the negative space; diamonds are formed in the borders between triangles; and parallel lines mark the edges between each pattern. Stare at the work long enough, and you might notice a kind of kaleidoscope effect—each image turns on and is formed by the other.

Lehuauakea invokes the intimacy of this worldview in the red ochre motif, which they “designed and created to represent the rays



of the sun rising over Mauna Kea, my home mountain,” and which “allud[es] to the life-giving power of the sun.”⁴ The triangles and diamonds evoke not only a physical landmark—the highest point on the island of Hawai‘i—but also a site that is personal to Lehuauakea; Mauna Kea is their home, their mountain. This intimacy expands from personal to communal, from communal to political. Kānaka ‘Ōiwi view Mauna Kea as a home to the gods and, thus, a sacred place of worship. It is also a tourist attraction and a site coveted for scientific development, conflicting interests which have led to ongoing struggles over land rights and sovereignty. Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar, Kanaka Maoli artist, activist, and educator, summarizes the conflicts surrounding Mauna Kea:

Since the first 12.5-inch telescope and state-funded six-mile road were built in 1964, Mauna Kea has become a world-class astronomical observatory, hosting some of the largest instruments of science in the world. It has also become a site of conflict between Kānaka ‘Ōiwi and people who want more telescopes. The battle over development on Mauna a Wākea is like the broader struggle over Hawai‘i. Indeed, the protests against astronomy expansion on Mauna a Wākea are a symptom of 125 years of military occupation of Hawai‘i by the United States. Hawaiians have, for just as long, fought against a settler state dependent on the excesses of tourism and a distortion of history . . . Mauna a Wākea [is] as a symbol of our collective struggle for life, land, and independence to contribute to raising a critical consciousness about settler colonization under U.S. occupation.

. . . The people leading the charge to defend Mauna a Wākea call themselves “kia‘i,” or “protectors,” not protesters. While some TMT [Thirty Meter Telescope] advocates criticize Hawaiians for inventing traditions and using religion as a political tactic to stop the project, it was actually settler colonialism that made being Hawaiian a political act—not the other way around. Contrary to such beliefs, Kānaka are not opposed to science or development. We are not ignorant of the value of science, nor are we backward-looking, unreasonable, and naive in our demands . . . Our demands are actually quite practical. We are opposed to the legal structures that silence us and discredit our claims to land and self-determination. We are opposed to structures that diminish our knowledge systems to justify the continued exploitation of Hawai‘i.⁵

Casumbal-Salazar showcases the breadth and depth of what Mauna Kea represents in Hawai‘i—for Kānaka like Lehuauakea; for kia‘i who risked arrest by blocking construction of the TMT on Mauna Kea; and for state actors who continue to pursue development even as they openly admit their failure to ethically manage this sacred site. What he maps here is a geography of resistance and survivance that stretches beyond Mauna Kea. As I take in Lehuauakea’s rendering of their mountain, its rich ochre reinscribing Hawai‘i on Hawaiian barkcloth, I see the tessellated pattern producing a kind of recursive insistence that this site is home and temple. Despite the pressures of tourism and development, Muana Kea remains intimately connected to Lehuauakea and to “the great and powerful gods.” And they, in turn, are part of the wider cultural and political struggle of Kanaka against “settler colonization under U.S. occupation.”⁶

As a settler in Hawai‘i—a guest who arrived, uninvited, to a place illegally annexed by the United States in 1898—I do not share in the genealogy of belonging which informs *Nā Akua Mana*

Loa. Instead, I have a responsibility to “[learn] the sometimes uncomfortable place, protocols, and responsibilities of someone who is a settler and an ally for decolonization in Hawai‘i.”⁷ I borrow these words from Indigenous, cultural, and ethnic studies scholars Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez because they help me name “the kuleana [responsibility] that comes from being nourished by this place.”⁸ In writing about *Nā Akua Mana Loa*, I take seriously my kuleana in approaching this work. I began by paying attention to form and artistry, spending time simply observing the patterns—tracing pathways from one triangle to one diamond, from one reflection to its contrast. I then aimed to be attentive to context. This work, along with Lehuauakea’s commentary, directed me to aspects of Kānaka history and culture that felt important to share with those encountering it here, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Form and context are as intertwined as the shapes and lines of *Nā Akua Mana Loa*.

Nā Akua Mana Loa sits within a diverse body of Kānaka craft practices. Reflecting on the arc of their work, Lehuauakea writes, “While I believe it is critical that contemporary kapa-making evolves with our communities and avoids staying fixed in time, I also find it important that our present-day innovations are rooted in a foundation of ancestral knowledge.”⁹ They identify *Nā Akua Mana Loa* as part of a series that honors traditional techniques passed down through generations. Kapa, like the Kumulipo, is a testament to the vast bodies of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi knowledge that have been preserved, transmitted, and adapted—a testament to Kānaka survivance. Attentive to the origins of kapa practices (while also experimenting with them), Lehuauakea describes *Nā Akua Mana Loa* as an example of a “stripped down” approach. Yet, its kaleidoscopic effects bely that categorization. The kapa is resonant with the aesthetics and politics that frame Lehuauakea’s artistic practice. *Nā Akua Mana Loa* reflects a deep commitment to tradition and innovation, paying homage to “[a] genealogy connecting mankind to earth and sky” in an “everlasting continuum.”¹⁰

1 Email correspondence between Lehuauakea and Shannon Egan, shared with the author, March 10, 2026. See also Lehuauakea, *Lehuauakea Catalogue* (Winter 2026), 1-34.

2 Email correspondence.

3 Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahele, “Foreword,” *The KUMULIPO: An Hawaiian Creation Myth* (Pueo Press, 1997), https://www.higp.hawaii.edu/~scott/GG104/Readings/Liliuokalani_1897.pdf.

4 Email correspondence.

5 Iokepa Casumbal-Salazar, “‘Where Are Your Sacred Temples?’: Notes on the Struggle for Mauna a Wākea,” in *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai‘i*, Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, eds. (Duke University Press, 2019), 200, 204.

6 Casumbal-Salazar, 200.

7 Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, “Introduction,” in *Detours: A Decolonial Guide to Hawai‘i*, Hōkūlani K. Aikau and Vernadette Vicuña Gonzalez, eds. (Duke University Press, 2019). 6.

8 Aikau and Gonzalez, 6.

9 Lehuauakea, *Catalogue*, 20.

10 Kanahele.

EXAMINING EXTRACTIVE LANDS IN WESTERN FRONTS

Heather Plumridge

To address anthropogenic climate change, an energy transition from fossil fuel energy to low or no-carbon energy is required. This transition is mineral-intensive. Rare earth elements are required components for clean energy technologies, including wind turbines and electric vehicles. With the rapid depletion of land-based mineral deposits, the United States and other countries are exploring new resource frontiers, including those found beneath the surface in formerly protected lands in the United States.

Bears Ears National Monument in Utah is emblematic of these contested lands. Bears Ears is the sacred ancestral land of the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Pueblo of Zuni, Ute Indian Tribe, and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Based on a tribal proposal, President Obama designated 1.35 million acres of Bears Ears as a National Monument in 2016, cooperatively co-managed by the tribes and the federal government. The status protects sacred ceremonial sites, rock art, and cliff dwellings, prevents mineral or energy exploitation, and prohibits off-road vehicle use.

Through a 2017 proclamation, President Trump attempted to reduce the size of the Bears Ears National Monument by about 85 percent. Tribal and environmental advocates challenged these land reductions in the courts. In 2021, President Biden issued an executive order restoring the original Bears Ears National Monument protected land.

These contested lands are central to Rick Silva's video *Western Fronts*. In the video, Silva juxtaposes drone footage of Western natural lands with a digital window, revealing the potential minerals beneath the surface. The drone footage includes Bear Ears (Utah), Cascade-Siskiyou (Oregon), Gold Butte (Nevada), and Grand Staircase-Escalante (Utah). A digital strip across the landscapes reveals shimmering black rocks and light, leading the audience to wonder what lies beneath the surface and ponder the political, economic, ecological, and cultural implications of the extraction of these lands.

Through this artistic interpretation, Silva leads the audience to explore terranean and sub-terranean conflict and beauty. The digital window, accompanied by ominous music, pulls the audience into a visually stunning spatial exploration of what could be below the surface. This transfiguration encourages the audience to consider how their demand for minerals may drive potential extraction processes, with major implications for the peoples, lands, ecosystems, and animals above the surface.

As an interdisciplinary social science researcher who examines human-environmental injustices linked to climate change, the energy transition, and land grabbing, Silva's work offers a parallel investigation to my own concerns about how extractive processes impact communities and ecosystems. Land is a precious resource, simultaneously holding priceless sacred value, endless ecological services, and potential extractive value. Central to environmental injustices are decisions about what human's value and prioritize, in part through insatiable human demand for goods, including the innovations necessary to power the energy transition away from fossil fuels. The contrasts highlighted by Silva force the audience to move from being passive observers to considering their complicity in these complex problems in these contested resource frontiers.

Rick Silva
(American, born Brazil 1977)

*Western Fronts: Cascade
Siskiyou, Gold Butte, Grand
Staircase-Escalante, and Bears
Ears*

2018

Video, 18 min, 32 seconds

Sound design by Kuedo + Holy Other

Assistance with drone cinematography by
Zack Dougherty

Art Bridges



AN ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF *VALLEY OF THE CUMBERLAND*

Sarah Sterner

Henry Boese
(American, 1824–1863)

Valley of the Cumberland

c. 1847

Oil on canvas

29.5 x 49.5 in. (74.93 x 125.73 cm)

The Trout Gallery, Gift of Mrs. Charles Service,
1944.1.1



“One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well, and does not want to be told otherwise. One sometimes envies the ignorance of those who rhapsodize about a lovely countryside in process of losing its topsoil, or afflicted with some degenerative disease of its water system, fauna, or flora.”

– Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)

Henry Boese’s *Valley of the Cumberland* (c. 1847) was painted approximately 180 years ago in the same Great Valley Ecoregion that Dickinson College sits today. As a Hudson River School artist, Boese’s painting was meant to inspire national pride by representing a picturesque American frontier, where humans appear to live in perceived harmony with a tamed “wilderness.”¹ Like many artists from this movement, he most likely combined scenes of the area, exaggerated lighting and scale, and omitted signs of human impact to create a sense of natural grandeur. Despite the artistic liberties that Boese might have taken to depict a romanticized landscape in the *Valley of the Cumberland*, he unintentionally also created an ecological snapshot in time, illustrating the seemingly subtle impacts of human development on the environment.

The Valley of the Cumberland draws us in to relax near a beautiful, idyllic stream meandering through a valley of pastoral fields surrounded by forested mountains. If you look closely at the stream, its edges are lined by cutbanks, or vertical cliffs lacking vegetation. In a temperate Northeast ecosystem, healthy streams have gently sloping, fully vegetated or forested banks that anchor soil, dissipate water energy, and provide critical shade and habitat for aquatic life.² The exposed tree roots and grasses dangling over bare soil cutbanks in the painting are actually indicators of significant erosion, most likely caused by the clearing of surrounding forests to make way for grazing cattle. When forests are converted to pastures, rainwater is no longer intercepted by layers of tree branches. Instead, the water forcefully hits the ground and cannot be absorbed into the newly compacted soil, which in turn increases the amount of water that runs into local waterways, taking with it soil from the landscape.³ This erosion fills streams with fine, muddy sediments that clog fish gills and smother fish eggs, destroy aquatic vegetation, and bury rocky streambed habitat, leading to declines in fish, macroinvertebrate, and plant communities.⁴

Now that your eyes are more tuned to ecological clues, look closely for a sloping trail between two large shrubs on the left bank of the stream where grazing cows likely walked to the water to drink. On their way to the stream, the cows' hooves loosen soil and stir up sediment, while their manure adds bacteria and nutrients to waterways.⁵ Excessive nutrients like phosphorous and nitrogen from manure act as a heavy-duty fertilizer, causing algae to grow rapidly and form mats on the water's surface, blocking sunlight and reducing the dissolved oxygen available for aquatic critters.⁶ Just from a few environmental cues, we've clocked the many impacts of erosion and cattle grazing in this historic painting, but the ecological story doesn't stop there!

Look to the treeline on the left side of the painting, and you'll see a row of standing dead and dying trees along the forest's edge. It's very common to see tree mortality lining the edges of a forest clearcut, as trees that had been previously sheltered in a forest interior are suddenly exposed to an entirely different climate, often causing them to struggle and die.⁷ Direct sunlight can overheat and crack bark (known as sun scald), while compacted soils from trampling cattle prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground to nourish tree roots (hydrological shock). Additionally, strong, unobstructed winds pick up speed in open areas and increase the potential for windthrow (trees uprooted or broken by strong winds).⁸

Finally, let's shift our gaze to the sky and talk about those clouds. In the *Valley of the Cumberland*, light, delicate, white and gray clouds dance across the sky with wisps of charcoal black clouds in the foreground. In my interpretation, the charcoal clouds in the foreground are actually smoke, not a natural cloud. Clouds form when water vapor condenses into water droplets and appear white because they scatter all colors of sunlight evenly.⁹ In contrast, wispy clouds that appear sooty or take on a charcoal tone typically indicate smoke as carbon-rich particles in the air absorb rather than reflect light.¹⁰ During the 1840s, the Cumberland Valley was bustling with settlers burning forests to make way for pastures and agriculture, clearing land, and heating their homes. By including those charcoal

clouds, perhaps Boese was alluding to the human settlements and activities just out of view.

As a student of ecology, when I look at Boese's picturesque *Valley of the Cumberland* I see how the seemingly simple act of clearing trees for cattle pastures creates ecological ripples across a landscape. As forests are cleared, water races across fields causing stream banks to erode, increased sediment suffocates fish and smothers aquatic habitat, trampling cattle compact the soil and contribute bacteria and excess nutrients to waterways, trees along the edges of clear cuts perish, and burning wood smoke reduces air quality. As John Muir wrote, "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."¹¹

However, would I turn a blind eye and happily walk down the cleared path with my children, pointing out the beautiful trees and mountains, making necklaces from flowers, collecting smooth rocks, listening to birdsongs fill the air, hunting for salamanders, watching butterflies dance across the fields, mimicking the moos of cows, and sharing in the wonders of the earth? Of course, any day. As Boese implores, we can enjoy the majesty and beauty of the Cumberland Valley's pastoral landscapes, appreciate the fertile soils that nourish our society and bring food to our tables, while at the same time we can recognize what was lost or changed to create that beauty.

1 Trudy Mercadal, "Hudson River School (painting)," (EBSCO, 2022), <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/visual-arts/hudson-river-school-painting>.

2 S.K. Xenophon, K. Koch, and J. Fetter, *A Healthy Stream Has Stream Bank Cover* (Penn State Extension, 2025), <https://extension.psu.edu/a-healthy-stream-has-stream-bank-cover>.

3 I Potić, L.M. Mihajlović, V. Šimunić, N.B. Čurčić, and M. Milinčić, "Deforestation as a Cause of Increased Surface Runoff in the Catchment: Remote Sensing and SWAT Approach—A Case Study of Southern Serbia," *Frontiers in Environmental Science* (2022), 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fenvs.2022.896404>.

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5 Layla El-Khoury, Barbara Doll, Jack Kurki-Fox, *How to Monitor Streambank Erosion and Estimate Resulting Sediment and Nutrient Loads* (NC State University College of Agriculture, 2024), <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/how-to-monitor-streambank-erosion>.

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11 John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1335&context=jmb>.

Joyce Tenneson
(American, born 1945)

Wise Tree

2015

Archival pigment print on metallic paper

41.25 x 44.75 in. (104.78 x 113.67 cm)

The Trout Gallery, Gift of Michael Moses,
2017.33.16

RESISTANCE

Adrienne Su

Without pencil or pen, without paper,
I cannot enter the forest. For people like me,
it's a cosmos devised by human makers.

Only in fiction would I read beneath a tree.
The irony, of course, is in the materials,
right down to the shelves in the library.

Confronted with actual forested trails,
I advance, retreat, and compose a story.

Whatever I write is and is not the child
of earth and photosynthesis. Sure, I'd rather
explore a fabricated clearing arrayed
with fabricated trees, but like everything wild,

I come from dirt and the sun, no matter
how far from the earliest tree I have strayed.





EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Ansel Adams
(American, 1902–1984)

Cedar Trees, Winter,
Yosemite National Park,
California

1949

Gelatin silver print

9 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (23.8 x 18.7 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection

Ansel Adams's photograph of snow-covered cedar branches in Yosemite National Park resembles vertebrae, suggesting both structure and fragility in nature. A devoted conservationist, Adams joined the Sierra Club, a nonprofit organization founded in 1892 by preservationist John Muir, as a teenager and spent over six decades supporting its mission—as caretaker, photographer, and board member—while using his striking landscapes to advocate for national parks.

In 1864, President Abraham Lincoln designated Yosemite Valley for public use, helping establish the national park system. Yet figures like Lincoln, Muir, and Adams largely overlooked the Southern Sierra Miwuk peoples, who have lived in the region for over 5500 years and continue to call it home.



American School

Sawmill Along the River

19th century

Oil on plywood

20 ½ x 26 ¼ in. (52.07 x 66.04 cm)

Lebanon Valley College Fine Arts Collection,
Gifted by Hilary Peery Vesell, 2020.1.42



This painting presents an idealized vision of the timber industry: tall pines rise beside a river where stripped trunks, a working sawmill, and a small house emitting chimney smoke suggest steady productivity. Bathed in warm light, the scene celebrates lumber's transformation from forest to finished goods.

In the nineteenth-century United States, abundant

forests fueled expansion, as settlers harvested timber for ships, homes, tools, and paper. Sawmills became fixtures along waterways, symbolizing industrial progress. Absent here, however, are the environmental consequences of deforestation and the displacement of Indigenous communities—revealing a selective portrayal of growth and prosperity.



Henry Ary
(American, 1807–1859)

On the Hudson

1850

Oil on canvas

27 ½ x 33 ½ in. (69.85 x 85.09 cm)

Lebanon Valley College Fine Arts
 Collection, Gifted by Hilary Peery
 Vesell, 2020.1.36

In *On The Hudson*, painter Henry Ary, an artist associated with the Hudson River School, centers a towering white pine, paired with a bare, gaunt trunk rising from dense shrubs. The trees overlook a sweeping river landscape where signs of human presence—cattle, small buildings, and distant sailboats—signal ongoing settlement.

By foregrounding the pines, Ary alludes to their pivotal role in American history. Species such

as the Eastern white pine and the longleaf pine shaped Indigenous diplomacy, supported maritime industries, and helped build the nation's infrastructure. Notably, the Eastern white pine holds cultural and spiritual meaning for Native communities. For the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, it was the Tree of Peace, under which warring nations are said to have buried their weapons to establish the Great Law of Peace.

George N. Barnard
(American, 1819–1902)

Battleground of Resacca,
GA, No. 2

1866

Albumen print

18 x 22 in. (45.72 x 55.88 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection

George N. Barnard published *Battleground of Resacca [sic], GA, No. 2*, in his 1866 book *Photographic Views of Sherman's Campaign*. Taken less than two years after the May 1864 battle—where more than 4000 Union and Confederate soldiers died—the photograph reveals a landscape stripped and scarred by war.

Rather than depicting human casualties, Barnard turns to the land itself. Broken and felled

trees mark the violence of battle, as well as the widespread ecological destruction of the American Civil War. Forests were cut for fuel and to build “snake” or “worm” fences. Trees shattered by gunfire and cannon became silent witness to conflict. Over the four years of brutal conflict, millions of trees were destroyed—revealing the environment as another casualty of war.



Henry Boese
(American, 1824–1863)

Valley of the Cumberland

c. 1847

Oil on canvas

29.5 x 49.5 in. (74.93 x 125.73 cm)

The Trout Gallery, Gift of Mrs.

Charles Service, 1944.1.1



In *Valley of the Cumberland*, Henry Boese depicts a landscape familiar to residents and visitors of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, presenting a seemingly pastoral scene shaped by settler expansion. Grazing cattle, two riders, and open fields signal agricultural growth, while subtler details—dead trees at

the forest's edge and an eroded creekbank—reveal the environmental impact of deforestation.

As European settlers cleared forests for farming and development, the Cumberland Valley lost its dense, native woodlands. Trees provided materials for fences, as seen framing the road on the right

side of the painting, while their removal reshaped the land itself. The towering sycamore at the center, commonly found along the region's waterways, dwarfs human figures, underscoring both the valley's abundant resources and the scale of its transformation.



Zoë Charlton
(American, born 1973)

***Mercy and Good Fruits:
 Bluebirds***

2020

Collage on paper

53 x 60 in. (134.62 x 134.62 cm)

Courtesy of Zoë Charlton

In *Mercy and Good Fruits: Bluebirds*, Zoë Charlton merges body and landscape: a lush, leafy tree spills from a Nigerian mask, evoking memory, ancestry, and place. Inspired by her grandmother Everlena Bates, who owned land in northern Florida, Charlton recalls a childhood sense of freedom that contrasts with the lived realities of Bates and other Black women who were employed as domestic workers in the South.

An Ogoni spirit mask appears to “birth” an inverted tree whose ancestral roots are found in West Africa. The composition then can be understood as a landscape, a verdant ecosystem, and an abstracted approach to a family tree. In the artist’s words, landscape is “a space the figure moves through, is shaped by, or resists.” Through collage, Charlton embraces the dissonance of layered images and textures, disrupting familiar forms to suggest that identity is fluid rather than fixed. By pairing the mask with natural imagery, she explores connections between Black womanhood, memory, and an unsubdued wilderness.

James King Davison
(American, 1810–1892)

Notebook on Botany

1828

Archives and Special Collections,
Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson
College



This notebook belonged to Dickinson College alumnus James King Davison (Class of 1829), who documented his studies across disciplines including ornithology, chemistry, geology, history, and astronomy. A significant portion focuses on plant life, organized by class, order, and

genus, with detailed sketches in graphite, ink, and watercolor. Several pages are labeled “Michaux Forest Trees,” reflecting Davison’s engagement with contemporary botanical research.

Although Michaux State Forest was not yet established when Davison made his sketches, he

would have known the work of French botanists André and François-André Michaux, who catalogued North American flora for the French crown and published influential studies such as *North American Sylva* (1819). François-André also observed the widespread deforestation caused by charcoal

production for iron furnaces in Cumberland Valley. Davison likely was aware of this industrial activity in these nearby forests. Informed by such observations, the Michaux legacy of research and advocacy ultimately led to the establishment of Michaux State Forest in 1902.

Mark Dion
(American, born 1961)

*The Life of a Dead Tree -
Emerald Ash Borer*

*The Life of a Dead Tree -
European Gypsy Moth*

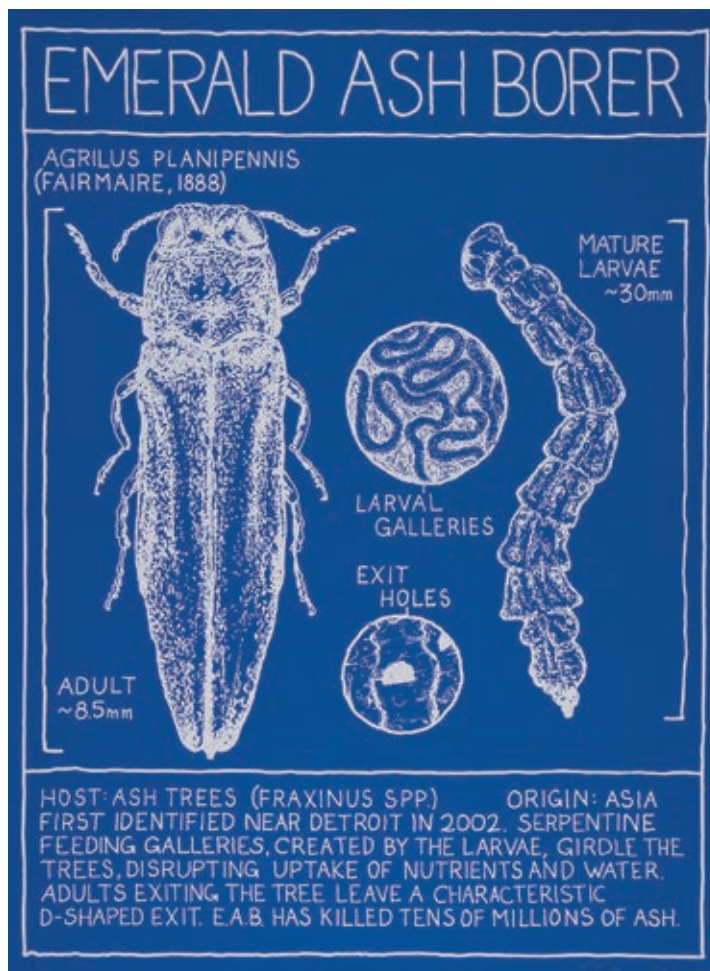
*The Life of a Dead Tree -
Hemlock Woolly Adelgid*

2019

Silkscreens on paper (ed. 11 of 20)

24 x 18 in. (60.96 x 45.72 cm) (each)

Purchase of the Friends of The
Trout Gallery, 2025.42.1-3



In these three prints, Mark Dion highlights the environmental risks invasive species pose to North American trees. While originally part of his larger installation *The Life of a Dead Tree* (2019), the species shown here—the emerald ash borer, the European spongy moth, and the hemlock woolly adelgid—are prevalent in Pennsylvania.

Dion's information on their introduction and impact helps viewers identify local threats and understand how to prevent the spread of invasive species.

In the original installation, Dion presented these prints alongside a centuries-old dead white ash tree and conducted a two month "autopsy" in the gallery. Throughout this process, he documented the organisms the tree sustained, from native species that support ecological cycles to invasives that weaken forest systems. Notably, the emerald ash borer—depicted in one of these prints—was actively consuming the decaying tree during the exhibition. Dion's work reveals the profound ecological consequences of human activity, particularly global exchange and urbanization, on forest health.



Susan Mackin Dolan
(American, born 1956)

The Cycle of Trees

2003

Woodblock print on kozo fiber
cooked in soda ash solution

10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.32 cm)

Gift of Dr. Eric Denker, Class of
1975, in Honor of James Bowman,
2022.39.1.8



In *The Cycle of Trees*, Susan Mackin Dolan explores trees as both subject and material, tracing their transformation from forest to paper. The composition moves from a floating log in the timbering process, shown in the top section of the print, to an enlarged wood grain at center, to a sparse landscape of bare trees below.

Raised in a Maine papermaking town where her father worked in a sawmill, Dolan brings personal and material knowledge to her practice. The print foregrounds wood grain, visible in the carved lines running horizontally across the image, and reflects the demands of printmaking, where artists must work with the grain to carefully create a legible

image. Dolan uses a sustainable Japanese paper-making technique to make Kozo paper using kozo, gampi, and local plant fibers that are then boiled and pounded to create a pulp. The sheet's untrimmed edges emphasize its tactile, sculptural quality and the full cycle from tree to art.



David Driskell
(American, 1931–2020)

Pine Trees in the Night

2008

Serigraph (ed. 23 of 75)

15 × 11 in. (38.1 × 28 cm)

Petrucchi Family Foundation
Collection, PFF 146H

David Driskell—artist, scholar, and curator—frequently used the motif of Eastern white pine trees in his artworks and saw their enduring greenery as a symbol of grace, resilience, and triumph over hardship. This print, titled *Pine Trees in the Night*, transforms towering pines into an abstract homage to his upbringing in southern Appalachia and reverence for his environment. As a child, Driskell accompanied his mother who drew on Cherokee and African knowledge to gather plants for medicines and teas. Driskell watched his father use local timber to build their home and furniture. Here, the dynamic interplay of green and black lines suggests the movement of tree branches against a darkened sky, but also the profound sense of spirituality Driskell felt in nature.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson
(American, 1803–1882)**

Nature

1836

Published by the Roycroft Shop,
East Aurora, NY, 1905

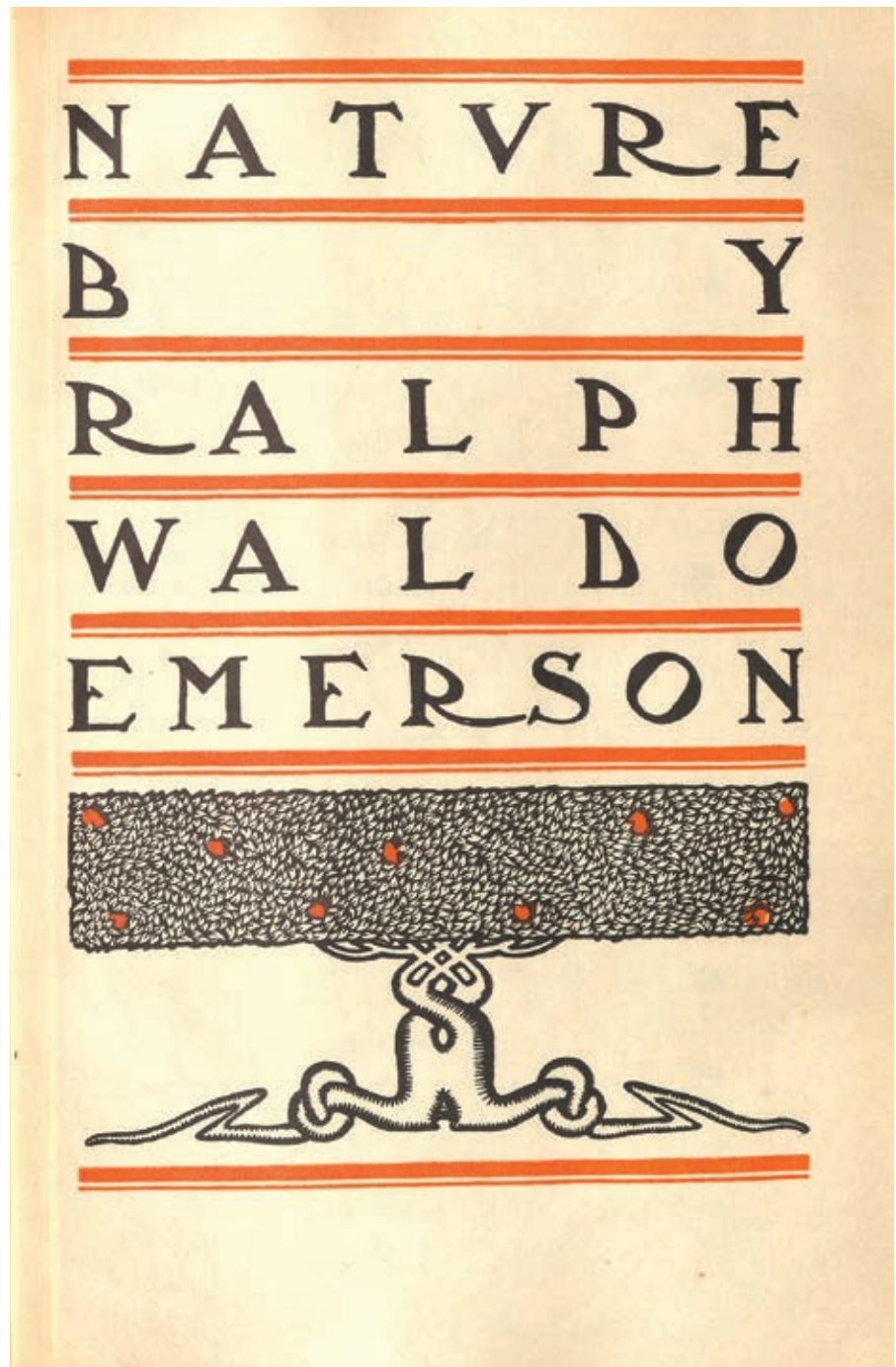
9 ¾ in x 7 ¾ in. (24.765 x 19.685 cm)

Archives and Special Collections,
Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson
College

Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature* (1836) is a foundational text of American intellectual and artistic culture, introducing the core principles of transcendentalism. Emerson argues that the divine is present in the natural world and accessible through direct, personal experience. He contends that modern life distances people from nature's beauty, limiting their ability to recognize its spiritual and moral significance.

Emerson also understood the role of art in expressing these ideas. His writings influenced nineteenth-century artists, particularly landscape painters who portrayed nature as vast, luminous, and imbued with a sense of the sublime. These works invite awe and reimagine the American wilderness as a site of reflection and revelation.

Photographs of Yosemite Valley by Carleton Watkins hung in Emerson's home, reinforcing his belief in the power of landscape to inspire wonder. Emerson's ideas contributed to a broader cultural movement that valued preservation and provided the impetus for creating national parks.



Ken Gonzales-Day
(American, born 1964)

Into Eternity, Claremont

2007

Archival ink on fiber rag paper
36 x 43 in. (91.44 x 109.22 cm)

Purchase of the Friends of The
Trout Gallery, 2025.39

The gnarled, bulbous trunk of a tree with four massive branches is starkly illuminated in this somber photograph by Ken Gonzales-Day. Lit as if by a flashlight against a pitch-black background, the image emphasizes the tree's rough, cracked surface. This is a "witness tree," marking the site of a lynching in Claremont, California.

Drawing on his work as both an artist and scholar, Gonzales-Day seeks to address gaps in the public memory of racial violence in the United States. Through extensive research on lynchings in California and the Southwest from 1850 to 1935, he documents the targeting of Latine, Asian, and Native American communities. This

photograph is part of his series *In Search of California Hang Trees*, which records sites of known lynchings. For Gonzales-Day, these photographs both expose a history of racial injustice and serve as a warning about the enduring consequences of hatred.



**Charles Francis
Himes
(American, 1838–1918)**

***Leaf Prints: Or Glimpses
at Photography***

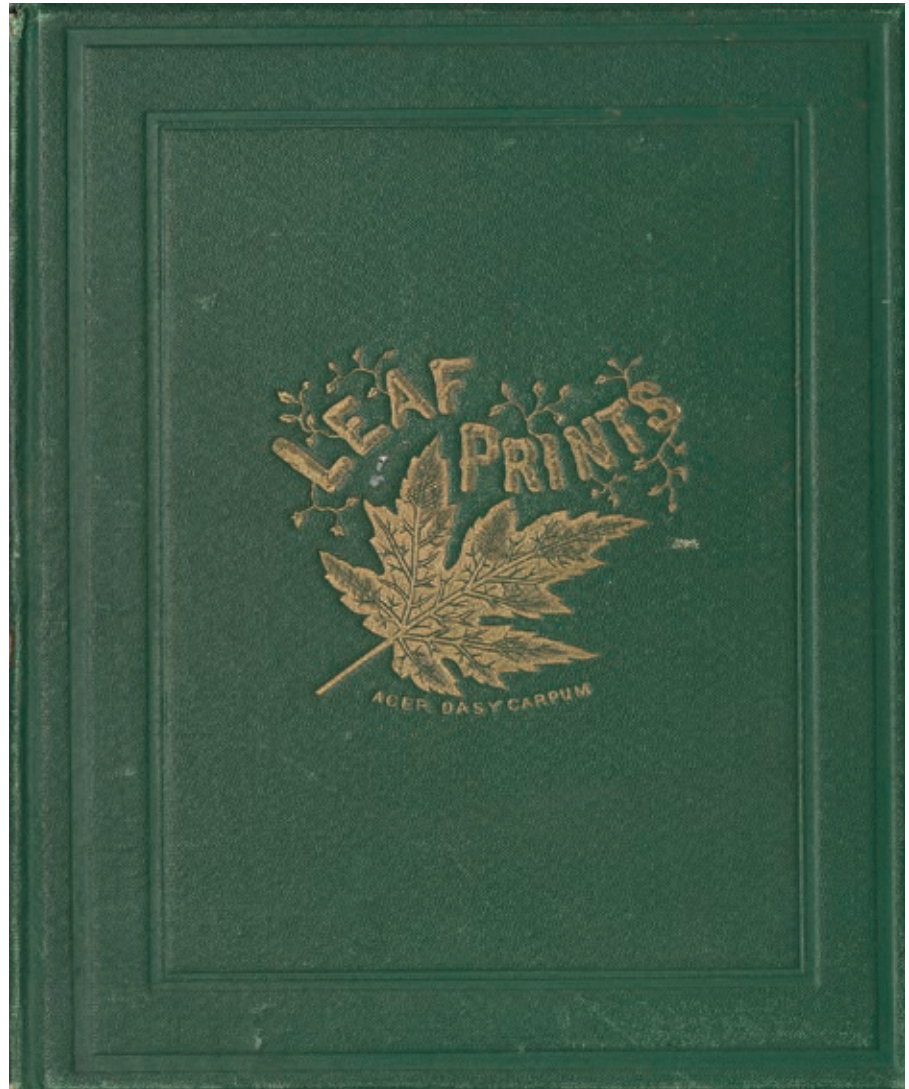
1868

Published by Benerman & Wilson,
Philadelphia

Archives and Special Collections,
Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson
College

Charles Francis Himes, who graduated from Dickinson College in 1855 and returned as a professor of natural sciences in 1865, sought to find innovative ways for studying science and realized that the relatively new medium of photography provided an opportunity to present leaf specimens, in his words, with both “beauty and accuracy.”

His book *Leaf Prints: Or Glimpses at Photography* offers an overview of the history, theory, and practice of photography in the three decades after photography’s invention. By offering specific instructions for “gathering leaves for photographic purposes,” Himes uses botany and photography to connect his interests in both art and science. Moreover, he anticipates the curricular goals of his faculty successors at Dickinson, who, like Himes, encourage close looking and intersections among disciplines to create more engaged student experiences.



Amer Kobaslija
(American, born
Bosnia, 1975)

Lowe's Tubes,
Ichetucknee

2018

Oil on panel

96 x 118 in. (243.84 x 299.72 cm)

Courtesy of Amer Kobaslija

In his *Florida Diaries* series, Amer Kobaslija—who fled Bosnia in the early 1990s and considers Florida his adopted home—depicts a real business near the Ichetucknee River that rents inflatable floats to tourists. A dead tree hung with rainbow-colored innertubes, connected by rope in a spidery web, rises against electric green grass and

a backdrop of cypress, pine, and weathered shacks.

The bare branches, stripped of all foliage, hold their plastic cargo like strange fruit—an allusion Kobaslija acknowledges to Billie Holiday's protest song mourning the lynching of African Americans. While not a literal illustration of that history,

the image is haunting, evoking the systemic inequalities of race and class that continue to harm under-represented communities in Florida. The replacement of living foliage with plastic also speaks to the environmental toll of rapid development on the state's fragile landscape.



Lehuauakea
(Hawaiian, Kānaka
‘Ōiwi, born 1996)

Nākua Mana Loa (The
Great Powerful Gods)

2024

Wildfire charcoal and red ochre
on kapa

32 x 13 in. (81.28 x 33.02 cm)

Purchase of the Friends of The
Trout Gallery, 2026.4

Lehuauakea revitalizes and innovates traditional Hawaiian bark-cloth practices, known as kapa, exploring themes of environmental stewardship, queer Indigenous identity, and cultural resilience. Kapa is made by harvesting tree bark, then fermenting, beating, and water-marking it into cloth. Patterns are applied using ‘ohe kāpala—stamps carved from bamboo strips.

Here, a red ochre motif represents the sun rising over Mauna Kea, the artist’s home mountain, invoking the life-giving power of the deity Kāne. The work’s title acknowledges the infinite spiritual

embodiments within the Native Hawaiian worldview. Red ochre, gathered in Hawai‘i, symbolizes fertility and procreation, while the black kaimana motif was made with charcoal collected from a 2020 Oregon wildfire, evoking cycles of destruction and rebirth.

The work resonates locally. In Central Pennsylvania, South Mountain’s forests were heavily deforested to create charcoal that fueled the region’s iron furnaces. Lehuauakea’s work then can be seen as a profound reframing of the relationship between the exploitation of and reverence for nature.





**Photographer
unknown**

***Denny and Parker
Properties***

1875

Albumen print

Archives and Special Collections,
Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson
College

In 1794 a black walnut tree at the northwest corner of West and High Streets in Carlisle shaded George Washington as he was reviewing the militia before the westward march to quell the Whisky Rebellion. This photograph documents the tree, now gone, over a hundred years after Washington stood beneath it. Dickinson College's Denny Hall now stands at this corner

that once belonged to the Denny family.

In 1950, sculptor Mary O. Abbott carved sections of Dickinson College's ceremonial mace from this tree, also known as the "Washington Stump." The material and motifs of the mace connect the ideals of America's Revolutionary history to the present-day traditions and values

of the College. The mace is carried each year in the College's commencement and convocation ceremonies.

The Denny property likely was photographed by Charles Francis Himes, class of 1855 and professor of natural sciences. Himes photographed many sites on campus during his time at Dickinson College.

**Photographer
unknown**

*Redwood Plank, 4ft.
Thick, 16 ft. Wide,
Eel River, Humboldt
County, California, For
Exhibition at World's
Fair, Chicago*

1893

Albumen print

Ron Perisho Collection

In 1893, a massive section and planks from a redwood known as the “Eel River Giant” were shipped to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This photograph shows a lumberjack dwarfed beside the towering plank he is hewing—more wall than wood. The composition captures lumber in every stage of transformation: rough trunk, scaffolded plank, scattered logs, and shredded bark.

California’s ancient redwoods were prized for their extraordinary resistance to rot, insects, and fire, making them essential for railroad ties, tunnel timbers, and the ornate detailing of Victorian homes. Timber was central to Californian life; political figures were often lumber barons, and communities famously used enormous stumps as dance floors. Redwood harvests even rebuilt San

Francisco repeatedly after devastating fires.

The spectacle of felled trees at exhibitions, such as the Chicago World’s Fair, generated both an appetite for destruction and outrage against it. That tension galvanized conservationists, among them John Muir and the Sierra Club. Their advocacy aimed to protect the forests of Yosemite National Park for future generations.



Arthur Rothstein
(American, 1951–1985)

*An Abandoned Farm,
Cimarron Country,
Oklahoma*

1936

Vintage silver print

Ron Perisho Collection



On Black Sunday—April 14, 1935—a blinding dust storm swept across the Great Plains, destroying farmland, displacing families, and plunging communities into darkness. This photograph captures the aftermath: an abandoned Oklahoma farm where windblown dunes of bare earth swallow scraggly trees and engulf a barn. The land is visibly beyond recovery.

Rothstein was among a generation of New Deal

photographers—including Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans—who documented the human and ecological toll of the Dust Bowl, the series of catastrophic dust storms that devastated the American prairies throughout the 1930s.

The disaster was not inevitable. European-American settlers displaced the Indigenous peoples who had farmed these plains sustainably for centuries. The Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara, and

Pawnee communities cultivated thriving agricultural villages by farming floodplains where tree roots anchored topsoil, planting complementary crops, and carefully limiting cultivation. Settlers ignored these practices, over-farming the land until its topsoil eroded entirely—creating the conditions for a catastrophe. When drought arrived, there was nothing left to hold the earth in place.



John Ruppert
(American, born 1951)

Split Strike, 37° 21'04.5" N
105° 06'22.2" W

1995

Cast aluminum

112 × 12 × 10 in. (284.5 × 30.5 ×
25.4 cm)

Courtesy of John Ruppert

The coordinates in this work's title mark the precise Colorado location where Ruppert discovered a spruce tree blasted by lightning. Part of his ongoing Lightning Strike Series, the sculpture was made by sand-casting the fragmented tree in aluminum—faithfully preserving the wood grain, bark texture, and monumental scale of the original. Yet the process of casting molten metal at extreme temperatures evokes alchemy, mirroring the raw, transformative force of the strike itself.

In Ruppert's words, the work "documents the moment when the electrical charge between the earth and its atmosphere equalizes and the tree acts as a conduit between the land and sky." Across many cultures and mythologies, lightning-struck sites are sacred. They are considered tangible traces of spiritual energy, bridging earthly and heavenly realms.

The physics of a lightning strike is equally astonishing. Carrying up to a million volts of electricity and generating temperatures approaching 36,000°F—roughly six times hotter than the sun's surface—a single strike turns sap to steam, explodes bark, and shatters the trunk. Ruppert's aluminum sculpture captures that violent, sublime moment.

Rick Silva
(American, born
Brazil 1977)

Western Fronts: Cascade
Siskiyou, Gold Butte,
Grand Staircase-
Escalante, and Bears
Ears

2018

Video, 18 min, 32 seconds

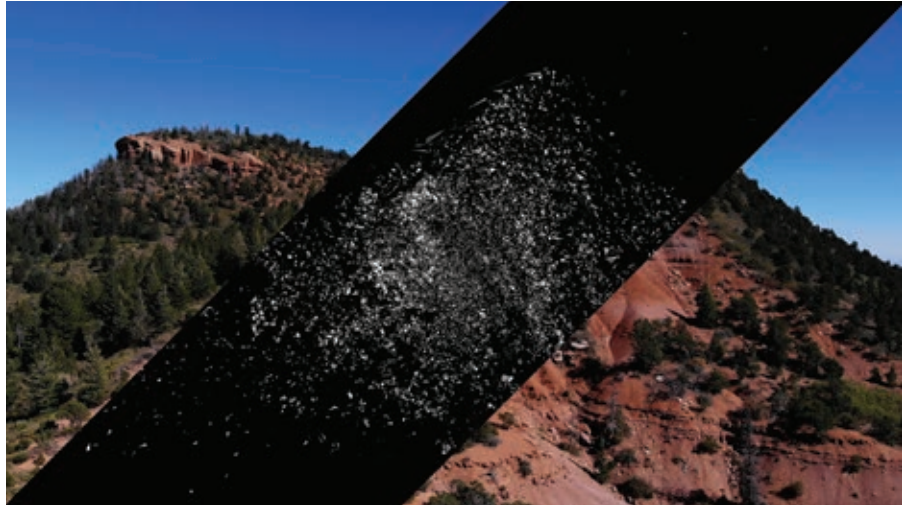
Sound design by Kuedo + Holy
Other

Assistance with drone cinematog-
raphy by Zack Dougherty

Art Bridges

In his video titled *Western Fronts*, Rick Silva features aerial drone footage of Cascade Siskiyou, Gold Butte, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Bears Ears, four major national monuments in Oregon, California, Nevada, and Utah. The artist created the work in response to a presidential executive order signed in 2017, which enabled mining companies to gain access to these once protected lands and sacred Indigenous sites.

In *Western Fronts*, Silva views these landmarks through the eyes of the extractor, laying geometric digital windows over the landscape, revealing the mineral content and subterranean structures under the surface. Silva imagines, in his words a “near-future dystopia of computer-vision aided resource extraction,” where prospectors look only for what they can take from these monuments. Silva’s video presents dense forests and rugged topography in relation to both their economic value and their sublime beauty.



Frederick Sommer
(American, born Italy,
1905–1999)

Champagne Rock

1940

Gelatin silver print

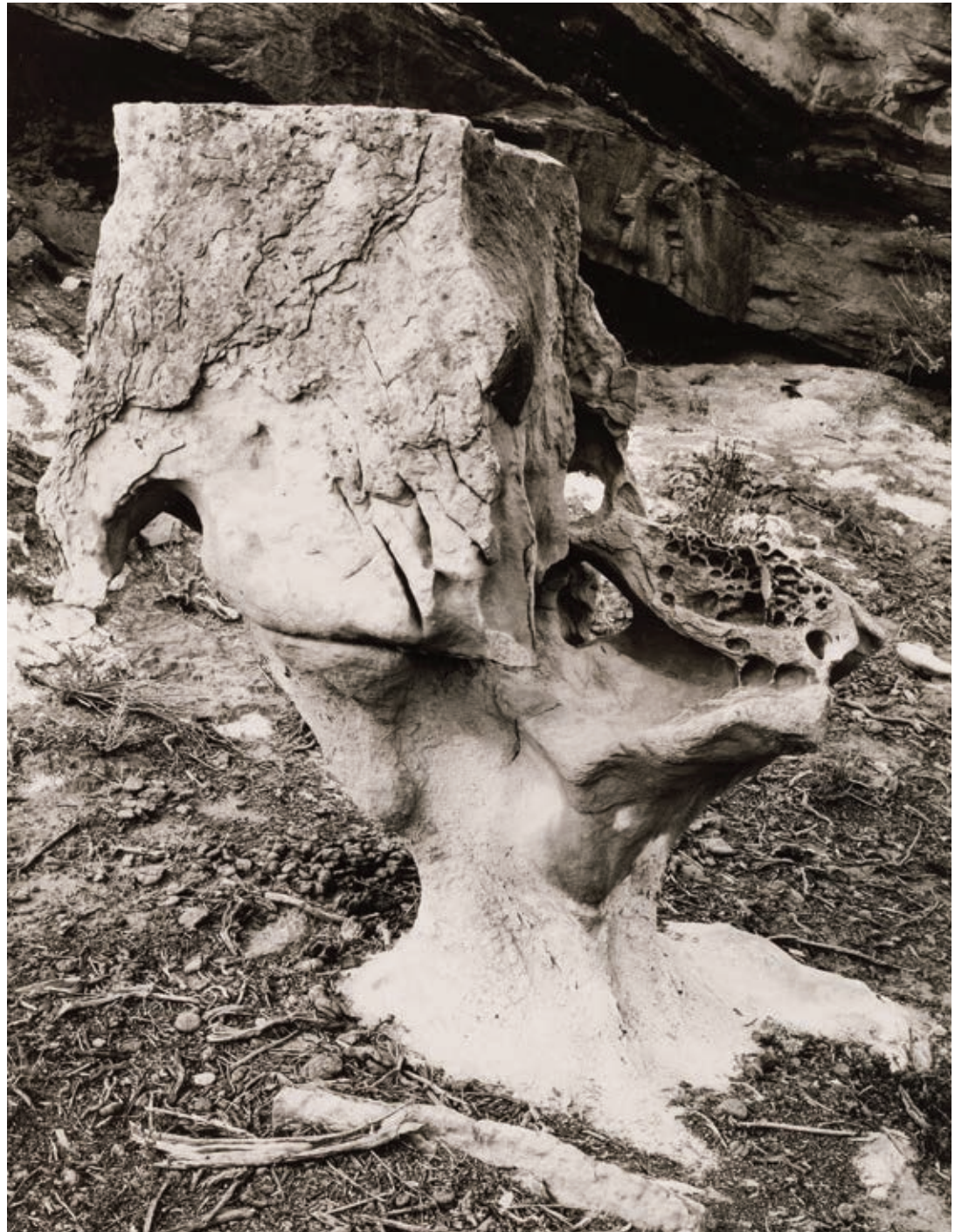
9 5/16 × 7 7/16 in. (24.3 × 19.2 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection

“There was very little distinction between the plants and the rocks,” Frederick Sommer observed of the Arizona landscape—a perception that lies at the heart of his photographic practice. Associated with the Surrealist movement in art, Sommer was drawn to pictorial ambiguity: images that blur abstraction and representation, unsettling the viewer’s sense of subject, scale, and depth.

This photograph exemplifies that sense of disorientation. A rectilinear block of sedimentary rock rests on an eroded, curved base that resembles a tree stump. The stone reads uncannily as a chopped section of wood. The confusion is not accidental. The same year this work was made, Sommer created other photographs in Petrified Forest National Park, where ancient trees have become fossils. Erosion sculpts other sedimentary formations in this area into bark-like textures and log-like forms, producing a landscape where boundaries between organic and geological matter dissolve.

For Sommer, this natural biomimicry was more than an aesthetic curiosity. It was a means of interrogating photography itself, probing the assumptions and associations we bring to images, and questioning what we believe we recognize when we look at the world.



Joyce Tenneson
(American, born 1945)

Wise Tree

2015

Archival pigment print on metallic
paper

41.25 x 44.75 in.
(104.78 x 113.67 cm)

The Trout Gallery, Gift of Michael
Moses, 2017.33.16

"I seek to reveal, in a single frame, the complex lives of trees—including their hardships and tragedies," writes photographer Joyce Tenneson. Her monumental, gold-toned image centers a majestic oak. Its branches in full leaf rise from a lush forest floor, evoking spirituality, wisdom, and endurance. The composition draws on ancient beliefs in trees as protective spirits, while the tree's

centrality and abundant growth invoke the archetype of the "tree of life"—a symbol of fertility and the interconnectedness of all living things.

The gold tone of the photograph further transports the viewer into a spiritual realm. Tenneson incorporated gold leaf into the printing process, calling upon its long association with the divine in Byzantine icons and Incan

ceremonial objects. Applied here to a living tree rather than a sacred figure, gold embodies the connection between nature and belief in the divine. In fusing ancient gilding traditions with modern photographic processes, and the human impulse toward reverence of the organic world, Tenneson's *Wise Tree* becomes both portrait and devotional object.





Sam Van Aken
(American, born 1972)

Untitled (Plum Boles)

2014-2017

5-7 ft tall, diameter of 10-12 in.
(each), placed on solid black locust
wood pedestals

Courtesy of Sam Van Aken

Sam Van Aken describes his practice as “sculpture through grafting,” using the horticultural technique of joining cuttings to a strong rootstock. In these plum boles, shifts in bark texture and bright wraps mark “graft unions,” where multiple varieties are fused into a single tree. The result is a living patchwork of flowers, fruits, and botanical histories.

These boles were collected in preparation for Van Aken’s large-scale art installation, *Open Orchard* on Governor’s Island, New York in 2022. The installation consists of 102 hybrid grafted fruit trees of antique and heirloom varieties that were grown in and around New York City over the last 400 years. Most of the fruit varieties included in the orchard have been lost due to the industrialization of agriculture and climate change. Van Aken’s site-specific sculptures celebrate biodiversity, preserving the fruits of historic plants for future generations.

**Kay WalkingStick
(Cherokee Nation of
Oklahoma, born 1935)**

Spirit Center II, 1992

Oil stick on paper mounted on
canvas

30 x 60 in. (76.2 x 152.4 cm)

Art Bridges



Cherokee artist Kay WalkingStick's powerful connection to landscape in her paintings draws on her Indigenous identity and spirituality. She explains, "This is our beloved land, no matter who walks here, no matter who 'owns' it. This is our land. Recognize us and honor this land."

Spirit Center II is a diptych—a two-panel painting—depicting Sunset Crater National Park

in Arizona, home of Ancestral Pueblo peoples, who were displaced when a volcano erupted between 1064 and 1066 CE. Though visually contrasting, both panels represent the same sacred place. The left panel renders warm brown hues in a rounded, textured form evoking a seed or tree knot; the right shows a gnarled, leafless tree rooted in ancient lava rock. Together, they might be read as close-up and distant view, or

as spiritual essence alongside physical presence.

By portraying one place through two seemingly opposing perspectives, WalkingStick proposes that apparent contradictions—past and present, abstraction and realism, western and Indigenous ways of knowing—may be understood as two halves of a balanced whole, held together by reverence for the land itself.

Carleton Watkins
(American, 1829-1916)

Section of the Grizzly Giant, 33 feet diameter, Mariposa Grove, Mariposa County, Cal.

Charles Lyman Pond
(American, 1832-1891)

The Pioneers' Cabin - 32 feet diameter

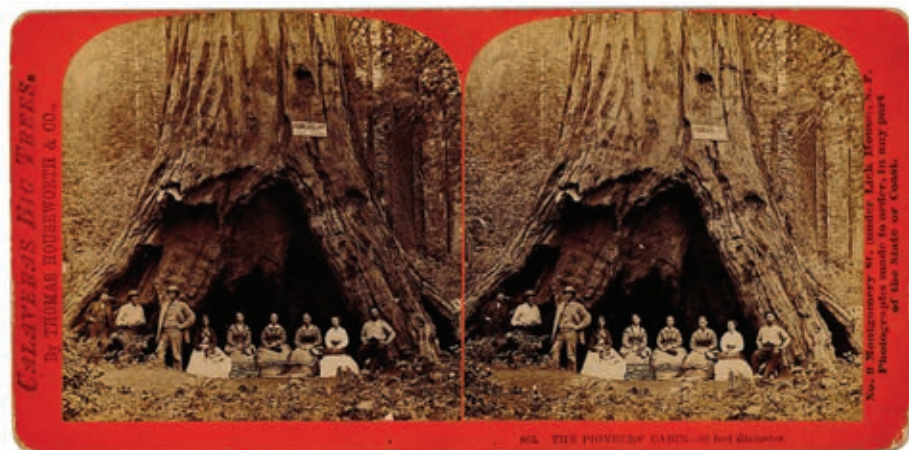
Isaiah West Taber
(American, 1830-1912)

Wawona, 27 ft. diameter, Mariposa Grove

c. 1860s-1870s

Albumen silver prints on stereoscopic cards

Ron Perisho Collection



These card-mounted stereoscopic photographs reflect the fascination with the giant sequoias and dramatic scenery of Yosemite in the nineteenth century. One card features a photograph by Carleton Watkins of the “Grizzly Giant” Sequoia. Over 200 feet tall and nearly 3000 years old, this tree is the oldest and largest sequoia in Mariposa

Grove. Conservationist Galen Clark stands at its base, offering Eastern audiences proof of its unimaginable scale. In other photographs, tourists pose inside the hollowed Pioneer Cabin Tree, and a horse-drawn wagon passes through the tunnel cut into the Wawona Tree, capturing the era’s enthusiasm for inhabiting these monumental living things.

Watkins’s images and Clark’s advocacy together contributed to Yosemite’s designation as a national park in 1864—a landmark conservation achievement. Yet the same photographs that helped preserve the landscape also fueled a tourism boom that commercialized and diminished it.

Preservation came at a grave human cost. The Ahwahneechee peoples of the Sierra Miwok had lived in Yosemite Valley for centuries before being forcibly displaced as colonialism and tourism expanded. This dispossession was rooted in the California Genocide of the 1840s and was accelerated, in part, by the images shown here.

Edward Weston
(American, 1886–1958)

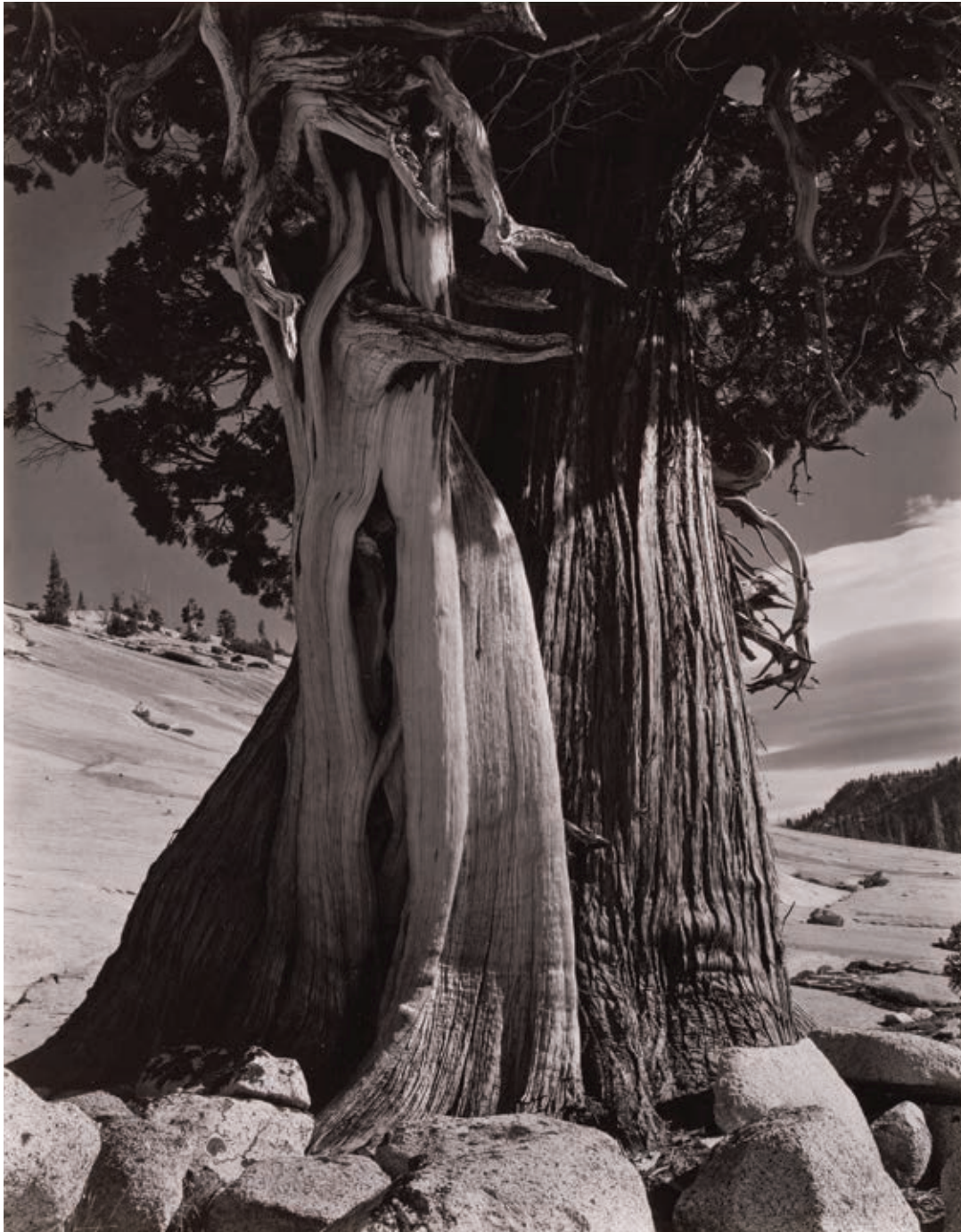
Juniper at Lake Tenaya

1937

Silver print

14 1/8 x 13 7/8 in. (35.8 x 35.2 cm)

Ron Perisho Collection



A massive juniper tree emerges like a monument from the rocks of the High Sierra. Two intertwined trunks rise together; one lighter, smooth and almost metallic in texture twists in front of the darker, rougher bark behind. Edward Weston, best known for his sharp detail and technical precision in photography, transforms this tree into an almost sculptural abstraction. His use of a silver printing process echoes the polished silvery appearance of the juniper.

Along with photographer Ansel Adams, Weston cofounded the photographic collective Group f/64—named for the smallest aperture on large-format cameras—and championed “straight photography”: sharp, unmanipulated images that focus on the texture or abstracted geometry of their subjects. Weston’s attention to tonal contrasts heightens the rhythmic lines of the juniper’s bark and branches and the dark canopy that fills the sky.

The photograph is also a testament to the juniper tree’s remarkable ability to thrive in the altitudes of the High Sierra region of the Sierra Nevada. These trees anchor thick roots into solid rock, endure gale-force winds and prolonged drought and grow so slowly that a single tree may survive for over a thousand years.

Emmi Whitehorse
(Diné (Navajo Nation),
born 1957)

Green Wood

1996

Oil and chalk on paper mounted
on canvas

39 ½ x 51 in. (100.3 x 129.5 cm)

Art Bridges

Leaf silhouettes, concentric rings suggestive of tree growth, as well as forms that resemble seeds, pods, berries, and nuts drift through the vaporous atmosphere of this painting by Emmi Whitehorse, *Green Wood*. She explains that her “paintings tell the story of knowing land over time—of being completely, microcosmically within a place.” The composition evokes the muted greens of a mossy forest floor, the fertile abundance of a canopy’s fruit and seed, and the shifting light that filters through leaves.

Whitehorse was raised with the Diné concept of *hózhó*, meaning a harmonious balance between humanity, nature, and the universe, and this ethic of reciprocity anchors her practice. Rather than centering the human viewer, as Western landscape traditions typically do, her paintings understand nature as an interconnected web of relationships among human and other-than-human beings.

Whitehorse’s vision resonates with botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer’s (Citizen Potawatomi

Nation) writing in *Braiding Sweetgrass*: “I like to imagine that when Skywoman scattered her handful of seeds across Turtle Island, she was sowing sustenance for the body and also for the mind, emotion and spirit: she was leaving us teachers. The plants can tell us her story; we need to learn to listen.” The seeds and leaves scattered across *Green Wood* also ask us to look and listen closely to nature.



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