



# ROT: The Afterlife of Trees



# ROT: The Afterlife of Trees



**The Arts Center**  
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## ROT | The Afterlife of Trees

The Arts Center proudly presents *ROT: The Afterlife of Trees*, an art exhibition that explores the connection between art and science. The exhibition is the culmination of a collaboration between Oregon State University College of Forestry Ecosystems Researcher Dr. Mark Harmon, the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest, Spring Creek Project and The Arts Center. Over seven months in 2015, artists had the opportunity to walk the woods with Dr. Harmon and learn about forest ecology. This catalog serves to archive resulting artworks, as well as some of the discoveries and reflections of participants in the project.

Decomposing logs may seem like an unusual subject for an art exhibition, but consider these factors:

- Artists and research scientists both seek answers to life’s many questions.
- The Arts Center is just down the street from Oregon State University – our state’s land grant and leading public research university. The College of Forestry has been studying trees and forest systems for over a century. The Arts Center has presented many science based and technology themed shows over the years.
- The “dead” logs of Dr. Harmon’s project are actually teeming with life. The many implications of his research have provided rich subject matter for artists participating in this exhibition project.

Let this catalog be your guide for further exploration and reflection on our incredible natural world.

–Cynthia Spencer  
Executive Director of The Arts Center, Corvallis, Oregon

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## **How I Got to Here and Now**

### **Dr. Mark Harmon**

Imagine two scenes simultaneously unfolding in the Pacific Northwest: a tractor trailer hauling a conveyor belt with a crematorium ready to remove dead trees from existence versus several stream ecologists suddenly realizing that the large downed trees that they had been crawling over, under, and around contained carbon, the particular element they were inventorying. While both contain their absurd elements, the former represents the culminating illogical moment in the quest to eliminate all woody waste from forests; the latter the intellectual seed that dead trees play an important role in forests and their associated water bodies. Over my 40 year-long professional career I have tried my best to dissuade others from using the crematorium (or its attitudinal equivalents) and direct them onto the path of understanding that allows some dead trees to fulfill their natural destiny.

I will be the first to admit it: an obsession with the fate of dead trees is unusual. My general excuse is that science has many oddball eccentrics fascinated by obscure subjects. That is a good thing because if everyone studied the same thing, the same way, at the same time little would be known about our world. We make progress by trying to observe and understand as much as we can, but since scientists spread the load, they end up in some fascinating but limited area. My scientific justification is that dead trees impact and react to everything contained in a forest ranging from the organisms living in it to the energy and matter moving through it. If one is interested in all these things, then the dead tree is a great tool of integration. On a more personal level, I freely admit I am prone to adopt lost causes and dead trees have often been one of least appreciated features of forests often relegated to the role of waste, decadence, and to large extent non-existence. In sum they have everything I need ranging from mysteries to windmills.

The path that brought me to this obsession has some odd, but true twists. As a child, routine tasks included feeding the compost pile with leaves from the yard and vegetable scraps. One of

the benefits was that this stuff became a source of bait for fishing. I distinctly recall thinking at the age of 8 or 10 that it was truly remarkable that this pile of discards transformed into an irresistible wiggling fish attractor and soil that enriched our garden. Perhaps I should study this as scientist if the job of secret agent did not pan out? But since neither seemed very immediate, I put those ambitions away and headed off to Dudley Pond to “catch” the big one. Many years later I was about to graduate from Amherst College having studied ecology in the biology department. I decided to celebrate by running in the woods about 5 miles after partaking in several “herbal” cigarettes. At one point during my journey I noticed this glowing green surface off the trail to the right, which turned out to be a moss covered log. I went back to examine more closely and after admiring the intensity of, yes, the colors, I returned to my run, finishing with a steep hill ascent. Stopping to catch my breath I distinctly recall the sensation of something over my head physically descending and entering my brain: “you will lead a large research team that studies decomposing logs.” Was this a pinched nerve or part on an unscheduled vision quest? I eventually convinced myself it was the lack of cerebral oxygen, but still it was an interesting possibility, and filed it away for future reflection.

It turns out that future was closer than I realized. The summer after graduation I found myself in Glacier National Park helping to inventory fuels in a fire management study. We measured downed trees, and while we could tell how much was there, nothing we did told us the why. As my ambition at this point was to become a fire ecologist I studied that topic for my Master’s thesis in the Great Smoky Mountains. Being attracted to lost causes I picked a very moist location where fires were generally uncommon with one small corner dry enough to support them, an area I explored for several years in part by measuring dead trees again. This time I tried to figure out the why, and so designed my first study on tree decomposition. It turned into one of my



first publications and one of the first on this topic in the ecological literature (35 years later it still represents one of the largest collections of data on this process in the eastern United States).

About this time there was a call for proposals on long-term ecological studies from the National Science Foundation, and for some reason the University of Tennessee faculty allowed me to contribute. I decided to study tree decomposition, not by going out and aging various trees that had died at different times as I had just done, but by cutting trees down and watching them decompose over time, maybe three decades or so. I played through all the steps in my head as to how we could do this the right way, but alas our proposal was declined. While disappointed, I knew I was moving on to Oregon State University and as it turns out their proposal to do a similar study for over a century had been funded.

My intention for the doctoral dissertation at Oregon State was to study the carbon cycle of Pacific Northwest forests, but it turned out another opportunity awaited: figure out why so many trees started their life on dead and downed trees. It didn't take long to realize this might not only move me toward my previous "visions", but also help me learn the craft of field experimentation. This study of nurse logs was well underway and near completion when I learned of a possible job installing the 100 year plus log decomposition experiment. I applied immediately and somehow my handwritten application letter impressed the investigators enough to give me a chance. My visions were starting to be realized fully—very strange, but true.

Well that is how I got on this path, but where has it lead me? The short answer is in some directions that I never anticipated. In a world of specialists, I remain an ecological generalist. Dead trees allowed me to examine a wide range of ecological phenomenon: I could ponder this subject at multiple levels from the molecule to the globe; I could study different kinds of organisms

(bacteria, fungi, plants, lichens, protozoa, mites, insects, nematodes, earthworms, salamanders, fish, birds, and mammals to name a few); I could examine different processes starting with the death of a tree, to the release of complex organic matter into simpler forms, formed soil, and fed new growth and fires leading to yet more dead trees; and I could apply many kinds of tools ranging from pure observation to experiments to models that simulated all the processes I examined. As the dominant method of dead tree management when I started was to yard and pile unmerchantable material (affectionately referred to as YUM and PUM), my work (and that of many others) lead me to try to shift this expensive and often ecologically harmful practice toward a more informed one. That has proven a challenge, but it is certainly nice to see that now dead trees in many circles are viewed as having a positive role in supporting biodiversity and many key ecosystem functions (Note to self: pockets of resistance remain to be snuffed out). An unanticipated direction was humor: I once witnessed a talk in which the presenter repeatedly showed slide after slide in which he asserted there was no carbon stored. Oddly each slide showed dead trees, but to him they did not exist. My asking if dead trees contained carbon did cause the audience to laugh, but did they see the larger point? However, the largest and most significant unplanned discovery was how powerful dead trees could be as a metaphor for the humanities to draw inspiration. I have been impressed by the written word inspired by Log Decomp (known more clinically as Log Decomposition Site Number 3). I was recently asked to read aloud the part of Allison Hawthorne Deming's "This Ground Made of Trees" that moved me the most. I suppose those were the lines that caused me to choke up. It has made me realize that while science is one way to understand the world around us, the humanities can be just as powerful a tool to the same end.

As part of my effort to pull all my scientific thoughts and data together, I applied for an OPUS

grant from the National Science Foundation and luckily it was funded. In addition to my scientific synthesis, I thought it would be interesting to explore a parallel synthesis in the arts as documented in this book. I am very thankful for all those that have participated in this effort and I hope it provides you rich insights along your journey through this world.

–Dr. Mark E. Harmon  
Richardson Chair and Professor in Forest Science

## Discovery Trail

### Leah Wilson

A lacquered tree round adorned with an image of a salamander marks the beginning of the Discovery Trail located at the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest headquarters. Along the trail you will find no signs or kiosks designating an area or object as particularly “discover worthy.” There is an invitation at the trailhead to discover, but it does not dictate what that discovery should be, or when it should happen. The gesture of placing the marker at the trailhead, and no more, succinctly describes the nature of this complex place perfectly. It is an invitation to you, the visitor, to discover both your questions and your answers.

In 2012, as a stranger to this forest, I spent ten days at HJ Andrews Forest in pursuit of an idea. Fred Swanson, a geomorphologist by training and an art-science connection-maker by passion, took me on a day-long tour of some of the sites. By the end of the day I was so overwhelmed that I could not effectively process my experience in the forest. I felt I had walked into a deep, dark abyss of the unknown, and I could not come up with any idea, neither a good one nor a bad one. I feared that my time there would be spent wandering around aimlessly with nothing to show. It ended up that my fears were unfounded. That does not mean that I did not wander around HJ Andrews Forest aimlessly, because that is primarily just what I did. However, wandering around that complex landscape proved to be a very valuable experience that continues to serve me well.

My seemingly aimless wanderings are a means to develop a deep knowledge of the place without being limited by a defined or specific goal. The more I know of it, the more questions I can ask of it, and I like to think that the more I know of it, the more the forest will be willing to



Beetle Drawing 1. Photograph by Leah Wilson



reveal itself to me.

One notable rainy day in October, I lugged my camera gear down a steep set of wooden stairs on a hillside to the gauging station at one of the creeks to find a graduate student systematically checking an array of piezometers that extended up the creek. We both gathered data – mine visual and his numeric – that we would be using to try to find answers to our respective questions. The specific questions and perspectives that we brought to that place directed what we constructed to explore possible answers.

During my wanderings I have often come across evidence of other questions scientists have asked of the forest. I have a particular fondness for two locations – one where the ground is wrapped, not unlike a Christo wrapped island, and another where you can find deliberately placed sticks arranged in a row inside small tents or laying directly on the ground without a tent. These discoveries of science in action always delight me. In appearance, they are akin to finding the work in progress of site-specific art installations. However their intention is not of art inquiry, but of science inquiry. Their forms resemble art enough for me to feel that what the scientists and I are engaged in at the forest are related. We are creating in the pursuit of a deeper understanding, knowing that our work will lead to yet more questions - ones that we could not conceive of asking without first working through our respective processes of discovery.

An inevitable result of discovery is that it reveals not only a deeper understanding, but also an



Piezometers. Photograph by Leah Wilson

even greater recognition of our own ignorance. It may sound as if inquiry is a Sisyphean effort, but it is the discovery of new questions in the pursuit of understanding that is so intriguing. It is the driving force in both science and art. The process of making art is the act of bringing into the world physical manifestations of the pursuit of greater



Wrapped Stump. Photograph by Leah Wilson

understanding, be it of materials, form, or concept. Once the artwork is completed, there is a fleeting sense of elation. But it is ephemeral and, when it soon dissipates, it is replaced by the desire to once again walk back into the unknown. In the unknown lies the exciting potential of all possibilities. This is the territory both artist and scientists inhabit.

For *ROT: The Afterlife of Trees*, my thinking began incoherently. Rot and decay are not subjects that would naturally attract my attention. It was only after I followed Dr. Mark Harmon for a short while at his log decomposition site that I could begin teasing

out a nascent idea with which to work. I did not know enough at the onset to even understand what to look for. I listened to him enthusiastically describing white rot and other fungi found on wood. I had never heard someone talk about rot with such passion! It was infectious. I returned a week later to spend an extended weekend splashing up Lookout Creek and blazing my own trail through the dense forest searching logs for rot and fungus. My attention was focused on something novel to me. I now stopped at places where I would not have previously stopped, and was rewarded by finding some truly strange and beautiful forms.

Experiences like this differentiate this forest for me from others. There are many people here who, like the Discovery Trail placard, encourage me to begin to discover again and again as they are doing. What a vibrant environment for an artist to wander aimlessly and make art in response to wondering what it would look like if...!

I hope that the Discovery Trail remains the way that it is now rather than conforming to the expected form discovery trails typically take. The path that conveniently provides the answers may be the easier and more comfortable path to travel, but it is also far less intellectually and emotionally satisfying. The freedom to be able to walk into the unknown and find no answers readily available encourages creativity. It is the path that scientists and artists alike choose to take. It is *the* reason that we can be found wandering in HJ Andrews Forest.

– Leah Wilson  
Artist

## Rot, Writing, and Renewal

### Charles Goodrich

Walt Whitman in “The Song of Myself” says, “To die is different from what any one supposed / and luckier.” Poets and artists have long intuited a continuity between life and death. Artists have often put themselves in proximity to the dead to observe firsthand and learn from the experience. For them, an open-minded inquiry into mortality can be a serious aesthetic exercise.

In the past few decades scientific research such as that of forest ecologist Mark Harmon’s work in log decomposition has given new credence to the poets’ intuition. Harmon reminds us that there is often more living matter in a decaying tree than there was in the ‘live’ tree. As the “Head Rotter” at the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest, Harmon has spent a career on the topic, analyzing the decomposition process and carbon dynamics with a vast array of experimental, observational, and modeling techniques. To accentuate the importance of dead wood and decay in forest management, Harmon coined the term “morticulture.” Harmon estimates it may take two-hundred years for the most rot-resistant logs to be recycled back into soil and atmosphere. Sustaining research over such long periods is a crucial issue for a short-term-focused society.

When the Spring Creek Project initiated a writers-in-residence program at the HJ Andrews Forest in 2003, we were inspired by Harmon’s long-term perspective. The program, called Long-Term Ecological Reflections, has adopted to a similar two-hundred year time frame to encourage the study of this place for generations in order to learn to perceive the temporal dimension – the presence of pasts and futures – through informed observation. As writer and lepidopterist Robert Michael Pyle, our first writer in residence, put it:

*If we care about what’s to come, it makes sense to send delegates to the forests of the present to find out how things truly are, report back, and check in again year after year. ...Maybe looking to the future is a way of hoping there will still be something to see when we get there. Maybe it’s the only way to make sure of it.*



The residency program invites creative writers to spend one to two weeks at the HJ Andrews Forest, to visit Harmon's 'log decomp' site and other significant research sites in the forest, and to reflect and compose on matters silvicultural, morticultural, and cultural. Log decomp occupies a mossy glade among towering old-growth conifers. It is quintessential old-growth forest, with a little added tension: metal tags, plastic sampling chambers, and other miscellaneous research paraphernalia. The writers have reveled in the beauty, fecundity, and, paradoxically, the redolent decay of the deep forest. They have found the metaphoric potentials of decay and decomposition grounded here in the realities of the forest science. The writers' testimony ranges from the analytic to the emotional, from the mysterious to the pragmatic. Their insights are often different in kind from those derived from scientific research, and these different perspectives can stretch and complicate one another. Bringing science and art into conversation can create resonances and amplifications that no single way of knowing can achieve on its own.

All the poets included in this catalog have been residents at the HJ Andrews Forest, and each has brought a unique facet of the forest experience to light. Alison Deming, who visited the site at a time when her mother was gravely ill, said she received "grief counseling" from the forest. When Jerry Martien saw the plastic buckets attached to some of the decomposing logs to measure off-gassing, he riffed on the idea of respiration, of breath, and allowed the dead logs to speak for themselves. Though plastic buckets and other scientific instrumentation, fondly referred to as "researcher trash," may strike some visitors as unsightly or intrusive, poet Vicki Graham saw them as evidence of love.

Long-Term Ecological Reflections is a collaboration among the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word at Oregon State University, the HJ Andrews Forest Research Group, and the Pacific Northwest Research Station. To date, over sixty writers have participated in the

HJ Andrews Forest residencies. Each has contributed creative writing to this ongoing inquiry, collected on-line in the Forest Log. A wide selection of essays and poetry from the program is gathered in the anthology, *Forest Under Story: Creative Inquiry in an Old Growth Forest*, to be published by University of Washington Press in early 2016.

–Charles Goodrich  
Director, Spring Creek Project

# POETRY

## THIS GROUND MADE OF TREES

The giants have fallen.  
    I think I can hear the echo  
        of their slow composition  
the centuries passing  
    as note by note  
        they fall into the forest's  
silent music. Moss has run  
    over their backs, mushrooms  
        have sprung from the moss,  
mold has coated the fungal caps  
    and the heartwood  
        has given itself to  
muffled percussion  
    of insect and microbe  
        that carpet of sound  
that gives the forest its rhythm.  
    A nuthatch twits  
        or a vole cheeps.  
The scent of decay rises  
    like steam from a stewpot.  
        Anywhere I set my foot  
a million lives work  
    at metabolizing  
        what has gone before them.  
The day is shortening  
    and the winter wrens have  
        something to say about that.

I can almost give thanks  
    that the soil will claim me  
        but first allow me, dear life,  
a few more words of praise  
    for this ground made of trees  
        where everything is an invitation  
to lie down in the moss for good  
    and become finally really  
        useful, to pull closed  
the drapery of lichen  
    and let the night birds  
        call me home.

—Alison Hawthorne Deming, October 2008  
HJ Andrews Experimental Forest

from *Debris*

In an old-growth forest,  
not even the earth is still:  
stakes set four square  
trace trapezoids twenty years later.

A science of debris:  
a bit of bark, a scrap of lichen,  
a dropped needle or cone,  
a stone shifting on the gravel bar,  
a shed snake skin, a wasp  
depositing eggs near the wood borer's larva—  
pages torn from a book—read by a research.

Each stake stumbled upon in the middle of the forest,  
each aluminum tag and magenta flag,  
each rope reaching up into the canopy  
or pipe reaching down into the creek  
tells the walker: Someone has measured  
this flow, tested this soil, weighed this log,  
tells the walker: someone loves this place.

—Vicki Graham

### ***Log Decomposition***

The dead in a real forest belong,  
they are beautiful there.  
They die in each other's arms,  
or their bones shatter,  
as they hit the ground.

Or their lumps have become  
so rancid and strange  
that you are not sorry  
to see them go.

There are no two deaths alike  
when they come at their own time.  
When a life is over, then,  
all that's left is light.

In a real forest trees do not have wounds  
straight-lined like surgery.  
The dead here have been murdered  
and lie like corpses in a mass grave.

The clues are plastics and metals  
in shades that don't belong.  
The victims, cut at the ankles  
and laid at the feet of the living ones.

Those left standing cannot run or turn away.  
Mosses cover the bodies with a blanket  
of green, out of respect, but the trees  
can only drop needles and seeds.

The clothed apes have visited the bones  
year after year, discussing,  
their elegant experiment.  
But the study will never be over, not even then.

—Joan Maloof

***return of the dead log people***

thank you for your participation in the blue river bone orchard's first bicentennial  
morticultural conference: the role of the dead in carbon budgeting. But don't  
think of it as over and done / we are everything still to come

all the indignities you're afraid will happen to you  
happen here

all the mortal invasions you keep from the house of the living / from the porches  
of your ears / the eaves of your seeing / openings you don't want eaten into  
/eggs hatching like little ideas in your brain / microbes growing furry unspeakable  
words on your tongue / the dark juices of your heart  
gone to feed the living

upstart salal and Oregon grape  
sapling of cedar & hemlock & fir  
thriving in our cold wet breath

perceived by you as a chill in the air / and in your green bones  
with which you thought to walk away from here  
unchanged

but in your breath now  
our breath

& in our breath  
these words

which you will remember by a new / stiffness in your limbs  
a whisper in your many-branched veins / & at last by

silence

& time

& your dust will rain on us with the rain & we will take you in as easily as you  
breathed our air today

we eagerly await your input.

—Jerry Martien



### ***In the Experimental Forest***

And here is what the scientists see  
but cannot say:

How the dogwood blossoms glow  
against the black wet trunks of Douglas-fir;  
how the skin of yew runs red in rain, the bark  
of young vine maple green as skin of anole  
in a hot southern wood.

The way yellow evergreen violets erupt hot yellow  
from the green magma of moss, and trilliums pink  
out, paste their petals to the waxy leather of salal.

The manner in which Douglas squirrels inscribe  
the snow, and where they leave their middens.

Cascara's small tongues lapping the drip  
as chorus frogs and winter wrens sound  
the walls and depths of Lookout Creek. Pipsissewa  
and bunchberry catching all the windthrow  
winter can bring. All these things

may have adaptive value, for all we know.  
Could generate data, yield understanding,  
render the answers that poets may dream  
but cannot write.

As last year's bracken rots beneath the new sword ferns  
and varied thrushes whistle through spit,

I have faith  
that somebody, somewhere, surely knows  
what to make of all this.

—Robert Michael Pyle

ART

## **Decompose + deCompose = DeCompose**

### **David Paul Bayles**

#### **DeCompose**

**Decompose:** There is a fascinating microcosm in my woodpile, usually hidden from view. It's a world of insects and fungi thriving in the inner layer between bark and wood. Certain beetles create precisely etched lines as they eat their way through the wood, leaving marks referred to by entomologists as beetle galleries. These are works of art by creatures living their primal impulse. They chew, digest, poop, make babies and turn a giant tree into compost.

**deCompose:** The oldest human-made marks are found in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Those marks were created 39,900 years ago by placing a hand on the cave wall and blowing pigmented dust to create a stenciled image. Of the many hundreds of photographs I have made of human mark-making on the skins of trees, the most common are expressions of love.

**DeCompose:** These images are created by layering and blending the insect /fungi marks with the human marks. I am fascinated by the primal impulse of mark-making we humans share with insects and fungi.



*DeCompose 172-3. Photograph. 16 x 48"*

## **Driftwood 9, from the DRIFT series**

**Michael Brophy**

My work has always been about the place I live, and the interconnectedness of human, natural, and cultural histories. I aim to contend with the landscape as a constructed place, defined by labor, and to convey the often strange encounter of natural beauty and human intervention. This is evident in the bodies of work I've produced over the past thirty years related to the history of western expansion and settlement, logging, transportation, recreation, and other, sometimes very elusive or allegorical indications of the human impact on and relationship to the land.

The latest group of oil paintings, collectively titled DRIFT, includes images of the jetties, driftwood beaches, and shipping container yards that exist at the mouths of rivers. These are sites of evidence and encounter, of nature and culture drifting in and out — piles of driftwood and stacks of shipping containers—and the rock jetties that keep the throat open. The rivers are, among other things, drains—washing out to sea fallen timber, storm blowdown, ruined docks, produce, and consumer goods. The ocean pushes some of it back. We've injected ourselves into this process, diverting the river's flow, altering its banks, creating new beaches for driftwood and flotsam collection, and mimicking its processes in our commercial transit and trade.

I'm interested in the found aesthetics of these images — the mundane yet uncanny, hiding in plain sight. At the same time, they are invented spaces for the viewer to enter and narrate, a stage to project oneself into and mentally drift.

*"You throw the dust against the wind / And the wind blows it back again." —William Blake*



*Driftwood 9.* Oil on canvas. 38 x 32".

Photograph by Brad Ness. *Courtesy of the artist and The Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, Oregon*

## **Moon Map**

### **Jeanne Drevas**

I spent forty years of my life, starting as a young adult in the same place, the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, gleaning materials from the forest I know so well to help build my handmade hippie house and my art work. Bark became a focal point for me; huge sections can be taken off the right trees (pine, fir, tulip poplar) from newly cut down live trees. I love the history marked on each piece, old scars, the holes left by branches, insect markings on inner bark.

And now I'm out in Oregon and I'm slowly learning the forest out here. I walk under huge fir and cedar, the forest floor spongy with rot and moss. I absorb.

I'm relearning lost bits of my DNA, and of a fir tree's, and I discover that those bits are nearly the same in each of us. A tree wants the same things as I, food and water, to bask in the sun, to live in a place conducive for splendid growth, to be connected with all that is around. They are made of millions of participating organisms, all intent upon making their larger parent organism (the tree) function in its refined direction of eons of experimentation. They go gladly back to help the common good. Good lesson.





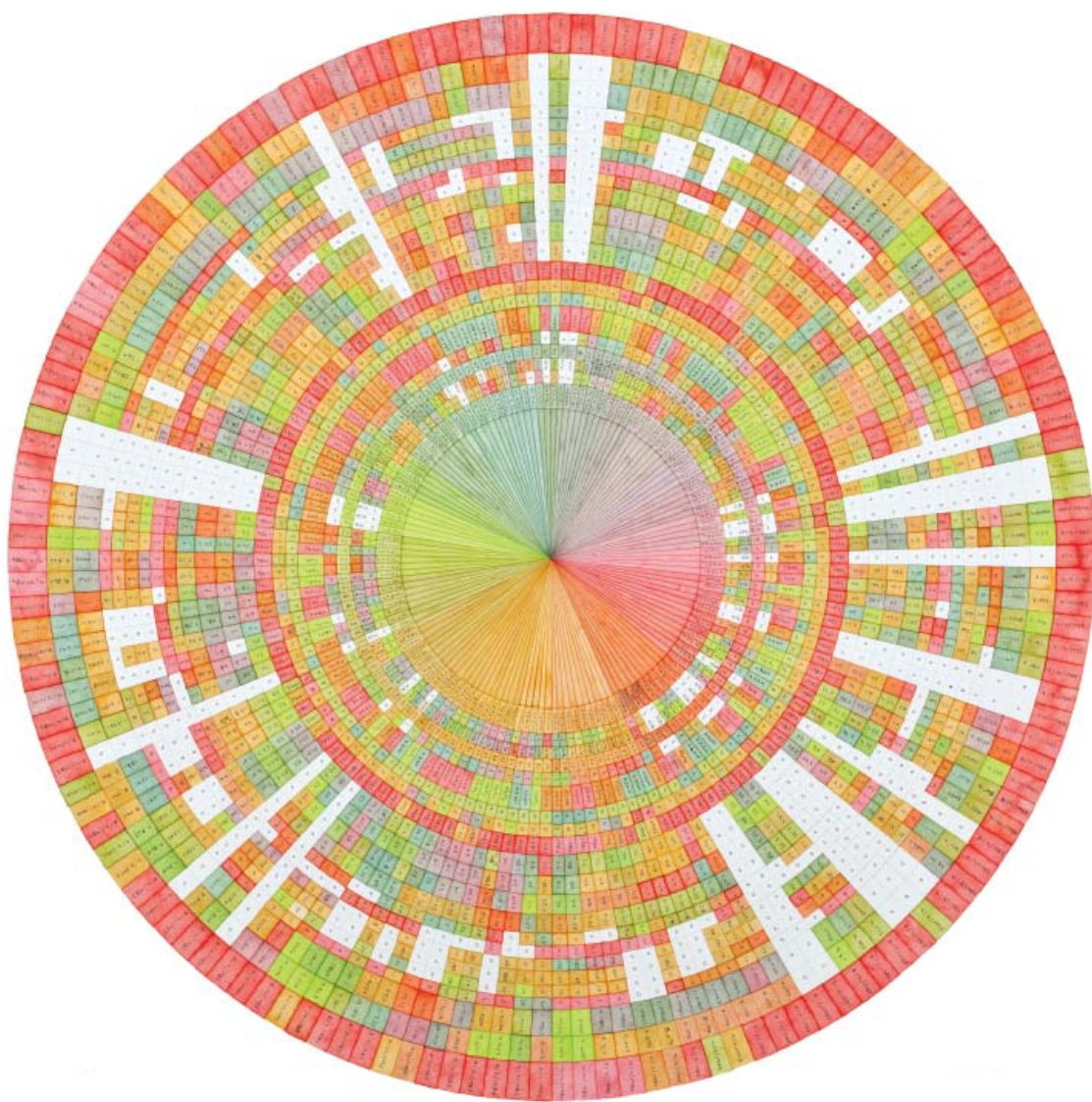
*Moon Map.* Douglas fir, sweet birch pegs, eggshell mosaic. 31 x 21 x 3"

## **Site 1**

### **Sally Finch**

The Log Decomposition Study has so much information that I narrowed my focus to the general description of the logs in table td01401, creating a survey of every log in the study. I arranged the table contents by site number to create three large and three small drawings or diagrams.

Circular formats and elements are references to the cross-section of a tree, with three diameter measurements taken per log, and because samples are collected as a cross-section as well. The larger drawings are a stylized cross-section 53 centimeters across (within the diameter range for the actual logs) and even in a flat drawing the size reminds me of the physical scale of the logs. The data for each of the first three sites is radially arranged by log number into a set of rings within the cross-section. Each piece of data (except 0) is color coded based on its value (or another cell's value) within the range for that measurement. The smaller drawings are simpler surveys in which each log is represented by a circle, with all arranged in a grid. The drawings' 25 colors are a circular range (with color # 1 being very close to color #25) very close to the colors I saw at the HJ Andrews Experimental forest this March.



*Site 1.* Graphite, ink, acrylic ink on paper. 22 x 22"  
Photograph by Aaron Johanson

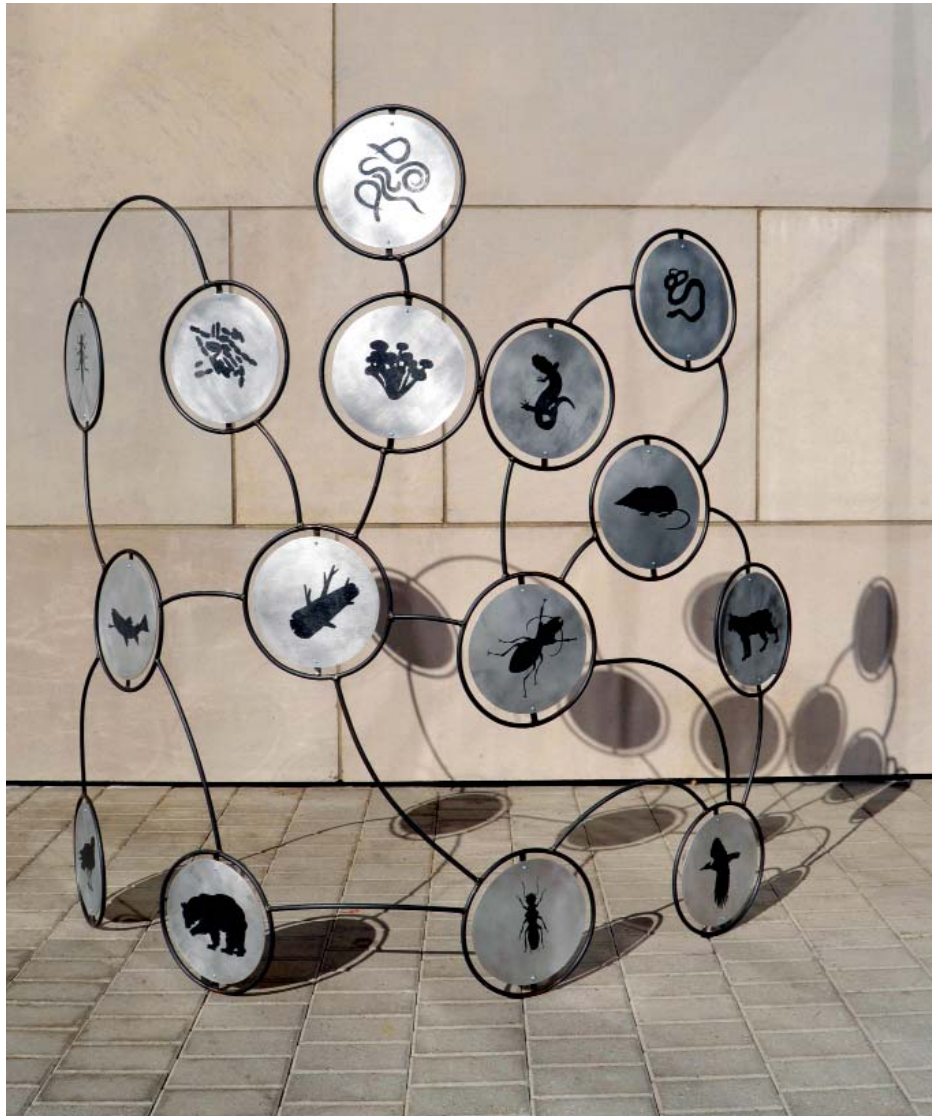
## **Andrew's Web**

### **Andries Fourie**

Although the popular perception is that art and science are polar opposites, they are in fact closely related in a few key ways. Both fields provide a means for investigating the world, both rely on close observation, and experiments play an important role in both processes. Both also value original, creative thinking, and problem-solving.

I see this work, titled "Andrew's Web", as collaboration with Dr. Mark Harmon. I particularly valued being able to visit the experiment site with him, and having him explain to us the importance of trees generally, and downed logs in particular. The part of his explanation that resonated most with me was the fact that trees extract minerals and nutrients from the ground, and after they die, those minerals are released into the ecosystem gradually as the log is eaten, or as minerals slowly leach from it. I learned that one way of understanding an ecosystem, or indeed a specific place, is to map the way in which nutrients move through it. In this case, I recorded the web of interactions that spreads out from the log through the organisms that shelter beneath or in it, consume the nutrients it provides, and are in turn consumed by other organisms.





*Andrew's Web.* Welded steel, aluminum and silkscreen. 65 x 64 x 21"

## Elemental Patterns of the Life Cycle of a Tree

Sarah Anne Graham

**Introduction.** The research I conducted to find a way to best illustrate the theme for this exhibit started by gathering information about the life cycle of trees. I wanted to look at the various stages during life that a tree goes through, to better understand what happens after a tree's death and the implications of this event on the ecosystem surrounding it.

Trees symbolize various things within our culture: birth, death, family, virility, Mother Nature, settling or creating a home, etc. Our relationship to trees and what they symbolize mirrors our relationship to the natural world. Showing the intricacies of that relationship in various print and paper media, I hope to present work that bridges the inner and outer life (and death) of a tree with that of one another.

**Description of artwork.** This piece is done using basic printing and recycled papercutting from Oregon watershed maps that identify specific vegetation and soil taxonomy present in the Western part of the state. The artwork comes from one series and originates with one image. They are of an old growth forest, carved on wood and printed on a watershed map. The maps are used to layer over the imagery, that are also cut as well as printed on; these maps identify soil, vegetation and other natural objects within a watershed. Once the imagery was transferred onto these maps, it was then colored on and cut through, using paper cutting techniques to give the illusion of decomposition, as well as of a fragile man-made material such as lace.

**Conclusion.** This work is still in progress and covers various medium and art techniques to express the relationship we have as conservators to the natural world and to point to the man-made effects our efforts have on the ecosystems we come in contact with, for purposes that are often self-serving, but also symbiotic in nature.



*Elemental Patterns of the Life Cycle of a Tree. Mixed media. 37 x 25"*



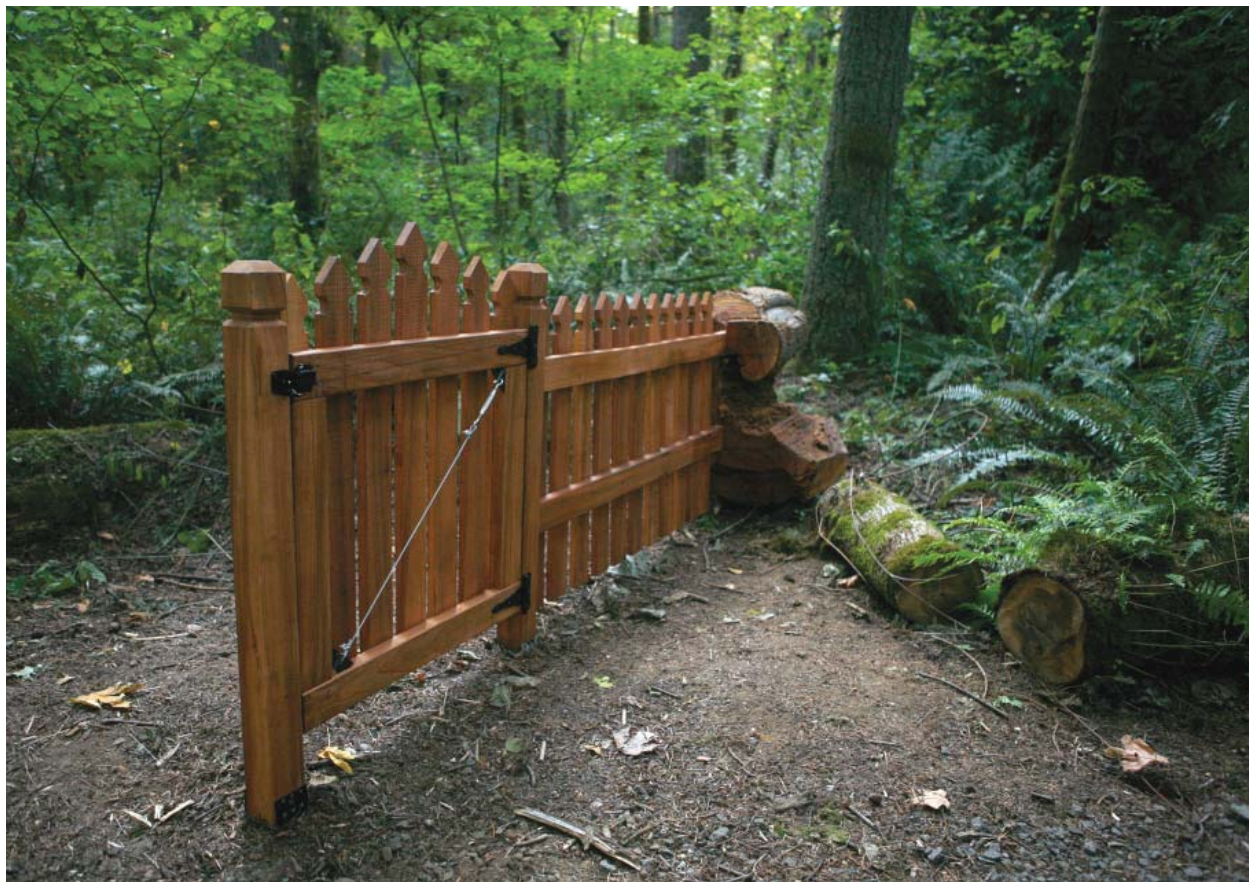
## **Picket Fence**

### **Lee Imonen**

My current studio body of work is the Source Series, which is intended to focus on the interactions between the human-made and natural worlds. This series of sculptures puts into visual form our dependence on natural materials and our need to balance our consumption of these resources. It is also intended to communicate the impermanence and tenuous nature of this relationship, as our necessary use of resources is simply one stage in the delicate cycle of growth, use and reclamation.

Each sculpture in the Source Series is made from a single salvaged or windfall tree. One half of each log remains intact in its natural form, while the other half has been cut, sawn, constructed and reconfigured into an object that would typically be made from that wood. The constructed half has not been added to the natural half, but instead emerges from it. The challenge in creating the sculpture is in highlighting the transformation of materials from one form into another.

The forms of these sculptures are everyday objects that we might not think about as consuming natural resources. Picket Fence, Pine Box, and Lumber Unit have each been created entirely from the material of the single source log itself. No additional wood has been added, the existing materials have simply been rearranged. The details added to each sculpture are equally important to the forms and complete the pieces by authentically mimicking the real world objects themselves.



*Picket Fence, Source Series.* Western Red cedar, steel. 4 x 3 x 12'  
Photograph by Francisco Salgado

## **Tree 2015.55 and Tree 2015.56**

**Bob Keefer**

I make original hand-colored photographs of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. My black and white photographs are individually printed and then hand-colored with artist paints on archival watercolor paper.

The slightly vintage look and feel of hand coloring lends itself well to the Northwest landscape, whether the dreamy look of the westside forests – such as these trees at HJ Andrews Forest – or the starker shapes and forms of the eastern desert.

I've been making hand colored photos and selling them online and in galleries since 2002. Each work is original and unrepeatable.



*Tree 2015.55. Hand colored photograph. 74 x 24"*



*Tree 2015.56. Hand colored photograph. 84 x 24"*

## **Fresh Corpse, Old Growth Doug Fir**

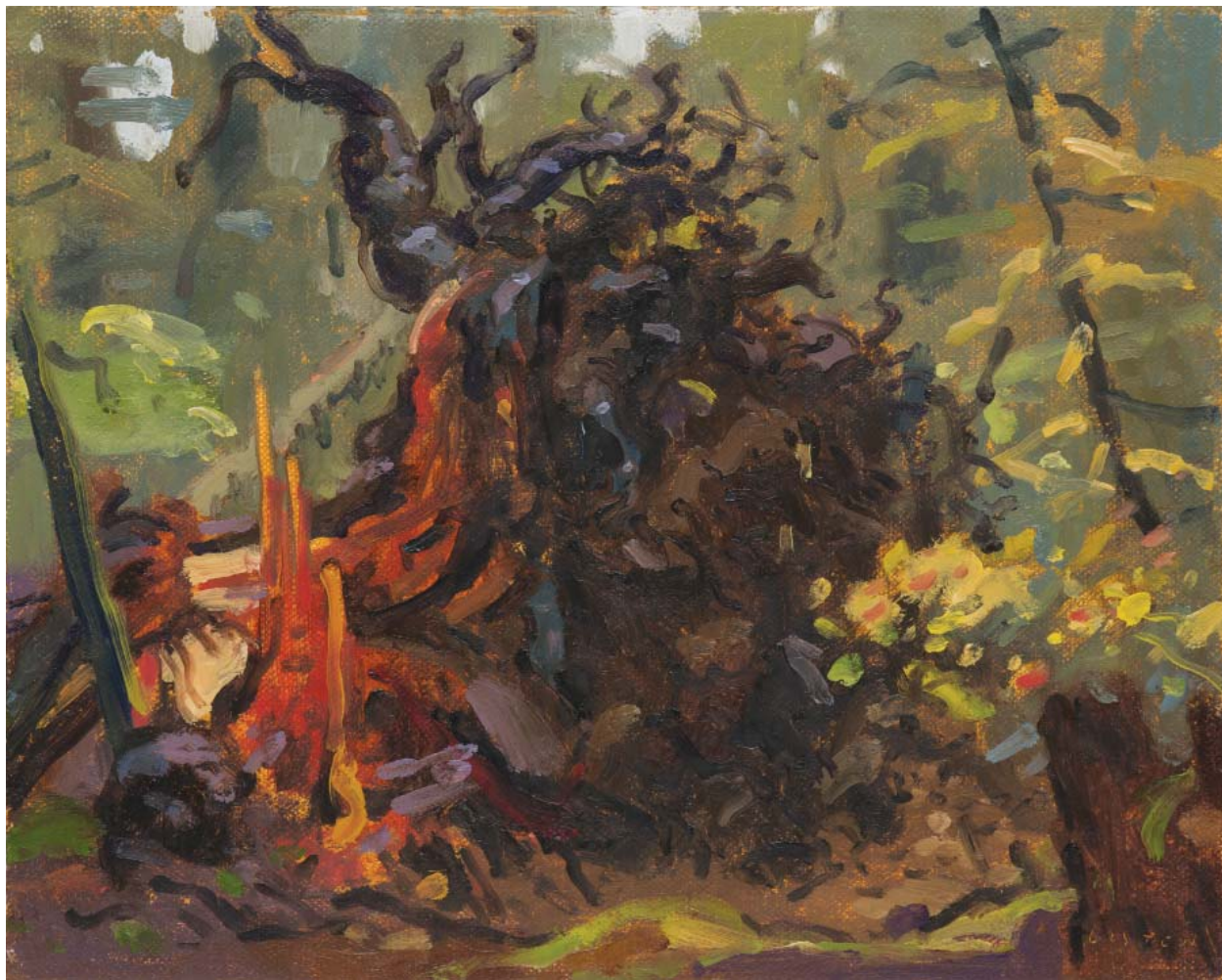
### **Gabriel Liston**

An upended conifer has always tempted me to believe in an afterlife. The placental root ball and the gaping crater below promise something secret, profound, and older than your grandmother's grandmother. If there were a passage to Hades, this is would be it.

One such portal exists in a laying-out field of the HJ Andrews Forest. It was/is a big old Douglas fir. It is a volunteer in a cache of the resurrection men. Unlike the limbed corpses, this ancestor brought its root ball along, doorway to hell and all. It is not an invitation to afterlife, it is only a glimpse of it. This underworld requires no heaven. This underworld exists to consume the living, and to redistribute what can be salvaged.

Once there were many trees, but no tree-decaying fungus to consume them. The cycles they lived through were not yet as evolved as our own. Their destiny was oil and coal. Their insufficient afterlife became the material we use to disrupt our own cycles of living. In our modern afterlife, I can only hope the cycles stay in sync long enough to allow another evolution.





*Fresh Corpse, Old Growth Doug Fir.* Oil on panel. 8 x 10"  
Photograph by Jim Lommasson. *Courtesy of the artist and Froelick Gallery, Portland, Oregon*

## **Sustaining More Life in its Death**

### **Leah Wilson**

Window-like holes created by insects open into the interior of a log revealing ribbons of cubical brown rot, cellulose long gone. Fungus, like an old scab with edges curling and dry, has been transforming the log that became part of the architecture of the creek many floods in the past.

I manipulated the size of the fungus to 36 times its actual size and isolated it from its original surroundings of the log to investigate it without distraction. Most of this fungus is hidden. I increased the scale to be able to explore the structure of the fungus beyond the form that is accessible to my eye and I have found that it has a honeycomb structure that is simultaneously exquisite and grotesque. Often with a new subject, as with this fungus, I work with gouache on paper. I struggle with gouache, and I chose to use it because it mirrors my internal struggle with the subject.

“Sustaining More Life in Its Death” is built layer upon layer of paper. Each layer cuts away windows to the layer underneath, as rot has created windows into the layers of wood. The process of making it is like creating a door that leads to deeper layers and complexity of understanding.





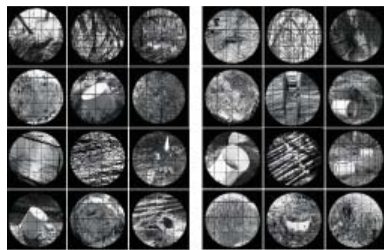
*Sustaining More Life in its Death.* Gouache on paper. 12 x 12"



### Joey Azul

*Decomposing (ART)* | Ink, watercolor, steel wool | 36 x 12"

Considering the decomposition of trees, as subject for art-making, for me, resulted in a focus on process and materials. Methods and materials were used in a way that parallels the process of decomposition first, followed by "growth" of a new form. Much time was spent producing the drawings, which were then torn apart, hand dyed, and reassembled onto a different support. The work – *Decomposing (Art)* – is already in process of decomposing, it is rusting. Steel wool is under the paper surface. It was adhered with fluids which would start the rusting. The artwork will continue to rust in humid conditions. The concepts of decomposition and re-growth in the forest stimulated thoughts about impermanence and continuity, in both the natural world and that of the Art World. From where does the impulse for art-making derive in the Art World? Which is impetus? Which is consequence?



### Julia Bradshaw

*Experiments and Research (diptych)* | Photography | 25 x 35"

I wanted to make visible the experiments taking place at the long-term ROT ecological site at HJ Andrews Experimental Forest. So, I photographed the evidence that this is an active research site and then presented these photographs to imply precision and the elements of examination and measurement. Walking among the fallen trees I was faced with the incongruity of the magnificence of the Grove in opposition to the contrived and rather small plastic structures that protected or isolated the various experiments at the site. I was struck by the contrast between the messy, imprecise beauty of nature and scientists' exactitude to categorize, measure, and reflect. This is research happening now.



### Kathleen Caprario

*De-Comp Watercolor Studies 1 and 2* | Watercolor on paper | 12 x 16"

Decomposition and renewal – it is that duality that is the foundation for succession, biologic innovation and the new – the future of the forest and of life. The interconnected systems and patterns found in nature have a scope and duration that is outside of our generation's lifespan or cultural aesthetic. The "De-Comp Watercolor Studies 1 & 2" are an interpretive record of the HJ Andrew's Log Decomposition Site and reflect on the subjective nature of time and the relationship of self to environment.



### Carol Chapel

*Carabidae* | Intaglio | 8 x 11"

I started thinking about the Afterlife of Trees early 2015 when Spring Creek Project co-sponsored a workshop at the OSU entomology department to make drawings of bugs. I became intrigued with beetles. Particularly the beetles that live in our forests here in the Pacific Northwest and "digest" the wood from fallen trees. Some never fly. They just live within the fallen wood their whole lives. Then there are those that arrive at the wood soon after it hits the ground. They are on it helping to complete the forest's life cycle. My approach is far more art than science. I am curious but have very little scientific knowledge. I collected Carabidae on the tour of the HJ Andrews Research Forest. It plays a key role in the Afterlife of Trees.



### **Karen Clark**

*Log Rot Landscape* | Encaustic, oil, and crochet on board | 12 x 15 x 1.5”

For years I have been working on a body of work about seedpods. I became interested in them one summer when, as a result of a busy life, my overgrown garden went to seed. The seedpod is tenaciously devoted to self-preservation and their forms describe unabashedly how they go about attracting bugs and animals to transport seed to new ground. The colors and shapes are beguiling.

Preparing work for “ROT: The Afterlife of Trees” has gotten me interested in following this thread through a series of drawings and paintings. The paradox of decomposition’s importance to our existence is as intriguing as are the forms and colors of it. Rot does not feel or look like death to me – it feels and looks like transcendence, from one kind of life to another.



### **Deborah Springstead Ford**

*Riveting Itself to the Presumed (top), Reality of Its Presence (bottom)*  
Archival pigment photograph | 16 x 16”

CHON Carbon-Hydrogen-Oxygen-Nitrogen. These four elements are the core of life’s sustaining cycles, events and processes including respiration, photosynthesis, decomposition, oxidation and precipitation. In this recent body of photographs I attempt to explore the intersection of art, science and nature, chaos and climate, while trying to understand the tenuous equilibrium that these core elements play within the ecosystem, for reclamation and restoration of a planet in peril. This selection of photographs focuses on a visual investigation of these elements within life’s soup amidst the arid landscapes west of the 100th meridian contrasted alongside images of natural reclamation.



### **Jane Herbst**

*Pitcher And Cups On Woven Runner* | Ceramic and handwoven wool | 12 x 36 x 17"

The Art of Science is my area of greatest interest and expertise. In this project I have created a display that combines art and biology with my two favorite media, clay and wool. I have shown organisms growing upon the wood and deriving their nutrition and energy from breaking down the wood.



### **Kristin Kuhns**

*After the Fall* | Mixed media | 48 x 48 x 60"

In my re-construction of nature: trees, views, sculpture and painting, I am exploring the relationship between myself, the earth and art. Using materials from our landscape in processes steeped in domestic traditions and rituals, acquaintances are made. Relationships are made and a kind of self-forgiveness or atonement is felt by physically engaging our land, our earth, our nature.





### **Bill Marshall**

*The Way In* | Acrylic on panel | 18 x 24"

The forested slopes of the western Oregon Cascades are rich in the diversity of life, and the natural beauty of their life cycles. Working on paintings and drawings that attempt to capture the feeling of being in the presence of such beauty will always be a welcome challenge for me. This painting is from one of many trips to the area northwest of Waldo Lake, one of many places like this in the higher altitudes. In October the vine maples, vanilla leaf, mountain ash, and many other deciduous and perennial plants light up with color in the dim understory. The low sun angle will occasionally shine through small openings in the canopy and illuminate areas of foliage on the forest floor. The ground is covered with moss, rejuvenated by the fall rains, carpeting the fallen trees that are returning to the soil. A small game trail is the only indication of active movement through this environment; exposing the reddish colors of the soil and rotting wood where disturbed by boot, paw, or hoof. Distant light through the trees indicates another opening in the canopy. Perhaps a creek bed or another fallen hemlock is the cause for the opening to the sky. One can only know by continuing to explore the way in.



### **Kathee Moore**

*Circles of Life (top), Changing of the Guard (bottom)*

Digital photography | 11 x 15"

After many years of living in the Salem area, our family recently explored campgrounds along the road to Detroit Lake that we had always just driven by. Happily, we discovered the beautiful Niagara County Park. These images were taken as we walked along the trail beside the North Santiam river.







### **Jeri Oswalt**

*Moss Box 2* | Hand embroidered box | 2 1/2 x 8 x 6"

Poem by Janis Lull. Photo by John Telford

When earth sends these green days  
I forget  
they were not  
made for me. Like moss, I ride  
unattached  
on the planet's  
rough face. Like me, moss must abide  
the dry time  
to come.



### **Breanne Sherwood**

*I Owe A Great Deal To Prevailing Westerly Winds And Fading  
Cascadian Light* | Woven, crocheted, and knitted hand dyed wool,  
cotton, and silk | 12 x 10 x 8'

The Pacific Northwest is the backdrop of inspiration when making my work. Memories of mystery and intrigue of the outdoors fill my work. The experiences I gained are relayed by creating three-dimensional structures which are abstracted by my observations. Hand dyed, woven fibers are used to express the textures and color palette based on the rain forest and coast line of the Pacific Northwest. Adding and subtracting materials, whether fabric or stitching, creates an evolutionary process that takes my work places that sometimes even I am surprised by. Reawakening lost ideas is what I long to create in my work. The ideas and imagination of a child refreshed and now created by the lens of adult experience.



### Sara Swanberg

*Fast Water in the Owyhee River Canyon (top)* | 10 x 10 x 2", *Icelandic Landscape (bottom)* | 7.25 x 11.25 x 2" | Amboyna burl, rot, and clay

Each of my artworks in this exhibit is carved from an exotic burl of the New Guinea Amboyna tree. These pieces show the fine detail of grain seen in the red wood, bordered by the lighter-weight tan/grey sections that rot much more quickly when left to that process. In *Fast Water in the Owyhee River Canyon*, the unimpeded flow of the river of clay balls takes me back to an experience in Eastern Oregon – of being surrounded by beautifully color-filled canyon walls while rafting unusually high and fast water in the wild Owyhee River canyon. In the piece entitled *Icelandic Landscape*, the surface area of this complex slab of wood is dominated by the rotting process. The piece offers an artistic suggestion of the surreal landscapes that can be seen in Iceland in which oddly colored streams meander through steaming fields devoid of visible organic growth.



*The Eulogy*

### Kaitlyn Wittig Mengüç

*Wake* | Proposal for future site-specific performance

Historically, trees have played an essential role in various folklores, religions, and myths to represent life and rebirth. This can be seen in the various depictions of the fertility figure of the 'Green Man' who has been portrayed throughout time and across many cultures. Trees have also been used to represent decay and death, as seen during the Plague in the mid-1300s. In contrast to the role of the natural world, contemporary societies are more commodity-driven. This drive results in a never-ending quest for resources which necessarily redefines the cycle of life, death, and rebirth. *Wake* contemplates the historical shift in our human interaction with, and our expectation of trees. Furthermore, *Wake* investigates the idea of the living tree serving as a host to dead matter and the dead tree as a host to life. Utilizing traditions from the ancient to the modern, this site-specific performance repurposes the modern-day wake to investigate and celebrate the life of living trees.

## The Arts Center Project Staff

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## About The Arts Center

The Arts Center is a community supported nonprofit dedicated to integrating the arts into daily life. The organization serves local and regional audiences through a mix of dynamic collaborations, innovative outreach programs, diverse exhibitions and creative educational opportunities.

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