

The Presence of Nature



The Presence of Nature

Jill Hartz and Richard Herskowitz
curators and catalog editors

Published in conjunction with
the special exhibition *The Presence of Nature*

Schneider Museum of Art
Southern Oregon University, Ashland

April 7–May 21, 2022



Naeemeh Naeemaei

Jaan, #1

2018–21

Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas

edition of 3

40 x 60 inches

FOREWORD

We are delighted to once again be collaborating with the Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF). This partnership began shortly after I started at the Schneider Museum of Art (SMA) in 2015. I always knew that I wanted to put forward media-based artworks in film, video and installation because these mediums are so prevalent in our contemporary art world. I want to expose our audiences to what the art world is doing today and it is a vast and plural field. With our seasonal exhibitions, I originally thought that once every twelve to eighteen months will suffice.

As I began my post as Director, I read an interview in the paper with the then new Artistic Director of AIFF, Richard Herskowitz. Richard spoke about bringing their films and videos into alternative platforms as well as installations. I saw a wonderful opportunity to not only bring in diverse voices for curatorial means, but also a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with another arts nonprofit here in Ashland, OR. Ashland is recognized internationally as an arts and culture destination but that does not mean we can rest on our laurels. I was looking for like-minded arts workers who wanted to see the bar raised. There is always room for new ideas and innovation within the arts. If we do not take stock and look for these new opportunities, are we being creative and current?

These collaborative efforts between Richard and me grew to invite his wife, Jill Hartz, former Executive Director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (JSMA) at the University of Oregon into co-curating the exhibition “Migrating Bodies: For(saking) Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” (August–October, 2020). Jill later solo curated “Collecting Cuba; Selections from the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art” (April–July, 2021), a collection of Cuban works that Jill procured for the JSMA over two decades.

Our spring 2022 exhibition brings Richard and Jill back again with a curated show that focuses on Oregon nature. Just as Richard shares in his essay at the end of this catalog, I too come from the east coast and am still in awe of all the beauty the state has to offer. We have been creating nature facsimiles since some of our first marks made in caves 64,000 years ago. We have come a long way since then and I hope you enjoy the artworks that Richard and Jill have put forward in this exhibition.

Scott Malbaurn, Executive Director, Schneider Museum of Art



Olga Volchkova
Saint Basil – Holy Eugenol
2021
Acrylic on wood
20 x 24 inches
From the
"Plants and Science"
series

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *Presence of Nature* was first conceived as the 2022 annual exhibition at the Schneider Museum of Art (SMA), planned in conjunction with the April Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF). We are grateful to Sky Loos, former AIFF director, and Susan Elshire, AIFF bookkeeper, for their assistance in managing the funds raised for this project.

The exhibition and publication would not have been possible without the generous support of the following: Elizabeth Moyer, Ph.D., and Michael Powanda, Ph.D.; Larry Lenon; Nancy Toomey Fine Art; J. Maylee Oddo, Hycomb Marketing LLC; Anuncia Escala and Paul Semonin; Wendy Seldon; Ellen Tykeson and Ken Hiday, Sharon Underleider Family Foundation; and Mary Ann Gernegliaro and Emily Simon.

We have long admired the work of the artists featured in the exhibition and thank them for sharing their creative processes and art with us.

We thank Scott Malbourn, SMA's Executive Director, Emily McPeck, Office Manager, Maureen Williams, Preparator, and SOU students for helping to realize its presentation, and David Ruppe for designing the handsome catalog.

Jill Hartz and Richard Herskowitz

IN THE PRESENCE OF NATURE

What does it mean to be in the presence of nature, to be present in nature? For each of us, the answers quickly become personal, depending upon our relationship with the natural world. For the artists in this exhibition—three immigrants to Oregon from Great Britain, Russia, and Iran; a Native American born in the Pacific Northwest (Sky Hopinka); and two long-term state residents (Kurtis Hough and Vanessa Renwick)—nature is muse and conscience, the cycle of life to which we inexorably belong, and ecologies under threat. For them, nature is both within and without, a physical place, a spiritual home.

Oregon has long inspired artists. More than 15,000 years-old petroglyphs in the Warner Valley offer images of animals, peoples, and symbols. With colonization came Edmund Burke's concept of the grandeur of nature, the sublime: "The passion caused by the great and the sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror" (*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757). That turn toward Romanticism inspired Albert Bierstadt to make the journey west and paint Mt. Hood and many others—explorers and artists—to "discover" and commune with icons of Oregon wilderness.

As immigrants, Claire Burbridge, Naeemeh Naeemaei, and Olga Volchkova find both familiarity and the unexpected in their explorations of Oregon's micro and macro natural universes as well as new inspirations and connections through their growing friendship and time spent with one another's art. Perhaps because they are women or, perhaps more, because they are making art during a time of decolonizing art and museum practice, their work invites a different type of communion and a quieter grandeur, one arising from observation of and fascination with nature in her myriad forms. Coming from foreign lands, they find both the known and the new in Oregon. While the known links them to their former home and its meanings, the unfamiliar excites closer viewing and deeper understanding, and in that process, a bridge to a new home and a new identity.

This exhibition was first planned in conjunction with the 2022 Ashland Independent Film Festival, at a time when Richard Herskowitz, my co-curator, served as artistic director. In support of this exhibition, Richard has programmed three single-channel works by Oregon filmmakers on the state's natural environment for the Schneider Museum's

Treehaven Gallery. His commentary follows this essay and excerpts from my conversation with Burbridge, Naeemaei, and Volchkova.

While many, like these artists, often wander outside, exploring nature near and far, others forged new relationships with nature in response to the isolation enforced by the Covid pandemic. Richard and I are among those who found new pleasure in hiking the woods and mountains around Ashland, Oregon. We are grateful to our seasoned guides—especially Ron and Jessica Cohen and Claire Burbridge and Matthew Picton—for sharing trails and vistas, many of which became our frequent paths. As the seasons changed, the diversity of nature and vistas afforded by our hikes captivated us and gave us hope that, despite the dangers of viruses and human damage to our planet, we can still find joy in nature and one another.

Jill Hartz



Claire Burbridge
Listening Tree 2
2021
Graphite, pigment and pencil on paper
30 x 23 inches

ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION

Over the past months, Claire Burbridge (CB), Naeemeh Naeemaei (NN), and Olga Volchkova (OV) have shared responses to questions I've posted regarding their work and perspectives as immigrant artists in Oregon. The following discussion has been excerpted from those conversations.

Jill Hartz (JH): Each of you represents or creates ecosystems in your work. Olga shows the interconnectedness of flora and fauna very specifically, through the reification of plants, which are made possible by, and, in turn, make possible, their environments. These are, to me, idealized visions, like the Garden of Eden, before aspects of the ecosystem have been destroyed, signaling change and possible decay and entropy. For me that personification of plants is more than anthropomorphism. It's a synergy that includes humans or aims to make them empathetic to wildlife conservation or preserving the natural balance.

OV: The one thing as an artist that I had most confidence in was my understanding of the history, creation, structure, and making of icons. I thought it would be very appropriate to turn these techniques of reverence and respect away from their traditional subjects and toward the actual ecologies that we depend on. For example, I spent months creating an icon to the little creature *chloroplast* without which humans would have never emerged and without which we cannot survive. Everyone in Oregon was talking about reuse, upcycling, and ecological sustainability. In Oregon I realized that, for me, canonizing all the creatures of nature is an appropriate, sustainable reuse of traditional artistic techniques, wherever they are from. Using iconography makes people feel there's something godlike and sacred as they approach the paintings, but when they get close, they see these stories, ideas, shapes, colors, and facts in a universe they can connect with. I want people to stop, pay attention, and understand that we are not the biggest part of nature. We're just privileged, using all of nature, without thinking about the effect. But my work is also about the human pleasures of being in harmony with nature. As people and a society, we want to move back into the embrace of nature. We've just been distracted.

JH: Claire starts with the real objects of nature and places her images within an underlying geometric structure that holds the world together. I'm really curious about that structure as I think it can be missed if we focus only on the objects. Also, there's a predilection for fungi, the beginnings of life as we know it, as well as mosses, and other plant organisms that are essential to the cycle of growth and decay. But Claire doesn't stay with exactitude

in reproducing these objects, she imaginatively remakes them in seductive patterns and colors. Empathy again comes into play as we enter a magical world that we want to preserve.

CB: Although my work became centered around exploring things found in nature only after I moved to Oregon, I have always been fascinated by this subject. The sudden contrast of living environment—moving from inner city London to rural Oregon—made space for me to realize my deep love of being in nature. I see all my works as communications from the natural world. Much like a poet would write, I draw or paint the personal discoveries I am constantly making. This isn't a left-brain activity full of facts but more a bigger picture, wordless knowing. The geometric patterns I start each work with were inspired by my direct experience and understanding that there is an invisible structure holding everything in balance. I find great comfort observing the interplay of forms/species, and it all delivers a very uplifting message, that ecosystems/ biomes can always rebalance; there are mechanisms in place that ensure this. Everything can repair. Nature is endlessly creative.

JH: Naeemeh, a painter and sculptor, has unexpectedly turned to photography in her meetings with nature, representing herself by the red scarf, which has accompanied her faithfully in her paintings. Is the scarf, though, more than a human symbol, and what of its color? Depending on its position in the frame, the scarf caresses, heals, and nests, but it can also be the blood of nature. It also shields Naeemeh within a hollowed tree. Is she a tree within a tree or a mourning figure or can she be both (or neither)?

NN: The red scarf isn't a symbol but rather a representative of me. It's me but apart from my known body, like an extension. It's always been around my neck. It's not as heavy as me, nor as rigid as my body, and it's delicate, so it wouldn't harm wildflowers when it lays over them instead of me or doesn't break a tiny branch when it's holding on to it. Sure, it's blood, and also it's very much a vein to carry blood and life within it, and sometimes it's just a component of the composition. In one of my photos, the scarf is wrapped around a small stone and is just there among other stones. I try to be part of nature, as harmless and as gentle as possible, opposing human dominancy. About the picture in which I'm standing in a burnt trunk, well, I see it as birth—and revival. Also, my body is imitating the form of the tree hole, which is an effort to be connected to and somehow accepted by the tree. Here, I would like to leave a space for audience perceptions because in many of these works, several interpretations are possible.

JH: All of you create these living worlds that beg the question of climate change. Can these ecosystems survive? Are these works memoria, requiems, rear-view windows?

NN: Although when I look back I identify most artworks I've made as requiems, this series is not! Hopefully not! Oregon's natural environment is still very alive in my perception. Once, I read a quote from an environmentalist that said that we, as humans, might become extinct and lead a vast extinction, but the Earth wouldn't die. He said, "The Earth revives itself." Our natural environment is vulnerable, but at the same time, I have a small hope in me that if we stop or slow the destruction process as soon

Olga Volchkova
Saint Pomegranate
 2020
 Acrylic on wood
 30 x 40 inches
 From the
 "Plants and Science"
 series



as possible, all life-beings around us would get the chance of survival.

CB: In Oregon, I've learned that there are many people who are fascinated with nature and this way of living, and they help me to understand life and nature in Oregon. The older forests are, the richer they are, the better for people, with their deep biodiversity at all levels. It's critically important to keep these rich old forests alive. They are like a free machine that produces oxygen. The older a tree is, the more carbon it continually absorbs. And that's true for everything around it. It takes twenty years for porcini (*boletus*) to make enough mycelia to get mushrooms we can eat. When we clear-cut or destroy these trees and their ecosystems, hundreds of living things around them, things that we need and want, things we barely understand, die.

OV: I try to provide glimpses into nature, into the history of human-nature relations. Nature's strength, and our past with it, provide hope for the future. But the window is closing. And so, the theme of my last triptych (*The Resurrection of Life*), is that we can't anymore avoid the struggle against the darkness and apathy in the human character. We need to become a community, with each other and with nature. We must stop being conquerors and colonizers. We must study more and listen more. We must redirect all our resources—science and production and education; institutions and economies—to save and revive and regenerate a system of living with nature.

JH: Do you see your representations of nature as having a super-real or surrealist quality?

NN: I agree with this to some extent, but my effort is to minimize the fantastical aspects so as to make it look normal and real. I understand that the scene I make by placing a red scarf in a natural landscape doesn't look natural, and it's not. Or when the scarf is floating over long grasses, it's more like a fantasy than a realistic landscape; however, in the conceptual layer, I'm trying to minimize this strangeness. All these installations and placements are meant to form a unity in which the scarf is a natural part of nature.

OV: Because nature is mostly hidden from us, it's always surprising and mostly beyond comprehension. So, any glimpse into nature will seem surreal. But really, it's more real. Anything enlightening about this deeper reality seems supernatural and alien. But we must listen and look. With nature, we're at the feet of a philosopher, a teacher, and an engineer with no equal. I looked at photosynthesis in my painting about chloroplasts and chlorophyll, and there are no words to describe how stunning this system is—all human lives, and most existing life on earth, would never have happened without it. My first plant icons were meant to mark their sacred botanical beauty and the sacred human pleasure of being with plants. But the more I learned about them—the more I uncovered the surreal nature of nature—the more I needed to provide windows into their reality. At the same, I became more comfortable with the unfamiliar. Nature is always both comforting and mysterious.

CB: The drawings are direct responses to how I feel after immersing myself in an intricate world or realm within nature—like that of lichen, moss, and fungi. They are a combination of what I've observed and what I perceive

from my own inner mindscape or imagination. I don't use a microscope, but I use an intensification of my senses and intuition like a microscope to perceive beyond the surface and translate that into a work of art. Nature becomes super-real through this translation process.

JH: As an immigrant myself, from just across the border in Canada, I find that I cannot easily step inside American identity. For you three, who immerse yourselves in nature without borders, I wonder if that relationship helped to make your relocation easier.

NN: When you move to an unknown place far from your homeland, your eyes, which are those of an immigrant, are seeking familiarity. Every object in your surroundings, no matter how tiny or huge, visible or invisible, can be a bond, a tunnel to where you used to call home. I used to live in a very populated city—Tehran—on the fifth floor, where there is rarely a single house in a neighborhood, but instead towers that don't give you any horizon to look at, no garden you can plant, no forest or ocean nearby. There are nearby high elevations, mountains, which the city has invaded by its noise and smoke. Oregon, on the other side of the Earth, connected me to a place beyond my home, to a place better than home. It took me directly to my paternal land in the north of Iran with its forests full of oak trees, maples covered with wild cyclamen, primrose, and blackberry! Sometimes, when I open the door here, I'm right in the yard of Grandma's house, when and where the smoke of tandoor and fresh breads is mixed with the early morning fog, which also has collected the fragrance of mosses from the forest and brought it there. I don't even need to close my eyes to imagine I'm there. I'm there. It surprises me every time!

OV: In the USSR, I grew up, mostly, as a mid-sized-city girl. But my family has a long history in nearby farming villages, to this day. So in contrast with the years I spent in some of the world's biggest cities and economies, Oregon pulled me back into my childhood, where I grew up helping both our small subsistence homestead, and large collective farms, and foraging for berries, nuts, and mushrooms, cooking and preserving food, repairing buildings, chopping wood, and pumping water from the well. We had a vital concern for nature, plants, and animals—because we depended on them. Oregon reminded me of my agrarian past, and the kind of unconcerned, unprotected, easy interaction we had with the wild world. So here in Oregon I became interested in how some people develop this respect for life and nature, and I was curious to see if I could help others to achieve that sensibility.

JH: Did Oregon surprise you?

OV: When I just moved to Oregon, I found it so diverse. Some places remind me of Italy, others look like the middle of Russia, or Estonia, or Latvia. There's such rich variety in nature in Oregon. I was amazed that mushrooms in the forests here are just like those where I was born, on the other side of the planet. I grew up interacting with the forest a lot. Each time you go to nature you discover something new like how mushrooms interact with trees, giving to them and taking from them.

CB: The first thing I was struck by when I moved to Oregon was the abundance and diversity of nature. It was amazing to me that you could actually get completely lost, if you didn't pay acute attention to where you were going

in the forest. The British Isles don't have any significant wildernesses left; most of their forests were completely cut down centuries ago, although presently there is a big re-wilding movement nationwide. In Oregon, I found what was missing in my place of origin: true wilderness and rivers that weren't poisoned by factory farming practices. I spent the first year hiking around every day, collecting things to take a closer look at. I found the familiar and things I had never seen before—especially in the fungi realm. In truth, the things I'm fascinated by grow almost everywhere on earth; this observation of interconnection comforted me.

NN: Yes, indeed. The first impression was, oh my gosh, everything is huge here! It's not only cars and streets and food packages—these trees in streets, they are huge as well! And the diversity of leaves and flowers, even in urban spaces, is stunning. It was so poetic in Portland when I moved there from Tehran in October (2017)! It still is! Sometimes I pinch myself and say, "Don't get used to it. It's not normal. It's an exceptional opportunity, which happens to be normal here!" Later, I realized it's because of the differences in climate in the U.S. and Iran—and both obviously have several climates within. In Iran as well as western Asia and Europe, many plants have a smaller scale. Some are very slow growing. The Abarkuh Ancient Cypress, located in the central part of Iran, is about eighty feet tall and may be around 4,000 years old. Then, imagine when I walk in Portland or Eugene and I see a tree as big as that cypress! I know they are not the same age most likely, but they feel the same to me—and age is not the issue here: I just admire them for their existence. No need to mention redwoods! I haven't seen them yet. It

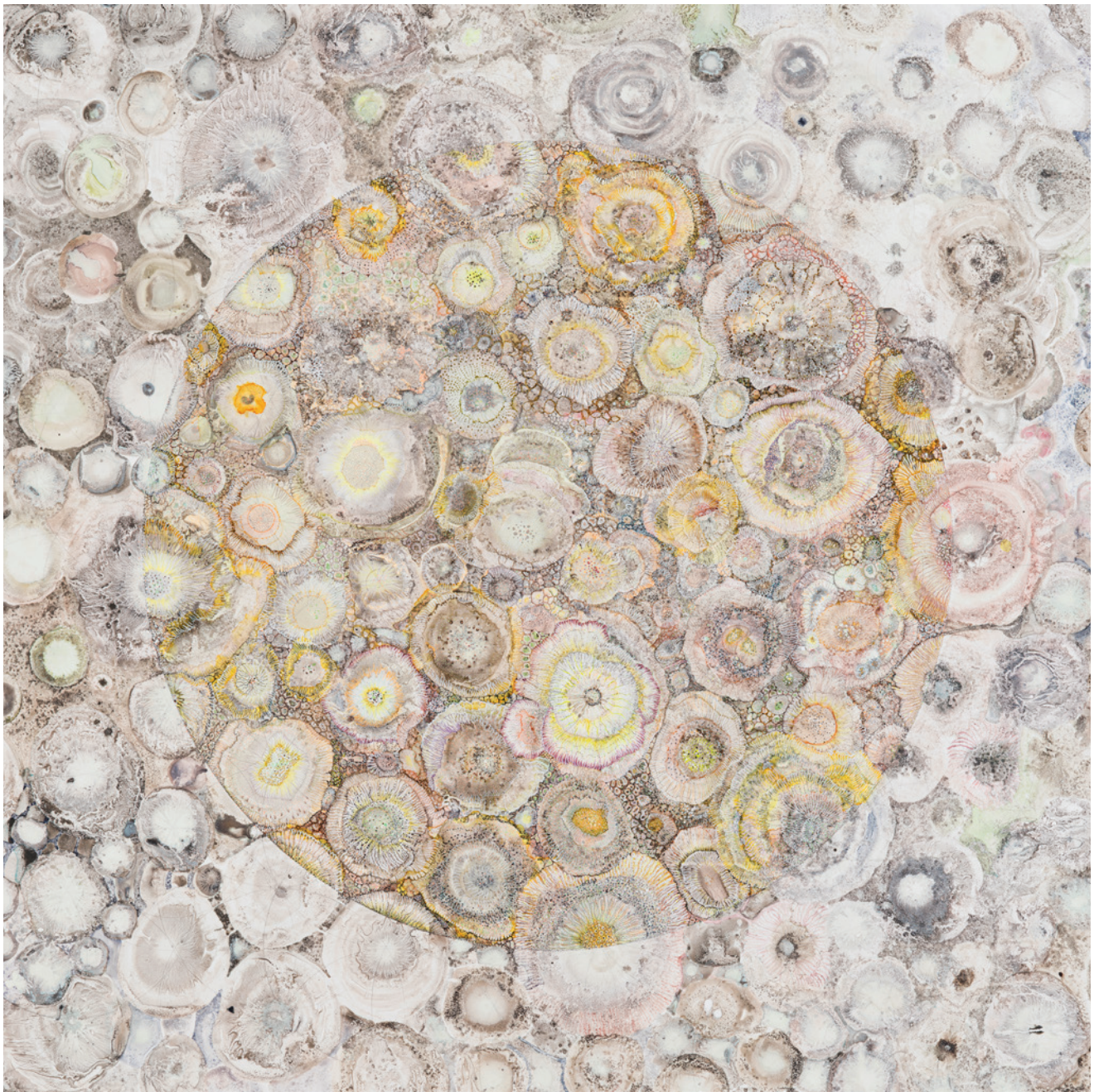
may surprise you, but sometimes I feel like I can't bear it, let's avoid it! It happens in your subconsciousness! Other significant experiences were seeing the Pacific Ocean—breathtaking!—and Crater Lake as well.

JH: Do you think there are connections among your practices?

NN: We are connected in the theme of our works and the natural elements we use, but more important, through the practice of observation. Also, the unity that I'm trying to achieve by placing me/my scarf in nature can be perceived in Olga and Claire's works. They picture an entity in each of their works. Each of their works is an ecosystem by itself.

OV: I resonate deeply with your answers. In fact, I think that is where the similarity in our work resides: in our shared motivation, indeed, need, for making this work, inspired by our love and respect for nature and an understanding, on the deepest level, that putting nature first is essential for the survival of our species.

CB: I think it's interesting that, no matter how different our work is, most of what you could say about one of us, is true about any of us. This is probably because of the hidden core of nature in all human existence with which we all need to express our relationship.



Claire Burbridge
Morphic Resonance 2
2022
Ink, watercolor, sodium crystals on yupo
56 x 56 inches

CLAIRE BURBRIDGE

Born in London in 1971, Claire Burbridge grew up on the west coast of Scotland and in rural Somerset in England. She received her BA in Fine Art and History of Art from Oxford University and her MA from Camberwell College of Art, London. In 2010, she moved to Ashland and began a deep study of nature, creating beautiful and complex drawings and watercolors. Wild nature greets her each morning at her hilltop home, whose backyard offers views of mountain ranges, wild gardens, and untamed creatures. <https://www.claireburbridgeart.com>; <https://www.claireburbridge.com>

ARTIST'S STATEMENT



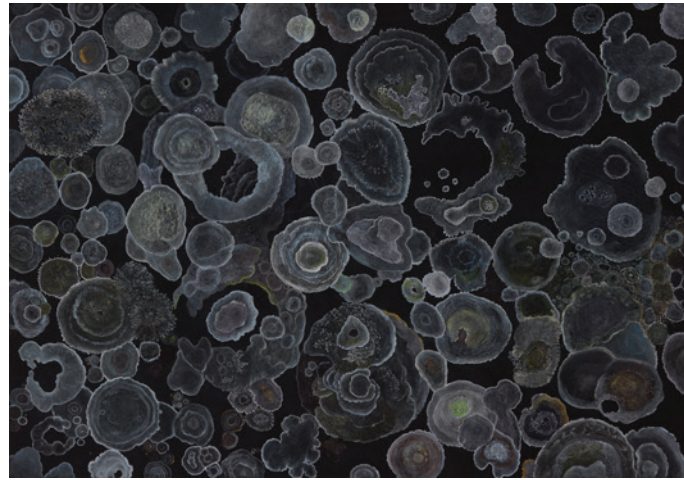
Like many non-conceptual artists, I find writing explanations about my work challenging for the simple reason that words are reductive, tending to pin things down as facts. So, I ask that you, as the observer of my works, use your capacity of feeling rather than intellect to decipher and connect to what you see.

This latest body of work, consists of four large-scale drawings and an installation of three dimensional “tree symbols,” an *Homage to Trees*. In essence, the work has reached the natural progression of deformation of form as opposed to a mastery of form. These works are a turning point in my approach: after many years spent drawing, I am moving from that crucial foundation into completely new territory. It compares to reaching that moment of needing to breathe out after an in-breath—an essential and inevitable step. The visual language used is of observation of the living cosmos that is nature and all its evolving habits, almost a listening into that realm.

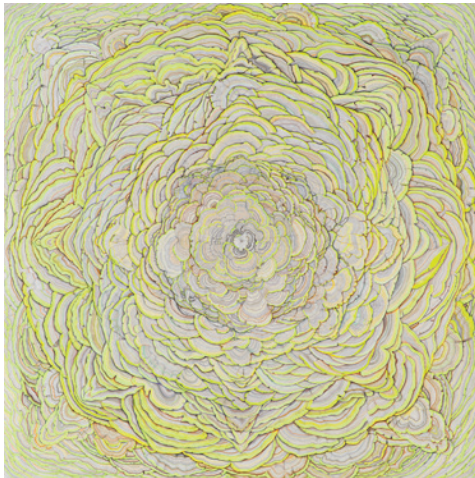
Familiar forms are isolated and then repeated in their myriad of unique incarnations and placed upon geometric patterns first drawn in graphite on the paper, then adorned with an infinite number of dots and lines, waves and particles—the building blocks of all things visible. The pattern is there to symbolize the very real but invisible realm of nature, the quantum world. The titles *Unified Field* and *Morphic Resonance* signal to that realm, descriptive words used by plant biologists like Rupert Sheldrake and quantum physicists like Lothar Schäfer. The subjects of these works I consider to be the unsung heroes of our eco-systems: lichens, trees, fungi, and mosses can be found everywhere, even in deserts, but here in Oregon are some of the world's best examples of these species. They are



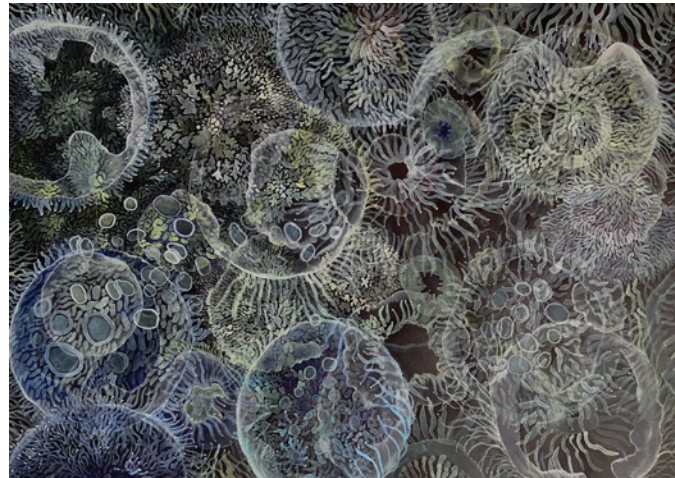
Claire Burbridge
Laocoön
 2017
 Pen and ink, graphite
 on archival paper
 51¼ x 51¼ inches



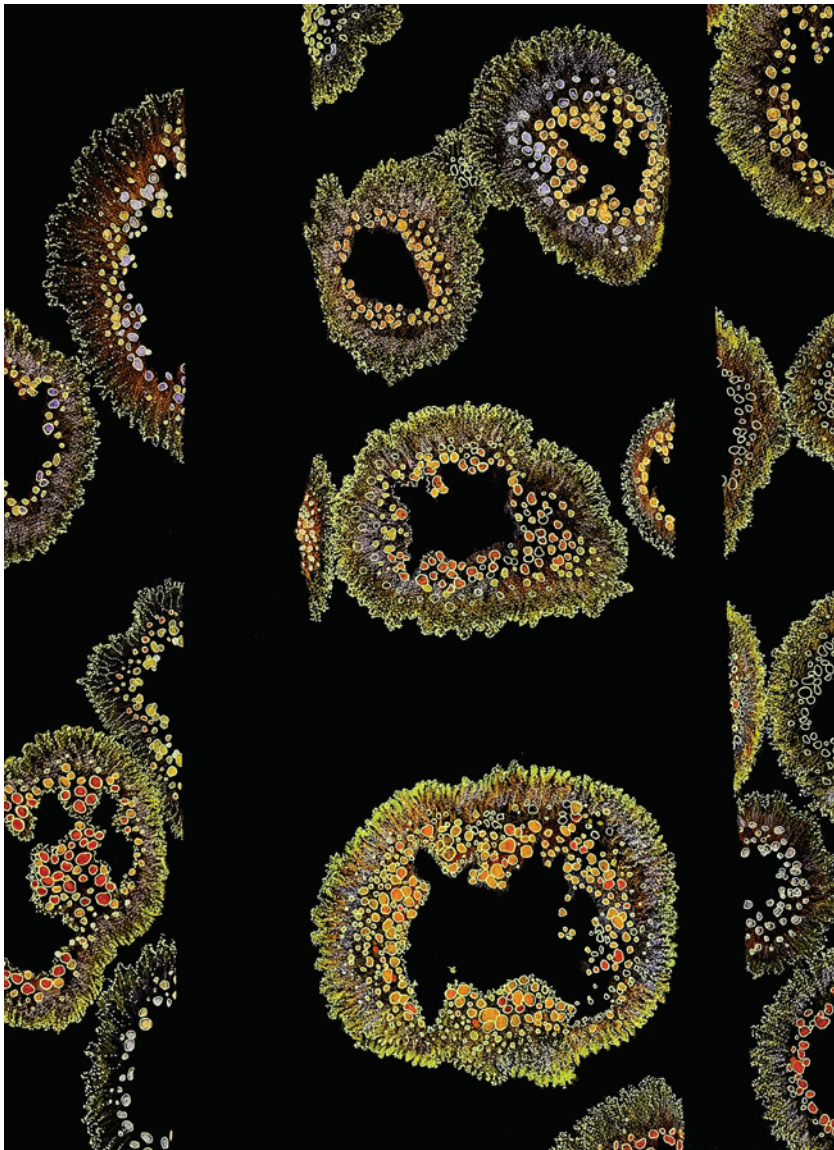
Claire Burbridge
Icelandic Lichen
 2020
 Pen and ink, graphite, pigment pencil on
 Arches black paper
 29½ x 41½ inches



Claire Burbridge
Individuation Point
 2017
 Pen and ink, graphite on archival paper
 51¼ x 51¼ inches



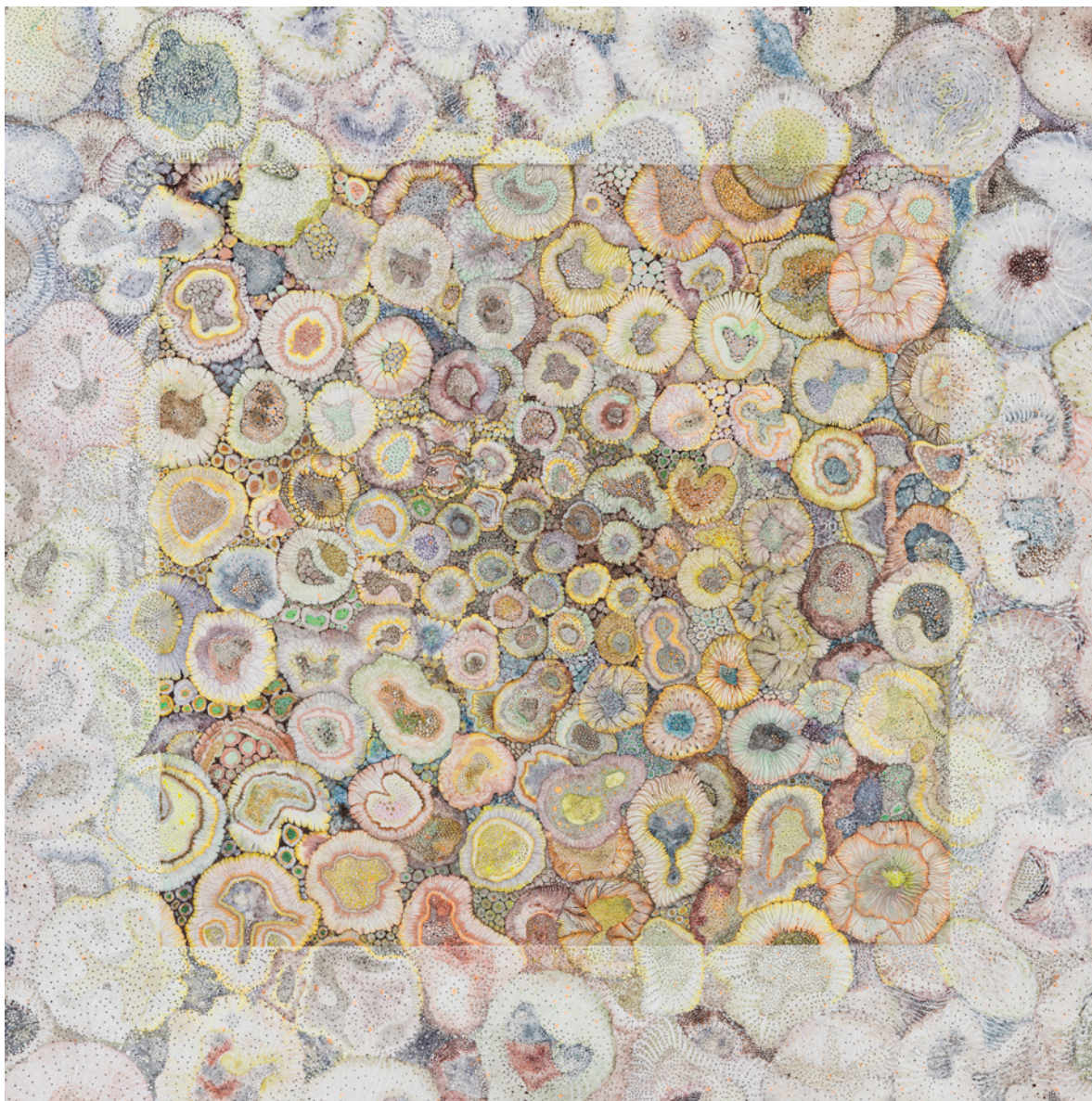
Claire Burbridge
Phenomena
 2021
 Watercolor
 30 x 23 inches



Claire Burbridge
Invisible Trees
 2021
 Pen and ink, pigment pencil on Arches
 black paper
 30 x 23 inches



Claire Burbridge
Listening Tree 1
 2021
 Pigment pencil, pen and ink on
 Arches black paper
 30 x 23 inches



Claire Burbridge
Morphic Resonance 1
2022
Watercolor, ink, graphite, salt crystals on watercolor paper
56 x 56 inches



Claire Burbridge
Unified Field 1
2022

Ink, watercolor, sodium crystals on Arches watercolor paper
60 x 59 inches

Claire Burbridge
Unified Field 2
2022
Ink, watercolor, sodium
crystals on yupo
60 x 59 inches



undoubtedly some of the most environment-sustaining species. Trees create the air that we breathe, lichens break down rock and minerals, creating future soil, and the many functions and importance of fungi are only just starting to be truly revealed to us; they are even being used to clean up oil spills. These works are my prayers of reverence to these life forms. My wish is that the works create a mental space for discovery though their ambiguity, an invitation to ponder and be nourished—specifically not by interpreting, labeling, and discarding them into the pile of known facts. The works are conceived through a heightened still-perceiving, and the colors hint at the spectrums of light that



the human eye doesn't usually pick up but which other species, such as birds' and insects' visions, do. The drawings are relational to the original forms that inspired them, not intended as realism or illustration.

I hope these contemplative works provide a transformational experience like that which comes through direct merging with nature. As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in *Letters to a young poet*, "If you trust in Nature, in what is simple in Nature, in the small things that hardly anyone sees and that can so suddenly become huge, immeasurable; if you have this love for what is humble and try very simply, as someone who serves...."

Claire Burbridge
Homage to Trees
2021–22

Multiple free-standing sculptures
with drawings/watercolors
on outside; each, 7–12 feet (height)
x 2 ½–5 inches (diameter)



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #2
2018–21
Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
Edition of 3
40 x 60 inches

NAEEMEH NAEEMAEI

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1984, Naeemeh Naeemaei received her BFA from Tehran Art University in 2006, majoring in sculpture. After graduation, she participated in numerous individual and group shows in Tehran, both in sculpture and painting, including the 5th Tehran Contemporary Sculpture Biennial at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. In 2009, she began a series of paintings about endangered species, which led to her first solo exhibition, *Dreams Before Extinction*, at the Henna Gallery in Tehran in 2011. In 2013, the series was reproduced in a bilingual (English and Farsi) book of the same title, published by Perceval Press, and shown at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon, in 2019. Prior to moving to Oregon in 2017, Naeemaei was active in Iran's environmental movement and involved with several organizations that seek to raise awareness about endangered species and other environmental issues. She has also illustrated children's books, including *Mr. Samad and the Little Black Fish*, a modern classic in contemporary Iranian culture. In 2016, Naeemaei was the category winner in the Wildlife Artist of the Year Competition, sponsored by the David Shepherd Foundation in London. In 2018, she served on the Twelfth Glenn Gould Award Jury, given every second year to a living individual in recognition of his/her contributions to music and communication. Her works have been featured in renowned international journals and magazines such as *Orion*, *Leonardo*, and *Feminist Formation*. www.naeemaei.com



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My life got to a point where I felt that I couldn't define myself as an individual human being anymore. All the concerns about environment, social characteristics, religions, and politics looked very relative and fragile. The *Jaan* series was shaped in that dilemma. The encountering of human and nature in its narration can be categorized in three stages. The first stage is "to feel," which is a starting point for the relationship between me/human and nature/environment. It is basically about observing nature, not only to discover but to understand it. In that stage, I seek perception and comprehension. The second stage is "to heal," in which I try to get closer to nature to play the role of a healer, getting into cracks and wounds and being a bandage over broken bodies. The final stage is "to be," in which



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #5
2018–21
Inkjet and Willamette
National Forest ash on canvas
Edition of 3
40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #6
2018–21
Inkjet and Willamette National
Forest ash on canvas
Edition of 3
40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #3
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette
 National Forest ash
 on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches

there would be no distance, nor distinction between me and nature. It's about unifying with nature, camouflage, intimation, and finally, dissolving in nature. By the end of that stage, there would be no body and soon no trace. I narrate the story by my red scarf to avoid giving a conventional self-portrait. *Jaan* is a Persian word meaning soul, life, and also dearest. Nature is "Jaan."



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #4
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #7
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #8
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #9
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #10
 2018–21
 Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash on canvas
 Edition of 3
 40 x 60 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Paeon
 2013
 Acrylic on wood
 24 x 36 inches

HEALER OF THE GODS

OLGA VOLCHKOVA

Born in Russia in 1970, Olga Volchkova is a professionally trained icon painter and conservator. A resident of Eugene, she uses her knowledge of Orthodox iconography and her love of botany to create provocative paintings that explore the history of flora. Through intensive research about each plant specimen she portrays, Volchkova creates visual narratives that explore the mythologies humans have created around plants, while expertly rendering the form of each leaf, petal, and tendril. <https://www.olgalaxy.com>

ARTIST STATEMENT



I was born and raised in Russia in a town called Tver, about 100 miles north of Moscow. I lived in a completely different climate from Oregon. Winters were long, dark, and cold. During the short daylight of winter you see white landscapes of solitude, so far away—nothing stops your eye in the Russian flatness. It's a hostile and sentimental, meditative and tough world. Half of my childhood I spent with my grandma outside of the city in a self-sustaining old village. From all the achievements of civilization we only had electricity—sometimes. Some people would call it bare survival, but for me it was the most magical and interesting time of my life. I lived surrounded by wild nature—forests, rivers, fields, and orchards—with no borders: there was no private property in the Soviet Union. Everything belonged to us, at least I felt that way. The forest was like our backyard.

We collected berries, mushrooms, and herbs. Everything was carefully preserved and cherished. That feeling of freedom and comfort, safely surrounded by nature, became my main source of inspiration and curiosity.

When I moved to Oregon, I was a bit disappointed by the lack of ancient ruins. I especially missed the old European soulful architecture. But Oregon struck me with an incredible natural richness, a diversity of landscapes that I had never seen before! A lot of prehistoric species—like native rhododendrons, beargrass, oaks, madrone, with their special unique ecosystems—are still here, and we can still see them in their natural habitat.

Magnificent forests of Douglas fir, like cities full of ancient cathedrals, make you feel small, like you live on the ground with insects and mushrooms. I love oak savannas when the camas is blooming, and I try to imagine how people lived in this land before they were forced away. I see how they collected camas bulbs, the way my grandma and I collected herbs, with special knowledge of the land and seasons. “Don’t take more than you need,” she would say. I can see how through observations and centuries of learning, people were able to create more fruitful corn and beans, potatoes and squash. They planted them without destroying the ecosystems—like adding three more sisters to the natural community of life. I believe that most of this work was done by women. From mother to daughter to granddaughter, crops were selected and bred for future generations. All that effort caused a chain reaction of discoveries: photosynthesis, genetics, chemistry, oxygen, carbon . . . the sources of energy and life. I’m just starting to walk in this maze of adventures, looking at the windows of life from my perspective. And painting icons into nature.

It makes me sad and angry when I see the destruction of the forest where I grew up. And I have the same feeling when old forests in Oregon are cut down, or when a park in town turns into a parking lot. Please join me in defending nature.



Olga Volchkova
Sister Maize
 2022
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches



Olga Volchkova
Sister Squash
 2022
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches



Olga Volchkova
Sister Bean
 2022
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches

Sister Maize, 2022, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

Sister Squash, 2022, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

Sister Bean, 2022, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the “Plants and Science” series

These paintings were inspired by the book *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. The Three Sisters—Maize, Squash, and Bean—provide an example of a symbiotic relationship between nature and agriculture. They convey an ancient practice that’s much more effective than today’s industrialized monoculture, which exhausts the land and destroys the natural world. Native people planted these three plants near forest edges or inside of forest openings, where soil is rich and sunlight plentiful. The sisters help each other, like sisters do. Sister Bean provides nitrogen to the soil, Sister Squash keeps slugs and snails away with her spikiness, and Sister Corn provides a scaffold for Sister Bean to climb. If you eat them together, your diet is properly balanced with fiber, proteins, vitamins, and tasty flavors. The Sisters are gifted, smart and powerful.

Olga Volchkova
Saint Chloroplast and Holy Chlorophyll
2021
Acrylic on wood
30 x 40 inches



Saint Chloroplast and Holy Chlorophyll, 2021, acrylic on wood, 30 x 40 inches

From the "Plants and Science" series

Nature is a magician. It produces constant gifts for us. Those gifts are often invisible but completely essential for most life on earth. Every little leaf around us is an advanced machine that eats carbon, sunlight, and water to produce sugar and oxygen. It truly deserves honor and respect. No human engineering can recreate that machine. In this painting, sugar is represented by a muffin. Carbon is represented by a mouse—so many of these little fellows died so we could understand the process. In the center is the magic green molecule, chlorophyll, which absorbs just the right wavelengths of sunlight.



Olga Volchkova
The Resurrection of Life
 2021
 Acrylic on wood
 72 x 30 inches (triptych)

The Resurrection of Life, 2021, acrylic on wood, 72 x 30 inches (triptych)

From the "Plants and Science" series

I'm saddened by the continued destruction of ways of living that are in harmony with nature. As a result of this destruction we survive, in a way, but we cannot be fully alive. The people in the center of the destruction seem to live in terrible fantasies within which we are, unfortunately, forced to struggle. But for me, this is a hopeful painting. When we see what is wrong, we can fix the problems and resurrect our harmonious relationship with nature, again living lives that are fair, stable, beautiful, and complete.

Saint Basil – Holy Eugenol, 2021, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Plants and Science" series

One of the largest families of local anesthetics came from the discovery of eugenol in many herbs and spices, including cloves and basil. I imagine a forest of basil, under which this saint rests, catching drops of Holy Eugenol, somewhere in medieval Persia, which may be where the most popular strain of basil originated. I studied orthodox saints and I've noticed that none of them lie down, unless they are dead. I guess it's not polite for them to relax in front of their god. This is unnecessarily strict and dated. In Eugene, I met Naeemeh. She is from Iran, and she pointed out an old story of a Persian king who saved a large snake. The snake was so grateful, it spit up seeds of the royal basil plant as a gift.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Basil – Holy Eugenol
 2021
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches
 From the "Plants and Science" series



Olga Volchkova
Saint Date Palm
 2020
 Acrylic on wood
 24 x 30 inches

Saint Date Palm, 2020, acrylic on wood, 24 x 30 inches

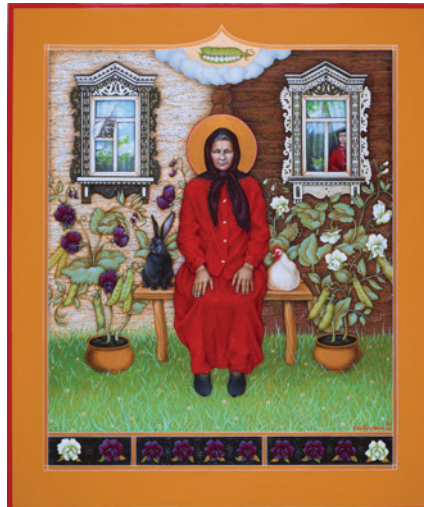
From the “Plants and Science” series

Phoenix dactylifera—it makes the deserts bloom. It also inspired the creation of the ancient pump—what was later called “Archimedes’ Screw,” which pumped water into the famous gardens of Nineveh, which we call the Gardens of Babylon. The Akkadian word for this pump is the same as that for the date palm. The palm trunk forms a helix, which water cascades down in a spiral, so the pump simply rotates the helix in order to *raise* water.

Saint Pea, 2020, wood and acrylic, 20 x 24 inches

From the “Plants and Science” series

Observations about pea hybridization by village farmers, who were almost always women, led Gregor Mendel, who grew up in such a village, to conduct the first modern genetic research. Rigorous experiments allowed Mendel to build a mathematical model of inherited characteristics. If you cross-pollinate purple and white peas, the recessive white gene is expressed only after skipping one generation. That would explain why I look like my grandmother. And Saint Pea smiles down upon us all.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Pea
 2020
 Wood and acrylic
 20 x 24 inches

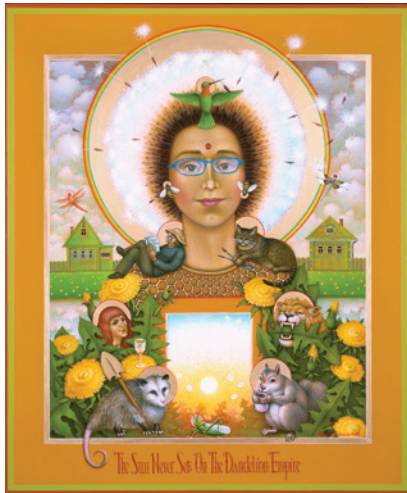


Olga Volchkova
Saint Pomegranate
 2020
 Acrylic on wood
 30 x 40 inches
 From the “Plants and Science” series

Saint Pomegranate, 2020, acrylic on wood, 30 x 40 inches

From the “Plants and Science” series

The pomegranate played a special role, cherished by Middle Eastern cultures and incorporated into the stories of many religions. The crown and flower of a pomegranate has six petals, and this was considered significant. Persephone, for example, ate six seeds of this forbidden fruit and was banished to the underworld for six months of every year, then released, representing the cycle of life. Pomegranates also inspired the Babylonian number system: they counted in base 60 with their fingers, a system echoed today in geography, geometry, and our measurement of time.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Dandelion
 2019
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches

Saint Dandelion, 2019, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Garden Saints" series

Although the dandelion is an immigrant almost everywhere, she is generous and helpful for native species—providing food, nectar, medicine, and pollen. I empathize with her. Also, hummingbirds use her fluffy seeds to insulate their nests, which is adorable.

Saint Beargrass, 2018, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

In the early summer in eastern Oregon, where the altitude is higher and the landscapes are breathtaking, you can see this tall, gorgeous, floating, lace-like, club-shaped flower. The plant blooms once every five to ten years. Seeing many at once is miraculous and magical. Beargrass is one of the first plants that grows on land scorched by fire, which helps to bring the rest of the vegetation, fungus, and animals back. Beargrass provides food for mountain goats, bedding material for bears, and excellent weaving material for baskets and clothing. The fibers are flexible and tough.

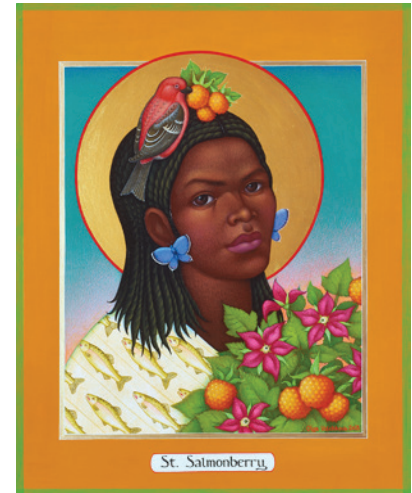


Olga Volchkova
Saint Beargrass
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches

Saint Salmonberry, 2018, acrylic on wood, 16 x 20 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

Rubus spectabilis is edible, providing food in various stages for all creatures, with the same fruit structure as a raspberry. Made into jams, candy jelly or wine, they were an important food for indigenous people. Traditionally the berries were eaten with salmon, but they also look rather like salmon roe or caviar. Its beautiful magenta flower is absolutely stunning.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Salmonberry
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 16 x 20 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Rhododendron
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Wild Ginger
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 20 x 24 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Fireweed
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 16 x 20 inches

Saint Rhododendron, 2018, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

The first time I saw a rhododendron in bloom I couldn't believe that nature, the source of all beauty, could make something as incredibly beautiful as this. We have so many native rhododendrons here in Oregon, turning back time for every forest, toward our tropical past. Rhodies always transport me to these ancient times, when dinosaurs roamed and flew, on an Earth undisturbed by modern development. When they bloom all kinds of life is blooming, snakes and bees are waking, fern fiddleheads are emerging; the ecologies buzz with the joy of new beginning.

Saint Wild Ginger, 2018, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

In early spring, the attractive dark red flowers of wild ginger appear on the Oregon forest floor. They look like advanced alien ships hiding from view behind heart-shaped foliage. Although not related to culinary ginger, the roots produce a scent that is similar. Fresh or dried roots of wild ginger were used as a ginger substitute in times past, but the plant is not normally used today for culinary purposes,

as it can contain poisonous compounds. Wild ginger's seeds attract ants, which carry the seeds to their underground homes where they eat the tasty outgrowths of the seeds and leave the seeds themselves to germinate.

Saint Fireweed, 2018, acrylic on wood, 16 x 20 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

In the midsummer, higher altitude pastures look like transparent pink seas of fireweed's candle-like flowers. They are called "fireweed" because they're one of the toughest plants that grow on scorched land, and they bring life back to that land. Not everyone knows that *all* parts of this plant are edible: the young spring shoots are especially delicious. They can be eaten raw or steamed, just like asparagus shoots. Young fireweed leaves make a delicious tea, high in vitamin C. In Russia and most of the Earth's lands of the north, including Oregon, fireweed was what "tea" meant, before black tea was imported. Fireweed also provides habitat for many insects, and food for birds and other animals.

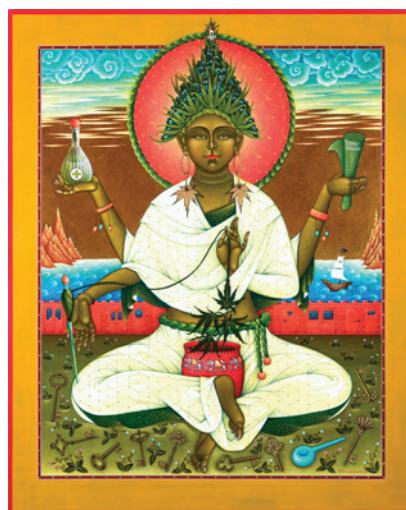


Olga Volchkova
Saint Oak
 2018
 Acrylic on wood
 16 x 20 inches

Saint Oak, 2018, acrylic on wood, 16 x 20 inches

From the "Oregon Native Saints" series

The Oregon White Oak (*Quercus garryana*) is a keystone species in the ecology we call oak savanna: a jewel in Oregon's natural heritage. The white oaks of the Oregon savanna provide acorns, young buds, and shelter for insects, birds, rodents, and deer, as well as leaves for fungus, mosses, soil invertebrates, and animals further up the food chain. Oak savanna is a highly endangered light-density forest-prairie habitat, native to the Pacific Northwest and the Cascadian bioregion. The habitat includes camas and fritillaria, major native food sources, and other species that thrived in the controlled-burn stewardship of indigenous peoples. Oaks also provide beauty in fall and shade in summer. The older an oak tree is, the more carbon it needs and the more carbon it removes from the atmosphere. They are doing their best to save us from climate disaster.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Cannabis
 2016
 Acrylic on wood
 24 x 30 inches

Saint Cannabis, 2016, acrylic on wood, 24 x 30 inches

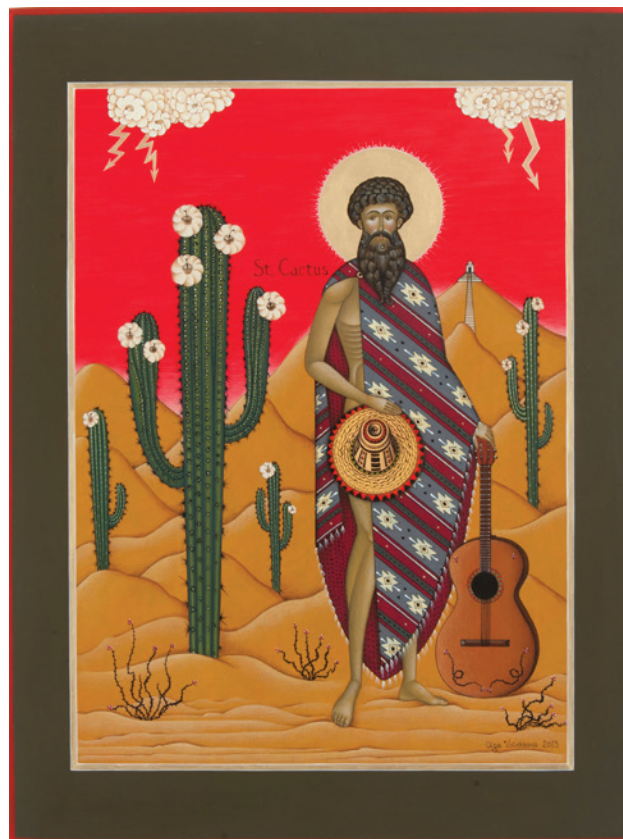
From the "Plants and Science" series

This magnificent plant came to us from the Indian subcontinent, with a potent history of traditional medicinal, spiritual, and recreational use. It was also widely used across the world for making fabric, paper, sails, robes, and "canvas" (the word comes from "cannabis"). If you find your own personal key, and then find your personal portal, connecting you with this plant, both of you can have a nice adventure together. Choose wisely.



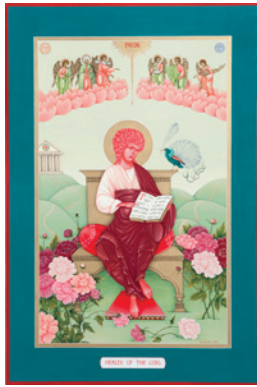
Olga Volchkova
The Holy Spirit of Herbs
 2015
 Acrylic on wood
 24 x 30 inches

The Holy Spirit of Herbs, 2015, acrylic on wood, 30 x 24 inches
 From the "Plants and Science" series
 Twelve figures represent natural antibiotics from the Holy Spirit of Herbs. The painting is in the "festival icon" format, used for a unifying theme, where twelve smaller compositions frame the central figure. Clockwise from the upper left, the saints along the edges represent usnea, ginger, rosemary, sage, garlic, echinacea, turmeric, Oregon grape, juniper, aloe vera, wormwood, and goldenseal.

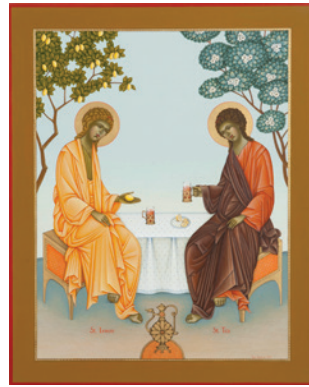


Olga Volchkova
Saint Cactus
 2013
 Acrylic on wood
 18 x 24 inches

Saint Cactus, 2013, acrylic on wood, 18 x 24 inches
 From the "Garden Saints" series
 The survival of these special plants have inspired and assisted the survival of humans since we first arrived in the deserts of the new world, tens of thousands of years ago. Cacti have been cultivated for their beauty and for their important fruits, medicines, psychedelics, dyes, and metaphors.



Olga Volchkova
Saint Paeon
2013
Acrylic on wood
24 x 36 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Tea and St. Lemon
2013
Acrylic on wood
24 x 30 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Gerania
2012
Acrylic on wood
20 x 24 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Datura
2012
acrylic on wood
18 x 24 inches

Saint Paeon, 2013, acrylic on wood, 24 x 36 inches

From the "Garden Saints" series

The peony already has a long history in human spiritual life. Many gods and demigods associated with the Greek pantheon were involved in healing and medicine. One of these, *Paeon*, is known as the healer of the Olympian gods. In verses 401 and 899 of Homer's *Iliad*, Paeon applies soothing herbal ointments to heal first Hades and then Ares. Here, the healer's many patients float in the floral clouds, waiting for their appointment. The titular character is seated on a throne nestled among the flowers named for him. In his hands, he holds a book enumerating some of the flower's medical applications.

Saint Tea and St. Lemon, 2013, acrylic on wood, 24 x 30 inches

From the "Garden Saints" series

Some icons intend to put the viewer in a mood of contemplation. Fifteenth-century painter Andrei Rublev's *Holy Trinity* is one of these, presenting hospitality in a beautiful setting, and it inspired this painting. *Camellia sinensis* (known as black tea in English and red tea in Chinese) was first cultivated and oxidized thousands of years ago in China, in the general region where *Citrus limon*, or its close ancestor the citron (*Citrus medica*), was domesticated at about the same time. The saints drink their tea in Russian *podstakannik* holders, which most Russians associate with tea drinking during train travel. In the foreground is a *samovar* for boiling water; similar devices have been found that date back to the origin of tea cultivation in Asia.

Santa Gerania, 2012, acrylic on wood, 20 x 24 inches

From the "Garden Saints" series

The name for the genus of flowers to which the geranium belongs originated from the Greek word for crane, which is *géranos*, because of the fruit capsule's resemblance to a crane's bill. Geranium plants have grown wild in Europe for thousands of years and have been cultivated there to be used in herbal remedies since the medieval period. The plant boasts properties that stop bleeding and tighten tissues, and it is often used externally to treat minor wounds. As they are hearty plants that can survive harsh winters, they are also used decoratively in cold climates, such as Russia. These flowers provide hope during the winter months in even the most humble of homes.

Saint Datura, 2012, acrylic on wood, 18 x 24 inches

From the "Garden Saints" series

Datura, commonly called devil's snare or devil's trumpet, is a member of the nightshade family, which also includes the potato and the tomato. It originated in parts of present-day Mexico and the Southwestern United States, although it was introduced to areas of South America and South Asia during the first millennium CE. *Datura* has long been recognized for its hallucinogenic and medicinal properties. Poisonous if taken internally, it makes you vomit and puts you to sleep. Never try it. *Datura* was a powerful medicine traditionally, and it's studied by researchers today for its analgesic and anti-asthmatic qualities.

THE MEDIA ART OF *THE PRESENCE OF NATURE*

My years programming AIFF (2016–21) were made especially fulfilling by the opportunities the Schneider Museum of Art gave me to complement our theatrical selections with an annual media art exhibition. This is the seventh and final exhibition I have co-curated here, often with Schneider Museum director Scott Malbourn, and, more recently, my spouse, Jill Hartz.

It feels appropriate to wind up my exhibitions with a show devoted to the presence of nature. Nature was made more present for both Jill and me, as immigrants from the East Coast, by our lives in the Northwest. The last two pandemic years, to our Eastern friends' amazement, turned us into avid hikers. Now, living in Maryland, I'm surprised by how much I'm missing those trails.

Shortly after coming to Oregon, outside a theater in Portland, I encountered Vanessa Renwick, whose experimental films I had screened in Virginia. Vanessa and her work ultimately became my portal to the Northwest. Northwesterners' close relationship with the natural environment—and their sense of its fragility and danger—is palpable in Vanessa's art. In 2017, I presented her *Medusa Smack*, giving Schneider Museum visitors, who lay under the jellyfish-shaped screen, the orgasmic experience of floating with the fish Vanessa filmed at the Oregon Coast Aquarium. Her return visits to AIFF brought nature experiences that were equally beautiful but also more foreboding. She presented *Hope and Prey* and *Cold Cold Water*, conveying the vulnerability of wolves and whales in the wild. For *The Presence of Nature*, she brings her piece *layover*, which dazzles with the magnificent choreography of Vaux's Swifts in flight and disturbs with the sight of an industrial chimney filling in for the dying trees of old growth forests.

Vanessa is, like the three other women artists in the exhibition, an emigrant to Oregon, having migrated from the Midwest (legendarily, she hitchhiked barefoot across the country with her wolf-dog by her side). Kurtis Hough, another experimental filmmaker captured by Oregon's natural environment, also hails from the Midwest, although his roots were, unlike Vanessa's, in a Michigan apple farm and not Chicago's concrete jungle. His two-part film in this exhibition, *Mossgrove/Bed of Moss*, finds the rhythms in patterns of

moss and cavortings of slugs, which dance to the musical rhythms of Rachel Grimes' *Book of Leaves*. The superficially unappealing moss and slugs (not to mention the slime molds, which are the stars of Hough's latest work, *New Brain*) become mesmerizing through his time lapse, high-definition photography, CGI techniques, and sensitive pairing of movement and music.

The third media artist in the exhibition, Sky Hopinka, is the one artist born in the Northwest, in Washington. However, as he points out, "The Pacific Northwest landscape is familiar to me: it's my home, but not my homeland, as my tribes are from Wisconsin and Southern California. I find it deeply fascinating that there are so many ways to look at where belonging and its tensions come from, what these places represent."¹ Hopinka went to school at Portland State University, and, while there, he got involved in indigenous language revitalization and learned and taught the Chinuk language. What you hear in his film *Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary* is the reactivation of Chinuk, being taught on the soundtrack by elder Wilson Bobb to linguist Henry Zenk. What you see is the activation of architectural structures important to the Chinook people, Cathlapotle Plankhouse and Tillikum Crossing bridge in Portland, and the environment surrounding them. Through Hopinka's experimental gaze, they are not dead monuments but spaces for exploration, without path or boundary.

Sky Hopinka, like Jill and me, has moved East, but the Northwest draws him back, as it drew us back for this exhibition. Hopinka made his magnificent first feature film *malni-towards the ocean, towards the shore*, which came out last year, in the Portland area and in the Chinuk language. Hough and Renwick both remain rooted in Oregon, creating an environmental experimental cinema that powerfully evokes and illuminates the ethos of this region.

Richard Herskowitz

1. <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/sky-hopinka-on-indigenous-language-the-afterlife-and-making-his-first-feature-81960>

SKY HOPINKA



Sky Hopinka (Ho-Chunk Nation/Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians) was born and raised in Ferndale, Washington, and spent a number of years in Palm Springs and Riverside, CA, Portland, OR, and Milwaukee, WI. In Portland, he studied and taught chinuk wawa, a language indigenous to the Lower Columbia River Basin. His video, photo, and text work centers around personal positions of Indigenous homeland and landscape—designs of language as containers of culture, expressed through personal and non-fictional forms of media. His work has played at various festivals, including Sundance, Toronto International Film Festival, and the New York Film Festival. His work was a part of the 2017 Whitney Biennial, and he is a recipient of a 2020 Alpert Award for Film/Video and a 2020 Guggenheim fellowship.

Anti-Objects, or Space Without Path or Boundary

2017, 13 min, HD Video

Directed, filmed, and edited by Sky Hopinka

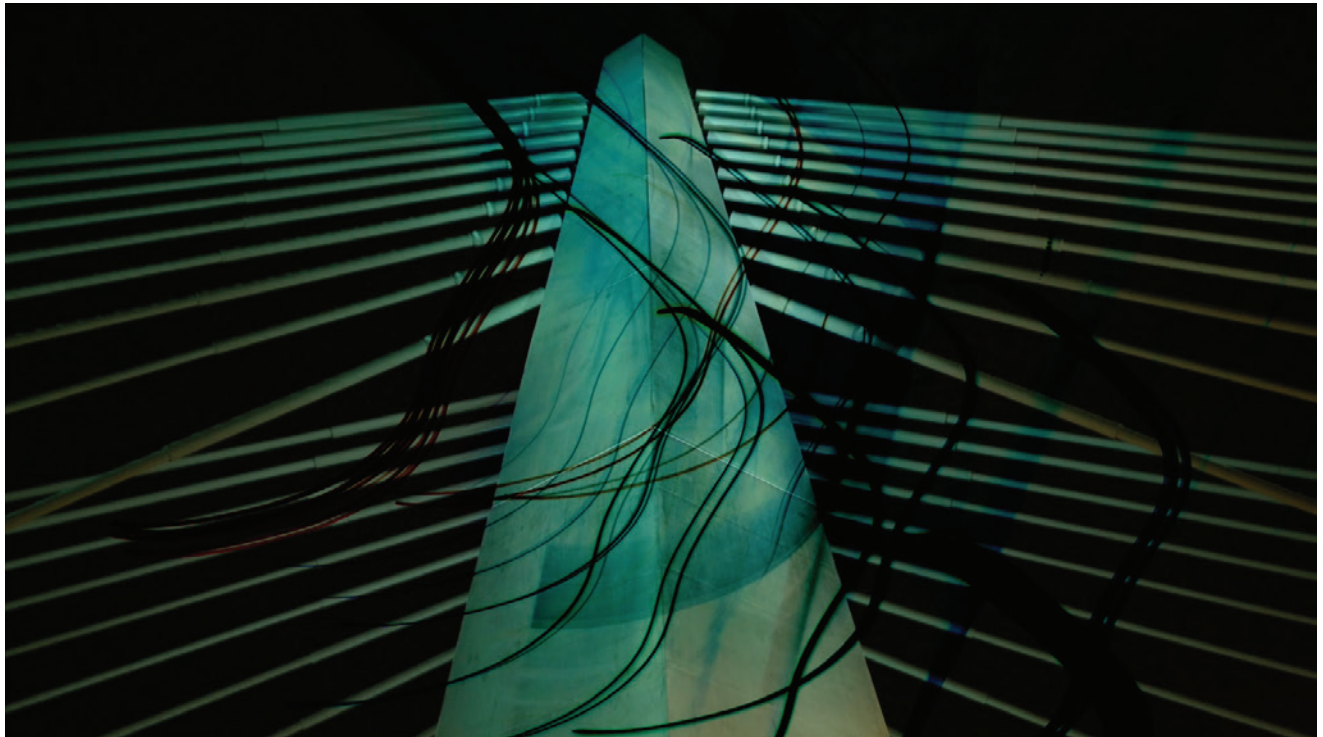
“The individual is not an autonomous, solitary object but a thing of uncertain extent, with ambiguous boundaries. So too is matter, which loses much of its allure the moment it is reduced to an object, shorn of its viscosity, pressure and density. Both subject and matter resist their reduction into objects. Everything is interconnected and intertwined.” — Kengo Kuma

The title of this video, taken from the texts of the architect Kengo Kuma, suggests a way of looking at everything as “interconnected and intertwined,” as are the historical and the present, the tool and the artifact. Images and representations of two structures in the Portland Metropolitan area that have direct and complicated connections to the Chinookan people who inhabit(ed) the land are woven with audiotapes of one of the last speakers of the Chinookan creole, chinuk wawa. These localities of matter resist their reduction into objects and call anew for space and time given to wandering as a deliberate act and the empowerment of shared utility.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I wandered through these spaces and realized that any way I filmed them, any bits of audio I chose, they would still be entirely subjective to the path I construct in an edit. It would become an object itself. I can't photograph these spaces and show you how to move within them, but I can show you where I went. I can't tell you how long I was there, but I can construct an idea of the time I occupied. The paths and boundaries I created are vaporous and already gone, but the space remains, waiting to be ambled through once again.

— from Hopinka's book *Around the Edge of Encircling Lake*
(Green Gallery Press, 2018)



KURTIS HOUGH

Winner of the 2014 Oregon Media Arts Fellowship, Portland filmmaker Kurtis Hough's work blends animation, documentary, and the surreal into an investigation of the musical undertones found in abstract patterns of nature. Beginning with time-lapse photography of landscapes from around the planet, Hough's work captures the lyricism and movements of unseen microscopic formations and natural events that typically go unnoticed by the human eye. His films have been screened at many festivals and have earned awards from, among others, the Columbia Gorge International Film Festival, Ann Arbor Film Festival, Philadelphia Video Festival, and Onion City Experimental Film Festival.



Mossgrove/Bed of Moss

2011, 10 min, HD Video

Music by Rachel Grimes, from the album *Book of Leaves*

Mossgrove/Bed of Moss is a two-part film exploring the locomotion of Oregon's banana slugs and lush mossy landscapes. With timelapse and macro photography, the film was made with over 10,000 photographs taken in the Columbia River Gorge.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

This project started by listening to Rachel Grimes' 2009 album *Book of Leaves*. Rachel and I share inspiration from nature, and I began imagining vertical images, like keys to her piano notes. I also had recently moved to Oregon and was fascinated by the textures of moss and lichen in the forest, and knew I wanted to create some type of artwork from that. With Rachel's endorsement, I began *Bed of Moss* as an experiment, knowing that if it turned out well, I would design a two-part film, pairing the higher energy notes of *Mossgrove* with the quiet triptych of *Bed of Moss*.



VANESSA RENWICK



Vanessa Renwick, founder and janitor of the Oregon Department of Kick Ass, has been a singular voice in the experimental cinema for over twenty years. Eschewing an allegiance to any one medium or form, Renwick builds authentic moving image works revealing an insatiable curiosity and unflinching engagement with the world around her. Often focusing her lens on nature, freedom, and the locales of her adopted home, the Pacific Northwest, she uses avant-garde formal elements to explore radical politics and environmental issues. An artist who often self-distributes, her screening history reads as a map of independent cinema worldwide. She has screened work in hundreds of venues internationally, institutional and not, including the Museum of Modern Art, Light Industry, the Wexner Center for the Arts, Art Basel, Oberhausen, the Museum of Jurassic Technology, Centre Pompidou, Bread and Puppet Theater and True/False Film Festival.

layover

2014, 6 min, HD video

Score: Sam Coomes

Cinematographer: Eric Edwards

Edit: Vanessa Renwick and Tim Scotten

A swan song for the factory age. Every autumn, a South America-bound colony of Vaux's Swifts numbering in the tens of thousands enjoy a layover in a Portland, Oregon, elementary school chimney. Sunset brings a vortex of swirling shapes whose each tiny piece combines to form a hypnotic, ever-changing pattern; an equinoctial rhythm beats in every swoop of the organic overhead spiral. The defunct industrial chimney is our own demise, and yet the relentless, fluid choreography of the tiny migrants signals a new start, the turning wheel.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I think of myself as akin to a she-wolf with cubs. Lightly pricking your neck with my teeth, I carry you to a different location I have chosen. It's dusk, look up, the swifts are migrating to South America, swirling in for rest tonight along the way. The chimney stands in for long gone snags.





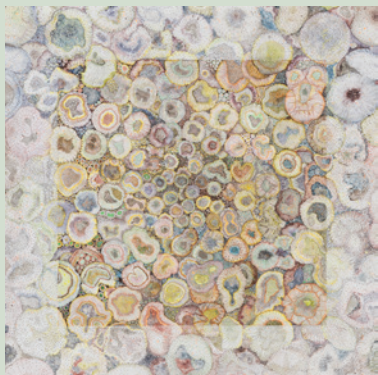
Claire Burbridge, *Homage to Trees*, 2021–22
Multiple free-standing sculptures with drawings/watercolors
on outside; each, 7–12 feet (height) x 2 ½–5 inches (diameter)

CURATOR BIOS

Jill Hartz is an independent curator and arts management consultant. Previously, she served as executive director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at the University of Oregon, Eugene (2008–2019), and director of the University of Virginia's art museum (1997–2008). She is president emerita of the national Association of Academic Museums and Galleries and a reviewer for professional museum programs. She has organized numerous exhibitions, primarily in the contemporary art field, and is the editor of five books, including *Rick Bartow: Things We Know But Cannot Explain* (co-edited with Danielle Knapp, 2015), *Siting Jefferson* (University of Virginia Press, 2003), and *Agnes Denes* (1992). She has curated and co-curated exhibitions for the Schneider Museum of Art, including *Collecting Cuba: Selections from the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art* for the (2021) and *Migrating Bodies: For(saking Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness)* (2020). She lives with her husband, Richard Herskowitz, in Potomac, Maryland.

Richard Herskowitz served in various artistic and executive management roles for the Ashland Independent Film Festival from 2015 to 2021, including the position of Artistic and Executive Director. He was Artistic Director of the Houston Cinema Arts Festival (2008–18) and director of the Virginia Film Festival in Charlottesville (1994–2008). Herskowitz ran Cornell Cinema, where he presented over 500 films annually from 1982 to 1994 and also served as film and video curator at the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art in Ithaca, New York. He was the curator of media arts for the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art in Eugene from 2009 to 2019 and has also co-curated an annual media arts exhibition at the Schneider Museum of Art since 2016. Herskowitz has been a programmer multiple times and president of the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar and chair of its 50th Anniversary Committee.

ON THE COVER



Claire Burbridge
Morphic Resonance 1
2022
Ink, watercolor, sodium
crystals on Arches
watercolor paper
56 x 56 inches



Naeemeh Naeemaei
Jaan, #8
2018–21
Inkjet and Willamette National Forest ash
on canvas, edition of 3
40 x 60 inches



Olga Volchkova
Saint Datura
2012
Acrylic on wood
18 x 24 inches