

Trees That Follow Me

∞

artist
Joel Fullerton

September 8 - October 6

opening reception
Friday Sep. 8, 17:00

Hae
Sint Jacobstraat 5
Maastricht
12:00 - 18:00

joelfullerton.com

There is still a lot about the work that I don't know, and that's where I want to be. I don't want to know everything about what I'm doing because, because it's not going to lead me anywhere.



Without that sense of wonder one doesn't really understand how fundamentally connected we really are. (David Suzuki)



Exploring the interdependence of human and tree relations, this series of works are rooted in a process of sustained meditative drawing that expresses a desire for reciprocity with the more than human world. The drawings are indexical representations of protective bark tissues of specific tree species: Black Maple, Black Willow, Douglas Fir, Eucalyptus, Giant Sequoia, Mountain Ash, Torrey Pine, White Ash, White Cedar, White Pine, Yucca Palm.

The process involves drawing with coloured pencil onto a transfer surface and then the drawn image is transferred to a secondary paper using hand pressure and direct contact between the two surfaces. This method is a tension between controlled drawing and improvisational rubbing: an exchanging of energy. By transferring an image from one paper to another, the original drawing becomes softened and blurred like memory. The images of bark and the drawing process itself recall associations of an internal and external space: consciousness, breath, body, sensation, history, and place, all points of contact in the exchange, connection, and vital relationship between trees and humans and our mutual kinship.

Each of the drawings represent a particular place and memory for the artist and each spectral colour suggests a specific sensuous experience of that tree. These are the trees that follow me.



I have been working on these drawings for over two years now. It started with 'place' and it started with my son Elio. Thinking about his breath and being now in the world. He was born in British Columbia where trees are cathedrals, like columns, and the Douglas fir was one of the first trees I wanted him to see, so we went and saw this tree. This was the first tree he touched, outside within the living environment.







Black Willow's were the only grove of trees on my parent's property before they planted their own. I sometimes think it was the first tree I understood being in that space, rooted in my memory. I have had many interactions with this tree over the years, we have a sort of relationship.

The frottage drawing is of a Black Willow, it is the only drawing in this series I did a direct rubbing from a tree, I think of it as the outlier or the intermission. It was really nice at the time because I was about half way through making the drawings, and it was just a different relationship with what it was I was trying to represent. More so in a sense that my body was now in direct contact with the tree, in the space and of the terrain. Whereas the other drawings themselves are representations, indexical representations of specific trees and their bark. They reimagine the sensuous textures that animate my memories of place.





The rubbing of the Willow was transferred directly onto a lithographic limestone, and was printed in a spectral range of colours using ink. I didn't alter the image, any alteration that occurred was in the process of it becoming a lithograph print, there's an element of intuition. Fingerprints can be distinguished along the right edge of the image. This is from touching the litho stone as the paper and transfer was being placed on the surface of the stone. It was important for me to have the finger prints remain, to show the process, contact, and reciprocal trace between body and tree.



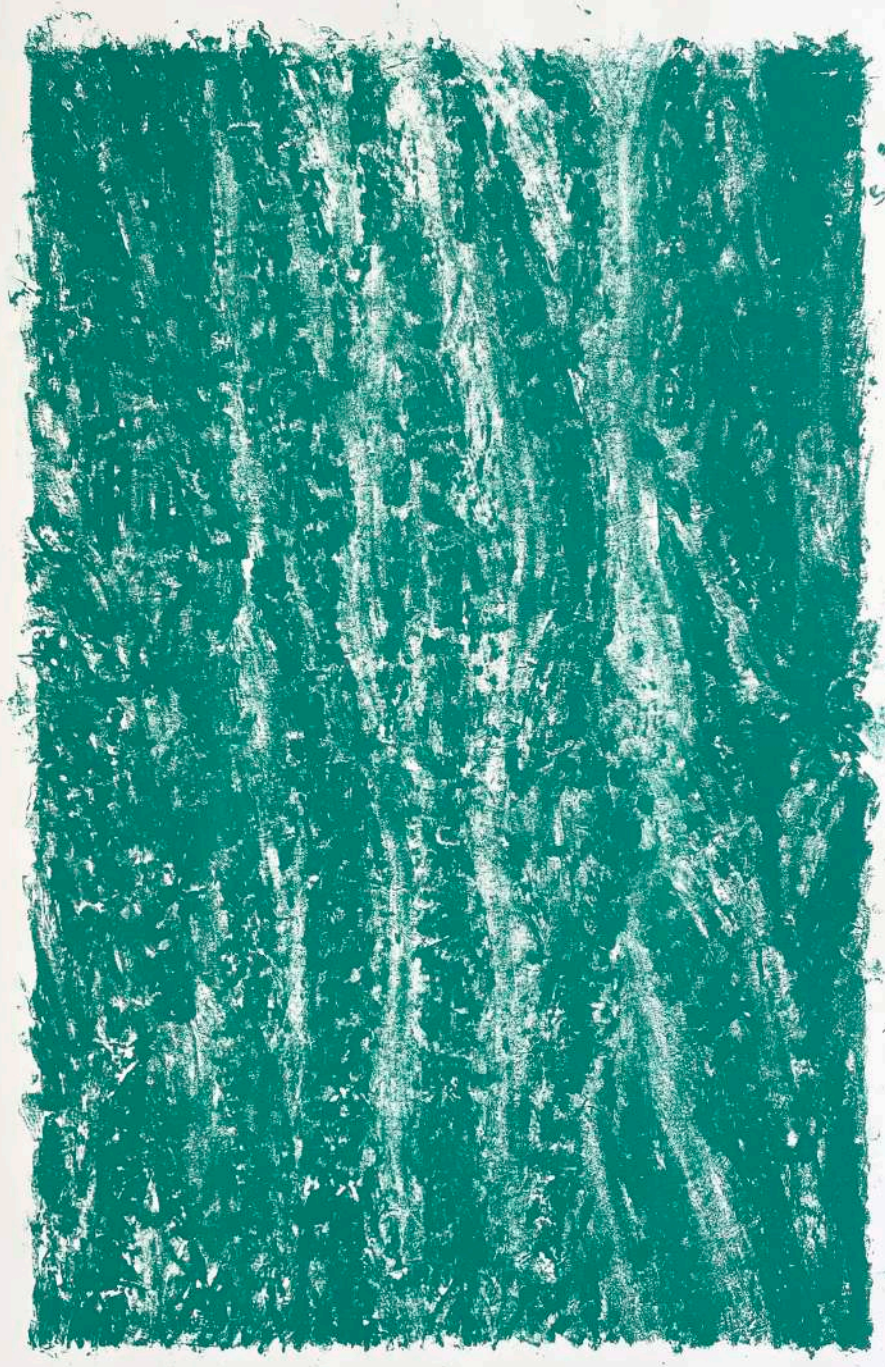
















The drawings started with glassine paper, it's a material used by archivists to store works but I kind of fell in love with it, the physical quality of it, and the idea of how it's used primarily to protect. There is both a vulnerability to it but it's also so strong. I began using it for that purpose and because of this idea and material quality. The 'process' is like printmaking, I draw directly on glassine paper and transfer the image with wooden spoon and hand pressure onto a secondary sheet of rag paper. The pigment of the colour pencil collects on the smooth surface of the glassine and through the direct contact between the two surfaces the image is transferred.



I used specific polychromos colours that make up the spectrum, I wanted to use colour purely and playfully as a way to think about spectral light as that that both nourishes and animates my relationship with the more than human, but also as a metaphor for a sort of desire toward reciprocity. Using colour in this way allowed for me to enter into a sensuous dialogue with my experience of the specific tree I was representing and my personal experience of that memory and place.













It's about finding a process of what memories I have with these [tree] beings and the sensations of place. It's about the specific places that I've lived in, having some sort of understanding with and the landscape itself, remembering the lived environment and my experience in it. What were the colours? How did it 'feel?' Was I thinking of smell or was it the sound?

When I was working on the drawing Black Maple (ultramarine), I was thinking about the trees across from my parents home, they line the edge of the farm field and the road where I grew up. There was a swing on this tree when I was a child, and so I was thinking of the blue sky.









I have always been fascinated by process, the idea of things changing, and the transience of things. And so the glassine transfers are special on their own but they are not the finished drawing itself. When I am working on the initial stage of the drawing, there's a meditative aspect to it, there's a sense of control, a lot of control, in terms of how I can manipulate the surface, how I can move, how I can build up the pigment and colour, but it took time to figure this out, what the process was and going to become.











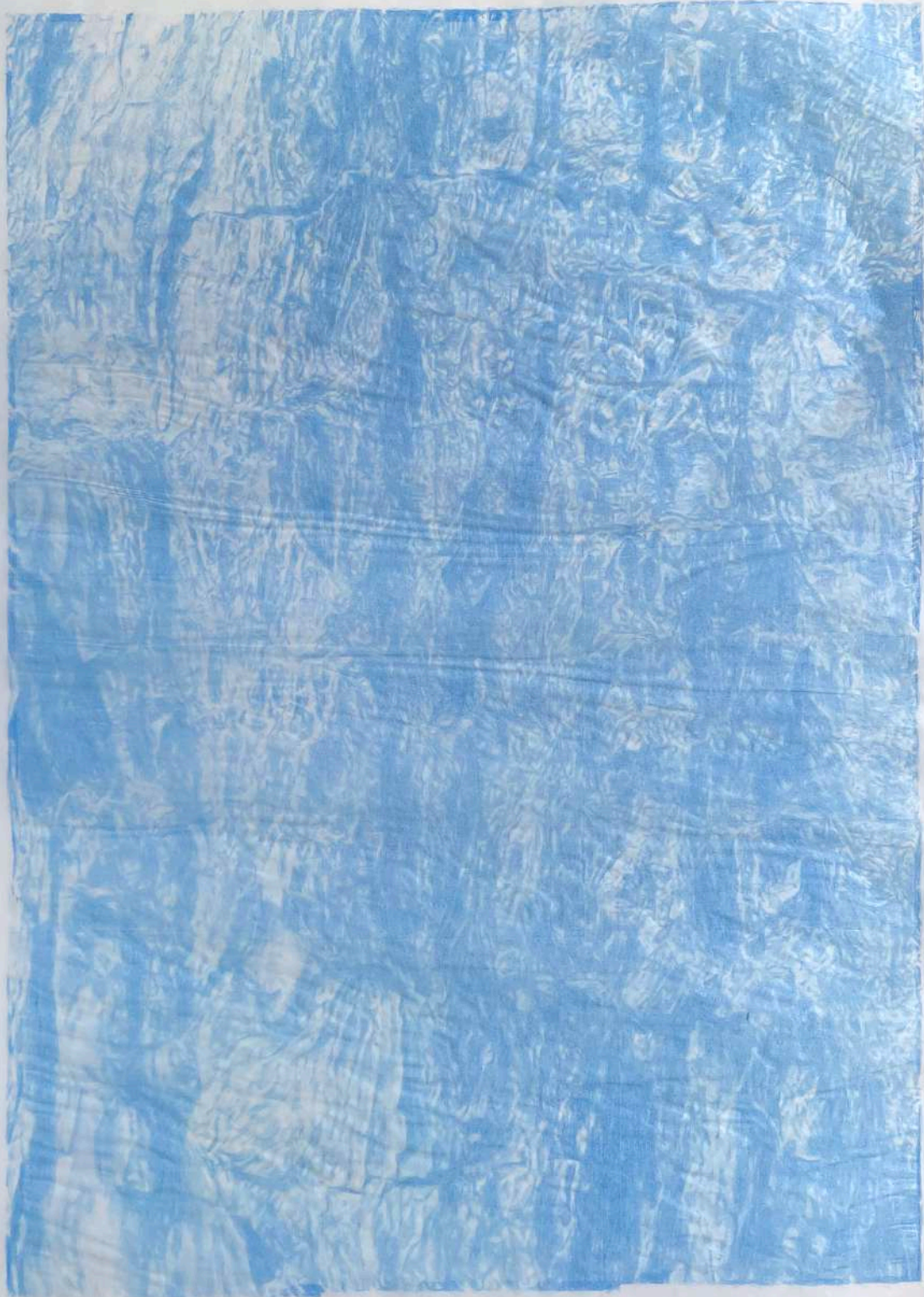






The drawing, and the process of drawing on the glassine paper, it depends on how I'm feeling and what's going on, but it can take anywhere from two-to-eight weeks to complete. This depends on the image I might be looking at and working from and when I feel okay about it. You learn the process over time, and part of it is knowing how much pigment to use and that varies, every colour has a different chemistry to it. Each drawing used two crayons to have enough pigment, but the transfer itself takes one or two days.





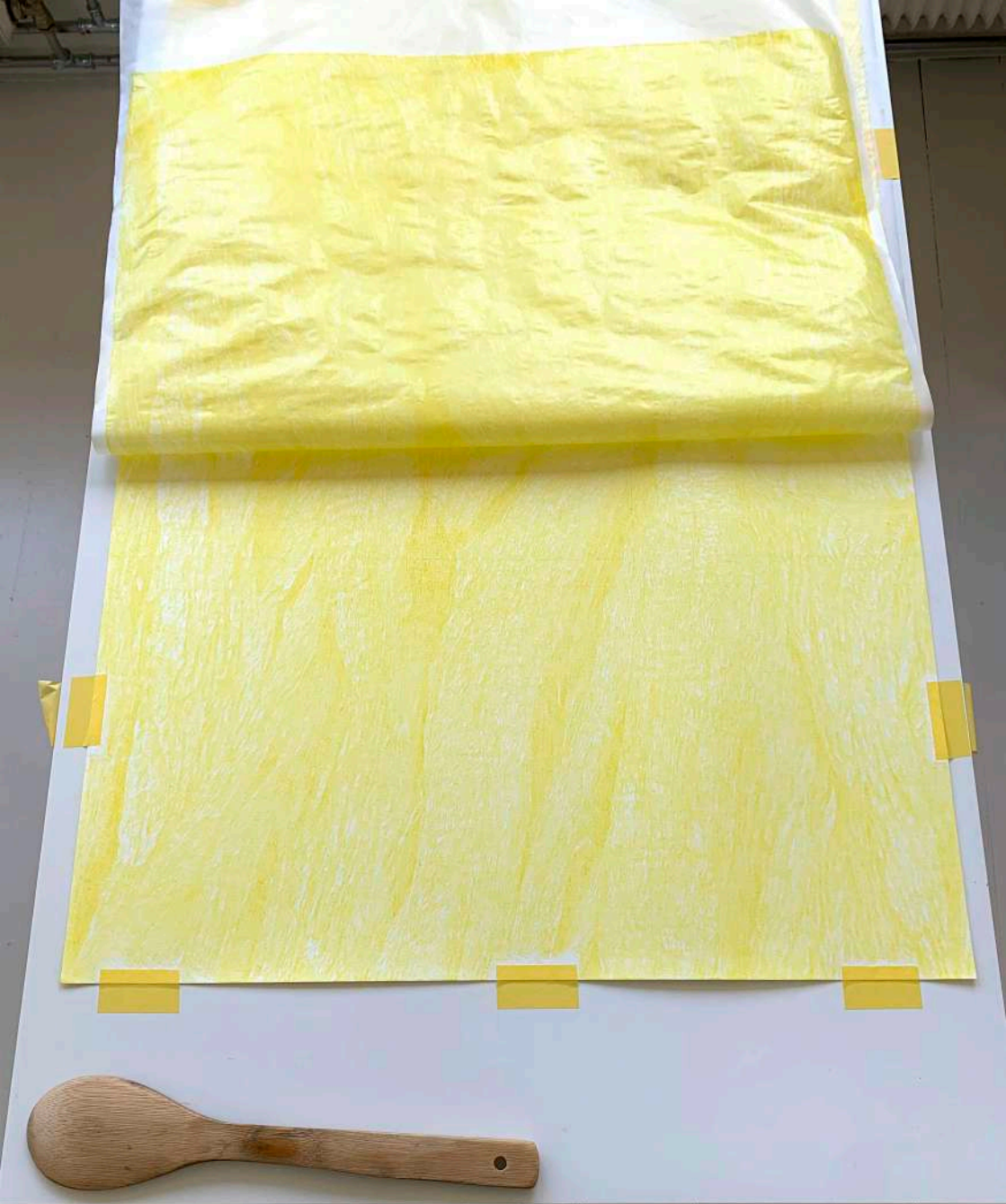








I think of the transfer process almost like breathing, a sort of internal tension or a breathing in as the drawing is becoming, receiving a sense of things. When the image is ready to transfer what is so wonderful is the improvisation of letting go, just the philosophy of it I really love. I only have so much control in how the image will transfer, where it might go and what it will become, it feels like the exhalation of breath.



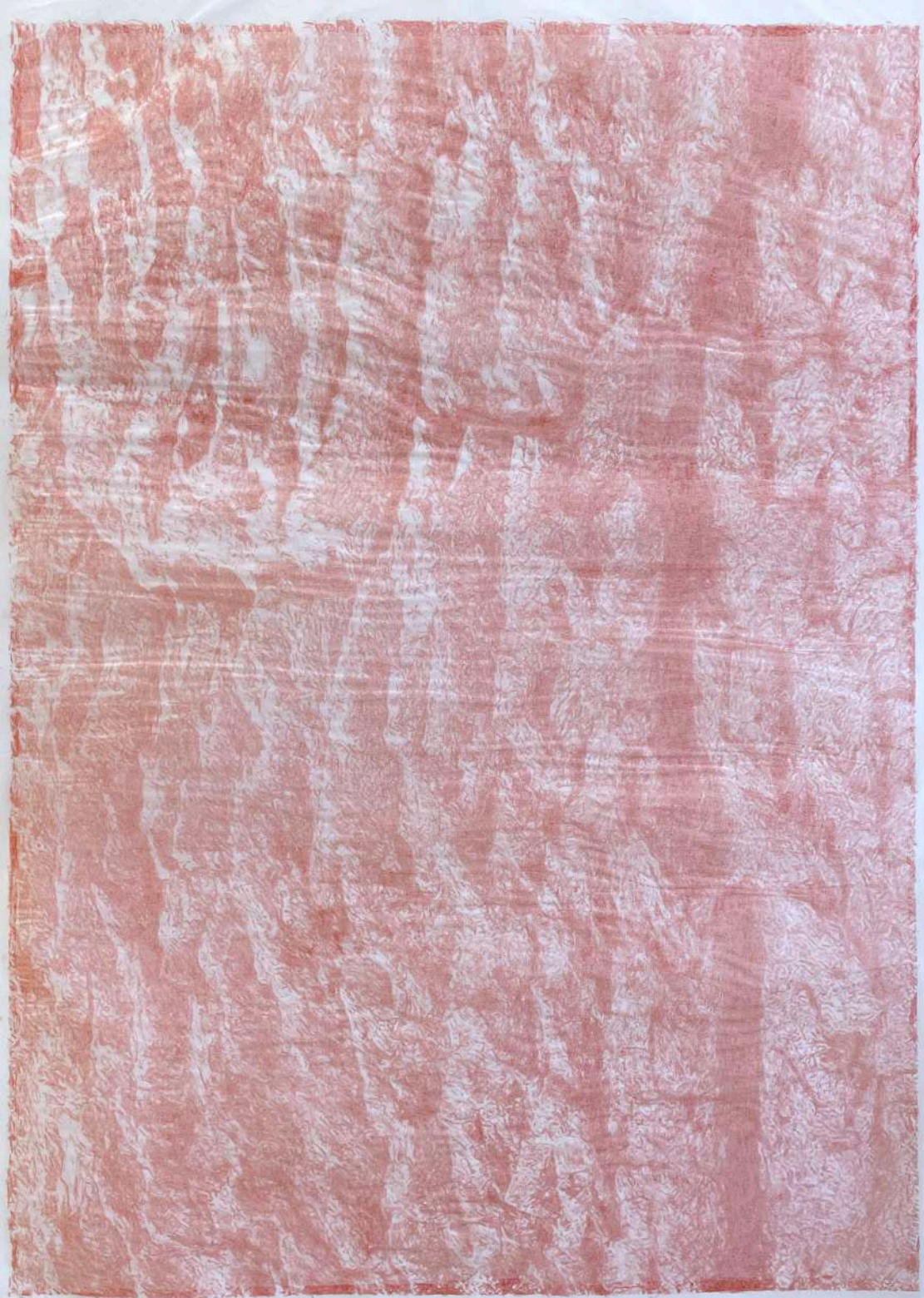
There's a physicality and bodily aspect to making the drawings, and I think that's part of the idea of the work, that it is not simply just representing trees. I mean they are abstractions, they're of the bark, they're of the skin, they're of the surface, they're very tactile, but it's about the idea of finding a relationship with that more than human, a sense of animism, and for me going through the process in this way gets me to this space a bit more than just rendering the image itself.















It's been very enjoyable to just focus on drawing, I think for me, everything goes back to drawing, it all goes back to mark-making. But these drawings are also very much aligned with printmaking too, primarily the transfer process, and previous works that I've done. The element of touch is really important, in the sense of being able to feel the material that I'm working with. If we're talking about a connectivity with previous works, it's the idea of material and process, being able to work through something, a sort of evolvment to become something else.





Growing up in Canada the seasons have always been important, that idea of the cyclical, the cycle of knowing the seasons, and the recurring cycle of 'being' at the cottage. The cottage is seasonal, it is fairly remote, you take a boat to get there, there's no electricity, there's no building code, there's [still] no reception, and it's a kind of spiritual place, not in a sense of religious spiritual but a sense of being in that place, of that place, and resigning yourself to that space. It's in my psyche, these structures that my family built, the buildings themselves, within that landscape, in that forest on the lake, and using wood from that terrain. And so I think the idea of place and the more than human, the trees and the animals, the water and the air, and the warmth of that environment, it's this relationship that is really important to how I think about my work, and thinking about it maybe not literally in the representation of these drawings, but literal in how I wanted to explore it in this body of work.



List of Images

- p.5. Douglas Fir, 2020
- p.7. Douglas Fir in Spectral Light, 2020
- p.8-9. Black Willow (spectral colours), 558 x 762mm, stone lithographs, 2022
- p.11. Black Willow, 2022
- p.12. Black Willow (tusche black), 558 x 762mm, frottage in lithograph stick on washi paper, 2022
- p.14-22. Black Willow prints, 2022
- p.27. Giant Sequoia (dark cadmium orange), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2022
- p.29. Glassine Transfer, Giant Sequoia, 2022
- p.31. Glassine Transfer, Black Maple, 2022
- p.33. Black Maple (ultramarine), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2023
- p.36. Glassine Transfer, Yucca Palm, 2022
- p.39. Yucca Palm (magenta), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2022
- p.41. Mountain Ash (pale geranium lake), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2022
- p.43. Glassine Transfer, Mountain Ash, 2022
- p.48. Glassine Transfer, Torrey Pine, 2022
- p.49. Torrey Pine (phthalo blue), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2021
- p.51. Glassine Transfer, White Cedar, 2022

- p.52. White Cedar (cadmium yellow), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2023
- p.58. Glassine Transfer, White Pine, 2022
- p.59. White Pine (dark indigo), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2023
- p.60. White Ash (pompeian red), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2021
- p.61. Glassine Transfer, White Ash, 2022
- p.65. Glassine Transfer, Douglas Fir, 2022
- p.66. Douglas Fir (dark phthalo green), 558 x 762mm, transfer drawing on rag paper, 2021
- p.72. Douglas Fir bark, 2020

About the Artist

I am an interdisciplinary visual artist with a foundation in traditional and expanded drawing practices, printmaking, digital media, and sculpture-installation. My interest is in the history of artifacts, images, and plants, and my work explores metaphoric representations of the body and its physical and temporal relationship to the built and natural environment. These fascinations have led me to create artworks that investigate ideas of nature, displacement, and self-reflection, and increasingly relevant are concepts of material as memory and notions of ecological kinship. My most recent work, *Trees That Follow Me*, is a series of drawings that explore ecology, abstraction, and memory.

I received an MFA at Washington University STL and a BA at the University of Guelph. I have since taught as a visual arts professor and writing instructor in global world history within college and university programs in Canada and the United States, including U of Guelph, UC San Diego, and U of Fraser Valley. My work has been exhibited in public and private spaces in North America and most recently Europe. I currently live in Maastricht, Netherlands.

