

Andie Thrams Artist's Statement

Painting, walking, drawing, meditating, and observing nature are inseparable aspects of my art practice. I trek into wildland forests on foot or by kayak for hours, days, or preferably, weeks at a time. During my wilderness sojourns, I work with watercolor, gouache, and ink on rolled or folded sheets of paper, lightweight materials that fit into my pack or kayak. I sit on the ground, under a tarp if needed, and work in response to particular moments, habitats, plants, birds, and animals. I often invite unpredictable forces to entwine with my own energies by painting with local river, lake, or sea water; allowing found bark, leaves, soil, lichen, sap, and fungi to stain or mark my paper; letting rain fall upon my work; drawing with burnt forest charcoal; and painting with twigs dipped in ink.

When I sit quietly in wild places, studying each leaf and color, every brushstroke weaves me more intimately into my surroundings. Separateness fades, and my sense of wonder and reverence for lifeforms that continue to thrive on our small planet deepens. Biophilia* lies at the heart of what I do.

The art I am moved by merges a sense of mystery and inquiry with natural history imagery, and includes medieval herbals, icons and illuminated manuscripts; early Northern Song dynasty landscapes and Japanese ukiyo-e prints; graphic novels and comics; natural history field journals; Disney animation of the 1940's; and contemporary artists Brice Marden, Joan Nelson, Judy Pfaff, and Kiki Smith.

My paintings and artist's books chronicle outdoor experiences and are prayers for wildness. I teach to share the paradoxical experiences of biophilia and solastalgia** so critical to our era. I believe that the simple practices of slowing down and paying attention can transform how we care for our planet's ecosystems and each other.

* Defined by Edward O. Wilson in *Biophilia* (1984) to mean "the rich, natural pleasure that comes from being surrounded by living organisms."

** Solastalgia is a word coined by Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht, to describe the unique emotional pain produced by environmental degradation impacting people in their home habitats.

Why Forests?

Since childhood, I have loved to nestle in beneath trees, gaze at plants, watch birds, draw, and paint. I remain enchanted by the shimmer of light and deep shadows of forests, the intricate patterned chaos of wild plant communities, and the watery ways of ink and paint on paper. I want to reveal what I can of the complex beauty found in remote regions, where life still thrives on its own terms, untamed. Plants hold our earth in place, they connect to each other both above and below ground in intricate cooperative systems that scientists are only beginning to understand. Trees stabilize soil, create oxygen, metabolize carbon dioxide, store carbon, make shade, shelter wildlife, grow our building materials, and most of them live far longer than we do. I experience plants, especially trees, as mysterious beautiful protectors. I am endlessly delighted by their grandeur, shapes, colors, details, repeating patterns, the way they entwine with one another and other forest creatures, and how they thrive best when allowed to grow in their own diverse communities of varied species and ages. All over the planet, forests are disappearing due to human impact. When I return to places I've known over the years, too often I see habitats that are stressed, dying, or have altogether disappeared. This loss is personally wrenching (solastalgia), culturally tragic, and ecologically frightening. I believe in making artwork to chronicle our wild places and in sharing these ways with others through teaching. These are small acts, my own devotional practices, and a way to bear witness to our wildness that remains.