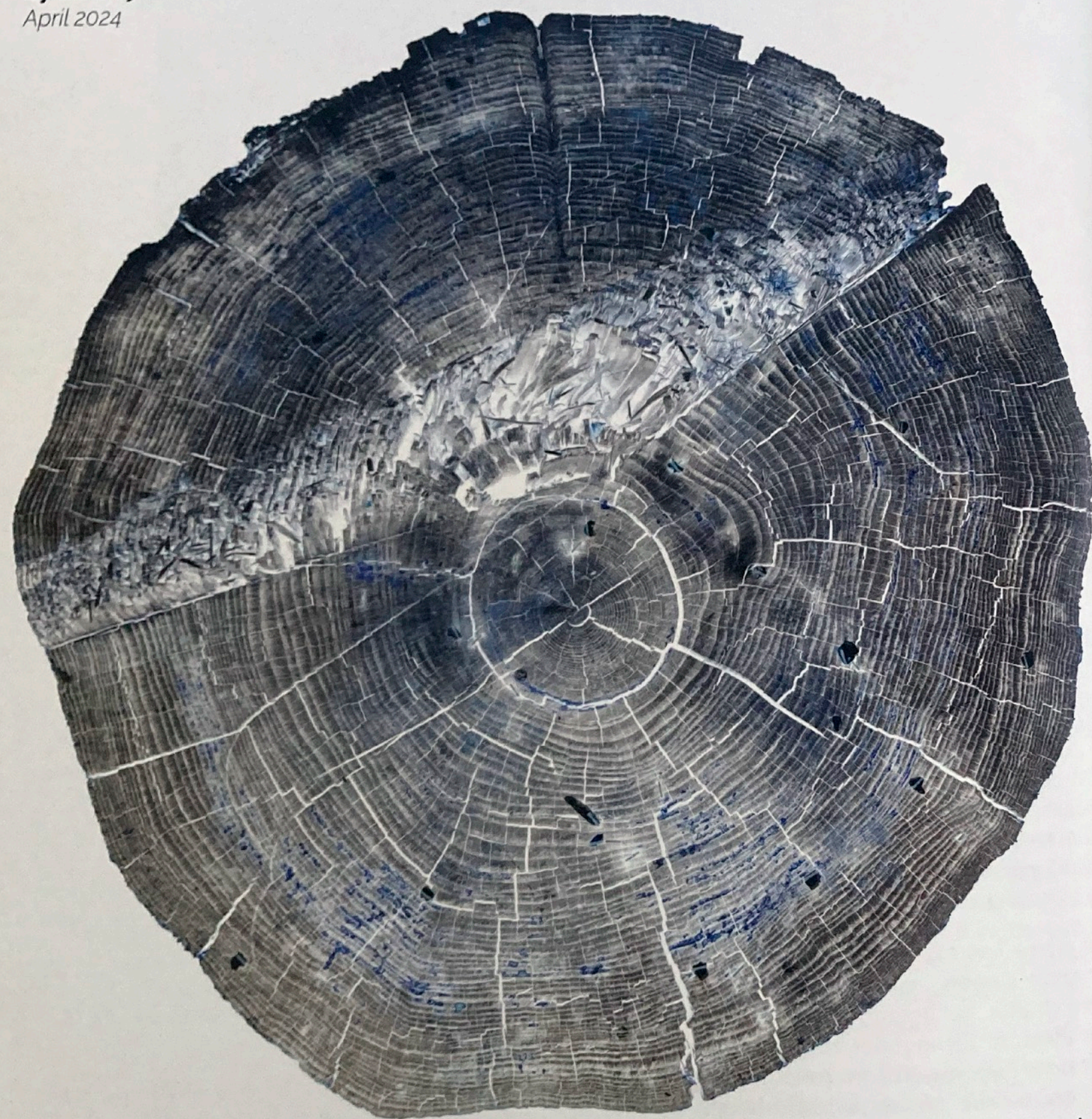


Making the Invisible Visible

By Bia Gayotto
April 2024



Memoirs (written by trees) #1
October 2020
Archival pigment print,
various sizes

B iologists increasingly argue that trees speak—and have long been trying to reach us—but that we humans need to learn to hear their language. Since I moved from Los Angeles to a redwood forest on The Sea Ranch in 2020, I've been compelled to make artworks that make the invisible seen. Shifting from an urban to a rural scene had a great impact in my practice, leading me to focus on trees and to explore concepts of art and ecology. Over time, and with fires in this region, my relationship with the landscape changed, making me re-envision the purpose of my artwork in the face of global warming.

Since then I've extensively researched about tree life, experimenting with new mediums and techniques in an effort to connect with trees and translate their language. The sequence of works here represents my creative process and inspirations over a four-year period. Collectively these projects illustrate questions of time, life cycles and decay, resilience and renewal, connectedness and community—all that I learned from trees!

"Memoirs" is a series of color photographs of tree stumps that I found near my house, in The Sea Ranch's redwood forest. Their concentric geometric shapes remind me of mandalas, which represent the universe in Buddhist symbolism. In post-production I eliminate the background of the

images to emphasize the circles, and use a photographic process that, like an X-ray, reveals details not seen by the naked eye. The lines, stains and scars that become visible are like a historical account, a memoir written by trees. The blue-purplish colors appear through color inversions, evoking the tree's ability to store tons of gallons of water and fire-resistant tannins in its trunk. These remarkable features enabled redwoods to survive drought and fire over many centuries. Through a relationship between parts and whole, the stump and the tree, "Memoirs" raises questions about life and decay, resilience and renewal, deforestation and global warming. The unique mandala-shaped stumps serve as portals for us to connect inner and outer worlds, the earth and the universe.

This series of drawings was made on thin paper using the technique of rubbings, by applying charcoal that I found on local burned tree trunks. The rubbings were made off an 800-year-old ancient redwood tree that was left by loggers because it was damaged. Its odd features allowed it to survive, and today it remains one of the oldest redwoods on The Sea Ranch. The composition results from interpretive tracing, which I generated by taking impressions of several areas of the tree. The title "Friction Ridge" is inspired by a scientific term used for the micro folds and valleys that develop on the palms and soles of human skin. Similarly, the friction of my fingers on the paper

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Uprooted #1
 October 2023, Archival pigment print, 24 x 34
 (Original photograph below)

creates abstract patterns, lines, circles and textures that make the tree's energy visible. "Friction Ridge" expresses a feeling for the fragility of California's forests, made clear through wildfires and climate change.

After two decades of drought, California experienced bomb cyclones and atmospheric rivers in early 2023. "Uprooted" (2023) is a series of color photographs made on The Sea Ranch, paying homage to over 500 fallen trees. Inspired by Goethe's theory that lightness and darkness create the colors and render the world recognizable, I've been exploring ways to make visible something that is not seen on the original photograph. I use the negative image as a conceptual strategy to unveil the below-the-surface world that is invisible to the naked eye. The composition is made on the spot and the photograph is

neither cropped or altered. The different shades of blue emerge from light and shadows cast on the trees' upended roots. "Uprooted" evokes an entropic state of being pulled from the ground, suggesting connections between macro and micro, above and below, darkness and light. The massive plant's root foundation, when exposed, reveals a glimpse into the psychic life of an otherwise unseen world, beckoning the viewer to reimagine the reality of climate change and the many events that shape our movements, and the changes in our own lives.



Friction Ridge, 2022
 Found charcoal on paper
 Pigment print on cold press, 44 x 55

I am a contemporary multimedia artist and curator based on The Sea Ranch, California. My interdisciplinary practice includes photography, video installations, and books, and combines elements of documentation, fieldwork, performance and collaboration. Over the years I've been developing "place-based" projects to examine ideas of connectivity through the relationships among people and their environment. My interest lies in producing artworks that raise environmental awareness, providing new perspectives on our relationship with the natural world.

In 1996 I earned an MFA at the University of California, Los Angeles, and my work has been featured in numerous exhibitions nationally and internationally, including Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Orange County Museum of Art; LA Freewaves; Gendai Gallery, Toronto; Asian Pacific American Institute, New York; The Breeder Project, Athens; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, São Paulo. I was the recipient of several awards including the City of Los Angeles (C.O.L.A) Fellowship, the Center for Cultural Innovation's Investing in Artists grant, Artists' Resource for

Completion grants, and Individual Artist grants from the City of Pasadena Cultural Affairs Division.

Influenced by site-specific practices and their intersections with community-engaged art, my "place-based" projects result from artistic residencies worldwide including the Banff Centre, Canada; "Threewalls" in Chicago, Illinois; the Lucas Fellowship at Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga, California; AIR Taipei, Taiwan, and the Sacatar Fellowship, Brazil. To further my artistic research I've curated exhibitions, including "Between Two Worlds" at the Fine Arts Gallery, Cal State University, Los Angeles; "PlaceBound" at Nan Rae Gallery, Woodbury University; "Somewhere in Between" at Kellogg Gallery, Cal Poly Pomona, "Latitude 33'56" at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), and "Bahia Reverb: Artists and Place" at Art+Practice in partnership with the California African American Museum (CAAM). ■