



Explorations in the Ecotone

Works by Meredith Davenport and Margaret LeJeune

September 4 – December 19, 2026

Visual Studies Workshop Rochester, NY



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and
Margaret
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VISUAL STUDIES
**WORK
SHOP**

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ENTANGLEMENTS

Friday, Sept. 4, 6 – 9pm
Exhibition Opening Reception

Saturday, Sept. 5, 2 – 4pm
The Botanical Lens: from contact
print to contemporary environmental
investigations - researching the
in-between. Presented by Liz Wells

Saturday, Sept. 12, 12:30 – 4:30pm
Field Study: Foraging for Photo
Botanicals Along the Genesee River

Sunday, Sept. 13, 12:30 – 4:30pm
Workshop: Making Anthotypes with
Foraged Botanicals

This workshop is funded in part by the Puffin Foundation.



Saturday, Sept. 26, 2 – 4pm
Conversation in the Gallery with
Margaret LeJeune and Meredith
Davenport, and Dr. Solon Morse

Thursday, Oct. 29, 6– 8pm
Birding with a Camera while Female:
A Researcher’s Dilemma. Presented by
Karla McManus, PhD

Saturday, Nov. 14, 2 – 4pm
Deep Listening Session with
Margaret LeJeune

Thursday, Nov. 19, 7:30 – 9:00pm
Film Screening – SLUDGE au naturel
– 16mm films from the VSW Film
Collection

Friday, Dec. 18, 6 – 9pm
Exhibition Closing Party

Explorations in the Ecotone brings together the work of Meredith Davenport and Margaret LeJeune to explore the shifting boundaries between human and more-than-human worlds. Taking the ecotone—a transitional space where distinct ecosystems meet and intermingle—as both subject and metaphor, the exhibition examines warming and rising oceans, extraction technologies, and the ecological histories embedded within place. Through attentive acts of seeing, sensing, and listening, these works reveal the interconnectedness of environmental change, material processes, and social histories while inviting reflection on our relationships with the living world. Together, the exhibition and its public programs encourage communities to imagine more reciprocal futures grounded in ecological care, wonder, and responsibility.



Cape Cod, 2025

Meredith Davenport is an artist and educator who uses photography as a way to witness and tell stories about the world around her. Her work explores the intersection between the language of imagery and internal psychological narratives. Davenport is the recipient of a Pew Fellowship and a Puffin Foundation grant.

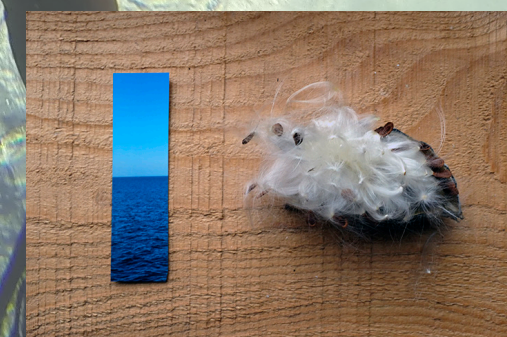
<https://www.meredithdavenport.com/>



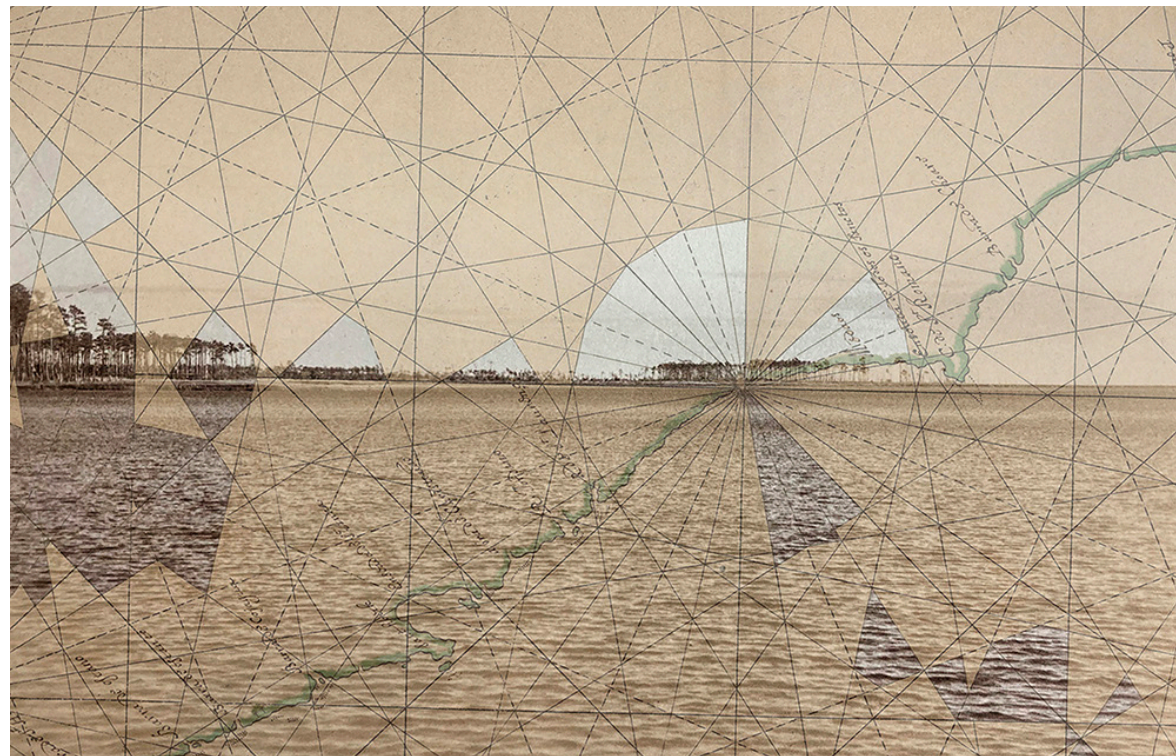
Photo by Travis Linville

Margaret LeJeune's creative practice explores the relationship between art, science, and environmental studies. As a lens-based creator, she produces works that probe shifting landscapes, symbiotic relationships, and the nature of the photographic medium. In 2023, she was named the Woman Science Photographer of the Year by the Royal Photographic Society.

<https://www.margaretlejeune.com/>

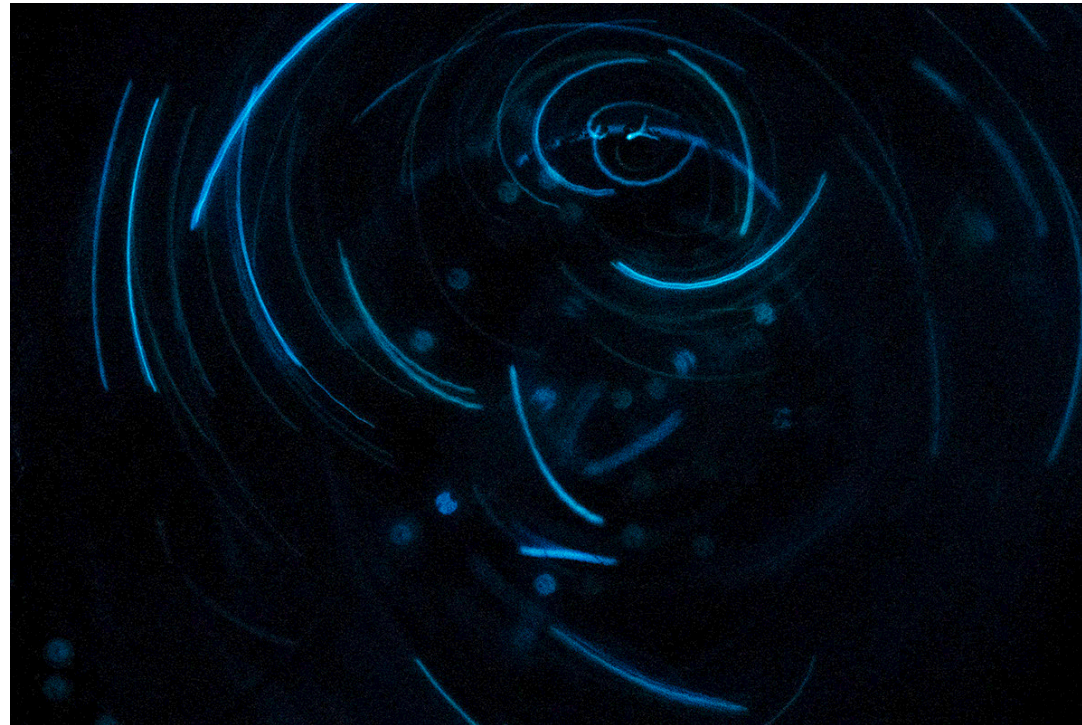


Thirteen Hours to Fall examines the climate crisis through an investigation of contemporary and future ghost forests along the mid-Atlantic coast. Ghost forests, large expanses of dead and dying trees caused by saltwater intrusion, are visible markers of rising sea levels and long-term environmental change. This project traces how the region has been transformed over the past 400 years by colonial capitalism, extractive timber industries, plantation agriculture, and ongoing climate-related issues. Informed by environmental history and intersectional analysis, the work considers the marginalization of Indigenous peoples, the appropriations of their lands, and the enduring imprint of slavery and white supremacy in the region. Together, these interconnected forces have driven widespread tree loss, diminished carbon storage and biodiversity, and produced deep social and ecological consequences for local communities. This project invites viewers to consider our multilayered and complicated relationship to the land.



Map Lines (2022), Salted paper print

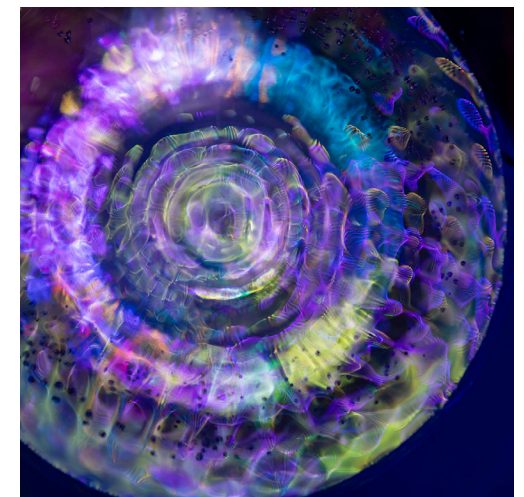
Improvisation No. 12, Digital Video Still



In the series **Growing Light**, I draw from both biological sciences and humanities to explore the photographic qualities of bioluminescent organisms. These cross-species collaborations reflect my curiosity and wonder of the natural world. By harnessing the fleeting light of dinoflagellates, bacteria, and other glowing bioluminescent species, I ask the viewer to consider our connections to these tiny creatures and the importance of working toward a non-human-centered world. I see wonder as a survival skill for the Anthropocene, an imperative to help us find hope and innovation amid the climate crisis. This work provokes discussions about the technical possibilities of bioluminescent organisms as photographic mediums as well as larger dialogues about climate change, stewardship, and the interconnectedness of life on our planet.

“When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.” - John Muir

Sonorous Seas is an interdisciplinary art and research project that invites audiences to engage deeply with the communication of whales as a way of reimagining our relationship with the more-than-human world. Drawing from bioacoustics, emerging AI research, and my personal encounters with whales at sea, the project creates space for collective listening, reflection, and wonder. Through immersive soundscapes paired with cymatic visualizations of whale song, Sonorous Seas invites participants to consider how acts of deep listening might expand our capacity for kinship, reciprocity, and more attentive relationships with the natural world.



Sonorous Seas (2026), Digital Video still

Updraft (2024), Archival ink jet print



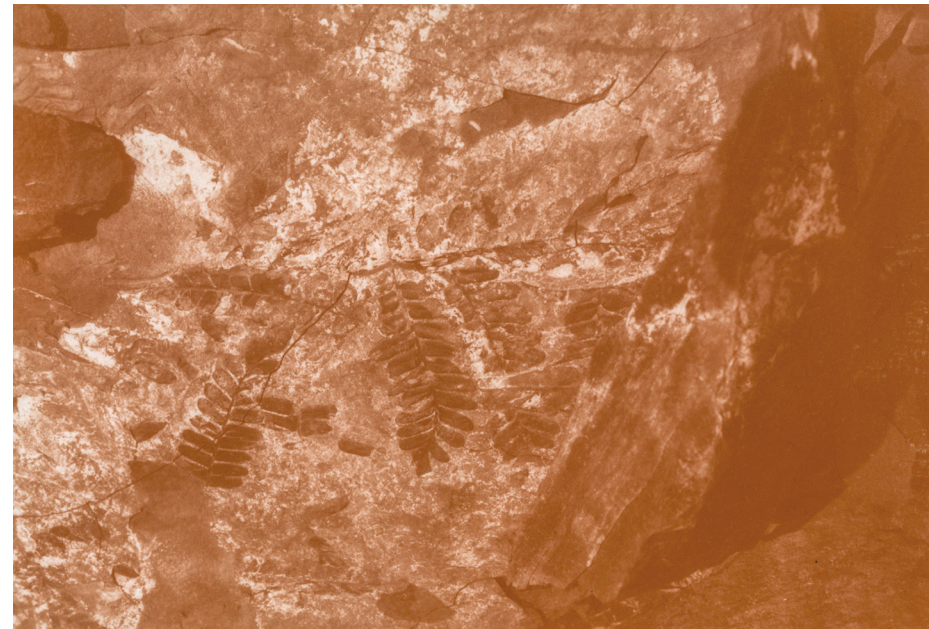
The barrier has not been breached by the fire (2022), Carbon print

Sym-poiesis

The act of “making with,” highlighting the necessity of collaborative creation and interdependence in a damaged world.

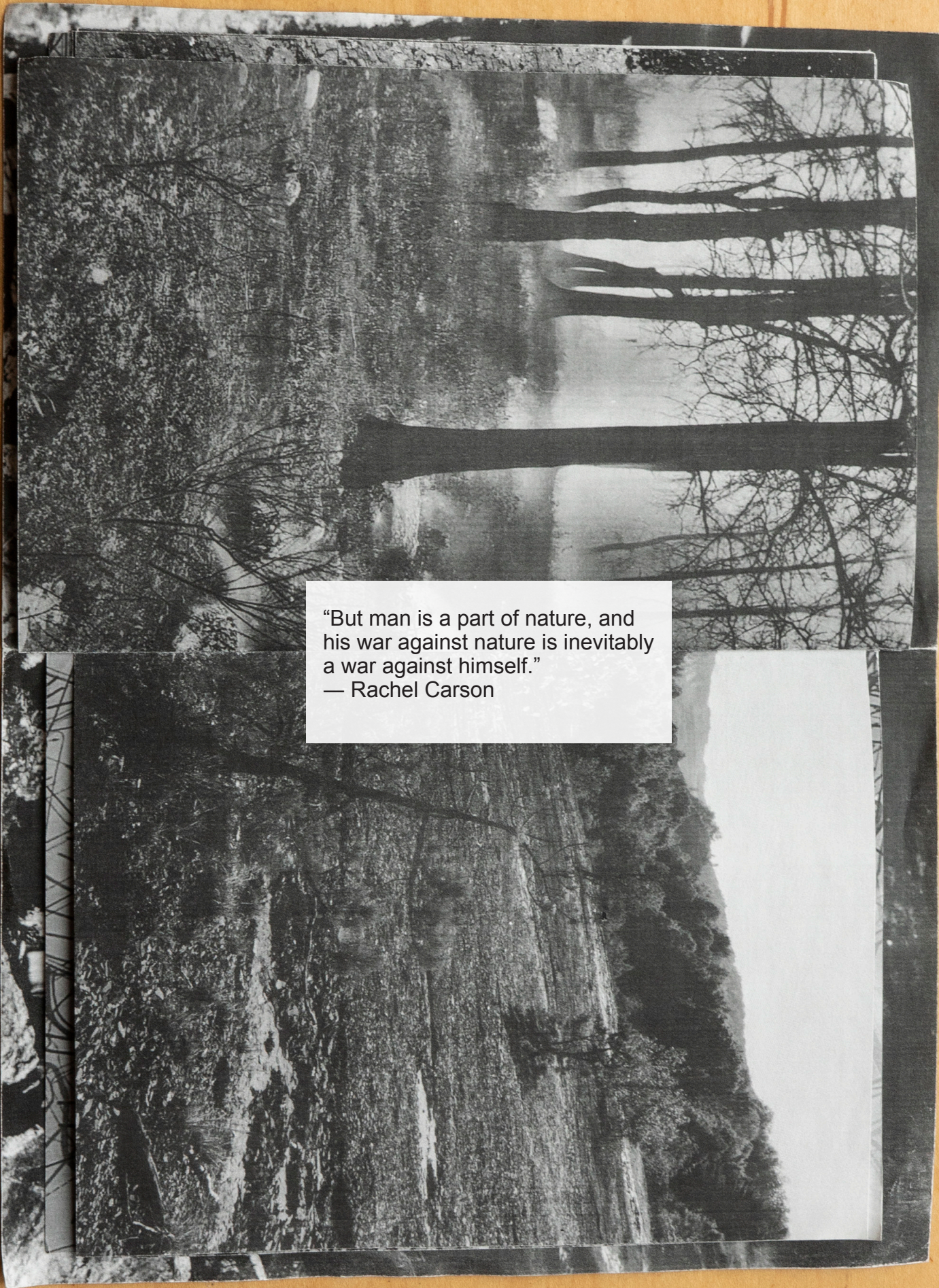
From *Staying with the Trouble* by Donna Haraway

Untitled (2025), Photograph



For the past three years I have been using photography to explore the sites of extraction of anthracite coal in Pennsylvania. The work explores the interdependent and entangled relationships between humans, non-humans, and time in the landscapes of coal extraction. The large-format analog photographs in this work are exposed multiple times over several seasons. The layered landscapes are a collaboration with chance, time and place that I do not try to control. I do not keep track of the images that have been partially exposed, so the making of the work is both playful and unpredictable. This process is meant to subvert the traditional, historic role of the large-format film cameras that were used as a tool to create formal, idealized depictions of industrial exploitation beginning with the US Geological Survey. I use repurposed x-ray film that is developed in eco-friendly darkroom chemistry. Some of the prints are made with handmade emulsions of carbon and acid mine drainage pigments recovered from local rivers and images of regional fossils exposed during the mining process.

“If we appreciate the foolishness of human exceptionalism then we know that becoming is always becoming with, in a contact zone where the outcome, where who is in the world, is at stake.” - Donna Haraway



"But man is a part of nature, and
his war against nature is inevitably
a war against himself."
— Rachel Carson

ECOTONE
where two
different
ecosystems
meet and
integrate

Conversation Between Meredith Davenport and Margaret LeJeune

Recorded July 14, 2026

Meredith: How would you define “ecotone” and how did that word come to be part of our show title?

Margaret: An ecotone is a transitional space where two distinct ecological regions meet, overlap, and interact—a place where species and systems from both environments can coexist.

When we began thinking about this exhibition, I immediately returned to the writing of Astrida Neimanis. I first encountered her essay on hydrofeminism while participating in the 2018 Global Nomadic Art Project. This intensive residency in England brought together 16 artists, from eight countries, focused on ecological art, water systems, and leaving-no-trace practices. I was struck by Neimanis’ powerful assertion that “we are all bodies of water.” That idea has stayed with me because it speaks to the deep interconnectedness between humans, other species, and the environments we inhabit.

As we began discussing a collaborative exhibition, I started thinking about the shared ideas that connect our practices. Water became a central point of intersection. In her writing on hydrofeminism, Neimanis, in talking about our bodies but also all water systems, asks “Where do they start, where do they stop? In a sense, we are always in the middle, navigating.” This idea of being perpetually in-between feels central to both of our practices. We are each navigating water—literally and

metaphorically—as a way of understanding ecological change and the health of the environments we study. The landscapes we work within are not fixed; they are constantly shifting and responding to larger forces. Thinking about ecotones as spaces of transition and connection felt like a natural framework for bringing our work together.

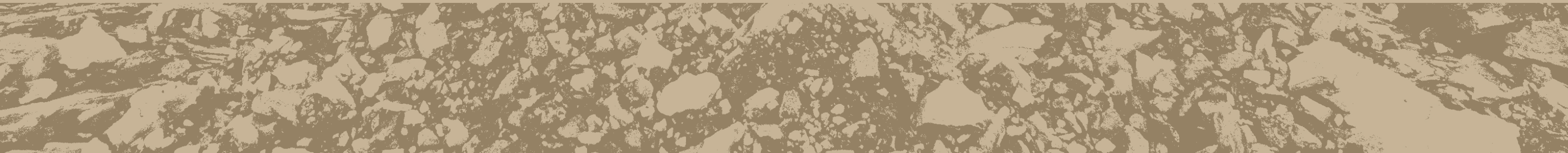
Meredith: I wonder if we should start by talking about our work.

Margaret: That sounds good.

Meredith: I’m particularly interested in the way photography records sites of industrial extraction and how it’s been used to create a way of thinking about these spaces as being conquered or organized or fixed in a certain way. For example, these very old systems like the US Geological Survey and traditional landscape photography such as that of Ansel Adams, which use large-format cameras to create beautiful images and organize the space in a way that feels subjugated to the human gaze. I’m interested in that. I use those tools, but I completely disrupt that by making double exposures that are uncontrolled, unplanned and completely random over different seasons of time.

I somehow feel like these double exposures have become a sort of dance with a place that is synchronistic and random but not. And that’s been fun in a painfully weird way. The results are always delightfully surprising.

Margaret: I am currently working on three bodies of photographic work that share intersecting themes. One of these projects, titled Thirteen Hours to Fall, examines the expansion of ghost forests along the mid-Atlantic coast, with a particular focus on Dare County. This region is especially significant because it is also the site where Virginia Dare, the first English child was born in America (in 1587), adding layers of colonial history to the ecological transformations I am investigating.





Meredith: Can you tell me what a ghost forest is?

Margaret: A ghost forest is a coastal landscape where rising ocean waters intrude into a forest ecosystem, altering the ecology of the place so dramatically that trees begin to die and are replaced by more salt-tolerant species. This is both a natural and an accelerated human-driven phenomenon. What makes ghost forests so concerning in the region I have been investigating is the speed at which this transformation is occurring. Since 1985, more than 50,000 acres of forest have been lost to ghost forest conversion.

Rising seawater is only part of the story. Another significant driver of this transformation is the legacy of colonial timber extraction in the region. Large logging companies have clear-cut portions of this landscape and constructed an extensive network of canals to transport timber to ships and railways. These alterations to the land also created pathways for saltwater intrusion, allowing rising seas to penetrate farther into the coastal environment.

Like you, I have been using USGS data and hydrological maps to understand how this landscape has shifted over time, while also considering questions of land ownership and stewardship. My research has taken me to the Outer Banks History Center, where I have been working with archivists to investigate the histories of the Native American communities who were once stewards of this land, as well as the maroon communities who found refuge in these swampy landscapes while escaping slavery. It is these layers of ecological and cultural history—the overlapping stories embedded within a place—that most interest me.

This project is deeply connected to the sea and to the transformations caused by rising waters. My other two projects are also connected to marine environments. One, titled Growing Light, is a project I have been developing for approximately ten years. In this work, I investigate bioluminescent organisms as indicator species. Bioluminescent organisms such as dinoflagellates, often called sea sparkle, can reveal important information about ocean health. I have been collaborating with these organisms to create images that explore the relationship between ecological processes and photographic practice.

My third project, Sonorous Seas, explores animal communication. In this work, I investigate whales and consider how emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, are transforming our ability to interpret whale songs. Because AI can identify patterns at a scale and speed far beyond human analysis, we are beginning to develop a deeper understanding of whale communication and gaining new possibilities for interpreting what these sounds might mean.

The possibility that we may soon achieve some form of bidirectional communication with whales is both fascinating and unsettling. It raises profound ethical questions: Who will initiate the conversation? What questions will we ask? What might whales share with us? And how will that knowledge be used? I am interested not only in the possibility of communicating with another species, but also in examining the motivations behind that desire. What does it mean to seek a relationship with another species, and how can we ensure that relationship is based on respect rather than extraction?

“Even while in constant motion, water is also a planetary archive of meaning and matter.



Meredith: If you could talk to a whale, what question would you want to ask it?

Margaret: I want to understand whale culture: What do whales know? What kinds of memories do they carry? Whales have existed for far longer than humans, and they have developed complex social structures in which knowledge is passed between generations. As a matrilineal species, many whales live in family groups where older individuals transmit cultural knowledge to younger members. What are they carrying forward that we might learn from? Is there knowledge they would want us to understand—or perhaps knowledge they would prefer to keep beyond our reach?

I am interested in what whales might teach us about living in relationship with other species and how their ways of being might challenge or expand our understanding of our place in the world. Through the deep listening sessions I have been facilitating, I invite people to listen to whale songs and reflect on these questions. Inevitably, the conversation turns toward communication itself: Who is seeking to communicate? What are we hoping to receive? And what are the intentions behind our desire to understand another species?

Meredith: I really appreciate your way of melding with science thinking. And I really admire it. You mind meld with the thinking of the science in your work and bring those two languages together in a beautiful way.

I work with Donna Haraway’s idea of Sympoiesis, which is the title of my work. And it’s the idea of making kin with the non-human world or the world beyond us or bigger than us. I love this idea of a conversation between worlds and moving between those two worlds like you do with the whale song to find ways to make connections.

When you can find these little linkages that allow us into the ideas around the climate crisis without feeling completely helpless and hopeless, I think that we have to hold onto them to find our way through.

Margaret: When I think about our work in conversation with one another, I find myself thinking about deep time and the histories embedded in the places we each work. The landscape you’re photographing was once covered by a shallow sea during the Paleozoic Era. As you spend time there and encounter fossils, I’m curious how you think about the layers of time that have shaped that place. Beyond the relatively brief history of the town of Centralia, Pennsylvania—which is only a moment when viewed through the lens of deep time—what does it mean to work in a landscape that has been inhabited by such different worlds over millions of years? How does that awareness shape the way you see the place today?

Meredith: It’s funny because one of the wonderful things that’s come with this work is thinking about time in such a different way. The fossils in my photographs are 200 million years old. I mean literally. They are everywhere in Pennsylvania because all of that time has been scraped away by the mining process and burnt in our furnaces.

To drink a glass of water is to ingest the ghosts
of bodies that haunt that water.

When “nature calls” some time
later, we return to the cistern and the sea not only our
antidepressants,



It is so hard to imagine these time spans that are so massive. But at the same time, the amount of damage that's been done in such a short period of time to these landscapes is shocking. There are entire mountains made of slag heat, slag from the inside the earth that was pulled out of the mines and left aside to become a mountain. And you can see these craggy mountains and then these smooth mountains. And the smooth mountains are the ones that aren't really mountains. They're just piles of stuff that's been dug out of the earth and put there in order to be able to mine the materials.

Margaret: As I think about hydrology and watersheds in my work, I keep returning to the fact that Earth's water exists within a closed system. The water circulating through our atmosphere, rivers, oceans, and bodies is continuously recycled; it is all part of the same planetary cycle. Neimanis's writing on hydrofeminism reinforces this idea by emphasizing our shared material connection through water. The acid mine drainage you photograph, the swamp water I work with, the seawater that sustains dinoflagellates, and even the tears we cry are not separate substances but manifestations of the same water moving through different bodies and environments.

This interconnectedness also underscores the political and ecological significance of water. In the mid-1990s, Ismail Serageldin, then vice president of the World Bank, famously argued that the wars of the future would be fought over water because it would become an even more critical resource than fossil fuels. Increasingly, it feels as though that future has arrived.

Meredith: I was listening to NPR yesterday and they were talking about the rights to nature conversation, which started in the mining areas of Tumaqua, Pennsylvania. Local community members were the first ones to fight to legally grant nature its own rights. It was put through the court system and it created the groundwork for a whole movement that's going on right now about rights of nature, which I know you know about. The Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund and an early member of the group, Ben Price, have built the foundations of a global conversation around the rights of nature.

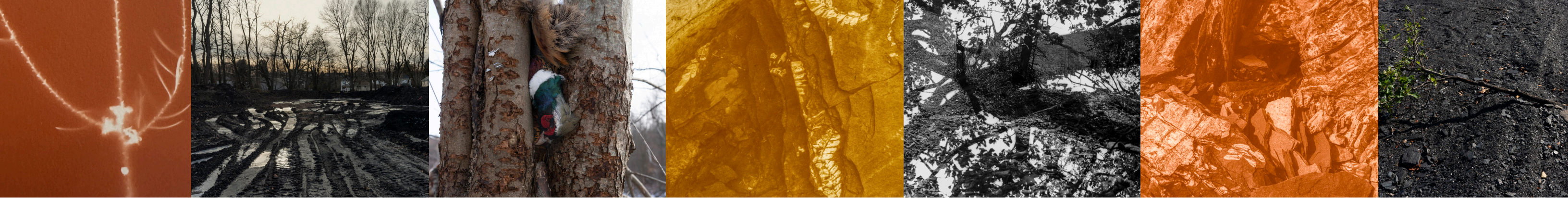
Ecuador picked up on what they had done in Pennsylvania and built it into their constitution. Talking about mountains having rights or entities in the world that need to be considered is a very old idea. The indigenous communities in many places have these beliefs while for some reason capitalism thinks this is a crazy idea, but it's becoming a more accepted way of thinking about our world.

Margaret: If we stop thinking of the world as made up of discrete entities with fixed edges, we can better understand the importance of symbiosis and ecological thinking. Everything exists in relationship to everything else; nothing is truly separate.

Meredith: When photography was invented it became a way to record the sublime beauty and also a sense of ownership of these spaces. Photography was integral in building a way of thinking about these landscapes, imagining the magnificence with large-format photographs.

our chemical estrogens, or our more
commonplace excretions,

but also the meanings that
permeate those materialities:



And likewise now, you see these scenes of fire and destruction that are equally sublime. But photography is not just a tool of dominance to try to create a sense of control and order, but it is also this magic tool to see things you can't see with your human eye like microscope photography and the way that you use it with the microorganisms that you work with or collaborate with.

It has both abilities—you know what I mean? Which is kind of magical.

Margaret: Yes. I have a complicated relationship with early landscape photography for many of the reasons you describe. I'm troubled by the ways photography was used to reinforce conquest and claims of ownership, serving as a visual tool that supported Manifest Destiny.

I also think we should be suspicious of the narrative that these landscapes were places that had “never been seen.” Indigenous peoples had inhabited, traversed, and experienced these environments for generations. What was new was not the landscape itself, but its encounter by European settlers, who often framed these places as untouched wilderness. In doing so, they erased or diminished the histories, relationships, and knowledge of the people already living there.

Photography has the potential to democratize knowledge by making places and experiences more widely accessible. At the same time, it can function as a technology of collection and possession, with photographs

serving as evidence of what has been claimed or owned. This logic has deep historical roots. In portraiture, for example, painters often included expansive landscapes behind their subjects to signal wealth, status, and dominion over the land. Early landscape photography reproduced many of these same power dynamics, using the camera to reinforce narratives of exploration, ownership, and territorial conquest.

Meredith: I think this goes back to the idea of entanglement, which is central to both of our practices. It is inherently complicated to make work about the environment using tools that are often environmentally harmful and shaped by systems of privilege. There is no way to fully disentangle ourselves from those contradictions. What we can do is engage with them thoughtfully and honestly. The depth of that entanglement is profound, and acknowledging it becomes an important part of the work itself.

Margaret: Absolutely. Photography is inherently entangled with systems of extraction and capitalism. As we've talked, we've discovered significant overlap in our practices because we are both interested in confronting those entanglements and acknowledging our own complicity within them. The tools we rely on are not neutral. Digital cameras contain components that depend on extractive mining, and many photographic processes require chemicals that can be harmful to the environment. Rather than ignoring these realities, we ask what they mean for our work.

disposable culture,

medicalized problem-solving,

Both of us are wrestling with the question of whether the ends can justify the means and how to navigate the ethical contradictions embedded in photographic practice.

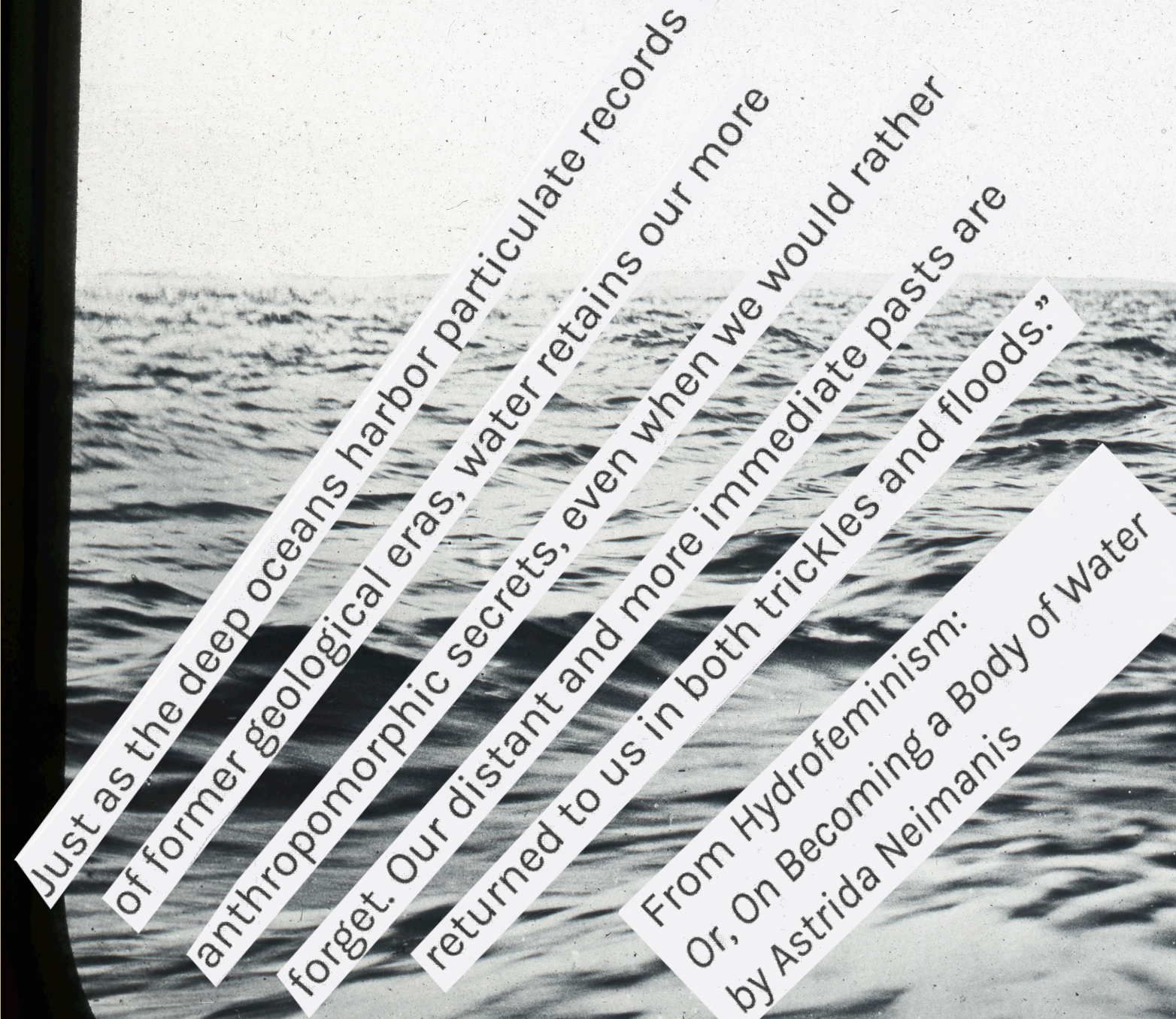
This leads us to ask how much participation in these conventional modes of image-making we are willing to accept. At the same time, we are interested in discovering new ways of working that emerge from confronting the limitations and consequences of our materials and processes. How might we create work that is more sustainable, both environmentally and conceptually? For me, the value of the work lies in its ability to generate dialogue. The relationship between the materials and the content is essential to that process; when the medium itself reflects the questions the work is asking, the conversation becomes more meaningful.

We are also interested in understanding ecotones as both literal and metaphorical spaces of transition. By investigating these landscapes, we are exploring the relationships between ecological systems, histories, and human activity. Ecotones become a framework for thinking about interconnectedness—places where boundaries blur, different systems meet, and the complexity of those interactions becomes visible.

Meredith: The camera is a tool for exploration and discovery, even as it remains entangled with the environmental and ethical consequences of its production and use. At the same time, it is a remarkable medium that brings science and art into conversation. That tension is precisely what makes photography so compelling in this context. What I've always loved about photography is its ability to exist at the intersection of science and magic, observation and imagination, image and world.

Margaret: What motivates us is a curiosity about places, people, and ideas—and a desire to create work that sparks further conversation. I like to think of us as explorers in that sense. Early in our collaboration, we talked about Alexander von Humboldt and the way he communicated his scientific discoveries through extraordinary drawings. There is a meaningful lineage there: artistic exploration intertwined with scientific inquiry. Both artists and scientists are driven by curiosity, observation, and the pursuit of discovery, seeking new ways to understand and interpret the world.

ecological disconnect.



Just as the deep oceans harbor particulate records
of former geological eras, water retains our more
anthropomorphic secrets, even when we would rather
forget. Our distant and more immediate pasts are
returned to us in both trickles and floods.”
From Hydrofeminism:
Or, On Becoming a Body of Water
by Astrida Neimanis

OUTLINES OF
BOTANICAL GEOGRAPHY.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF PLANTS

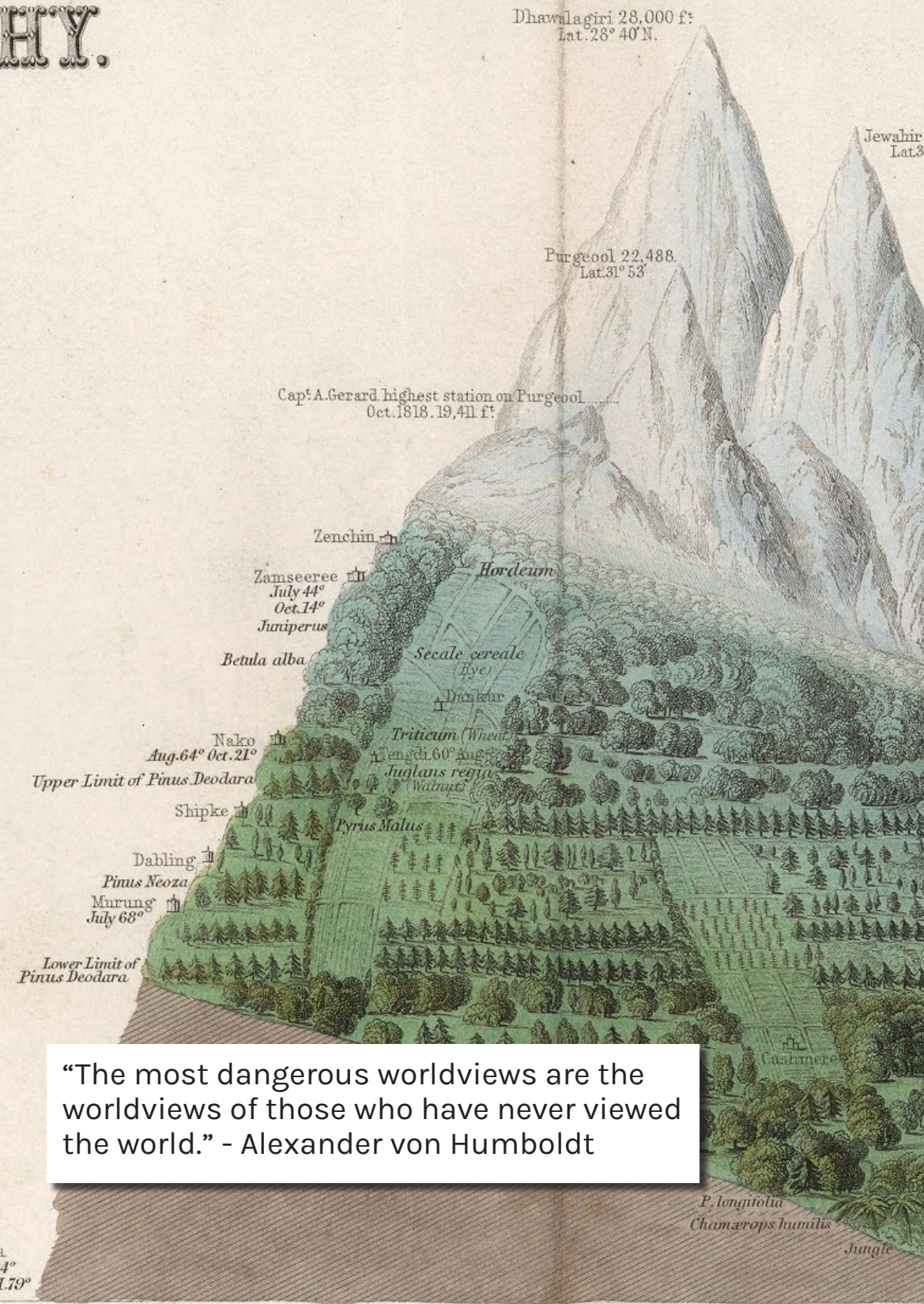
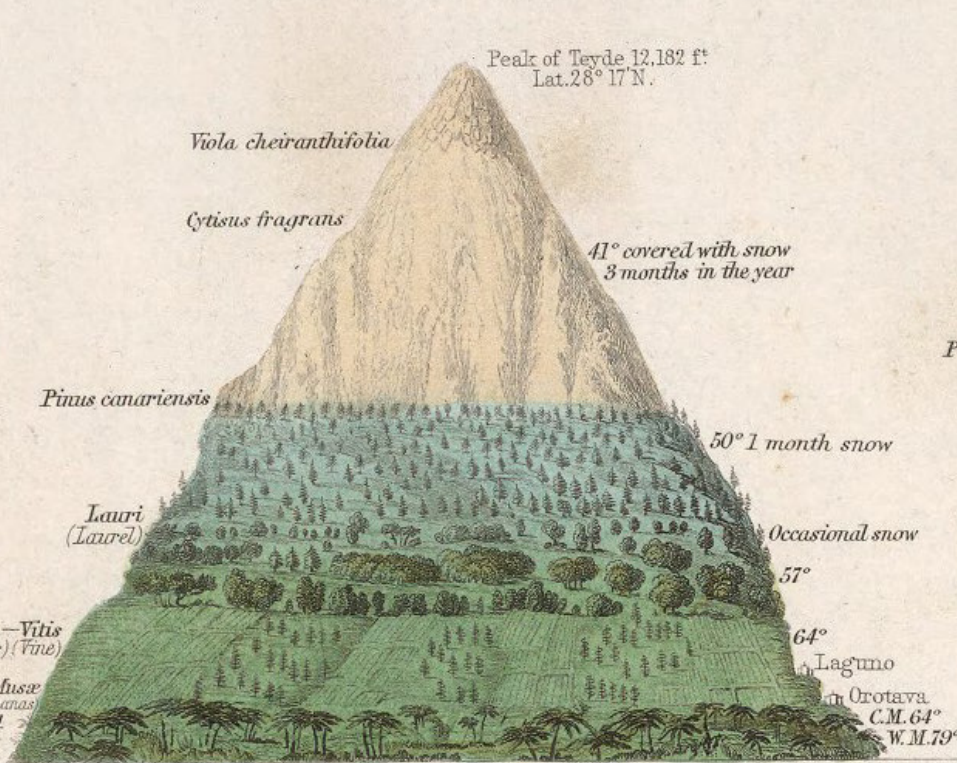
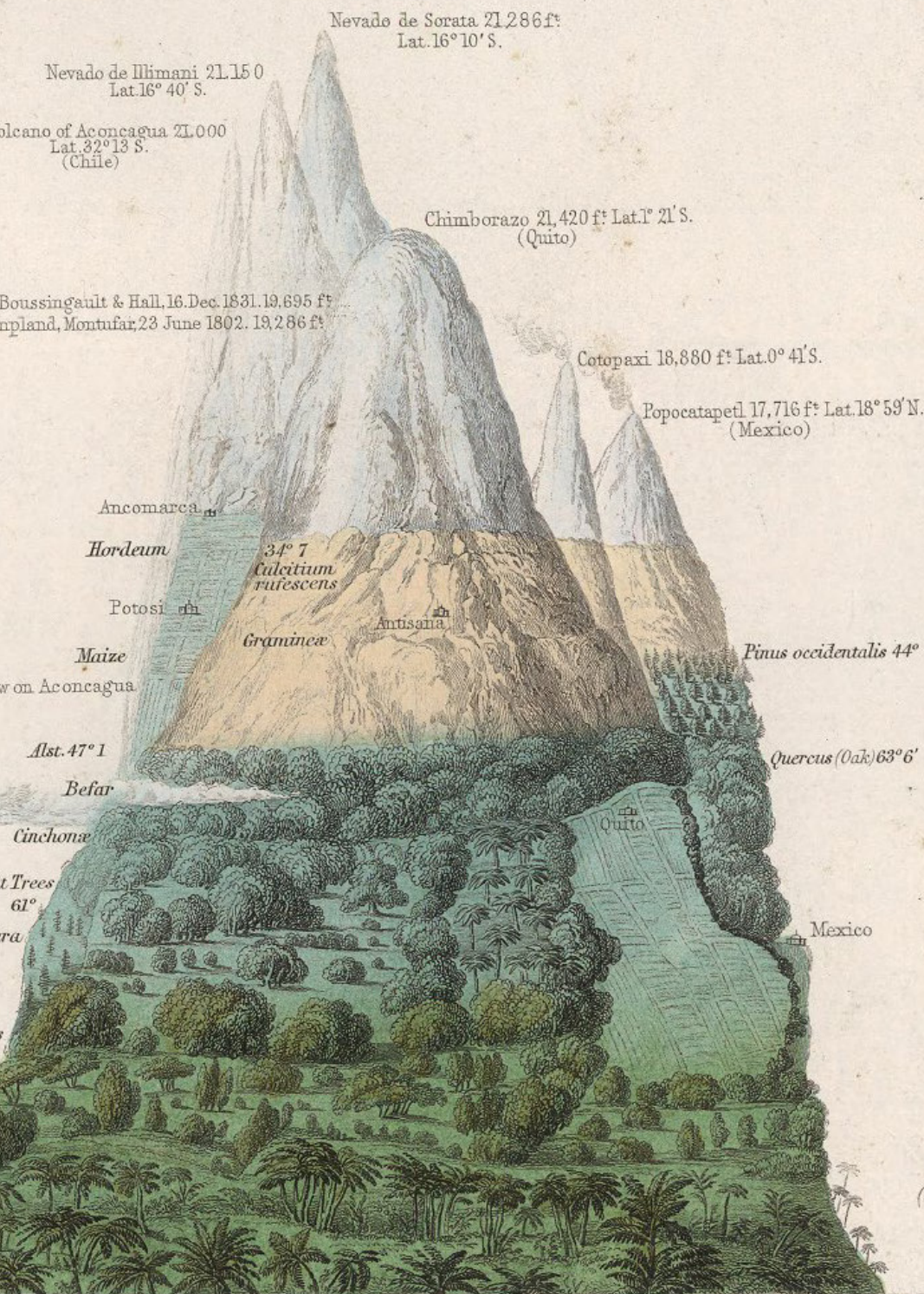
IN A PERPENDICULAR DIRECTION,
in the Torrid, the Temperate & the Frigid Zones;

WITH INDICATIONS OF THE
MEAN TEMPERATURE OF THE YEAR
AND OF THE COLDEST AND WARMEST MONTHS.
(*Geographiæ plantarum Lineamenta, auct. A de Humboldt*)

EXTENDED FROM THE DESIGNS OF PROF^r BERCHAUS

BY A.K. JOHNSTON, F.R.G.S.

TENERIFFE



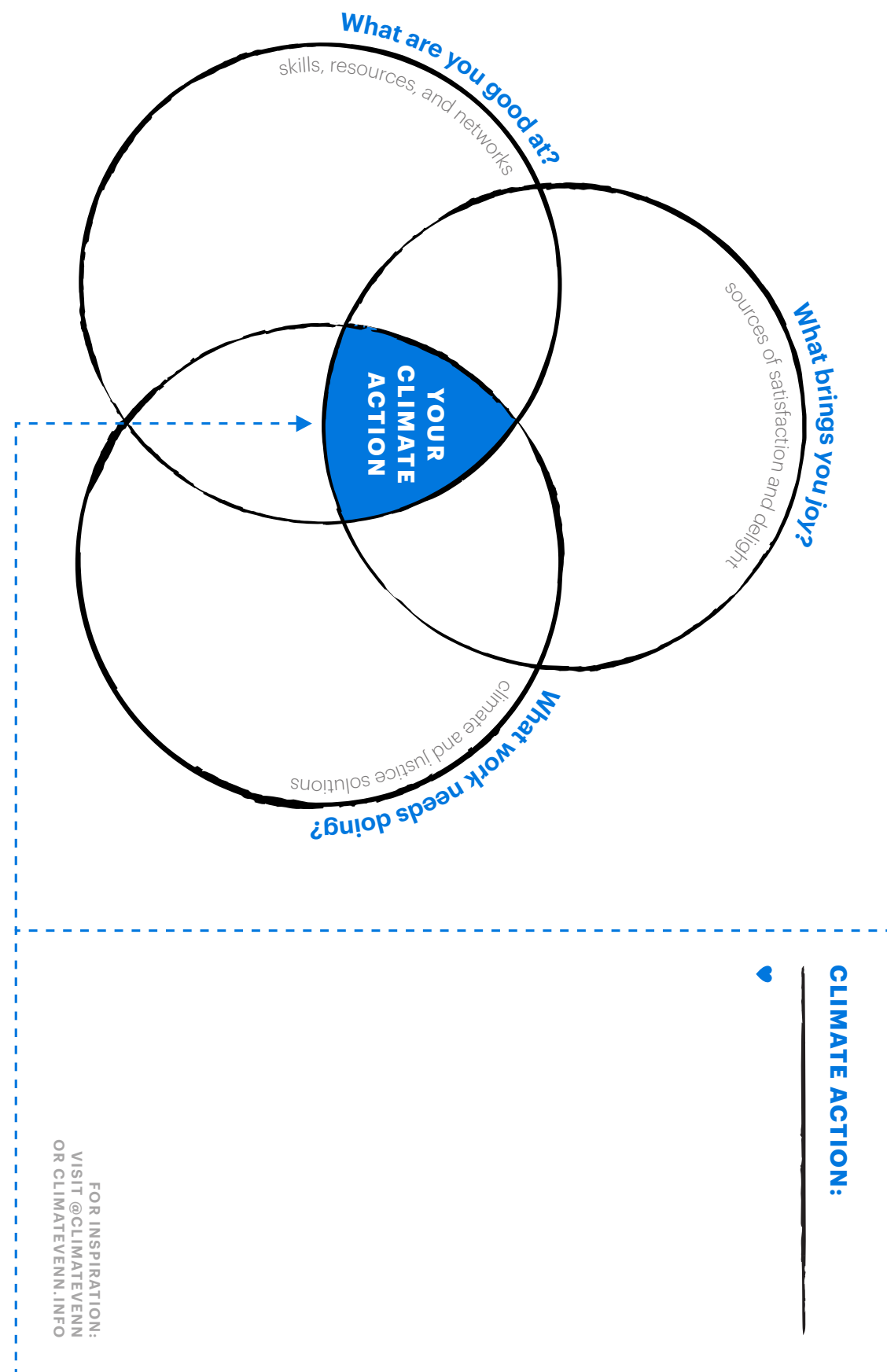
"The most dangerous worldviews are the worldviews of those who have never viewed the world." - Alexander von Humboldt

TORRID ZONE, LAT. 0°-10°
(Humboldt, Bonpland, Pentland.)

LAT. 27½-28½
(Buch, Smith)

TEMPERATE —

LAT. 29°-32°
(Herbert, Gerard, Wallich, Govan, Royle.)



Ayana Elizabeth Johnson's "What if We Get it Right?"
Worksheet: <https://www.getitright.earth/>

Further Reading

Angus, Siobhan. *Camera Geologica: An Elemental History of Photography*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2024.

Crone, Bridget, Nightingale Sam and Stanton, Polly, eds. *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies: Radical Practice for Art and Art-based Research*, 2nd edition. Eindhoven, the Netherlands: Onomatopoe Projects, 2024.

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Proulx, Annie. *Fen, Bog & Swamp: A Short History of Peatland Destruction and Its Role in the Climate Crisis*. New York: Scribner, 2022.

Schlanger, Zoë. *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth*. New York: Harper, 2024.

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White, Jonathan. *Tides: The Science and Spirit of the Ocean*. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2017.

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This catalog accompanies the exhibition **Explorations in the Ecotone: Works by Meredith Davenport and Margaret LeJeune**, on view at Visual Studies Workshop from September 4 through December 19, 2026.

Explorations in the Ecotone is an artist-curated installation with programming developed by Meredith Davenport and Margaret LeJeune in collaboration with Jessica Johnston, VSW's Executive Director.

Catalog Design: Nilson Carroll

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Visual Studies Workshop is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that nurtures experimental and expansive approaches to photography and media arts, and builds community among artists and the public through exhibitions, publications and residencies.

Image Captions

Front Cover: *Pocosin* (2023), Margaret LeJeune, Mixed media collage

Front Inside: *Injected light weight fly ash* (2025), Meredith Davenport, Archival ink jet print

Page 12: *She Will Burn* (2026), Meredith Davenport, Zine

Page 13: *The barrier has not been breached by the fire (detail)* (2022), Meredith Davenport, Carbon print

Page 25: Detail from *Undulation* (2023), Margaret LeJeune, from the VSW Lantern Slide Collection

Page 26 + 27: Detail from "Geographical Distribution of Plants. Distribution of Plants in a Perpendicular Direction" (1850) by Alexander Keith Johnston in collaboration with Alexander von Humboldt. From the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection.

Back Inside: *Updraft* (2024), Meredith Davenport, Archival ink jet print

Back Cover: *Untitled* (2025), Meredith Davenport, Photograph



