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Art in Print

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On the Local

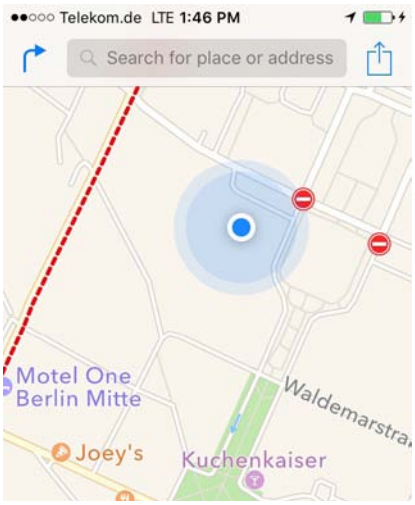
By Susan Tallman

Moral solutions to the rival claims of the near and the distant are, for most of us, conflicting and confused. Chauvinism is bad but loyalty to the local is good; globalization is bad but cosmopolitanism is good. In 1930s America "Regionalism" was heralded as a progressive assertion of alternate values, a movement unimpressed by the vacuous urbanity of certain European exemplars, and committed (like French Realists a century before) to the gritty truth of lives lived at distance from the art world. Three decades later, regionalism was seen as retrograde—a movement that had turned its back on the greatest breakthroughs of modernism (chiefly abstraction) to make populist pictures just this side of illustration. And so it goes.

These days the term of preference is "local": to resist monocultures (agricultural or corporate), thoughtful people shop at local bookshops, support local breweries and eat locally sourced produce. "Community supported art" (CSA) programs have cropped up to encourage collectors to source their art nearby as well. But while consuming locally grown produce has measurable environmental and nutritional benefits, the utilitarian good of consuming local art is a bit muddier. Isn't one of the jobs of art to tell us about places we have not been and people we do not know? Haven't prints in particular been built to be mobile? This issue of *Art in Print* asks us to consider what we mean by "local" when it comes to art. Its topics stretch from North Dakota to South Africa, from Essex to West 28th Street, from the French Revolution to the Cultural Revolution.

Nancy Friese's double-sided spread—the fourth project in the **Art in Art in Print** series—depicts a swath of farmland once settled by the artist's great-grandfather and now her own, a subject and place to which she returns every year. Britany Salsbury details Friese's image and its reflection of there and here, then and now.

Locality, of course, is a question not just of geography but also of time. As L.P. Hartley noted, the past is a foreign country. In her examination of two very different moments in recent Chinese history, Chang Yuchen shows how the woodcut was transformed from an instrument of political resistance to one of oppression, while the seemingly retardataire practice of plein-air painting became a secret language of the underground. Susanne Anderson-Riedel's essay on Alexandre Tardieu's engraving after Raphael's *St. Michael Vanquishing Satan* (1806) illuminates how reproduction can be used to embed local meanings in a seemingly "universal" image. And writing from Cape Town, Daniel Hewson reports on how the Apartheid-era destruction of one particular neighborhood continues to haunt the city.



Smart phone location services in Berlin, April 2016.

That most local of institutions, the home, is the focus of two artists here: Julie Warchol looks at Grayson Perry's mapping of local culture in prints and residential architecture; and Miguel de Baca speaks with Kate McQuillen about her cosmic suburban house-wrap, *Night House* (2015). Julie Mehretu's new seven-part monumental print, *Epigraph, Damascus*, is also built on an architectural foundation, but the schematic buildings glimpsed behind a frantic cloud of marks come from a place she has never been and may well no longer exist.

Displacement, the inversion of the local, was the theme of the "4th San Juan Poly/Graphic Triennial," reviewed here by Maeve Coudrelle. Showcasing artists from across Latin America and the Caribbean, the exhibition considered both the specificity of place and the propensity of print to be out of place on purpose. The winner of this iteration of the **Prix de Print**, selected by Thomas Cvikota, is Dutch artist Annesas Appel's *Metamorphosis music notation* (2015), a work that deals in translation, transliteration and displacement of a conceptual order.

Norma Bassett Hall, whose print catalogue raisonné is reviewed here by Jason Millard, was one of those American regionalists now being rediscovered. A founding member of the Prairie Print Makers, she spent most of her career in Kansas, but the method she used to record the Midwest was an adaptation of a Japanese tradition that she learned in Oregon and perfected in Scotland. Local is not the same as sequestered.

Finally, this issue includes a conversation between artist David Storey and Leslie Miller of Grenfell Press. (A video of this interview will be posted in the next few months, launching our new **Voices in Print** series.) Manhattan-based institutions are inevitably worldly, but Grenfell, having occupied the same floor of the building for more than three decades, is also a local entity.

Among the beautiful prints produced at Grenfell are those of Vija Celmins, an artist whose childhood was a saga of displacement and whose art is a hymn to the particular and specific. Celmins, like Friese, makes unconquerable vastness feel intimate by an almost sublime force of attention. A mile to the south of where I sit writing this introduction in Berlin, the hangars of Tempelhof airport are filled with refugees, people suspended between the exploded places of their past and the unknowable ones of their future. Meanwhile, the kids play on the runways and the grassy bits between, mastering, as children do, the individual bushes, doorways, voices, habits of clouds and odd beetles of this place, building their own local, if only for the moment. ■

Susan Tallman is the Editor-in-Chief of Art in Print.

Nancy Friese: Still Grove *(2016)*

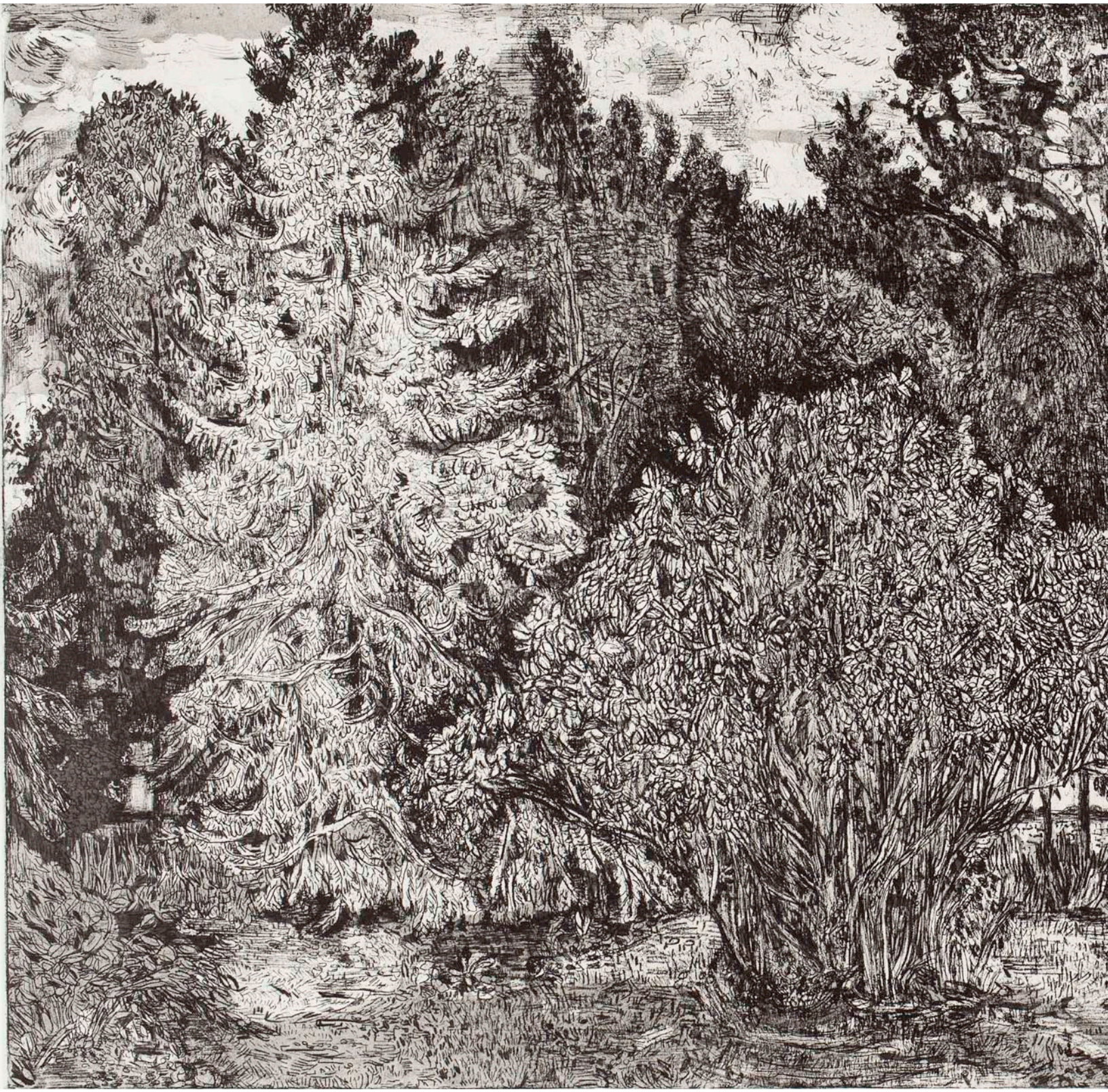
by Britany Salsbury

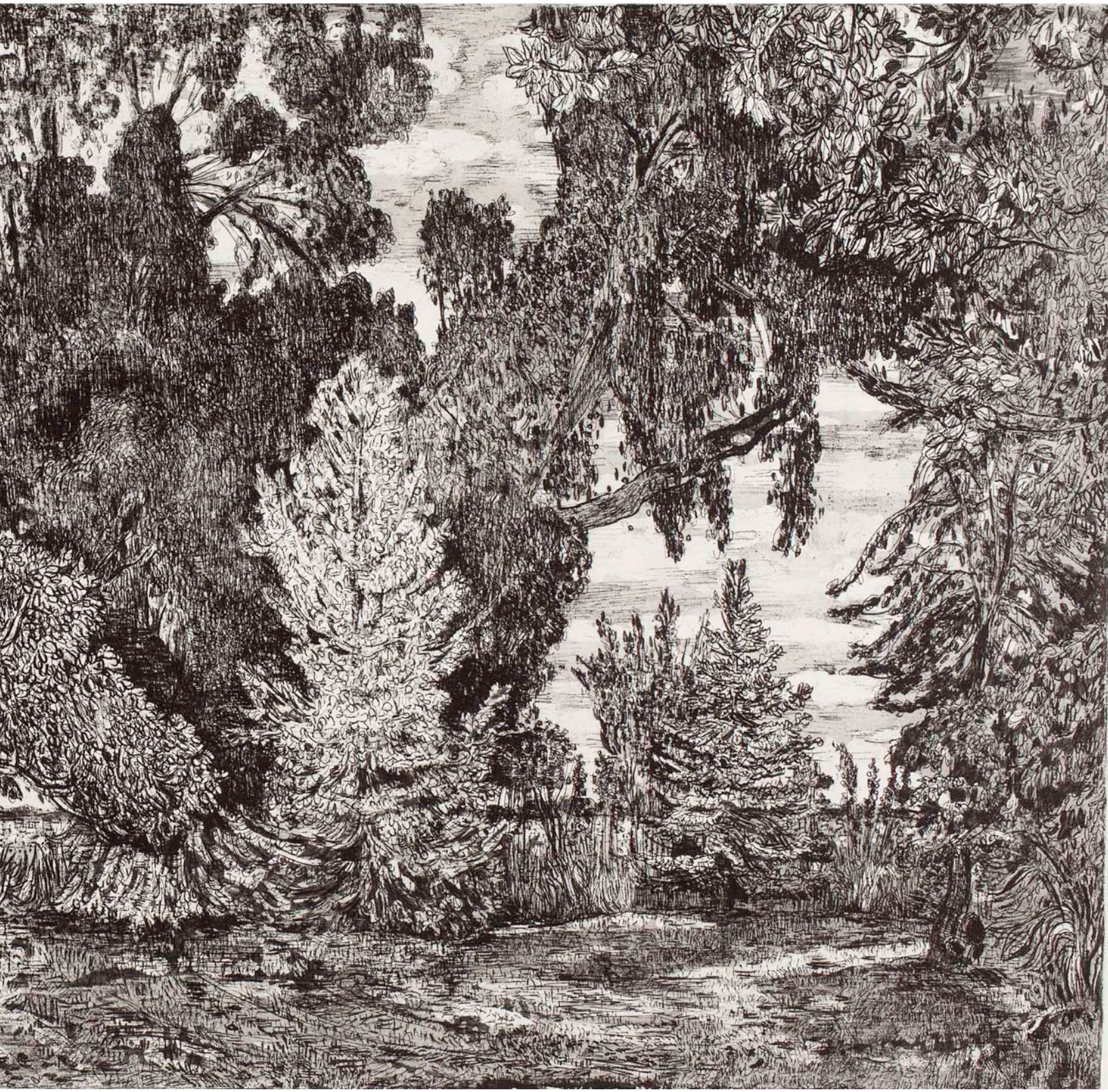
Above: *A view of Nancy Friese's North Dakota backyard with the copper plate under protective cardboard.* ***Right:*** *Nancy Friese, right half of* ***Still Grove*** *(2016), drawing over the soft-grounded copper plate with pencil, colored pencil, blue and black pen on newsprint, 24 x 48 inches.*

A sense of the local is central to Nancy Friese's work, which documents places and events that are specific and personal, while offering them up to be shared by the viewer. Friese is a landscape artist, and though she lives and works most of the year in Rhode Island, she spends several weeks each summer in rural North Dakota on the land her great-grandfather homesteaded when he immigrated from Norway.[1] It is land she has drawn again and again, depicting its expansive fields and seemingly endless skies, sometimes in vivid paint and sometimes in intimate etched lines.

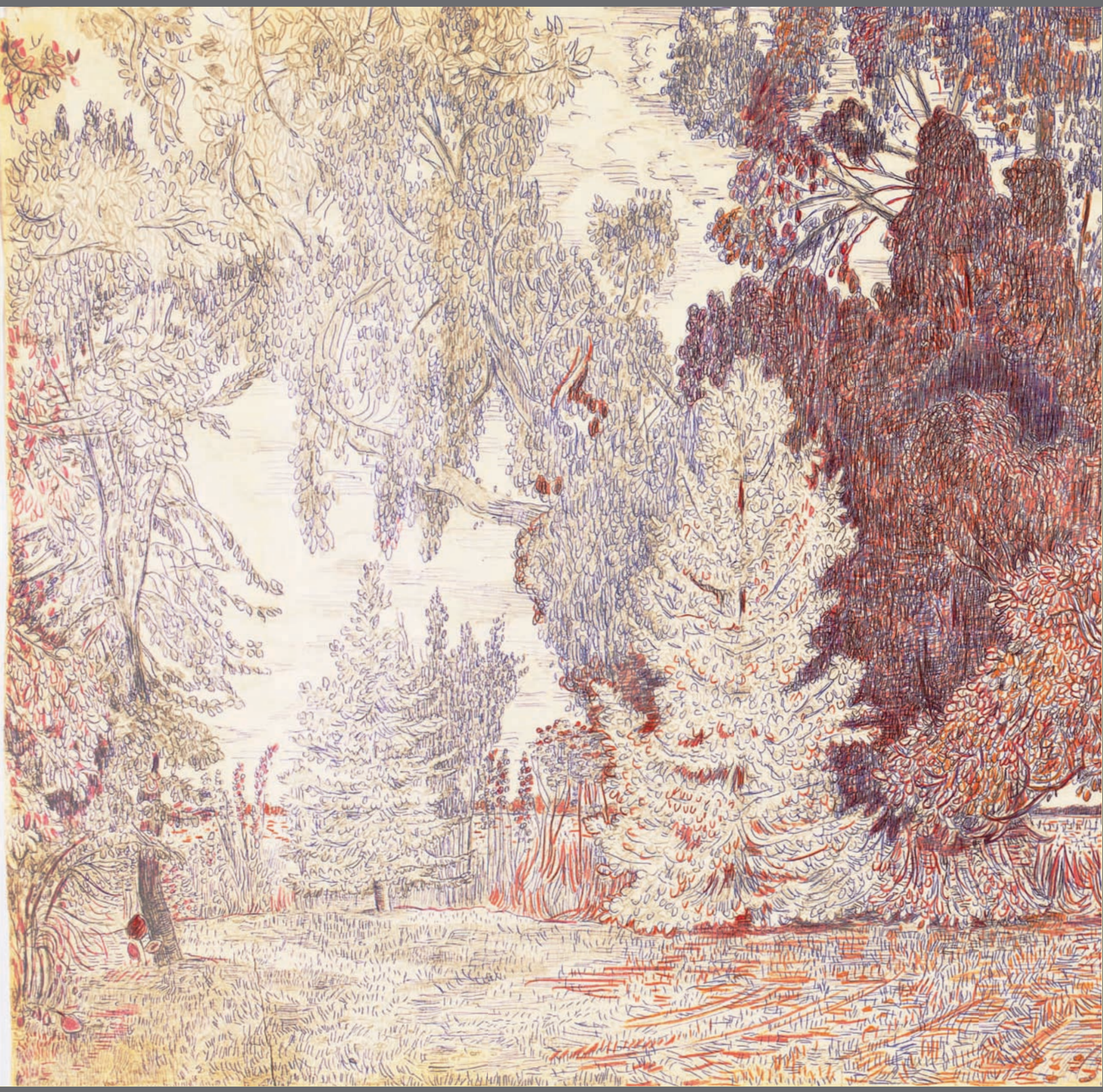
Still Grove was drawn there over the course of a month. The large copper plate, covered with soft ground, sat on a table under the trees, and each day from mid-afternoon to early evening Friese would draw in pencil on a sheet of newsprint laid over the soft ground, looking out, she explains, "to the Western horizon—the lilac trees, giant cottonwood trees, box elder and elm." The pressure of her pencil, transferred through the newsprint, picked up bits of the tacky soft ground, exposing the copper in "a particle-like way," eventually producing an etched line with the character of a drawn mark. As a way of working it is both direct and unnatural: "One has to draw with her hand up high," Friese explains, "so that the palm of the hand never touches the surface."

After returning to the East Coast, she continued to develop the image through subsequent states—etching and proofing the plate (in collaboration with Peter Pettengill at Wingate Studio in New Hampshire), reapplying soft ground, then laying her drawing overtop once again. She changed the nature of her drawing implements with each state, so as to be able to recognize what she was adding at each stage—pencil was followed by blue pen, red and orange color pencil, and finally black pen. Meanwhile the backside of the paper grew denser and denser with the brown soft ground that adhered to it with every mark. In the last stage of development she worked the plate directly with aquatint, drypoint and roulette. The image thus exists in five places: the front of the paper sheet that bears her marks in pencil, color pencil and pen; the back of the sheet, where those same marks collected soft ground, pulling it from the plate; the copper plate, where the lifting of the ground left openings for





*Nancy Friese, **Still Grove** (2016), soft ground etching with aquatint, drypoint and roulette, image 24 x 48 inches, sheet 30 x 54 inches. Edition of 20. Printed and published by the artist, Providence, RI. Courtesy of the artist and Cade Tompkins Projects. Assistance by Peter Pettengill, Wingate Studio, Hinsdale, NH.*



acid to eat the metal; the printed etching, where ink has been transferred from those bitten marks in the copper; and this journal, where these iterations are brought together, via photography and digital printing.

The image shows a wooded grove densely enveloped in bushes and trees. A small opening at right suggests the sort of place one might find a pleasant surprise while walking in the country, a private spot that invites time spent alone. Grainy soft-ground marks and finer lines of drypoint delineate the leaves and branches of the foliage, expressively but with precision. The degree of detail allows us to distinguish the variety of plant life, from flowering bushes to coniferous trees, inhabiting this snippet of land. The sky is glimpsed only in patches through the vegetation, and the cool black of the ink, like the earthy brown of the soft ground, reinforces the shadowy lushness of the scene.

Friese describes herself as a "painter/printmaker," using the term Adam Bartsch (1757–1821) adopted to emphasize printmaking's role as an original creative domain.[2] Like past masters of the landscape print, from Rembrandt in the 17th century to the Barbizon School in the 19th, she works from direct observation and eschews exotic locales in favor of familiar places, valorizing the beauty of the intimately known. She looks especially to the example of the 19th-century American printmaker Mary Nimmo Moran (1842–1899), who often sketched directly on a copper plate en plein air and also employed innovative etching techniques in her depiction of nature.

While acknowledging this historical lineage, however, Friese does not adhere to a conservative understanding of landscape. The careful topography, the tight cropping and the gestural sketchiness give the work a diaristic quality that calls attention to the durational aspects of its making. We understand not only that someone sat in this place, but that she did so for a long time and that this time and place exist as specific moments within a larger framework—there is a before and after, there is land to the east and west. *Still Grove* conveys more than a scenic view of one particular woodland—it harbors a story that begins with Friese's annual departure from her house in Rhode Island, her return to a place she considers "home," her meditations on natural vistas she has known her whole life, and her attentiveness to the ways those vistas confirm or depart from her memories.

Above: *Nancy Friese,* ***Still Grove*** *(2016), detail of the front and back of the drawing showing the brown soft ground transfer.* ***Left:*** *Nancy Friese, left half of the drawing* ***Still Grove*** *(2016).*

Friese allows us, sitting with magazine in hand, to glimpse the freedom of open spaces and the emotional validation of a place long known. The spill of the image across the two-page spread echoes at a small scale her panoramic view of the land, and allows us to share her pleasure in looking. On the verso we can see the soft-ground transfer on the back of the newsprint drawing—the link between hand and print—and can follow the translation from perception, to conception, to final image. The work is better understood through the act of turning the page.

In this act of prolonged attentiveness, Friese alerts us to the value of this plot of earth in North Dakota, a place at a great distance from the urban hubs of the art world. One of Friese's repeated subjects is the line of trees she planted to slow erosion and reduce flooding, a reminder that landscape is never static: it changes with the seasons; things appear and disappear from year to year; and dramatic alterations take place at the hand of both man and nature. In recording a specific site in a specific month, Friese nonetheless meditates on the past and the present, conveying the wonder of a comfortable and familiar place, even as it becomes defined by distance. ■

Nancy Friese is a painter-printmaker who resides in Rhode Island and North Dakota. She is represented by Cade Tompkins Projects.

Britany Salsbury is the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the RISD Museum.

Notes:

1. As a child, Friese paid summer visits to the farmstead where her grandmother grew up and her great-uncles farmed. It then passed out of the family, but shortly after 9/11 Friese discovered that the house and land were for sale and bought them.

2. Bartsch was the first to systematically catalogue prints in his Le Peintre-Graveur *(1803–1821), which differentiated the "painter-printmaker" from reproductive engravers.*