# KRISTIN MAIJA PETERSON

## FINDING OUR WAY BACK TO THE NATURAL WORLD

## SELECT WORK: WATERCOLORS & DRAWINGS

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## ARTIST STATEMENT

I blend art and story with self-directed science and environmental research to bridge an understanding of our current and historical relationship with the natural world. Work for series and exhibitions begins with curiosity and an ongoing search for awe and biodiversity in my immediate midwestern environment. A through line of my practice involves memory, reconnecting to my younger self running through tall prairie grasses, grasshoppers leaping in my wake, hearing a meadowlark call in the distance. Born in the early 1960s, even then, my young self sensed the Earth was in trouble, and my childhood world would not last.

In the Anthropocene age, we find ourselves living, I work through detailed, layered watercolors and large graphite drawings to elevate the beauty and biodiversity found in uncultivated ecosystems with a call to save all that we can without judgment or remonstration. Ironically, we need nature to heal from our overly technological existence that is killing our true nature. My work emphasizes what it means to be present in nature, closely witnessing what is right in front of me. It's an invitation to cultivate curiosity, observe how the natural world reveals herself to us, and rekindle a bond to our environment and ourselves. In saving all that we can here on Earth, love has to be a part of the equation. When we feel familiarity and connection, love inevitability follows. And what we love, we are driven to protect.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Kristin Maija Peterson's signature style in her artwork is richly detailed, beautiful, and illustrative suitable for picture storybooks. Since her early years growing up among the prairies, woods, wetlands, and farm fields of west central Minnesota, Kristin has taken to spaces within landscapes, seeking small pockets of ecosystems vital to the whole.

For 25+ years, Kristin worked as a graphic designer under her own business, Grand Ciel Design Co., specializing in branding, design, and marketing communications. Working with environmental nonprofits became her most fulfilling projects and a catalyst towards a full-time art practice. With a milestone birthday and a pandemic, Kristin transitioned into her vocation as a visual artist in 2020.

*Photo by Ani Cardot*

As an emerging artist, Kristin has exhibited in group and juried shows throughout the region since 2016. She graduated with honors from the University of Minnesota Morris in 1984 with majors in Studio Art and Art History with a minor in Biology. She attended the Women's Art Institute in 2019 and continues her art education through self-study and workshops.

Kristin has deep, ongoing interests in how colonization, hybridization, plant aesthetics, botanizing landscapes, and other human influences have impacted plant, animal, and insect life throughout Earth's history. She has traveled to more islands than continental US states, including Greece, Japan, Australia, and the Hawaiian Islands. Through her art and writing, Kristin hopes to insight intuitive knowledge that we ***are*** nature and by being part of nature and playing a role in its protection, however large or small, we will realize our true selves and purpose.

*A Little Chaos*
Watercolor
32” x 40”
$3,200

This piece is a love letter and remembrance of a backyard we let go wild. In our desire for tidy lawns, we lose out on so much. Letting a patch of land go wild creates habitat, diversity, and a window to return to nature as nature wants us to be.

It was a time when I started learning the names of so-called weeds knowing the plants that grew in the process of wilding the yard were either medicinal, edible, or both. “How can I pull you now that I know your name and those of your relatives?” runs through my mind when I tend my garden.

What would appear messy and unkept to the average suburbanite, I saw beauty, a sanctuary, a buffer from the din coming from the nearby highway. As the plant diversity increased, so did the insect diversity. For the first time in decades, I saw fireflies looking for mates in the moist, humid air held by the overgrown vegetation. Rabbits would stretch out, relaxed under tree shade. I befriended a chipmunk. Birds nested in the trees and came to the bird feeders. When I would spend time, being still, in that wild backyard, I felt the hum of life run through me, and I was home.

*In Any Given Garden We Cover Ground*
Watercolor
31” x 37”
$2,100

They say it’s never too late. For years I had heard of the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum described as a place of immense botanical beauty, a place for solace, artists, and to witness the cycles of nature.

During my first visit, I do as I always do, look down and see all the wonders growing, flowering at my feet.

*In any given garden*
*we cover ground*
*keep the sun and hold the rain*
*tree above shades our leaves*
*admiring our blue petals*
*we are joined in this world*
*along side tending hands*
*with earth, roots, and air*

*Where the Cat Bird Sings*
*(*Gray Dogwood — *Cornus racemosa)*
Watercolor
37” x 31”
$2,500

I never know what will catch my eye during morning walks. Surprises that stop me and hold me still, just as every living thing around me is doing, being in the moment.

I am working on learning the names and relations of the plants I encounter. Often I don’t know if they are native,  not-native non-invasive, or invasive until I research. Is it native is always my first question, followed by “Please don’t let me fall in love with an invasive species again!” There is conflict and controversy found here.

A little research tells me I spotted a native, the Gray Dogwood, which is anything but gray this autumn morning. The gray reference denotes its bark coloring.

As it turns out, Gray Dogwood is a very adaptable shrub and excellent for naturalizing complex sites such as ponds and stream banks. It blooms creamy white clusters of flowers in May, followed by white berries in late summer. Birds such as flicker, tanager, woodpeckers, and catbirds all enjoy and quickly eat the Grey Dogwood’s fruit. The Grey Dogwood also makes for a suitable shelter and nesting habitat.

Turning the Gray Dogwood into a tapestry of watercolor has a meditative project, seven weeks in the making. I became lost in the multi-colored woods.

*We Are Stardust*
*(Aspen Leaves)*
Watercolor and Archival Ink
38” X 30”
$2,500 [ **SOLD** ]

Autumn makes me feel time passing like no other season. Bright yellow aspen leaves shower the path around Thomas Lake Prairie Preserve. White grains sprinkled among the leaves like stars in space. It brings to me the refrain from Joni Mitchell’s song *Woodstock*:

*We are stardust*
*We are golden*
*And we’ve got to get ourselves*
*Back to the garden*

I think we all want to get back to the garden. I hear it was paradise.

**Limited Edition Prints available in the shop.**

*I Will Wait For You Forever*
*(Field Stone)*
Watercolor
28” x 33”
$2,100 [ **SOLD** ]

Early in spring, I found this stone nestled just beyond the backyard of our townhome rental within the bounds of a wetland-protected area.

It looked as if it were in child pose, waiting there for a very long time, grasses old and newly sprouting hugging the stone, next to it a single leaf holding vigil.

Time runs differently in nature. It’s patient and circular, not bound by hours or schedules. If this stone could talk, it would ask you to be present, to find stillness. Take your time. It will wait for you forever.

**Limited Edition Prints available in the shop.**

*Little Spring Thing*
*(Wild Sarsaparilla)*
Watercolor
28” x 28”
$2,100

Walking through Lebanon Hills Regional Park one lovely spring morning, I look down and see a woody-stemmed shoot of leaves that seem to glow in the dappled light of the forest. At that moment, I could not identify this plant by name. When just emerging, Sarsaparilla can be confused as Poison Ivy or Wild Ginger. No matter. It’s one of the beautiful discoveries of the season.

*“What does it mean*
*that the earth is so beautiful?*
*And what shall I do about it?*
*What is the gift that I should*
*bring to the world? What is the*
*life that I should live?”* — Mary Oliver

*This is Not a Weed No. 1*
Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)
Watercolor
28” x 28”
$2,000

At the center in soft mint green is a Common Mullein. It goes by other names, the most colorful as “Cowboy Toilet Paper.” It can be referred to as an herb, too. Not native to Minnesota prairies, the Common Mullein stands tall alongside native wildflowers without encroaching. Its signature stalk song sparrows and goldfinch love to perch on appears during its second year of growth.

Member of the Snapdragon (or Figwort) Family, the Common Mullein has many medicinal purposes I discovered in *The Lost Book of Herbal Remedies: The Healing Power of Plant Medicine* by Nicole Apelian, Ph.D., and Claude Davis. It’s impossible to discriminate plants as “weeds” as they often are good for something.

*This is Not a Weed No. 2*
Common Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)
Watercolor
28” x 28”
$2,000

A second take at Mullein. This one was spotted on an autumn afternoon in Lebanon Regional Park hanging out with what I dare say is my nemesis, Cocklebur (a member of the Daisy family, no less!) At times I can look at Cocklebur as if it were an intentional ornamental plant (like our garden Hosta) until the “annoying to humans and dogs alike” cluster of seed burs appear. Still, together, the Common Mullein with her soft, pastels and the thick leaved Cocklebur make a lovely view from above.

*Watery Worlds (So is Above is Below)*
Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
Watercolor
32” x 26”
$2,000 [ **SOLD** ]

I know the importance of looking up. Yet, there are many times I find myself looking down. At my feet among the pebbly trail is quite literally a terrestrial cosmos with its enormous (in the scheme of things) hydraulic moon orbited by many watery worlds, including one draped with a sliver of a spoon-shaped leaf. There is such wonder and awe in the natural world.

*“That which is above is like that which is below,*
*and that which is below is like that which is above,*
*to accomplish the miracle of one thing.”*

—Hermes Trismegistus, *Emerald Tablet*

*I Rode the Breeze as Children Will*
Watercolor
26” x 22”
$1,500

This piece was created through participation in the 20th Annual Poet Artist Collaboration, a showcase event held by Red Wing Arts in Red Wing, Minnesota. I chose to work from the poem *Planted* written by Deborah A. Goschy.

*Planted* is a poem about memory. Because of that, I wanted colors that felt nostalgic. Six layers of watercolor paint created this piece, perhaps to mark each decade I have lived and suspect the poet has too. In the end, it feels more like a tapestry than a painting. If you tilt the work just so, you can see the “fanciful trails” swirling across the surface.

*Thorn Birds*
*(Location, Location, Location)*
Watercolor and Graphite Pencil
36” x 28”
$2,000 [ **SOLD** ]

Walking through Lebanon Hills Regional Park, I see the tiny nest built within the branches of a thorny bush, low to the ground, on the edge of a prairie field, looking vulnerable and exposed. What bird would build their nest in a seemingly open and visible space where predators could take advantage?

I was able to see the nest in autumn after the leaves had dropped. In late spring, I tried to find the nest again. Where it was, was transformed. The bush completely leafed out was surrounded by thick grasses and a bramble of raspberry branches.

The bird had found the perfect location for her nest. Nothing was getting past that imposing green fortress.

*The Undertaker*
*(*American Carrion Beetle — *Necrophila americana)*
Archival Ink and Color Pencil
33” x 30”
$1,000 [ **SOLD** ]

These are the beetles that take care of the dead, be it deer, birds, or any life that passed away. Not only do they eat flesh but also fly larva that typically populates carcasses.

As gross as that sounds, what the American Carrion Beetle does is invaluable. Their undertaking services keep the environment clear of the deceased (and diseases that would result) and help keep fly populations in check.

I pay attention to the eyes when drawing insects, working to show that there is a living being, a personality in there. In that way, I hope to incite curiosity and compassion for the insect world. With climate change and habitat loss, their numbers are thinning, too.

*They Get All the Press*
*(Decline of the Honeybees — Apis mellifera)*
Mix Media
33” x 25”
$800

For years we have heard news reports of honey bee colony collapses. A great deal of research has tried to explain the causes behind honey bee losses. At the same time, honey bees aren’t the only pollinator star we should follow.

Around the world, there are 20,000 distinct bee species, with 4,000 of them in the United States alone. From 2006 to 2015, approximately 25% fewer bee species were spotted. Thousands of bee species have already become too rare. (earthday.org/fact-sheet-bees)

A population decline of 87% has happened to the rusty-patched bumblebee. To bring awareness to the bee’s plight, Minnesota appointed it as the state bee in 2019, making it a household name.

Planting native plants (these contain high nutrient levels and immune support), changing agricultural practices, and increasing bee habitat can help pollinator populations rebound.

*Tiny Universes*
*(Mosses)*
Watercolor
21” x 21”
$800 [ **SOLD** ]

I find an assortment of organisms living together among the minerals and the matter that fell from the trees. To the casual observer, what I see may look like nothing to them, just weeds and moss growing on rocks. What I see are “Tiny Universes.”

From what I know about mosses, I’m probably seeing more than one species of moss co-mingling, though they could be in fierce competition over resources.

Every plant has common name, a name easy to remember. Mosses are not given the same consideration, referred only by their scientific names. That explains why I don’t know a single moss by its name. The common name of plants come to mind easier.

Some people disdain moss and want it removed from their yards. I know others who wish to be buried in it. Like fungi, mosses are an ancient organism as they, too, break down organic matter to replenish the soil. Perhaps their most astounding feat is turning boulders into sand. Never underestimate the tenacity of a plant.

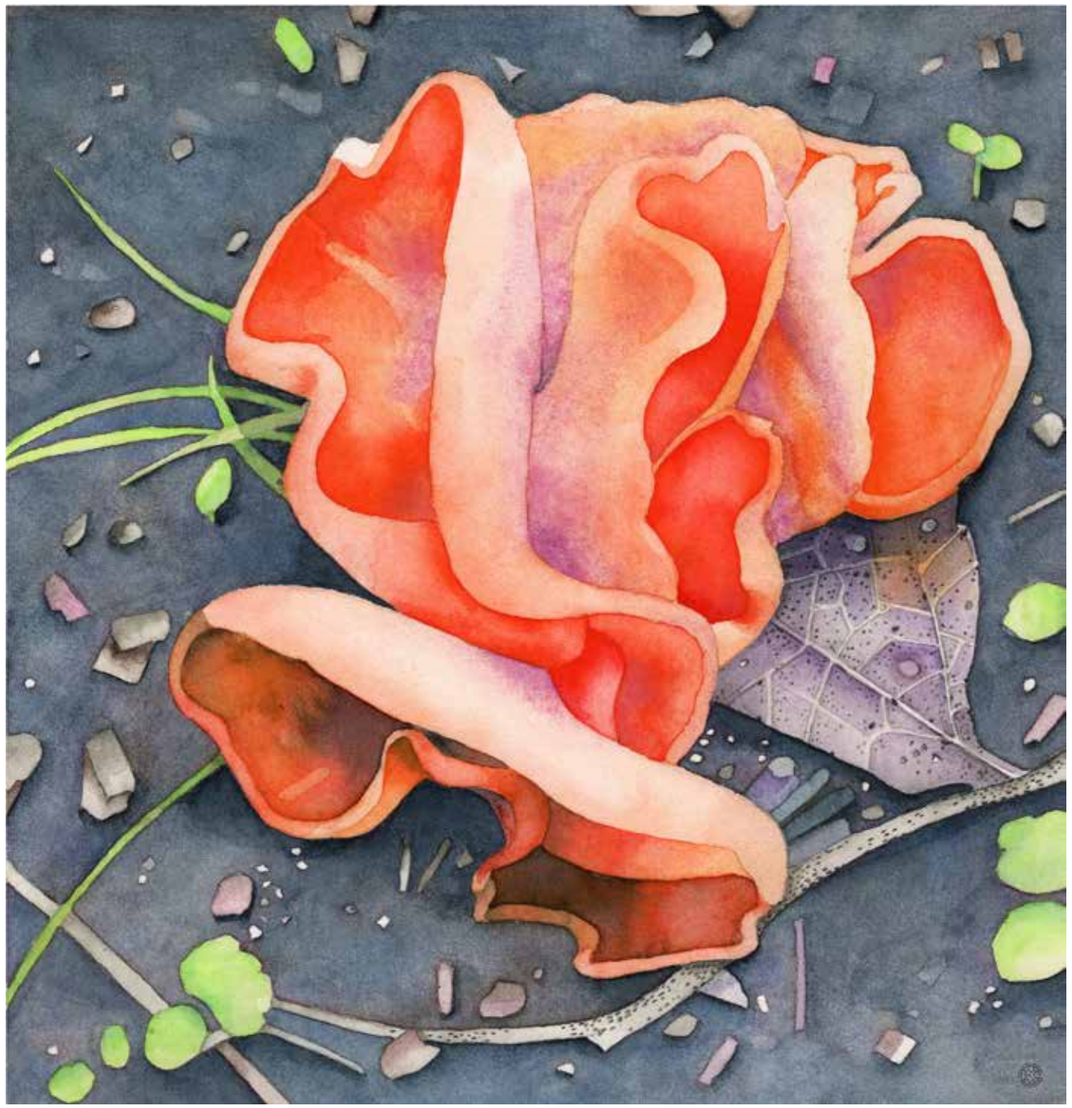
**Limited Edition Prints available in the shop.**

*Orange Fairy Cup*
*(Orange Peel Fungus - Aleuria aurantia)*
Watercolor
22” x 21”
$800 [ **SOLD** ]

There are not many living things that are orange so spotting orange in nature is a rare surprise. Like its namesake, it looks like a discarded orange peel. They’re not toxic and are editable, though it’s highly recommended consulting with an experienced forager before thinking about adding it to the menu.

The best thing I do with fungi and mushrooms is be amazed by them and let them be. They’re a part of the life cycle, breaking down organic matter, returning it to the soil, and ensuring it stays rich and healthy.

**Limited Edition Prints available in the shop.**



*One Snowy Day*
*(Northern Flicker — Woodpecker Family)*
Watercolor and Graphite Pencil
35” x 25”
$1,200 [ **SOLD** ]

*“Humanity is exalted not because we are so far above other living creatures, but because knowing them well elevates the very concept of live.”* — E.O. Wilson, American biologist, naturalist, writer and leading expert in myrmecology, the study of ants.

It feels like magic from nowhere when nature takes your breath away. A strikingly handsome Northern Flicker decides to land close by while the falling snow silently blankets the woods. It’s the reward for being still and present.

*The Crown*
(Sunflower — *Helianthus annuus*)
Watercolor and Graphite Pencil
32” x 24”
$2,300

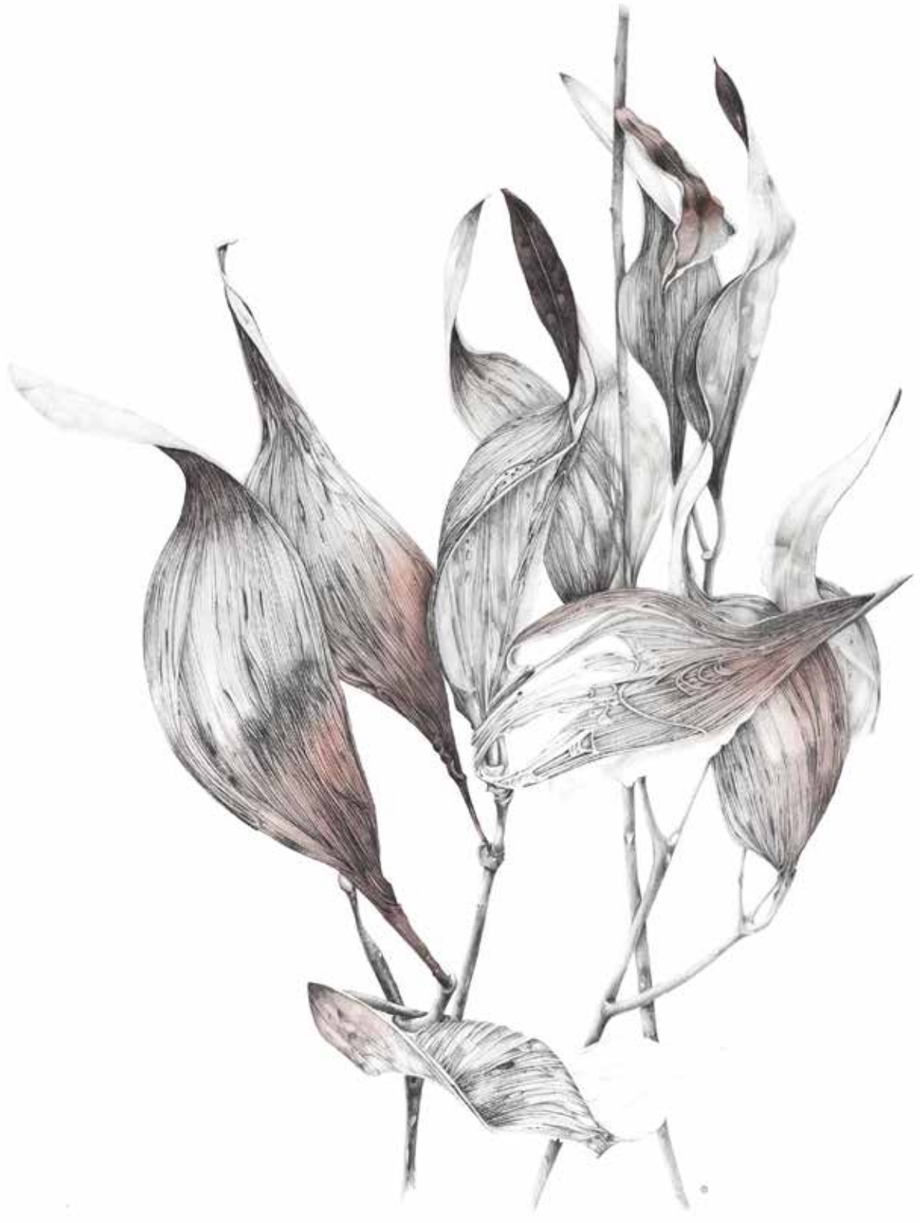
Something about wild native plants and the metamorphosis that happens to them after the frost has “done them in” that makes them amazingly beautiful.

I want to illuminate wild native plants in a higher light as they perform vital services, even in death. I am not certain what species this is, but her leaves resemble those of sunflowers.

In terms of vital services, many native plants may have seeds for birds to feed on throughout the winter, and their hollowed stems can be a place for beneficial insects to hibernate. Holding on with their deep roots, native plants keep soil from washing away when the snow melts in spring. Their decaying bodies return to the earth, nurturing it for the next generation of wild native plants.

*Guardians*
*(Milkweed Pods)*
Watercolor and Graphite Pencil
35” x 27”
$1,700

Dried and weathered, milkweed pods resemble spears and shields. Knowing the Monarch butterfly dependssolely on the Milkweed plant for her larvae to feed, grow, and eventually metamorphose into adult butterflies makes this image more apropos. Defending and protecting the Monarch butterfly means planting and preserving her guardians.



*Basket*
(Dried Bull Thistle — *Cursium vulgare)*
Graphite Pencil
29” x 34”
$3,200

Featured in ***Eyewitness: Minnesota Reflections on Climate Change*** published by *Climate Generation: A Will Steger Legacy* commemorating of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, April 22, 2020.

The underside of dead bull thistles has the feel of woven baskets. Baskets for holding, gathering, giving, and receiving. Reciprocity. The land I was standing* on had been rescued from agricultural use and appeared to at rest. Because of its sandy rocky soils and seed resources, the land reverted and now supports a surprising number of native species.

Think what you will about bull thistles. Some argue they are invasive. Others love the big puffs of purple blooms thistles produce. Thistles could be a symbol of reciprocity. In exchange for a place on this earth, they are noteworthy for their high wildlife value, copious floral resources for pollinators, nourishing seeds for birds, such as goldfinches, foliage for butterfly larvae, and down for lining birds’ nests.

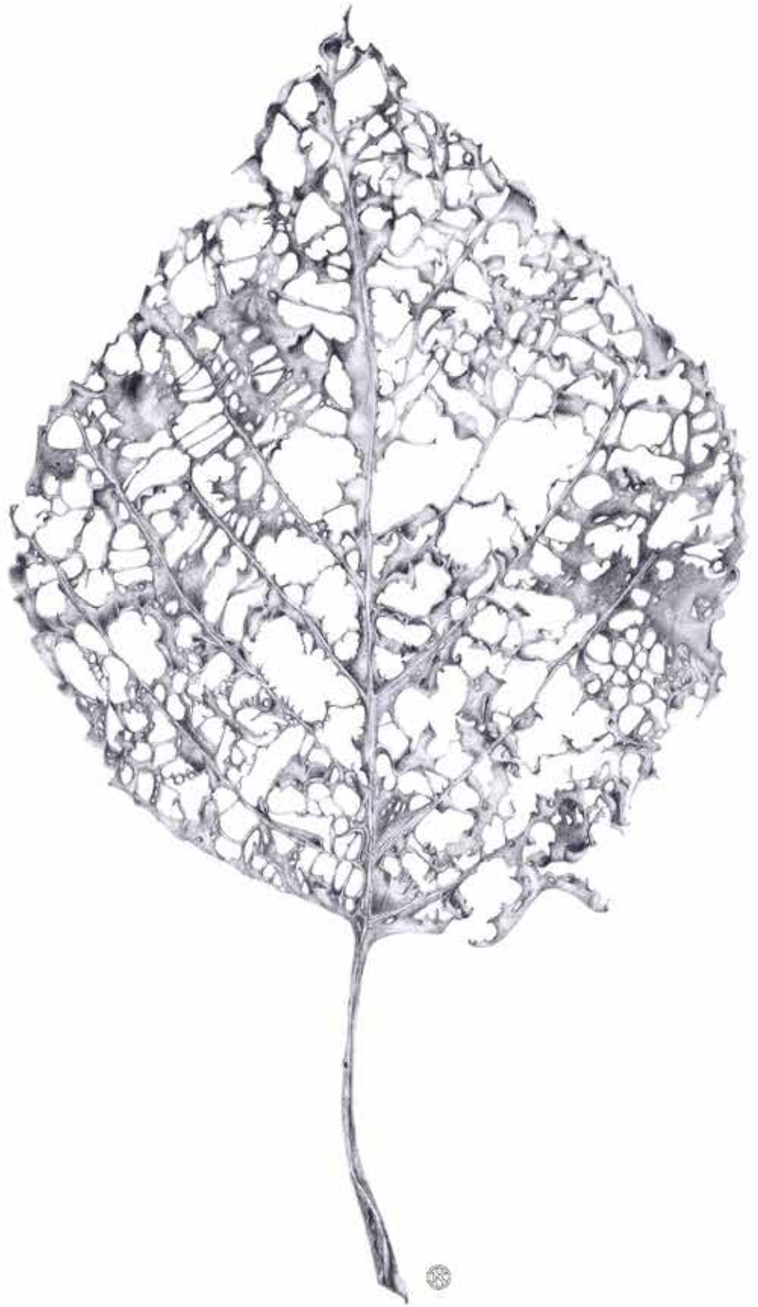
**Basket** was produced for the IN YOUR ELEMENT exhibition, organized and curated by *The Natural Heritage Project*. The land referred is *Standing Cedars Community Land Conservancy,** south of Osceola, Wisconsin. The land is protected by a nonprofit led by St. Croix Valley residents committed to protecting and preserving the quality and diverse biomes of the Lower St. Croix uplands from over development and for future generations.

*Temporary Housing*
*(House Finch Nest)*
Non-Human Architects Series
Graphite Pencil
35” x 28”
$1,700

Drawn in detail at three hundred percent its original size, a tiny house finch nest is an architectual wonder of fine weaving to hold their precious offspring.

*Collateral Beauty*
*(Japanese Beetle Leaf Mining)*
Non-Human Architects Series
Graphite Pencil
35” x 28”
$1,700

It’s a paradox. The beautiful “leaf lace” is created by the Japanese Beetle, an insect stamped as invasive. It’s not the fault of the beetle but rather the repercussions of a global, colonized world that makes such invasions possible.



*Mobile Home*
*(Common Garden Snail — Helix aspersa)*
Non-Human Architects Series
Graphite Pencil
36” x 34”
$1,700

We are just beginning to learn about the emotional and intellectual lives of animals. Not just mammals but invertebrates like squid and octopus have them, too. (Watching the documentary film *My Octopus Teacher* is a testament to this).

Who is to say a simple common snail wouldn’t want to adorn her shell? As if inspired by William Morris’ designs and philosophy that we should all be surrounded by beautiful things to improve one’s well being, she more aptly took from her surroundings, the delicate fern and mosses, wrapping them around her home just so.

*Tree Knots No. 1*
*(*Osage Orange — *Maclura pomifera)*
Graphite Pencil and Watercolor
20” x 20”
$950

Most people know its fruit, the strange yellow-green ball with rough, bumpy outer skin that repels spiders, mice and cockroaches. There are many names for the tree itself, commonly known as the Osage Orange though it’s not related to the orange at all.

Native to the American Midwest, Osage Indians used its hard, pliable wood for hunting bows. For European settlers the Osage Orange was an excellent hedge in the pre-barbed wire era.

What I found striking about the Osage Orange is their deeply furrowed and scaly bark. It looks like a lava flow where bright orange fleshly bark is exposed.

Growing up to 65 feet tall, the Osage Orange trees I observed had huge clusters of galls bulging from their bark. A sign of old wounds and infestations, galls like these are a woodworker’s dream. As the galls develop, so does the beautiful intricate patterns within the wood’s grain.

*River Divination No. 1*
*Reading The Mississippi Shore*
Watercolor
36” x 31”
$2000

**The River Divination** series began with an audio story recorded by a first-year University of Saint Thomas student telling about his experiences with the Mississippi River. Wanting to take an authentic approach for the project (Mississippi River Stories Exhibit), I retraced this student’s steps as best imaginable and discovered a portal into an oasis of peace and beauty.

Light filtered through flaming autumn maple leaves in stunning color created a magical experience. I began taking lots of reference photos and in do so noticed patterns and arrangements of rocks, seeds, sticks, leaves and sand along the shore. It made me start thinking about divinations and their meaning.

We live in a state with the most fresh water in the world, home to the source of the Mississippi River. Water shapes our stories, songs, art, and culture. Though we have made efforts in restoration and conservation, we have done much damage to our life-giving water. It’s time to wake up to what the river telling us.

*River Divination No. 2*
*Passing Through*
Watercolor
28” x 28”
$1500

There was so much to take in that day by the Mississippi shoreline and I took many reference photos to bring back to the studio. I noticed a dog’s paw print with indentations of water drops scattered on the sand. The dog must have enjoyed a river dip before trotting back onto the bank. While I was relieved not to see trash scattered about, I didn’t see any evidence of human occupation with the exception of a lone rusted bolt that had washed ashore.

*River Divination No. 3*
*We Will Know When We Get There*
Watercolor
28” x 28”
$1500

This piece is an extension of River Divination No. 2: Passing Through. You can see a few of the same stones, the rusted bolt washed up long ago, and a dog’s paw print in the sand but at a different perspective and lighting.

It’s how our minds view and interpret the world, looking for signs of where to go next. The strong afternoon light in contrast to what could be my shadow, standing there observing the patterns and organic forms designed by the river, whispering to me where I should go next.

*River Divination No. 4*
*Devotion*
Watercolor
25” x 25”
$800 [ **SOLD** ]

There are times when nature orchestrates a moment that feels like it was intended for you. Like a Zen master, she asks you to pay attention to this one point in time and be devoted to it.

An autumn leaf lands on a rock just so on the banks of the Mississippi River, well before I have arrived on the Mississippi Shores, October 18, 2021. I’m so glad I was there to witness every arrangment nature orchestrated.

*The river welds its muse to shape the stories we tell ourselves.*
*Ask people to look at what the water is saying, hear her poetry, and sense her magic.*
*We feel so much better sitting at the river’s edge. — KRISTIN MAIJA PETERSON*

**Limited Edition Prints available in the shop.**

*Marshland: Casting Spells*
Watercolor
32” x 32”
$1800

This is a view into the marsh that lives behind our house. It’s autumn with a few clouds reflecting on its shallow waters. In spring the marsh bursts into frog song. Later the arrowheads and blue flags will bloom. Red wing blackbirds nest in the reeds. Muskrats patrol Mallard ducks all summer long. That’s just the surface. I know there are many more organisms that call this marsh home.

People sometimes use marsh and swamp interchangeably. I didn’t know the difference until I looked it up. Both are shallow bodies of water but their identification is based on where they reside. Marshes are found in open areas like prairie wetlands and swamps in forested areas. Both are vital and vibrate, diverse ecosystems.

*The artist in her studio. Photo by Ani Cardot*

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