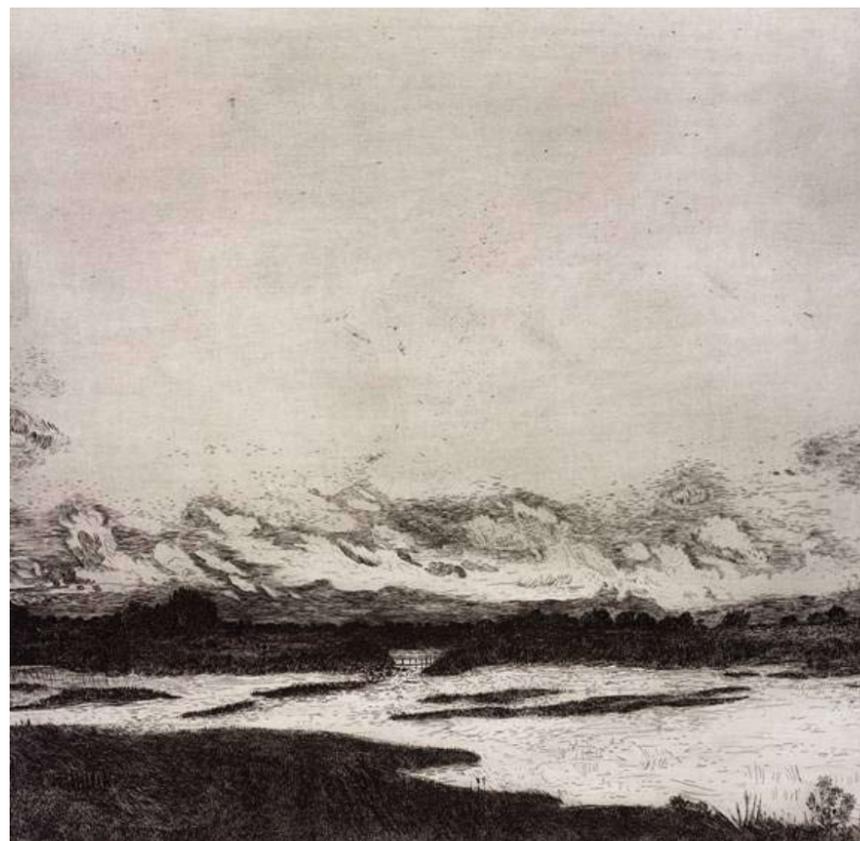


Imagining Nature

Nancy Friese



Editor's note: *Painter-printmaker Nancy Friese teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence. She has exhibited her work nationally and internationally. Friese was recently elected as a National Academician of the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts in New York. NMWA has acquired six of her etchings including Slough and Cottonwood.*

Nancy Friese, *Slough* (from "Tumbling Time"), 2008; Line etching on Gampi-coated Shikoku; 15 x 15 in.

As a child, I daydreamed while I collected agates for my father on the shores of Lake Superior, gathered starfish from a Pacific beach, rode through the Red River Valley and into the plains of North Dakota, and walked along creeks in Ohio. The quiet time allowed me to look outward on the world. How could I re-create these heightened experiences of timelessness?

Through more travels and paths, I

studied art and turned to landscape as a source. A landscape artist seeks out special places in nature in which to reflect and concentrate. I learned printmaking from the masters: April Foster at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Sylvia Lark at the University of California, Berkeley, and Gabor Peterdi at Yale University.

I move easily between printmaking and painting and begin in either medium at a chosen site. In many cases I have

created both a painting and a print from the same site but from different views. It is meaningful for me to work in places that I have a personal connection to or in preserved terrains. Spatial readings, the quality of texture and light, the particularity of the trees and foliage, the relationships of the forms, or even the memory of another place—these elements initially draw me to a spot. I may visit a site six to twenty times to produce a single piece,

doing as much work as possible outdoors but completing some works in the studio. My open-air paintings range in size up to twelve feet. I created *Walkway*, 2009, at Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay, New York.

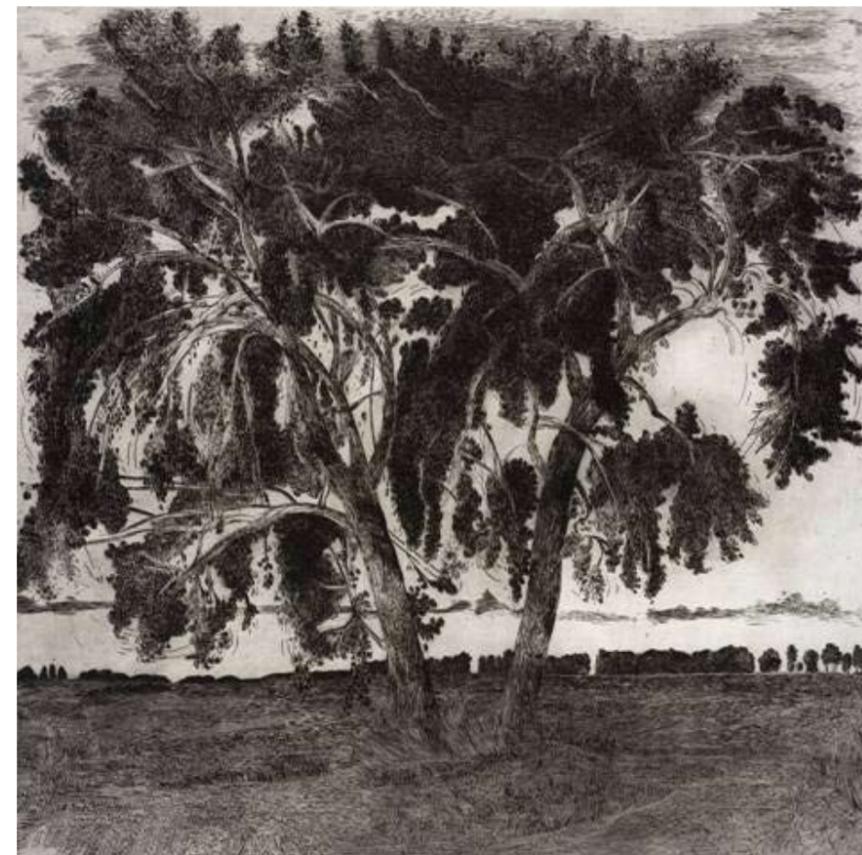
When I first saw etchings by Mary Nimmo Moran (1842–1899), I felt an immediate connection. Through direct observation, she translated nature in a way that seemed humble yet bold. Her fresh and direct style was beyond her time. She was an acclaimed painter-printmaker during her lifetime and the first woman to become a member of the Royal Society of Painters and Etchers in England, yet she remains underrecognized today.¹ Eliza Pratt Greatorex (1820–1897) and Edith Loring Peirce Getchell (1855–1940) were also respected etchers of that era. The means were limited to achieve a range of sky, water, twilight, and bright sunlight, but these women created tone by line etching, rouletting, and wiping the plate selectively.

Historically, after a total number of prints is completed, a plate is scratched with an X to prevent further editions. Through reprinting extant historical cancelled plates, I became familiar with the depth, scale, and effects achieved by the etching revival of the late nineteenth century.

I drew my North Dakota prints, "Tumbling Time," on copper near the Red River and around my rural farmstead. I built up the print through layers of lines, using varying densities to create tone. In each of the five prints in the suite, the horizon is shifted to emphasize vast or



Nancy Friese, *Walkway*, 2009; Watercolor on Lanagravure; 40 x 60 in.; Courtesy Cade Tompkins Editions * Projects, Providence, Rhode Island



Nancy Friese, *Cottonwood* (from "Tumbling Time"), 2008; Line etching on Gampi-coated Shikoku; 15 x 15 in.

intimate space. Laurel Reuter, director of the North Dakota Museum of Art and author of the poems and prose that accompany "Tumbling Time," wrote, "Cottonwoods are beloved ... for their chatter or the sound caused by shimmering heart shaped leaves as they move in the wind."² *Cottonwood*, 2008, highlights the giant plains cottonwoods that encircle farmsteads and slowly tumble down. *Slough*, 2008, was drawn at Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge, a bird sanctuary with eight pools of water.

For the series "Emerald Necklace, Muddy River," 2009, Barbara O'Brien, now curator at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, Missouri, invited me to work along the Emerald Necklace waterway in the fens of Boston for an exhibition at Simmons College. O'Brien was interested in the performative role of a contemporary artist working outside and the historical trajectory of women landscape artists. I made a set of

eight paintings followed by four line etchings that translate the urban wild.

Looking at my paintings and prints together, the lessons of line and tone are side by side with color and form. In the watercolors and oils, as in my prints, I build the surface from light to dark and use line for texture and volume. Art historian Linda Hults has written that my landscapes are "invariably rich in human history."³ For me, the history of observation and construction is revealed.

—Providence, Rhode Island, April 2010

Notes

1. Gladys Engel Lang and Kurt Lang, *Etched in Memory: The Building and Survival of Artistic Reputation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 169.
2. Laurel Reuter and Nancy Friese, *Tumbling Time* (Providence, RI: Cade Tompkins Editions * Projects; Grand Forks, ND: Sundog Press, University of North Dakota, 2008), 7.
3. Linda C. Hults, *The Contemporary Landscape*, exh. cat. (Wooster, OH: College of Wooster Art Museum, 2002), 18.