

Image page 1: "Fault Lines at the Breaking Point," 2020, Mixed media assemblage on birch wood blocks, 16"x20"x3"

Image page 2, top: "Maritime Forest," 2020, Digital photograph, 20"x24"

Image page 3, middle: "Storylines 1," (detail: "Ghost Forest"), 2020, Image transfer on aluminum panel mounted on stained and burned raw canvas, 4 6"x6" panels, 18"x14" total size

Image page 3, top: "Lost Connection," 2020, Digital photograph, 20"x24"

Image page 3, bottom: "Persistence," 2020, Digital photograph, 16"x20"



FAULT LINES, THROUGH LINE Lynne Scott Constantine

Whether we jump or are pushed, or the edge of the known world just crumbles at our feet, we fall, spinning into someplace new and unexpected. Despite our fears of falling, the gifts of the world stand by to catch us.

-Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

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Each person who lives in the Outer Banks has a personal map. No two people's perceptions of a place are the same. Memory, prior experiences in other places, what you know about the area's history and the world of its indigenous inhabitants, your engagement with the natural world as it once was and as it is now, all shape your sense of what a particular location is and means.

I grew up in a place called "Sound View," in the Bronx, New York, but there was no sound to view; just the Bronx River, filthy with industrial waste, emptying into a tidal strait of Long Island Sound—a sound, yes, but not visible from anywhere in Sound View. Nature to me was the toxic river, the curated landscape of Central Park, the strip of grass separating lanes on the Cross Bronx Expressway, a tangle of untamed bushes near my home camouflaging little lean-tos built by homeless immigrants from Central America. My vision was so poor for the first decade of my life that I couldn't even see individual leaves on trees.

So, it is a surprise that the remarkable eastern coastal plain of North Carolina has felt like my true home from the minute I moved here. You cannot live here



without being attentive to this remarkable biome. Here I have not one but five actual sounds to view; Currituck Sound is less than a city block's walk from my door. I wander easily among the brave remnants of the area's maritime forests and dunes; scour the ocean beaches for ghost crabs, shore birds, and other skittering life forms; sit in the darkest dark I have ever known for a glimpse of the miraculous Milky Way; and cautiously coexist with snakes, purple martins, spiders, voles, skinny coyotes, and the occasional bear. I can talk weather like my local-born neighbors and can read the clouds for minute-by-minute change.



I admire this place because it models the way even fragile-seeming environments have natural resiliency. To live on and among barrier islands is to know the constant push-and-pull between land paths and the water's intention. Bridges are our triumphant assertion of will over water, but bridges are also the fault lines of our connections—a reality seen in the non-functioning bridges of "Fault Lines at the Breaking Point," created for this exhibition. I also think about New Inlet's history of opening, closing, and re-opening, which highlights the fruitlessness of human-made

intent along the always-changing coast. We will see more of this battle of wills as rising sea levels and increasingly frequent storms reshape barrier islands up and down the East Coast.

Left to its own devices, the natural world is a miracle of adaptation. The trees of the maritime forest, for example, learned to adapt to wind and salt spray. On a misty day, even a small swath of maritime forest can body forth the illusion of its majestic, mysterious past, when it covered large parts of the coastal plain and participated with the dunes and the marshes in holding the islands together.

Today, more and more of what remains is ghost forest—trees killed by rising waters, but which continue to stand, leafless, lifeless, but unbowed.



Every inch of the planet's surface bears the imprint of human activity. Yet we still fail to see that the health of the planet depends on our collaborating with nature in a mutual dance of survival. Flows of water, roads, and paths become transformative when the human hand reaches out not in dominion over, but in partnership with, shaping and connecting.

If I had to select a mascot for humanity as we try to regenerate our climate-stressed, sprawling world, it would be the lichen, an ancient collaboration between two simple lifeforms. Through teamwork, a lichen is a self-contained survival unit, able to succeed in the harshest environments without doing harm to any other creature. Experts estimate that 6% of the earth's surface is covered by lichens. Lichens are often the earliest lifeforms to return to an area devastated by a disaster. They also are among the earth's oldest living creatures: a colony of map lichen growing on rocks in Greenland, for example, is between 3,000 and 5,000 years old. We have much to learn from the lichen's success.

In "Storylines 1" and Storylines 2," created for this exhibition, images of lichen, a bridge, dunes, maritime forest, ghost forest, a sea rise map and an open hand are the collective unconscious of the Outer Banks. Timeless and dreamlike, at once present and ephemeral, they are a repository of storylines waiting for us to fill them in with our imaginations. They embody both the fault lines along which perils lie, and the through line of human good will, persistence, and ingenuity that offers hope and a way out of peril. Can we find a tremulous balance with our natural world to preserve what depends on our good will for its continued presence among us?

