

Fairy Tales of the Anthropocene:
Drawing Stories for a New Age of Forest Fairy Tale

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington

2019

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
Department of Art, Art History, and Design

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Abstract

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What would a contemporary fairy tale set in the forest look like? In European folktales, the forest serves as a setting for morality lessons, social commentary, magical encounters with animals, and often violent or unsettling outcomes. Today, in the context of the Anthropocene, the current geologic age in which humans have impacted the planet beyond repair, forests are contested sites where human activity encroaches on animal habitats and threatens fragile ecosystems. The resulting interactions between people, animals, and trees at the forest edge form the subject matter for my series of ink drawings and oil paintings. Using a gaggle of girls as my flawed protagonists, the series interweaves my own autobiography with forest myths, news stories, social media posts of recent events in U.S. National Parks, and accounts of human-caused extinctions. What began as a single drawing depicting the killing of the last Great Auk—a penguin-like bird from the North Atlantic that went extinct in the mid-19th century—expanded into a complex narrative evoking the blindness and folly of human misdeeds against the natural world.



Fig. 1: *The Girl and the
Albino Moose*
Ink Transfer on Paper
9 x 12 in.



Fig 2: *The Last Great Auk*
Ink Transfer on Paper
9 x 12 in.

What would a contemporary fairy tale set in the forest look like? From Little Red Riding Hood's adolescent awakening when she killed the wolf deep in the forest to Hansel and Gretel's folly using breadcrumbs to guide their way through the trees, the forest serves as a setting for morality lessons, magical encounters with animals, and often violent or unsettling outcomes. Today, in the context of the Anthropocene, the current geologic age in which humans have impacted the planet beyond repair, forests are contested sites where human activity encroaches on animal habitats and threatens fragile ecosystems. The resulting interactions between people, animals, and trees at the forest edge form the subject matter for my series of ink drawings and oil paintings. Using a gaggle of girls as my flawed protagonists, the series interweaves my own autobiography with forest myths, news stories, social media posts of recent events in U.S. National Parks, and accounts of human-caused extinctions. What began as a single drawing depicting the killing of the last Great Auk—a penguin-like bird from the North Atlantic that went extinct in the mid-19th century—expanded into a complex narrative evoking the blindness and folly of human misdeeds against the natural world.

At the Henry Art Gallery, the drawings hang in two rows, quite close together and thinly framed in simple wood frames with clean white mats. Their proximity and grouping suggest a connection between the images and a linear reading from left to right. However, they could also be shown singularly, in groups, or in a different order. Each drawing is like snapshot in a story, a specific moment in time placed next to other snapshots not necessarily from the same day or even the same place. As I worked on the drawings and researched the content, I allowed the story to change and evolve. From the original drawing of the last Great Auk, I drew scenes backward and forwards in time, developing alternate plotlines like chapters in a book. The entire series grew out of research and a broad gathering of stories related to interactions between humans and forests. As I searched for the content for my new fairy tale, I drew from myriad sources, which I divide now into four categories: Art Historical Influences, Autobiography, Ecological Accounts and Contemporary Events, and Fairy Tale and Forest Myths. Before explaining the influences, content, and methodology of my work, I first illuminate where the idea for the series came from and how this fictional narrative approach developed.

The development of this body of work led me to question and investigate my role as an artist in relation to this highly charged political and environmental moment. The breadth and scope of the environmental issues at stake often left me feeling at a complete loss for how to represent them in my work. Just as one person can have little effect on the larger collective crisis of climate change, one image often fails to communicate an issue so complex and largely *un-seeable*. Rising temperatures, melting ice, bleaching coral, dying species, refugee crises—the full story of climate change is either so large that it numbs people to images of apocalypse and destruction or so small that the effects appear inconsequential.

Over two years as an MFA student, I navigated numerous approaches to the issue. During an artist residency in Singapore, I investigated human-caused alterations to the physical landscape through land creation (or “reclamation”) in my series of etchings, “East Coast Park, Singapore, 1954-...” (2018). Upon returning from that residency, I made paintings of the dams that control the flow of rivers, imperiling fish habitats throughout Washington. While these works tap into fascinating stories in the Anthropocentric vein, for my thesis, I felt compelled to make more personal works. Returning to my roots, I examined my individual perspective as a young woman who grew up living on the edge of the forest in rural Maine. I began telling the stories of my life and memories of my childhood, which I connected to stories from art history, fairy tales, and current news media. By tapping into the childhood imagination, I allowed fiction and true events to merge, blending fragments of news images with family photos and invented forested settings. As artist Nicole Eisenman described of her work in 2016, “It’s the most tender work I’ve done...These are me and my life” (Solway 5), the work I am making now is a tender return to my childhood self and the world that child has grown up into.

I see the role of artist and storyteller as intricately linked. Individual stories, both real and fictional, have a way of connecting with people. I collage figure and landscape together to tell site-specific stories with a universal meaning. Using images without words lends an inevitable ambiguity to the narrative. That ambiguity, as well as moments of abstraction leave openings for the viewer to insert their own experiences and associations. A child holding a rifle could reference teaching a child to hunt. Or did the girl pick up the gun without supervision of her parents and is a horrific accident imminent? Or

does she have a more violent intent? As an artist, I draw from the specificity of my experiences and observations, but tell only half the story, allowing the viewer to fill in the gaps.

Art Historical Influences

The coalescing of imagery to induce comparisons of contemporary and historical perceptions of the forest became one goal of my series, *Fairy Tales of the Anthropocene*. When viewed from afar, the drawings resemble a story book—children frolicking in the forest, perhaps. Upon closer observation, the imagery defies expectations of classical depictions of humans in nature. I pit images of Edenic bliss against scenes of blindfolded girls tumbling down a slope. A youth in para-military garb could be hunting for survival, but the scope is unnervingly close to shooting the other children. Kids scramble up the branches of a Joshua Tree in playful enjoyment of the forest, yet the outcome, the breaking of the tree, the falling of the girls, is left unsaid. The ambiguity of these situations is largely inspired by Goya's series, *The Caprichos* (1797-1708). His etchings and aquatints combine magical and fictional characters involved in violent and gleefully absurd acts. In this series, as Licht describes, Goya "sets himself the task of illustrating certain incongruencies, injustices, stupidities, and cruelties of his age in order to open our eyes and arouse our indignation" (92). He goes on to explain that rather than take a self-righteous viewpoint in his representations of the actions of others, one feels as though "Goya has direct personal experience of the error being satirized and that it is not just something being observed from a detached vantage point" (Licht 93). Similarly, the viewpoint of my narratives is firmly on the ground (or in the trees) alongside the characters at play, suggesting a kind of complicity in the actions of the girls.

Much of the story itself is inspired by Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting, *The Parable of the Blind Leading the Blind* (1568). The painting of blind men following each other down a hillside has been used as a metaphor throughout history when a leader is ignorant of the situation into which he brings his followers. In this political moment, the metaphor seems apt to describe the inaction of the world's leaders towards climate change. In my interpretation, however, the children in my story are intentionally blindfolded, just as many people today turn a blind eye to the crisis. I added a scene to the series depicting the moment when the main character joins the group of children and is given her own blindfold

in order to conform. From then on, the girls move through the forest and engage in unsettling, destructive acts as they blindly follow the actions of the group they take part in.

Methodology

A mix of free-associative drawing and collage form the basis for the development of my ideas. I begin either with a story or a selection of images, from childhood photos and my own snapshots to staged photography, media images, and drawings from my imagination. I insert characters into settings, often using compositional structures influenced by art historical works by Bruegel, Bosch, Goya, and Gauguin. For example, in *The Trees Have Eyes, The Forest Has Ears*, the title references a drawing by Hieronymus Bosch called *The Field Has Ears, the Forest Has Eyes* (c. 1500). As Koerner describes, Bosch likely drew the image in response to a Proverb from his day, “‘The field has eyes, and the wood has ears; I will look, stay silent, and listen’. The Proverb warns of the perils of a hostile social order where the wise man keeps his counsel” (244). While drawing a forest in Discovery Park in Seattle, I noticed the trees had knots that looked convincingly like eyes. This forest is the setting for the scene where the main character joins the group, dons the blindfold, and does not speak against the violence about to ensue. In a single drawing, trees from Seattle join with stray sensoria from Bosch to form a scene from my fictional fairy tale.



Fig. 3: *The Trees Have Eyes, The Forest Has Ears*
Ink Transfer on Paper
9 x 12 in.

Spontaneity is an important factor in the process of making my drawings and paintings. In searching for methods of printmaking I could do in my studio without a press, I came across the process of ink transfer drawing, originally invented by Gauguin. To create a transfer drawing, I roll ink over a glass slab, gently lay a piece of thin paper over it, and draw an image in reverse using different pencils, tools, or even pressing onto the surface of the paper with my fingers to create textures. The thickness of the ink and qualities of the paper play important roles in the type of mark created. I found this process particularly freeing, lending a mode of chance to the resulting image, and in keeping with the theme of blindness in my work. I cannot see what is happening on the reverse side while I make the marks. Working particularly well for the idea of narrative, the residual ink left on the glass contains an impression of the drawing made, which can often transfer to the next image if I do not re-ink the glass. One can see the ghostly image only by looking closely and comparing sections of consecutive drawings. I appreciate the ghost image, since it links the images together and emulates the way memory works, leaving traces of past actions on the present. It also seems to mirror how folktales are passed down from one generation to the next and subtly changed over time. In each drawing, I add a splash of red ink, which I use to differentiate the main character just as Little Red Cap is differentiated in the Grimm Fairy Tale. To do this, I ink a separate glass with red ink, place the drawing face down over it, and press only where I want the red to transfer.

Autobiography

My recent drawings and paintings began to look like fairy tale scenes long before I was able to accept their roots in the stories of my childhood, growing up on the edge of the forest in Midcoast Maine. As a kid, I spent my largely unstructured summers playing in the forest, dragging rocks and branches to build forts with my friends, and having magical, but terrifying encounters with moose. I learned to collect kindling, build a wood fire, tap Maple trees, and boil sap. To me, the forest was simultaneously wild and unpredictable and a resource to be used and tamed. The forest I explored as a child is depicted in many of my drawings, oftentimes with my house, playhouse, or neighbors' homes featured in the background. While I look back on these memories with nostalgia, I am critical of Romantic ideas that represent

humans in nature as purely idyllic. Instead, I look for ways to embed the darker narratives of the irreconcilable damage humans have caused to the climate and animal ecosystems into works that simultaneously draw from and contradict the history of idyllic landscape painting.

Ecological Accounts and Contemporary Events

While the setting of many of my works hits home, I often draw narratives from accounts I read in the news and in environmental non-fiction. After reading both *The Sixth Extinction* by Terry Glavin and the book of the same title, *The Sixth Extinction* by Elizabeth Kolbert (both reference this story), I was particularly moved by the description of the Last Great Auk. The Auk was a bird that looked much like the puffins of Maine, but went extinct in the mid-19th-century due to overhunting and the popularity of its down feathers. Glavin quotes the sailors' account from the Outer Hebrides islands in Scotland in 1821, "While the bird was asleep they carried it up to their bothy, kept it alive for three days, and then killed it with a stick, for there had been heavy gales not long before and it might have been a witch" (53). The men apparently believed the bird had caused the recent storm. They may or may not have known it was the last of its kind in that area, but regardless, acted with foolish superstition in their violent and purposeless killing of the bird. This vivid account was one of the first stories I drew. Since the men acted in ignorance, I represented them as a group of children surrounding the dying bird while an older girl beats it with a stick. I began thinking about what events may have come before and after this moment and used this drawing as a starting point to create further compositions of the girls killing birds, snipping their feathers, and suspending their kill from the trees the birds once inhabited.

Stories like the extinction of the Auk continued to surface in my research and I began to think about human behavior and group dynamics when it comes to environmental irresponsibility. My work took on a political edge as I responded to the blind inertia and denial of climate change promoted by the current administration in the White House. In 2018, Trump announced his intentions to open the previously protected Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. He simultaneously blamed the deadliest wildfires in California history on forest mismanagement while rolling back carbon emissions regulations. These realities often take on the tenor of surrealism.

In several drawings, the girls explore the devastated landscapes of the aftermath of the 2017 and 2018 wildfires in Sonoma and Paradise, California. I noticed that in certain news photos after the fires, clay pots and garden gnomes were some of the only remnants of the destroyed homes among the burnt trees. My drawing, *A Post-Fire Rendezvous* depicts the garden gnomes, like dwarfs, in a forest full of detritus. I drew Trump in the background, hunched as if a gnome himself, and the American flag that was suspended to a destroyed home during his visit to survey the damage. This scene, with gnomes amid trees, and a magic mirror drawn in the foreground, is an amalgamation of contemporary events and embedded fairy tale tropes.



Fig. 4: *A Post-Fire Rendezvous*
Ink Transfer on Paper
9 x 12 in.



Fig. 5: *Aftermath I (with Dog)*
Ink Transfer on Kozo Paper
5 x 7 in.



Fig. 6: *Aftermath II (with Gnomes)*
Ink Transfer on Kozo Paper
9 x 12 in.

During the government shutdown in January 2019, many visitors to U.S. National Parks left heaps of garbage, drove vehicles through protected habitats, and interacted with wildlife in abusive ways. In Joshua Tree National Park, tourists posted photos to social media of themselves climbing on the sensitive Joshua Trees, resulting in damage that will affect the park for hundreds of years to come. In my drawings, I incorporated images sourced from Instagram posts of adults acting with the environmental sensitivity of children as they posed hanging from the Joshua Trees, whose shallow root systems may not recover from being pulled down. Park advocates responded to the posts by telling Instagrammers to remove the photos so as not to encourage others to do the same. My response was to draw these people as ignorant children, whose play in climbing on the trees resulted in irreversible damage. The ink transfer drawing—its composition divided into two parts—later became the reference for a large-scale oil painting on canvas, *The Tourists and the Joshua Tree*. Painted in a near monochromatic blue color palette, the painting pushes the image further into surrealism. Separated into two panels like the original drawing, each panel references a different color mood and time of day. The transition from dusk to mid-day describes how the acts occurred to the same tree over several days of the shutdown. The children, painted in various shades of blue and back-lit local skin colors, are joined by a dog looking towards two snakes hidden in the shadow under the tree. This tense moment references other social media posts of dogs trampling areas of the park where they were banned and adults childishly caressing wildlife and

beheading rattlesnakes. While there is inherent action in the drama of the moment, the characters appear frozen in time, rather than in movement, as if in a dream-like trance. The blue represents the colors of dusk and works in tandem with my other paintings painted primarily in yellows and reds, colors often associated with children's clothing or toys. These colors also add to the impossibility of the scenes, grounding them firmly in the realms of the imagination.

The reality of the events at Joshua Tree exemplify the trouble people get up to without reasonable authority. If no employees are there to man the park and enforce the rules, people will actively ignore rules set to protect the environment and ecosystems that the park is there to preserve. To me, this was a perfect example of the group dynamics I was interested in and fits into the story of *The Blind Leading the Blind*.



Fig. 7: *The Tourists and The Joshua Tree*
Ink Transfer on Kozo
Paper
5 x 13 in.

Fairy Tale and Forest Myths

Fairy tales have long served as a format for analyzing the vices of society, power dynamics between men and women, and communicating morality lessons to adults and children alike. Numerous contemporary artists, including Paula Rego and Kiki Smith use fairy tale, myth, and narrative to explore the complex relationships humans have with nature and with each other. While many fairy tales are re-interpreted in contemporary art, film, and fiction, it is important to understand their origins in the folktales and history of the forests of Lithuania and Germany. In the communities of these ancient forests, both Jewish fairy tales passed down in the oral tradition and German folk tales, later written

down by the Brothers Grimm, flourished. The stories then spread from Europe to the United States, where Walt Disney further transformed and altered their meaning. At the same time, in post-WWII Germany, Anselm Kiefer painted forest myths to reveal their ties to the nationalism that fed Nazi Extremist ideologies. In both Europe and the U.S., Euro-centric perceptions of forests changed from a fear of wilderness, to an idealization of the human experience in nature, to a source of nationalistic pride and, in the case of the German landscape, racial purification. These complex connections between fairy tales, forests, and social history provided fodder for the development of my own fairy tale narrative.

Duquenne writes while discussing contemporary artists' use of fairy tale, "In their eyes it is clear that the magical universe lives within this magical mirror that reflects not only the richness of our inner lives, but also the complexity of our relation to the world" (5). Paula Rego and Kiki Smith draw directly from fairy tales, but often transform the characters based off their own experiences. Paula Rego is particularly interested in the violence of folktales as representative of human nature. Her works reference stories ranging from Portuguese folktales to re-interpretations of Disney characters to a triptych illustrating the dark and disturbing play, *The Pillowman*. She combines adults, animals, dolls, and children to represent fantastical characters and archetypes as everyday people engaging in strange and often unsettling behavior. In an interview from 2011, Rego remarks on the violent impulses of the children depicted in her paintings, "Children are cruel, they have no other way. Either they cry and they give in, or they assert themselves. Lots of children are cruel. Then you grow up and you're much more vulnerable than when you are a child. You feel humiliation more" (3). By staging her models and props within the space of her studio, Rego positions her characters as perpetrators, complicit bystanders, or victims. While she has been criticized for portraying women as victims, she explains that her work is often rooted in her personal experiences, particularly her complicated relationship with her husband, artist Victor Willing.

Rego's work explores the complexity of the human experience without pigeon-holing her subjects into concrete roles of victim or perpetrator. I am interested in that blurring of archetypal roles within my own images. My protagonist is neither good nor evil but exhibits qualities of both. She is swept up in the action by following along with the game, but not the obvious perpetrator or leader of the group. I began to think of her as embodying characters from the ancient Jewish fairy tales from a compilation by Howard

Schwartz. When one thinks of fairy tales today, the Brothers Grimm comes to mind first. Yet another set of fairy tales passed down among the Jewish people explores a different set of attitudes towards the forest and the animals that live within in. Schwartz describes how, expelled from one village after another, Jews took their stories with them (8). Many stories describe the forest as either containing supernatural forces of good or evil, or as a magical Garden of Eden to be sought after. The collection includes the story, *Leaves from the Garden of Eden*, in which the leaves are sought to cure illness when boiled (Schwartz 155-56). In another similar story, *An Apple from the Tree of Life*, a daughter of the Sultan of Turkey falls ill and only an apple from the Tree of Life can save her (33-35). The story, *The Tzaddik in the Forest*, takes a different approach in which a magical man, Shimon Pilam, who lives in the woods, works in secret performing *tikkun olam*, the Jewish tradition of repairing the world (431). He is spotted purifying infested waters and performing miracles for blossoms to bloom on barren trees. Flowers spring up where he walks (336). Other stories feature a demon-woman, Lilith, who lives in an enchanted forest and seduces unknowing men who wander in. The author notes "It is important to keep in mind that the stories about Lilith found in traditional sources are all examples of tales told by men...they should be viewed as men's stories" (Schwartz 10). He later explains that women's tales describe Lilith quite differently and often feature a heroine in the form of a midwife who knows the secrets of healing and how to protect against evil (11).

As I further researched Lilith, I learned that certain Jewish myths describe her as the first woman in the Garden of Eden, alongside Adam. However, when she demands independence and equality from Adam, she is expelled from the Garden and from then on becomes known as a demon of the wilderness with hundreds of demon-children who corrupt other children, particularly young girls. This ancient story of evil lurking within the wilderness continues to influence the representation of the forest in popular culture today. Many of the themes of the forest as the site of supernatural evil surface in recent films fronted by female characters including *Twilight* (2008), *The Witch* (2015), and *Birdbox* (2018). These associations of untrodden wilderness with witches, vampires, and unknown evil continue to prevail in Western imagination.

After reading these stories, I noticed references to Lilith in contemporary art as well, particularly in the work of Kiki Smith. I had, in fact, encountered Smith's 1994 bronze sculpture, *Lilith*, in person before, but did not know at the time the story it referenced. Perched high on the wall of the museum, Lilith crouched, demon-like, her glass eyes gazing realistically down upon the viewer. Smith often references and embodies female mythic and religious figures in her work, recontextualizing them from a feminist perspective. Her wide and varied body of work includes drawings and sculptures of witches, human-animal hybrids, women climbing from the bodies of wolves, and women embracing and mourning the death of their animal companions. In an interview from 2018, Smith describes,

I went to Harvard and I was drawing from the Peabody Museum from these stuffed animals. One of the scientists there was saying how many mammals, from loss of habitat primarily, would become extinct over the next 20, 30, or 40 years. But that was '94 and so a lot of that is coming to fruition with climate change and habitat change. I just thought, 'oh, I should pay attention to that.'...At first I just made representation of animals but then it mixed with fairytales and this intersection between humans and animals, our identity in relationship to animals. (6)

Following Smith's practice, I spent several days at the Burke Museum drawing bird specimens in the ornithology collections. I drew a Passenger Pigeon, which went extinct in 1914, and a Carolina Parakeet, which went extinct in 1920 (both from North America) and numerous other bird skins of endangered species. These drawings became source material for the birds hanging from the trees in my painting, *The Blind Leading the Blind (Into the Forest of Extinction)*.



Fig. 8: *Lilith in the Wilderness*
Ink Transfer on Kozo Paper
9 x 12 in.



Fig. 9: Drawing bird specimens at the Burke Museum

Most of the fairy tales we think of today have their origins within the forests of Germany and Eastern Europe. These tales were written down by men, but often originally told by women. In the case of the Brothers Grimm, many stories were passed down by oral tradition and collected and adapted by the Brothers. Zipes explains, "Most of the storytellers during this period were educated young women from the middle class or aristocracy" who would tell the tales they heard from nursemaids and governesses (28). Yet as the stories evolved, they began to exhibit men's fantasies about women and power, particularly in the versions of Grimm stories adopted by Walt Disney (Zipes 59). As Zipes describes, Disney's versions "celebrat[e] the virile innocence of male power, emphasizing the domestication of sweet, docile, pubescent girls; extoling the virtues of clean-cut, all-American figures" (60). Disney films changed the meaning of the original Grimm's tales. Since many of the first Disney films were made during the Depression, as in *Snow White*, and during the Cold War, as in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*, they were "meant to distract viewers from grasping the evil that confronted their daily lives" (61). According to Zipes, this takes an opposite approach to the original Grimm's tales, which took on issues of class injustice and historical sources of repression rather than sugar-coat them (61). The Disney stories show how drastically fairy tales can change depending on the context—who is telling them and when they are told—and how they can be adapted for propagandist points of view.

In many of the Grimm's tales, the forest serves as a site of transformation for its characters and comes from a long history of German interactions with the forest. Simon Schama in his book, *Landscape and Memory* explains, "Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock...But it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, established itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery" (61). Tracing a forest myth to its origin is nearly impossible, as the stories seem to have existed since humans took their first steps out of the forests and onto the plains. In terms of German history, to investigate where German perceptions of the forest originated, Schama goes back to early Roman explorations of the region. These travelers to the ancient forests of Germany described them with "awestruck admiration" as well as fear; Arcadia as well as "outside (foris) the writ of their law and

governance" (Schama 83). This early dichotomy of good and evil associated with German forest myths continued throughout the history of the primeval Hercynian forest, of which the more commonly known Black Forest is a remnant.

By the early 1900s, German forests became highly politicized sites for various youth movements to exercise their demonstrations and events. In contempt of urban materialism, the Wandervogel movement and the Ramblers valorized the forests and a back-to-nature attitude (Schama 117). A group called the Hermannsschlacht that numbered up to fifty thousand men held marches in the forest dressed in armored, Viking-like historic costumes, imagining themselves as Teutonic kings (117). Whether these groups, which became the base of the Third Reich, were influenced by myth seems apparent, but linking them directly to the tales of the Brothers Grimm is debated. Zipes asserts, "certain American academicians appear to have lost their sense of humor and perspective...[and have] linked Grimms and German folktales to the national tradition that they believe may explain why Germans were so receptive to fascism" (109). He goes on to argue that the nationalism of these tales came from a time when Germany was invaded by the French and was meant to contribute to their cause of resistance (109). Schama presents the opposite view, describing how the German woods became an essential part of German character. He explains, "Tacitus's observation that their isolated habitat had made the Germans the least mixed of all European peoples would of course become the lethal obsession of the Nazi tyranny" (118). He further notes that after 1933, forest symbols increasingly infiltrated German politics, art, and ironically, environmental protection. Schama admits, "It is, of course, painful to acknowledge how ecologically conscientious the most barbaric regime in modern history actually was. Exterminating millions of lives was not at all incompatible with passionate protection of millions of trees" (119).

Whether German fairy tales were written with myths of racial purity in mind is uncertain. Nonetheless, the Third Reich appropriated these myths to inspire the kind of nationalistic sentiment that lead to the murder of millions of Jews. Hitler appropriated Romanticism of nature as a lesson of biological competition, adapted to support his militant nationalistic claims. It was equally as horrifying to hear the same chants of "Blood and Soil (blut und boden)" and "Jews will not replace us" on the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017. The association of the forest and the land with white nationalistic

fervor is a terrifying construct imposed on nature that continues today and one I explore in my short video, *Kaddish*. Made in response to the 2018 shooting in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh by a man who identifies with Nazi and White Supremacist ideologies, the video is my attempt, as a Jewish girl from a rural community, to process this event. In the piece, which uses stop motion animation including charcoal drawing and projection, a figure moves through a surreal grassy landscape on the edge of forest, humming the Jewish prayer for peace. Upon encountering several triggering items: an old photo in a puddle and an old TV in the grass, the landscape begins to transform and she watches as the TV plays news footage of the shooting in Pittsburg and the Charlottesville marches, as well as images from the vigils held across the country in response to these events. In the end, she returns to her surreal world, but the stop motion has changed to live motion, perhaps a sign that she is changed by the reality depicted on screen.



Fig. 10: Video Still from *Kaddish*

The role of an artist is often to examine and bring to the surface embedded collective trauma and the erasure of history. Anselm Kiefer, born in 1945, sought to combat collective German amnesia through his appropriation of forest myths and the work of Casper David Friedrich, a 19th-century German artist who often painted the forest and nature scenes and whose work the Nazis valorized. In one of Kiefer's first paintings since moving to the forests of Odenwald, he painted a dark forest with his own head hovering above it (Schama 122). In his 1969 series, *Occupations*, the artist poses in a photograph with

his back to the camera, giving the Nazi salute on a rocky shore, looking out on the ocean. The pose mirrors that in Friedrich's 1818 painting, *Wanderer Above a Sea of Fog*. The model Friedrich painted in this piece is ironically said to be forestry official Colonel Friedrich Gotthard von Brincken (Cohen 1). Kiefer, however, changed the pose to include the Nazi salute and added the awkwardness and futility of making the gesture alone on an ocean shore. Schama writes that Kiefer "force[s] together culturally acceptable elements of German heroic and mythic tradition with its unacceptable historical consequences" (123). In later works, Kiefer similarly subverts the forest symbols of German nationalism using aesthetics of decay, burning, and death in order to surface the truth of these symbols in the context of the Holocaust.

In my own work, I draw from Kiefer's methodology of first looking to art historical sources for inspiration, then subverting those works in the context of contemporary events and personal experiences. I am drawn to the Romantic paintings of Paul Gauguin, Paul Cezanne and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, which present blissful scenes of humans in nature. While I see similar scenes in city parks and rural landscapes, in *Fairy Tales of the Anthropocene*, I seek to show how this kind of Romanticism is one side of the more complex relationship humans have to nature and to each other. At the root of my work is the double-sidedness of my own experience in nature, which I see as representative of the inertia the world is currently experiencing in its inaction to stop rapid climate change and habitat destruction. I feel most myself trekking through forests, far from the sound of cars and construction. Yet, my very presence in nature has a negative impact on the forests and wilderness I cherish. A recent segment on the podcast, *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, "Into the Woods with Scott Carrier", discusses how the presence of hikers on the Pacific Northwest Trail through the Yaak Valley in Montana endangers the Grizzly Bears that live there. He interviews hikers, wildlife biologists, and environmentalists, and explains how the Grizzly Bears in this area are hanging on by a thread due to their encounters with humans. Carrier concludes, "This is the new face or fate of environmentalism. We create and protect public lands where we can go fall in love with the beauty of nature and wildness. But then just by being there we end up killing it. We kill the thing we love" (00:23:00-00:24:40).



Fig 11: *The Trail Kills the Bear*
Ink Transfer on Paper
9 x 12 in.



Fig. 12: *Fairy Tales of the Anthropocene*
Ink Transfer on Paper
12 Drawings, 9 x 12 in. each



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17: *The Tourists and The Joshua Tree* (diptych)
Oil on Canvas
60 x 109 in.



Fig. 18: *Lilith in the Garden of Eden* (diptych)
Oil on Linen
33 x 40 in. (33 x 20 in. each)



Fig 19: *The Blind Leading the Blind (Into the Forest of Extinction)*
Oil on Canvas over Panel
48 x 72 in.



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Watercolor on Paper
9 x 12 in.

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