

# ABOUT HOPE?



*This is not a drill. It's code red for the Earth...a terrifying future that will be created, or avoided, by the decisions you make...*

—Greta Thunberg



# ABOUT HOPE?

by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, Peter  
Thomas, and Andie Thrans

Eugene, Oregon  
Santa Cruz, California  
Coloma, California

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# ABOUT HOPE?

**HOPE?** is a collaborative art project created by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, Peter Thomas, and Andie Thrums. Through field work in recently burned and green forests in Oregon and California, we have been investigating the complex topics of tree mortality, catastrophic wildfire, and climate change. We created our reliquary of artists' books and artifacts to bear witness to the devastation of western forests and grapple with the question of hope at this pivotal moment in the Anthropocene epoch.

Our collaboration began over dinner during the 2019 Codex Foundation Book Fair and Symposium in Berkeley and Richmond, California. The Codex Foundation had invited artists to create work addressing the global environmental crisis for the project, "EXTRACTION: Art on the Edge of the Abyss." We responded by proposing a collaborative project to create artwork about trees and forests. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the project. During the intervening time, catastrophic wildfires near our homes impacted each of us, and we shifted our focus to investigating the impact of wildfire on western forests.

We were finally able to gather in person during August 2021 at the University of California Merced's Yosemite Field Station in Wawona, California, where we hiked, painted, and wrote in Yosemite's Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias. We explored green forests, blackened hillsides, and unburned areas with trees visibly showing the stresses of extended drought and beetle infestation. We observed the damage caused by a freak wind event in January 2021 that felled hundreds of trees, including an unprecedented number of giant sequoias.

Scientists, Dr. Breezy Jackson, Director of the Yosemite and Sequoia Field Stations, and Yosemite Ranger Naturalist, Jeff Lahr, explained to us that all Sierra Nevada trees, even the sequoias once thought to be invincible, are now vulnerable to fire, insects, and prolonged drought. In addition, fire suppression policies since the late 1800s have created vast areas of dense vegetation fueling megafires.

We asked scientists and rangers: how can artists help and what message do they wish artists would share? They



replied that artists translate facts, data, and observations differently than scientists. Through their work, artists can lead viewers to new insights and even inspire action towards change.

**W**hile in Yosemite, we realized the scope of our project had expanded from a response to catastrophic wildfire to a more significant consideration of climate change. We learned how fossil fuel burning, over-extraction of resources, and a human-centric way of relating to the natural world contributes to these events. We reflected on the survival of Earth's forests and the biosphere, what hope means to each of us, and what we could share about these topics through our project.





Our next step was to reconvene in Peter and Donna's Santa Cruz studio to work on our first collaborative pieces. We began to design a container for our artists' books and artifacts, a reliquary to hold what we deem sacred: the loss of our western forests and hope for the future.

We visited Peter's mother's home and the nearby forest that had burned in the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire. We hiked and painted beneath blackened coast redwoods, some adorned with bright green regrowth. Back in the studio we made paper pigmented with the charcoal we had gathered from burned trees, cut woodblocks, printed woodcuts and pressure prints, set wood and metal type by hand, and printed on the letterpresses. All four of us had our hands and minds engaged in the creation of each book. Our collaborative art process echoed the cooperative networks of mycorrhizal fungi in forests, called the "wood wide web."

In October, we reunited in Oregon's McKenzie River valley at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, a 16,000-acre ecological research area that supports study, education, and collaborations exploring forests and watersheds. We were awarded an art residency through their Long-Term Ecological Research Program: Arts, Humanities, and Science in Alliance. Our project will become part of a two-hundred-year research continuum that documents the changing forest until 2203.

We met with Fred Swanson and Sarah Greene, retired US Forest Service scientists, and photographer David Bayles. Fred led us through several sections of the Andrews and McKenzie River Trust properties, including old-growth groves and tree plantations of varied ages, both intact and burned, explaining their significance and role in forest ecosystems. Throughout the day, we had fascinating conversations about management practices over the decades, resilience in western forests, and how artists can reflect, respond, and inspire stewardship of forest ecosystems. The Andrews facility was closed due to the pandemic, so we set up an outdoor studio in a campground nearby. While in our campsite studio, we painted and created photograms using collected leaves, cones, and twigs. We explored the nearby Delta Campground, which had burned in the Holiday Farm Fire, painting beneath blackened old growth Douglas fir and western redcedar, and gathering burned sticks for later use in the project. We met with Patence Winingham-Melcher, Lane County's Emergency Manager, who had directed the emergency response during the Holiday Farm Fire. Patence is from a multigenerational logging family. She reiterated the complex problems of forest management, and expressed hope that her work is putting Lane County at the forefront of local climate change mitigation efforts.

After a week of camping and working in the woods, we moved to Susan's studio in Eugene. We designed several more books in response to what we had experienced in the McKenzie River watershed. We created more photograms, designed and cut woodblocks, prepared the burnt sticks we had collected, and made the first model of the reliquary. Then we returned home, communicating by Zoom, as each continued work on our contributions to the project.





learn and understand about forest ecosystems. The project has shown us how our diverse strengths and working styles as artists mirror the complexities found in a healthy forest. We hope the ideas and images we have shared within our reliquary will encourage others to ponder what we have pondered, and likewise find reason to take action and have HOPE. ■



In December, we gathered back at Peter and Donna's for more brainstorming and studio time. We set wood and metal type, and printed linoleum and woodcut images on the Vandercook. We experienced grief and joy amidst the challenging topics we were studying and sought forms and words that made sense. We found that if we listened well to one another, mirroring the complex communication systems in a resilient and diverse healthy forest, we became more willing to embrace each other's ideas and more effective at creating successful artworks. With each layer of color on the page and every folded structure completed, we were buoyed by the beautiful, evocative results.



With a deadline of the April 2022 Codex Bookfair, we worked throughout the winter months in our home studios to complete the design for the reliquary and all the editioned artists' books to be housed within it, and to write the text for this book. We stayed in touch through weekly Zoom meetings, cheering each other on, and finalizing project details.



We met one last time in Santa Cruz to bind books, take photographs, and revisit the burned forest in the Santa Cruz mountains. As we completed and documented our collaboration, we knew there would always be more to



# ARTIST'S STATEMENTS

*The following chapter contains statements by the artists' involved in creating HOPE?. These statements illustrate the variety and breadth of skills, and detail the individual areas of expertise, experience, interest, and focus each artist brought to the collaboration.*

## Susan Lowdermilk



**T**hrough my woodcut prints and artist books I explore themes related to the lifelong inspiration I have found in the natural world. As I witness the environmental disturbances caused by climate change, I am becoming increasingly concerned about our future. My recent work is informed by the changes I experience in my home region.

The wildfires that erupted all over Western Oregon on Labor Day 2020 had a profound effect on me. Cherished forests where I had adventured for many years were incinerated. Friends of mine were evacuated or lost their homes. Ash from the Holiday Farm Fire twenty miles away blanketed my city. The sky turned a sickly orange-brown and we experienced the worst air quality in the world for several weeks until the fires were finally contained.

Each of us in our artist group have been affected by wildfires in our own communities. We checked in with each other when we heard news about each fire. Our collaborative project HOPE? began as we shared our concerns about wildfires in western forests. We started talking about how to respond through our work.

I was awarded sabbatical leave from teaching at Lane Community College in the Fall term to explore this project with my collaborators. We chose late summer and early fall to take advantage of optimal weather to work onsite in the forests we wanted to explore for our project. Our research involved direct observation, study, inquiry, and interviews, all of which led us to a deepening consideration of contemporary forest ecology.

The four of us have spent our careers creating artist books, each working with varied media and processes, and possessing different skill sets. It was invigorating and educational to experience my collaborators' working styles, areas of expertise, and knowledge base that differed from mine. We called ourselves a "band" although we didn't brand ourselves with a name. We traveled together, cooked together, shared abodes, campgrounds and art studios in service to our project. Each book is a true collaboration that grew from group discussions, design iterations and production work. At different times, we each explored processes that we were not familiar with, and we all learned by example. I created plein air watercolor and gouache paintings, something I rarely do. Andie carved woodcuts and set metal type for the first time. We sent book pages to each other to paint, draw or print upon with just a one-word prompt and without prior knowledge of what we might receive from the last artist.

I have explored and processed hard issues and wondered about our future through making HOPE?. It is my hope that this suite of artists' books will offer reflection and insight as our shared, collective effort responding to the changes we are witnessing to the forested wilderness that we cherish. ■

Susan Lowdermilk is a book artist and printmaker. She creates hand bound artist's books involving movable parts and pop-ups with traditional print processes like woodcut. She is a Visual Arts and Graphic Design professor at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. She also teaches independent workshops in artist's books, paper engineering and printmaking. Her artist's books have been collected by many libraries and other public institutions and her work is represented by galleries throughout the United States. She earned her Master of Fine Art from the University of Oregon in Eugene, and her Bachelor of Fine Art from Colorado State University in Fort Collins. [www.susanlowdermilk.com](http://www.susanlowdermilk.com) ■

# Donna Thomas



**M**y favorite place to be is in a forest wilderness, and the inspiration for most of my artwork is found by a trail in the Sierra Nevada. It is not unusual to find me sitting on the ground for hours on end, with my watercolors and paper, staring at a beautiful landscape while I paint what I see. I'm intrigued by the way these natural scenes are composed, colored, and lit, and if the paintings I make can convey even a little bit of the awesome beauty of a place, I am pleased. So, when we started talking about this project as a gathering of artists meeting together and painting in forests we love, I was ready to join in.

As the project unfolded, it turned out that I had to adjust my expectations of the collaboration. I loved the painting, the creating, the camaraderie, but the more I learned about the consequences of climate change it became hard to overcome my sadness and have hope. I have known that fire is essential in a forest, but the blackened and downed trees were just depressing to me. One aspect of visiting the forest the spring after a forest fire, though, was my delight in finding the lily, "pussy ears." That little pink flower flourished after the fire, and I saw that rebirth and hope are modeled by it and other "fire followers" in the burned forest.

It is my hope that through the contributions I have made to this project, the paintings, linocuts, woodcuts, printing and binding, it will be evident that I do hold out hope that we can find ways to protect the natural places on our planet earth, so my granddaughters can thrive, and can enjoy what I have enjoyed.

Donna Thomas is a book artist from Santa Cruz, California. She works collaboratively with Peter Thomas, making both limited editions and one-of-a-kind books. They make the paper, print, illustrate and bind their books, combining the precision of the fine press aesthetic with the structural creativity found in contemporary artists' books. In addition to her career as a book artist, Donna is an avid nature enthusiast. In 2006, she rediscovered and with Peter retraced John Muir's 310 mile walk from San Francisco to Yosemite. Together they wrote a guide book for following the route titled *The Muir Rambler Route*. More information about this project is on their web site. <http://www.muirramblerroute.com> ■





# Peter Thomas



**T**his collaboration began because we all love trees and wilderness. The first idea was to create artists' books about the over-exploitation of forests then have an exhibit of our work in the middle of the Sierra Nevada - where only those willing to take a 5-day backpack trip could ever see the show.

I knew I could make an artists' book about trees. Clear cutting forests was an easy target. But as we began to work on this project it became obvious that the corporate greed of clear-cutting was a minor problem compared to climate change. I had pretty much been like an ostrich - head stuck in the sand - ignoring the issue of global warming. As I learned more, what I learned was overwhelmingly concerning: a future filled with ever more devastating natural disasters moving inextricably towards a species extinction event. The only way for me to deal with this dark reality was to look for hope.

As I sought hope, I came to realize that hope is inside me. What is hopeless, the ecological tragedy, endless stupidity, and greed, is outside of me. With hope I could see things differently and believe that what I do can make a difference. Then I started to realize that to have hope I need to be taking action, doing something to try to make a positive change, even though I may fail or not get the outcome I want.

Thinking of John Muir or Julia Butterfly Hill always gives me hope. They are examples of how what one person does can actually make a difference. I know that even if I do everything I can to reduce my carbon footprint it won't solve the problems of climate change, but if I do nothing, then nothing will change. And if I do something it will make one person's worth of difference. And if every other "one person" on the planet would do something, that would make 7.7 billion times the difference, and that would have a major impact.

I don't know if *Homo sapiens* will survive the consequences of our current actions and inactions. I don't even know if in the long run that really matters. After all, as a friend once told me: "If the dinosaurs hadn't died off, we would not be where we are now, and when we are gone something else will take our place. Mother nature will just keep on rolling." But I would rather see the earth remain a beautiful and livable place for my grandchildren. Because of that, with the hope that a larger group really will have a larger impact, I have committed the previous year of my life to this collaborative art project, and into creating this reliquary, with the hope that people who look at the art works and consider the texts will be inspired to join other like-minded people to do what they can to reverse climate change and save the planet for those coming after us.

Peter Thomas is a book artist from Santa Cruz, California. He works collaboratively with Donna Thomas, making both limited editions and one-of-a-kind books. They make the paper, print, illustrate and bind their books, combining the precision of the fine press aesthetic with the structural creativity found in contemporary artists' books. Between 2009-2019 Peter and Donna made four cross-country road trips as the "Wandering Book Artists", traveling in an artistic tiny home on wheels, teaching classes and giving talks about the book arts as they visited university libraries around the country. More information about this project is on their web site: <http://members.cruzio.com/~peteranddonna> ■

# Andie Thrams



I've been painting and adventuring with immense delight in wildland forests of the West my entire life. I am increasingly saddened witnessing firsthand the devastation of catastrophic megafires and climate change in our forests. A form of solace arrived through an opportunity to share and respond to environmental concerns by collaborating with three artists I admire.

I knew that Donna, Peter, Susan, and I shared an interest in making artists' books about the natural world and that we were all at ease in the wilder corners of the mountains, forests, and rivers of the West. We each brought decades of diverse art expertise, a profound appreciation for the natural world, and a yearning to create work of beauty and significance to our project. Working together was enticing.

We settled on a plan to spend time in burned and green forests to make artwork in response to the 2020 wildfires in the West that had personally impacted each of us in our home regions. We roamed, camped, and painted in those beloved forests, researched contemporary science, conducted interviews, collected artifacts, carved wood and linoleum blocks, wrote text, set type, made paper, printed, and bound our work into artists' books. We studied, trad-

ed knowledge and techniques, debated approaches, traveled long distances to work in different forests and in each other's studios, and zoomed when we couldn't be together. It was a demanding, complex process, and we kept at it.

The onslaught of disturbing news about our natural world weighs heavily on me. I first learned about the dangerous buildup of human-generated greenhouse gases in the early 1970s in a UC Berkeley environmental physics course. Through art collaborations with scientists over the years, my awareness of the stresses impacting our natural environments has only grown. Mulling over these challenging topics with my companion artists was comforting, energizing, and often kindled hope. Our conversations and artwork entwined us the way trees exchange information and resources through networks of mycorrhizal fungi in forest soils. I felt us becoming a band of forest advocates, hoping to illuminate the present peril and the uncertain future of forests—because we revere our Earth.

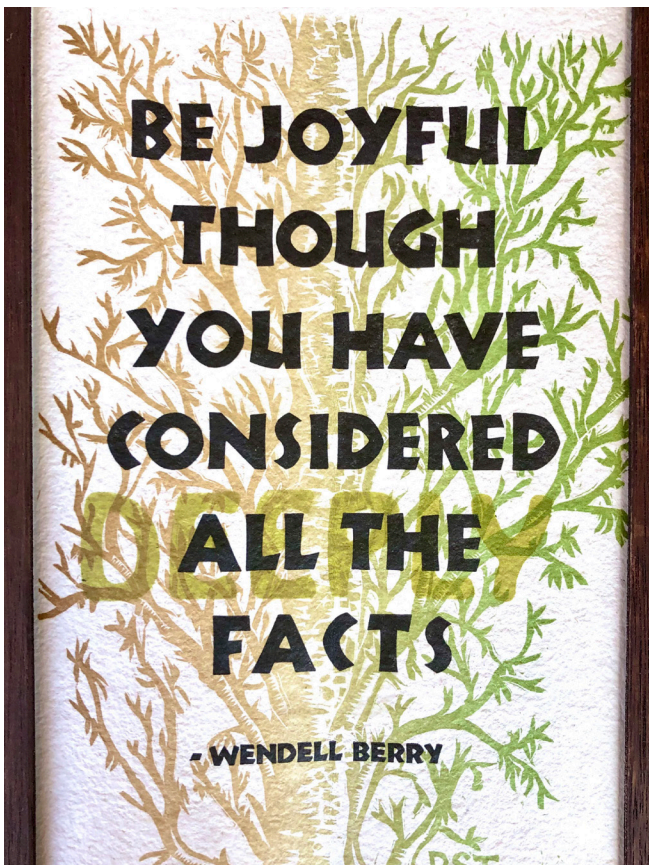
Through this project, I appreciated how devoted, persistent, hardworking, and resilient each of us could be. I learned to trust in the forms, images, ideas, and synergies that unexpectedly coalesced within our process—indeed, trusting in each other's wisdom and expertise was essential to crafting and completing our shared vision. My wonder at the world's complexity and mystery, the powerful yet vulnerable networks among forest species and between each of us as individual artists deepened with our collaboration. The interconnection between all beings continues to give me hope.

Andie Thrams is a Sierra Nevada-based visual artist who works onsite in wildland forests to create paintings and artist's books exploring mystery, reverence, and delight, while grappling with the vanishing habitats of our era. Merging the lineages of illuminated manuscripts and natural history field journals with a contemporary art and science awareness, her painting weaves layers of shape, color, and hand-lettered text to evoke the complexities found in forest ecosystems of the greater West. Her award-winning work is exhibited nationally, and is held in numerous public collections. [www.andiethrams.com](http://www.andiethrams.com)



# THE ARTWORK

The following chapter includes bibliographic information and descriptions for HOPE?, the twelve artists' books and the reliquary that holds them. All work was done in collaboration with each artist making contributions and bringing a variety of skills and ideas to the conception and completion of each of the books. Whenever not stated Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, Peter Thomas, and Andie Thrums are to be jointly credited as artists, authors, or editors of HOPE?



## Be Joyful

Text by Wendell Berry excerpted from *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*

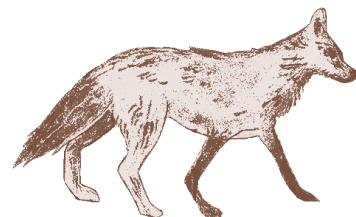
8.5 x 2.75 inches

2 accordion pages

Wooden covers affixed to accordion folded text  
Paper handmade by Peter Thomas using abaca and cotton  
Text letterpress printed by Peter Thomas using handset  
Neuland metal type, Hobo and Extra Condensed Roman  
wood type  
Linoleum cut by Donna Thomas

The wood used to make the covers is painted brown. The accordion paper is printed on both sides. The illustration and wood type are printed using a rainbow roll.

Wendell Berry is a poet, essayist, and novelist from Monterey, Kentucky. He has written extensively about the preservation of our land and culture, often discussing how essential it is that we remember our human responsibility as stewards of the lands we inhabit. We chose Berry's text hoping we might inspire our readers to become his readers and look more closely at what he has to say. The text for this book, "Be joyful though you have considered all the facts," is from the poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, and reminds us how necessary and energizing joy can be. In our book we added to what Berry wrote, subtly printing the word "deeply" behind the quote. It was our thought that just considering facts is not enough. Today, in the face of information overload and misinformation, educating ourselves becomes all the more important — we need to dig deeply into the issues to understand what is really going on, to find hope, and to take action.





## **Breathe**

Text by Boris Johnson, Susan Lowdermilk  
8.5 x 4 inches

3 pages

Folded paper cover holding tri-fold pamphlet

Cover paper is Svelt Antiqua

Text paper is Masa

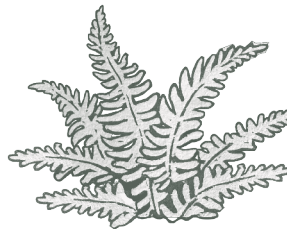
Image paper is Kitikata

Text letterpress printed using handset Lydian type

Woodcut by Susan Lowdermilk

Cut-outs in the folder reveal the words, “your breath,” “our breath,” and “breathe.” Woodcut tipped onto the center panel of the tri-fold. Additional text can be seen by lifting the woodcut print.

This book was inspired by walking the Lookout Creek Old Growth Trail in the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest in Oregon. This temperate rainforest is about 450 years old and is a complex and diverse ecosystem where a multitude of life cycles happen continually. I pondered upon the idea of how nature balances itself and how the exchange gasses mutually support plant and animal life. I listened to the COP26 Summit as I designed this book. I pondered upon world leaders addressing the existential threat of climate change. I saw images of protestors carrying signs demanding climate justice from their leaders with messages similar to the quote I used by Boris Johnson. I thought about how leaders and the people must understand balance with nature to survive.







## Catastrophic Wildfire

Text by Peter Thomas

10 x 5 inches

Wooden framework lashed together using copper wire

Text paper lashed to framework using red thread

Text paper is Arches Text Wove

Photograms by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, and

Andie Thrums

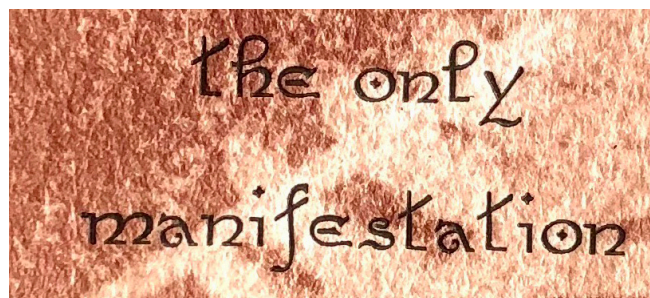
Letterpress printing by Peter Thomas

Handset Anglo type

The wooden framework was made using burned sticks gathered in Oregon's Willamette National Forest, site of the Holiday Farm Fire. The sticks were cut to length, the raw ends pigmented with charcoal, and coated with shellac.

The idea to make this book came during a day spent at the Delta Campground, in its old growth forest that had burned in the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire. While Andie, Donna and Susan painted, Peter imagined a book with a structure derived from the wooden frameworks used to stretch and dry parchment, and gathered burned sticks to use for the project. Back in the campground, we made photograms with gathered foliage. The rainy day made our results imperfect and uneven. Our process of creation reflected what we had witnessed, where fickle fires had heavily burned some parts of the forest and left other areas untouched.

As our understanding of catastrophic wildfires and their connection to climate change expanded, our concerns increased. We see the catastrophic wildfires as only one signal that we need to mitigate climate change now.







## Fire Followers

Texts by Walt Whitman, Donna Thomas

6.5 x 4.75 inches

8 individual sheets of paper

Paper folder with individual leaves placed in pockets, title and illustration printed on paper label stitched to cover

Text and cover paper handmade by Peter Thomas

Text letterpress printed using handset Bernhard Modern Roman type

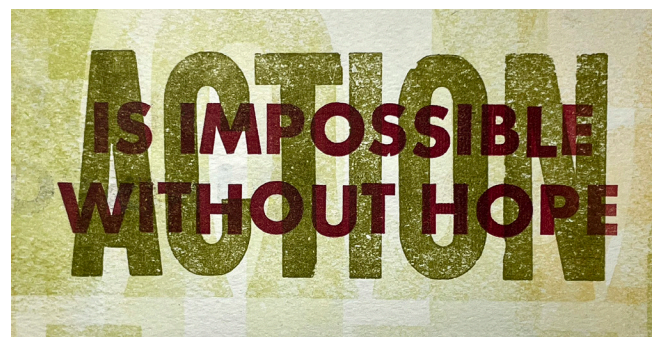
Hand colored linoleum cuts by Donna Thomas

Folder, relief printed by Donna Thomas using redwood leaves

The folder is made from a single sheet of paper folded and stitched together with colored thread. The cover of the folder was relief printed directly from post-fire re-sprouted leaves, gathered from coastal redwoods that burned in the CZU Lightning Complex fire. After fire burns through

a forest, though the ground is scorched and many trees are left dead or damaged, many plants benefit. Some need fire for their seeds to sprout, some thrive on the additional light brought to the forest floor by the newly opened canopy, others are aided by the nourishing ash. After a forest fire certain plants will bloom and these plants are called “fire followers.” Finding these plants growing through the ash and among the blackened trunks brought us hope and delight.

## Hope Calls for Action



Texts by David Attenborough, Wendell Berry, Louise Dickinson Rich, Rebecca Solnit, Greta Thunberg

4.75 x 5 inches

4 flexagon pages

Square flexagon, held in an expanding file folder with title printed on front and back.

Flexagon paper is Strathmore Pastel

Folder paper is French Paper Company Speckleton

Text is letterpress printed using Remington Typewriter and Futura Bold metal type, and various wood type.

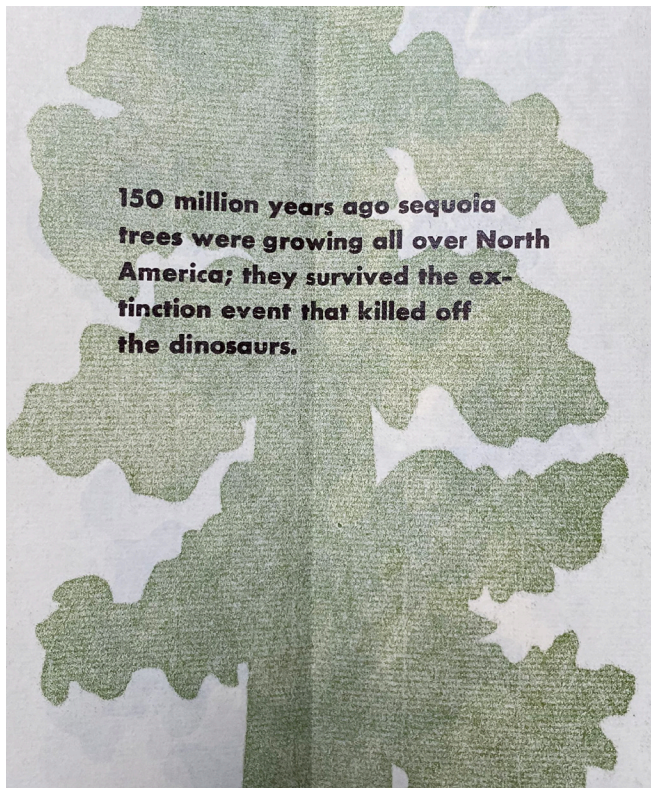
The words “FUTURE” and “EARTH”, printed from large wood type using colored rainbow rolls, fill the background of the flexagon paper. Peter and Donna Thomas designed, cut and assembled the expanding file folder style slipcase. The words “HOPE CALLS FOR ACTION” and “ACTION IS IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT HOPE” are printed on the folder.

The square flexagon structure appears to be a two-sided form, when folded and re-opened reveals four different sides. As the flexagon is manipulated, the texts fluctuate from hopeful to dire and reflect the shifts in our feelings



as we grappled with the possibility of a catastrophic future and our ability to mitigate the negative effects of climate change.

## Invincible/Endangered



Text by Susan Lowdermilk, Peter Thomas, Andie Thrams  
9.75 x 3.25 inches (folded). 19.25 x 13 inches (opened)  
8 pages

O-fold single sheet binding held in a paper sleeve

Sleeve paper is Glama translucent vellum

Text paper is vintage Bodleian mould made, from Hayle Mill, England

Text letterpress printed using handset Futura Bold metal type and mixed gothic wood type

Pressure print images by Susan Lowdermilk

The book is printed on both sides of the paper with pressure printed images of giant sequoias, and a full page image on the back.

Giant sequoias can live for thousands of years. Their

forests have existed for millennia and, because of their stamina, they have been thought to be practically invincible. But now, because our actions have tipped the balance of nature, these majestic trees are an endangered species. Witnessing the obvious decline of the forest in the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoia in Yosemite caused us to wonder what else will be threatened with extinction, and how that will affect the chain of life.

## Old Growth Matters



Text by Donna Thomas, Peter Thomas, Andie Thrams  
6.375 x 4.5 inches

20 pages

Coptic bound, gray paper covers, sewn with cotton thread  
Cover and text paper handmade by Peter Thomas from cotton rag

Text is letterpress printed handset Bernhard Modern Roman type

Woodcuts by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, and Andie Thrams

Covers painted with ink, watercolor, and gouache by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, and Andie Thrams

The cover paper imagery varies, and was painted by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, and Andie Thrams while sitting in the burned forests of the Holiday Farm Fire in Oregon and the CZU Lightning Complex fire, and in the Mariposa Grove, Yosemite, California.

This book features images and information about plants and animals that are integral to the long-term stability of



an old growth forest. The rich biodiversity of an ancient forest ecosystem takes centuries to evolve, provides habitat for innumerable species, sustains countless ecological processes essential to a healthy planet, and is therefore crucial to our survival.

## Mass Unraveling



1.5 x 4.87 inches

One scrolling sheet of paper 4.5 x 40 inches

Scroll attached on ends to wooden dowel and wooden strip, tied with linen thread

Scroll paper is Awagami kozo

Digitally printed with pigment-based ink by A. Thrans

Original imagery painted with ink on kozo by A. Thrans

As the scroll is unfurled, the burnt forest imagery evokes the destructive force of catastrophic wildfire in the West. Even if the most enlightened climate change mitigation policies were put into practice, scientists say it is unlikely our western forests will ever attain the splendor of pre-European settlement, or even regrow into the beauty many have been fortunate to experience—at least not for millennia into the future. How much is our world unraveling? Are we capable of taking action to reverse, or just slow down, the downward spiral we may be within?

## Only What We Love





Text by Baba Dioum, Julia Butterfly Hill, S. Lowdermilk  
5.5 x 2.75 inches  
Two 6-page accordions  
Paper wrapped cover boards slipped over each end of  
nested accordion structure  
Text paper handmade by Peter Thomas  
Cover paper from a 1948 edition of *The New Century  
Dictionary*  
Letterpress printed using handset Lydian and Goudy  
Modern Open type by Donna Thomas  
Foreground accordion cut paper doll style, in the shape of  
trees, by Donna Thomas

The dictionary pages used to make the covers were chosen specifically because they feature images of animals and plants that live in forests. The cut-out trees on the upper accordion move as the book structure opens, lending life to the concepts presented in the text: to love a tree so much that one gives it a name can lead to protecting what is loved.

### **Resilience (right)**

Text by Theodor Suess Geisel from *The Lorax*  
6.75 x 4.31 inches  
12 accordion pages  
Folded paper covers connected by a running stitch of  
thread to each end of the accordion  
Cover paper handmade by the artists  
Text paper is Arches Text Wove  
Text letterpress printed by Peter Thomas using handset  
Gothic wood type  
Watercolor and gouache painting by Andie Thrums  
Woodcuts by Susan Lowdermilk  
Linoleum cut by Donna Thomas  
Wood type set and letterpress printed by Peter Thomas

The cover paper was made using wildfire charcoal gathered from burnt coast redwoods in the 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire in Ben Lomond, California. The edition varies. It was divided into 3 sets of 11 sheets, each group of sheets being illustrated and printed in different orders and with different treatments.

The concept of resilience in forests was often discussed by the scientists we met. This book explores resilience



within our collaboration. The process we used to print this book was an exercise in trusting each other and our own abilities to respond to change. Andie, Donna, and Susan each took one third of the 32 sheets of paper cut to be used for the book. They each printed or painted imagery, and when done, mailed the work to one of the others until all 32 sheets had been treated. Resilience was required from each of us along the way, as we didn't know what we would receive, how we might respond, or what the next artist might do to the work we created. Finally, all 32 sheets were sent to Peter, who added the text about the

forests' resilience: Clearly the earth has enough resilience to continue on no matter what humankind does, but forests don't have that kind of resilience. Because of current human-centric decisions and actions, including fire suppression, clear cutting and herbicide cleansing, and inducing climate change, forests are proving to be less and less resilient. Unless we take a different course of action their ability to continue functioning as the lungs of our planet is in question.

## Vast Unseen Networks

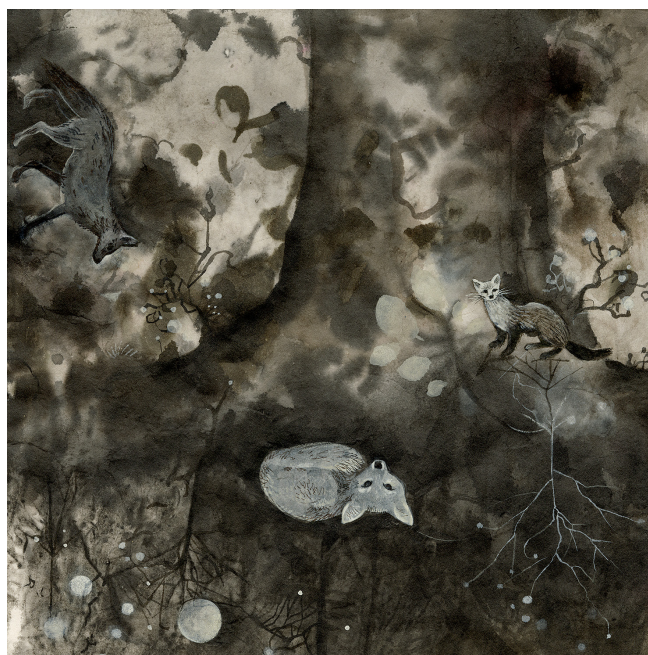


Text by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, Peter Thomas, Andie Thrums  
6.5 x 4.25 inches  
6 accordion pages  
Folded paper cover pamphlet-stitched through first valley fold of accordion  
Cover paper handmade by Peter Thomas  
Text paper marbled by Iris Nevins  
Cover and interior woodcuts by Donna Thomas and Andie Thrums  
Text letterpress printed using hand set Futura Bold metal type and sans serif wood type

Scientific research about the intricate networks of my-

corrhizal fungi in forest soils inspired this book. Through webs of underground fungi connecting tree roots to other plants, forest resources and information are shared. The accordion pages were printed with words and imagery on both sides and portray the above and below ground habitats atop web-like formations in the marbled paper. We hope this book inspires interest in and admiration for the mysterious and diverse processes that help trees flourish.

## Whiskey Tango Foxtrot



Text by Andie Thrums with anonymous contributors  
4.12 x 4.12 inches (folded), 16.5 x 12.37 inches (open)  
24 G-fold pages  
G-fold single sheet book housed in folding paper case  
Text paper is Awagami kozo  
Cover paper handmade by Cave Paper  
Digitally printed with pigment-based ink by A. Thrums

Original images, by Andie Thrums, scanned from hectograph prints made with ink and watercolor on kozo, with additional drawing, painting, and writing applied using ink, watercolor, gouache, and tree resin.

This book explores the overwhelming, destabilizing,



and sometimes dark feelings that frequently arise with awareness of catastrophic wildfire, worldwide species extinction, habitat loss, and climate change. Upon hearing the latest environmental news, I often think, “WTF?!” (Whiskey Tango Foxtrot), a not uncommon reaction. I asked others to share what concerns them most about the future of our forests and Earth; their responses became text for this piece. The book’s structure meanders, echoing disorientation, with no right or wrong way to unfold or view it, and forest creatures situated in strange dark places. As we grapple with planetary changes it is helpful, even empowering, to ask difficult questions and embrace all our emotional responses. Unspoken feelings sap energy, cause anxiety and depression, and usurp our sense of agency. Voicing uncertainty and fear can diffuse their power over us, stimulate conversation, contribute to our wellbeing, and generate energy for action. All are good reasons for hope.

## **The Reliquary**

13 x 8.5 x 7 inches

The structure was built by Taylor Millar, a woodworker from Lagunitas, California, using repurposed Douglas fir and locally sourced coast redwood. The title, hand-stamped on brass, is attached to the base of the structure. A paper label is affixed inside the structure stating the provenance.

Reliquaries usually hold the bones or possessions of a saint. Our reliquary is filled with the artists’ books we made to bear witness to what we have seen and learned, and contains a vial holding charcoal and ash, relics we gathered from burned forests in California and Oregon. The reliquary was inspired by a quote from the novel, *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers: “What you make from a tree should be at least as miraculous as what you cut down.” We built our reliquary using wood that grows in the forests where we worked, feeling it was important to house our artists’ books within a structure that is a tribute to the beauty and sacredness of the trees and forests we had spent time in.



## Acknowledgments

Like trees in a forest, we do not stand alone. We thank our families, friends, and all those we met along the way who generously shared support, information, ideas, and feedback as we worked on the project, including, but not limited to, Sarah Greene, Breezy Jackson, Jeff Lahr, Kirsten Liske, Tom Madison, Taylor Millar, Fred Swanson, Barbara Thomas, Lee Thompson, Suzanne Weinert, Patence Winningham-Melcher, The H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest Long-Term Ecological Research Program: Arts, Humanities, and Science in Alliance, the Horse Creek Lodge & Outfitters Campground, and the University of California Merced Yosemite Field Station.



## Colophon

About HOPE? was written collaboratively by Susan Lowdermilk, Donna Thomas, Peter Thomas, and Andie Thrams. There are 32 numbered copies of this book, created to accompany the artists' books in the reliquary. Unless otherwise stated all photographs were taken by the artists.

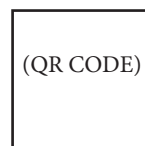
This book was designed by Tom Madison at Madison Design Company in Eugene, Oregon. Body copy is set in Minion Pro 10.5 type, subheadings in Futura Bold, display type and drop caps are a variety of typefaces that have been modified by the designer. This book was digitally printed and perfect bound by KDP.

This is copy number

Andie Thrams  
[andiethrams.com](http://andiethrams.com)

Peter & Donna Thomas  
[members.cruzio.com/~peteranddonna](http://members.cruzio.com/~peteranddonna)

Susan Lowdermilk  
[Susanlowdermilk.com](http://Susanlowdermilk.com)



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