

JANE OLIN

IN THE COMPANY OF TREES

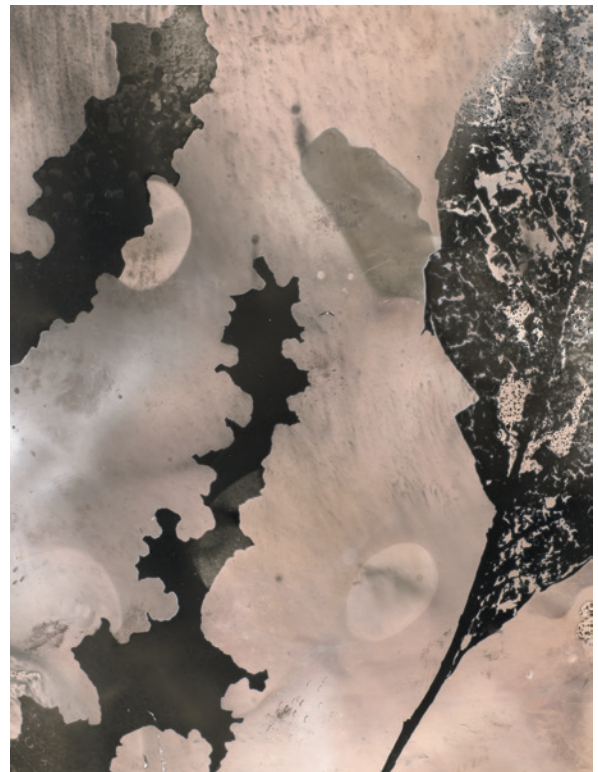
Trees Are the Lungs of the World

This old expression still works to convey the extraordinary benefits that trees, largest of all living organisms, provide to our planet. We have long known that trees use photosynthesis to take in and store carbon dioxide, and in the process release oxygen. Once abundant forest canopies conserved precious ground moisture, cooled the air, and lowered temperatures. In today's climate crisis, as temperatures rise to record-breaking heights and wildfires and droughts grow ever more serious, we begin to comprehend the true significance of their presence, and the disaster of their loss.

In addition to delivering oxygen and sequestering tons of polluting carbon, trees provide habitats for untold numbers of species and a large amount of the world's food. Many supply life-saving medicines, others release aerosols that support the human immune system. The world's indigenous people have always valued trees, learning their beneficial properties, ecosystems, and how best to keep them flourishing. Now, thanks to groundbreaking work by forester-scientists like Peter Wohlleben, Diana Beresford-Kroeger, and particularly Dr. Suzanne Simard, the public can begin to comprehend the remarkable nature of trees as well.

In films, lectures, and books, these scientists describe how trees communicate with one another through underground fungal filaments called mycorrhiza. Large mature trees – Mother Trees, as Dr. Simard calls them – literally nurture their seedling offspring and other saplings by sharing and exchanging nutrients through these filaments. Trees alert their neighbors to both animal and insect predators with chemical signals, and produce toxins for their own defense.

All the forest trees are linked at their roots by mycorrhizal networks in a near mirroring of the neuronal connectivity of the human brain. Considering tree intelligence Dr. Simard writes, "...both neural networks and mycorrhizal networks transmit information molecules across synapses." Such discoveries upend our understanding of trees as solitary and unconscious organisms, and give new hope for their future and for ours.



Jane Olin: In the Company of Trees

Jane Olin walks regularly among the trees. Since childhood, when the nearby forest was her sanctuary and the trees her earliest companions, she has found deep comfort in their presence. It seems inevitable then, that trees would become a powerful muse for her photographic practice. With deforestation and the climate crisis now threatening their survival, bringing attention to trees felt even more imperative. So her new series – the evocatively titled *Intimate Conversation* – began to take shape. Her photographs reveal the trees as she sees and experiences them – their stately wildness, their expressive diversity, and especially the atmospheric mystery of this presence. She aims to capture something of their essence and transmit its spirit to the viewer.

While Olin was engaged with her project, groundbreaking information challenging many long-held assumptions about trees has filtered into the public sphere. We have learned that trees are not simply solitary entities competing for limited resources. Instead, it appears they cooperate across species through underground fungal networks that thread the forest floor. Interdependent relationships enable them to transfer nutrients for the mutual benefit of both tree and fungus, and indicate a kind of knowing intelligence not previously understood or even suspected. This revelatory information reaffirmed what Olin has always intuitively felt, and further inspires her work. In this era of climate crisis *In the Company of Trees* seems more relevant than ever.







The Photographs

A bit of a maverick when it comes to tradition, Jane Olin has developed and refined a photographic vision distinctly her own. Throughout her career she has challenged the more traditional parameters of photography, which in the Edward Weston-Ansel Adams milieu of Monterey County, California, meant the f/64 “straight” West Coast style that dominated the latter half of the twentieth century. A major benefit of this locale however, was the opportunity to study with Ruth Bernhard and John Sexton, and other assistants and colleagues of Adams and Weston.

In truth, Olin has more in common with the experimental attitudes of early twentieth century Dada and Surrealist photographers like Man Ray and André Kertész. She likes to go off-script with unorthodox approaches to composition and focus, and enjoys photographing with pinhole and Holga (plastic) cameras for their unexpected effects. In her most recent series

Intimate Conversation, she has reworked the gelatin silver printing process itself. Her conversion came about through a now fortuitous incident in which she mistakenly left an unfixed print in the darkroom sink. When discovered, she found it had made a surprisingly beautiful transformation.

With a sense of excitement Olin decided to move away from working with a preconceived idea and engage with the developing process as it unfolds in real time. She purposely submits the exposed paper to various chemical manipulations using brushes and spray bottles, often over many hours, until she is satisfied with the result. This intensive, intuitive, hands-on (and analog) approach is central to her creative endeavors. She has no interest in making or even enhancing images with a computer; the wet dark room is where she thrives. Finally, the finished images are enlarged and printed digitally from her original gelatin silver prints – her sole nod to the digital revolution.



Jane Olin: **In the Company of Trees**

January 14 - June 5, 2022

*All images from the series
Intimate Conversation*

Inside flap:

IC 19 Devolving Toward Nothingness, 2018

Inside panels:

*IC 33 Winged Mystery, 2021 (left)
(center - clockwise from upper left)*

IC 27 Time Temple, 2020

IC 32 Stories that Long to be Told, 2021

IC 31 No Secret Here, 2021

IC 30 Aurora Luna, 2021 (right)

Back page:

IC 34 The Silence After, 2021

IC 28 Dance of the Forest Spirits, 2020

Cover:

IC 25 Sanctuary of Silence, 2020

Essays by Helaine Glick,
Independent Curator