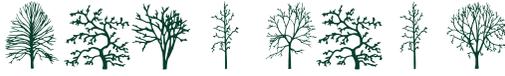




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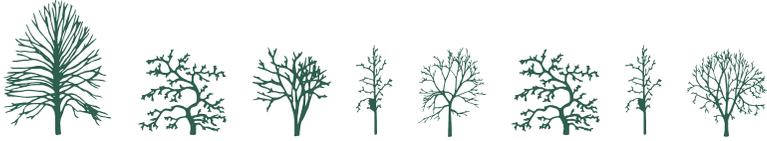
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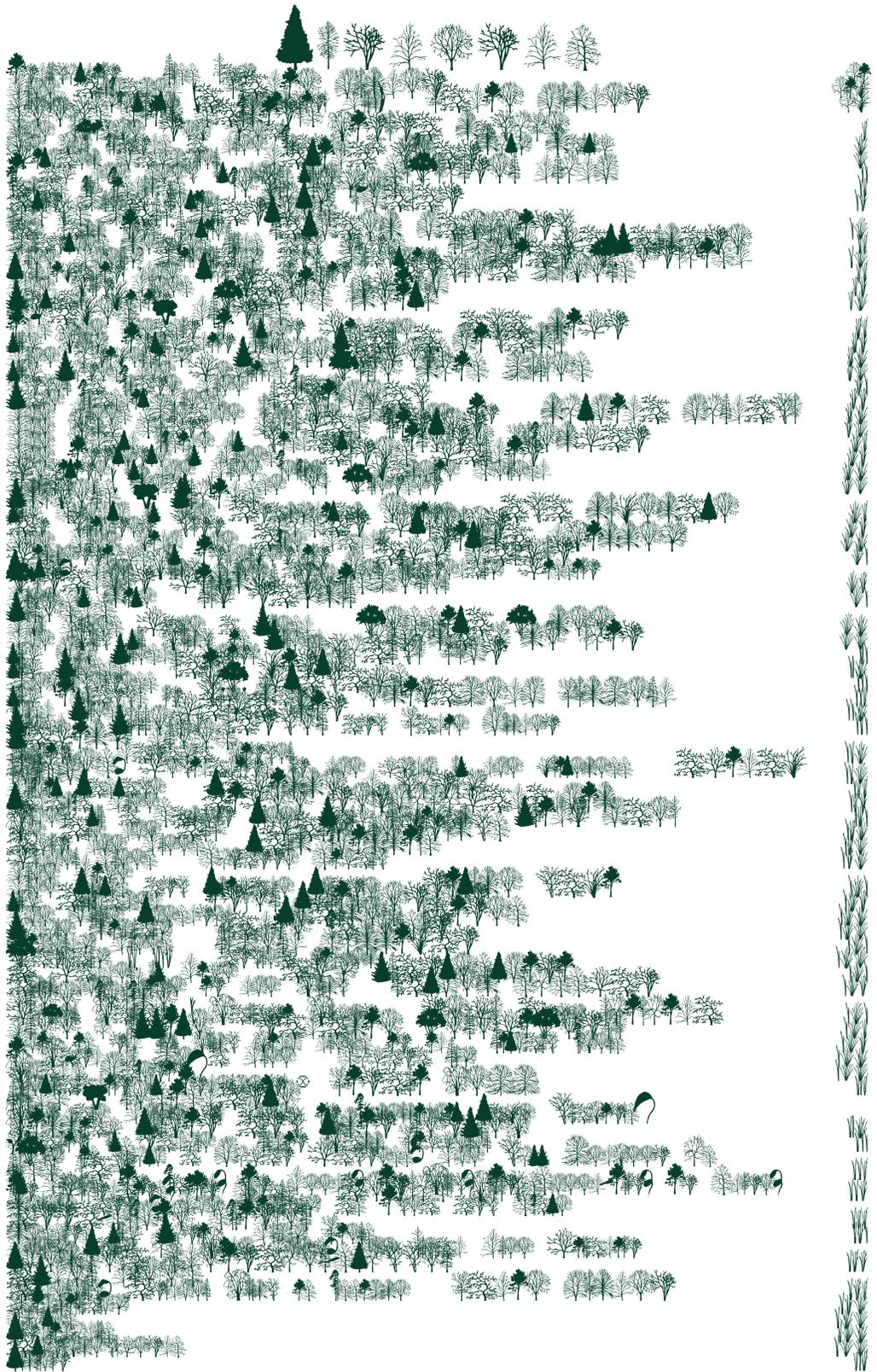
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T R E E S

*A Rewilding of Literature  
and Landscape*

KATIE HOLTEN



TIN HOUSE / PORTLAND, OREGON



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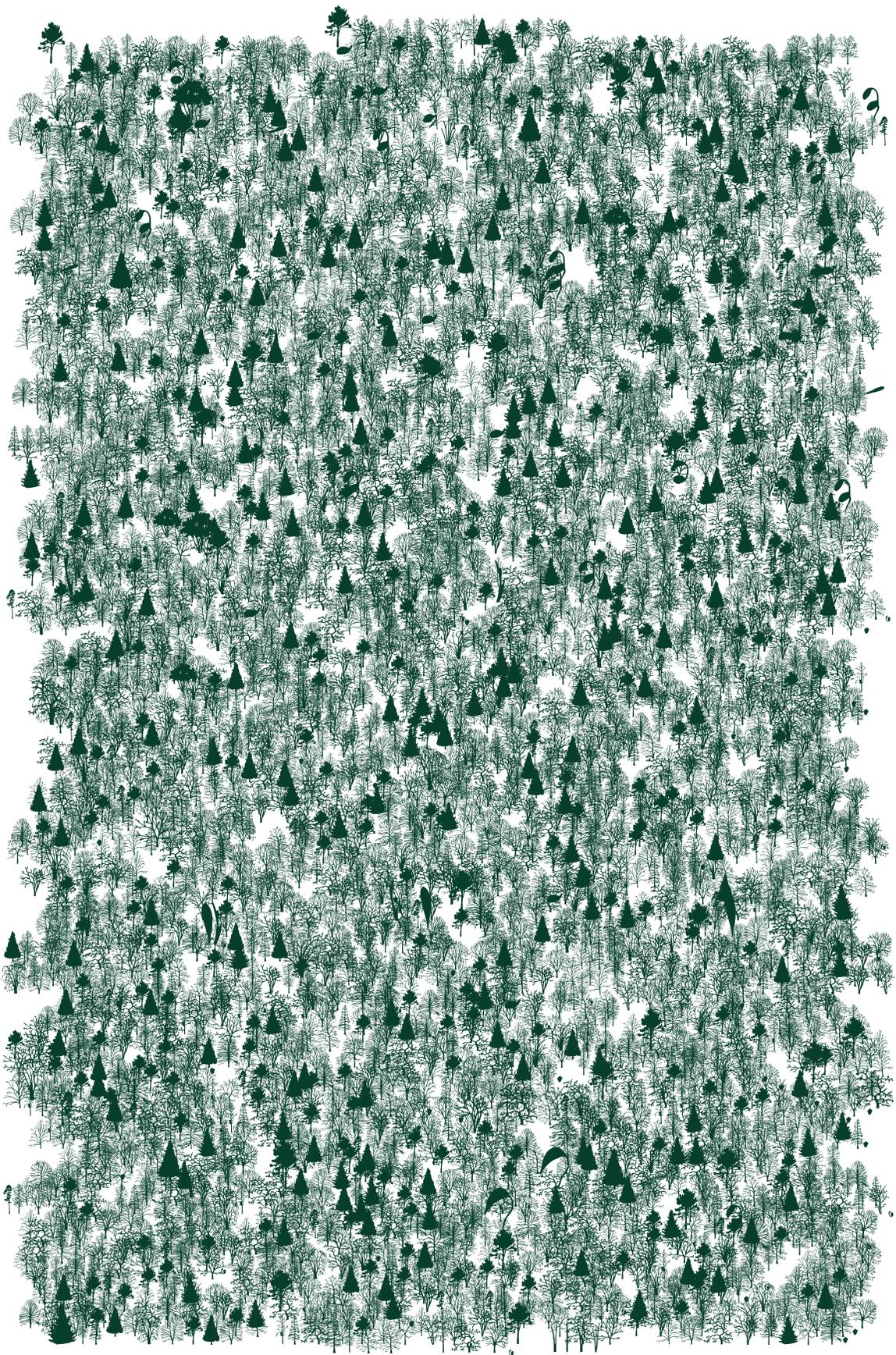
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# Introduction

ROSS GAY

I SOMETIMES THINK OF MAKING A BOOK OF ALL THE TREES I HAVE REALLY loved. Here's a very incomplete list: the mulberry tree in the tiny woods between the school and the apartments where I grew up outside of Philadelphia, into which every June we'd squirrel to harvest; the chokecherry tree in Verndale, Minnesota, where my grandpa parked his hospital-green '68 Chevy pickup, atop which I'd scoot to pull some fruit for the both of us; the redbud tree on Third Street my partner Stephanie showed me, whose leaves, backlit late in the day, became a canopy of luminescent, blood red hearts; the pear tree at the end of the block, a sale tree from a box store that is the sweetest, most reliable fruit in town and a local oasis for human, deer, possum, yellowjackets, and more; the giant sycamore with the fleshy, oceanic bark towering in the southeast corner of the graveyard, in the shade of which on hot days is about ten degrees cooler and so is a no-brainer gathering spot; the fig tree on Christian Street in Philadelphia, between 9th and 10th; and there's that beech tree in Vermont I met on a night hike two summers back, against whose smooth trunk I leaned my head, and though prayed isn't quite the word, it was something like that. The beech's breathing seemed to sync up with mine, or mine with the beech's, and though I can't exactly say what I was hearing, or feeling, I know it was a language coursing between us.

The word beech, I was delighted to learn a few years back, is the proto-Germanic antecedent for the English word book. The words for book in some other languages too derive from or overlap with words for trees. And though I suspect part of that common root has to do with trees providing the material for books, it's also the case that being in a library—I mean, the best libraries—can sometimes feel like being in a forest: a wild variety of plants from the canopy to the ground; all manner of life, some of it visible, most of it not; patches of dense shade, swaths of deckled light, clearings where a huge tree just fell and you can almost hear the turning beneath, toward the light. Just as being in the forest can sometimes feel like being in a library—I mean, the best libraries—where what

maybe begins as an illegible and almost foreboding place (see every fairy tale; see half of all horror movies), becomes, with time, and maybe with guidance, and patience, and wonder, all these voices, all these stories. Oh, with wonder we say, the trees have a language. There's a language of trees.

We watch the light flickering across their leaves, or the wind blowing them into song. We see the squirrel peeking out from the porthole in the oak thirty feet up, or the yellowjackets entering and departing the withering branch which until today you would have called dead. And the bloom of fungus underneath. We enter the canopy and soften our eyes or hear or feel the thousand pollinators perusing the blooms. We reach down to pick up one in the constellation of persimmons glowing at our feet. The woodpecker and the chipmunk, the beetle and the worm. We notice the branches and all their reaching. We learn the root systems sometimes scribble through the earth far beyond their massive canopies, some of them for miles and miles and miles, entangling with other roots and life, knitted to all this other life with all this other life. Made possible by being knitted, the trees seem to be trying to tell us, to all this other life. Except the trees never say other.

What the trees say, and how they say it—the language of trees—has never been as interesting to me as it is right now. Not only because, as you now know, I have a book of beloved trees (On the first page of which is a map! Let's figure out how to get seeds in there too! And birdsong!), not only because I have been lucky enough to work with the community orchard in my town, not only because of that beech tree whispering to me in Vermont. The language of trees is so interesting to me because whether or not we learn to understand it, or at least try to, seems so obviously, well, life or death. Our capacity and willingness to learn the language of trees, to study the language of trees, it's so obvious to me now, might incline us to be less brutal, less extractive. It might incline us to share, to collaborate. It might incline us to give shelter and make room. The language of trees might incline us to patience. To love. It might incline us to gratitude.

Which is precisely what I would call *The Language of Trees: A Rewilding of Literature and Landscape*—a gratitude. A gratitude immense. Redwood gratitude. Sycamore gratitude. Aspen gratitude. Pawpaw gratitude. Not only for the gathering of wonderers and lovers of the arboreal that it brings together. But for the literal language of trees—a script made of different

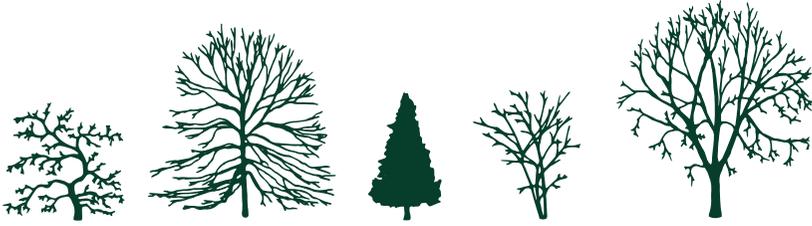
trees—by which it is conveyed to us. Can I tell you how batshit beautiful I find this? Can I tell you how each piece, translated into this language of trees, each essay or poem or song becoming a forest or orchard, rattles me, flummoxes me really, with how beautiful? Yes, I mean they are graphically beautiful; they are beautiful to look at as pictures, or arboreal maps or something. Like, astonishingly so. But what moves me so deeply, by which I mean into the loam, my own roots reaching out to yours, is the listening and care, the devotion and curiosity by which this script of trees comes into being. The gratitude, I mean to say, by which the language of people becomes the language of trees. The gratitude by which this book turns us into trees.

For which gratitude, I am thankful.

—*Ross Gay, 2023*

TREE ALPHABET

*Katie Holten*



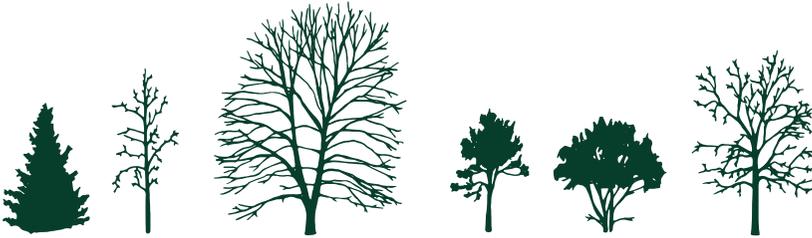
APPLE

BEECH

CEDAR

DOGWOOD

ELM



FIR

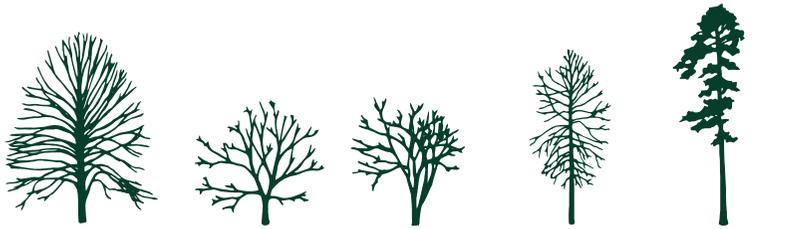
GINKGO

HORSE  
CHESTNUT

ILEX

JUNIPER

KENTUCKY  
COFFEETREE



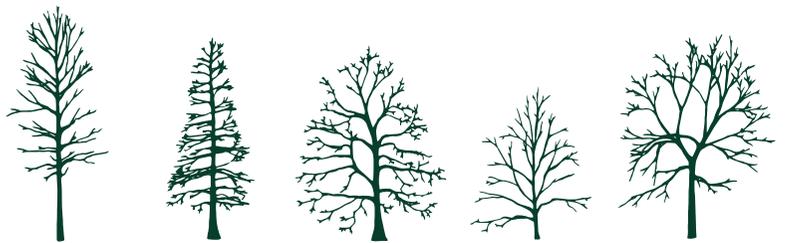
LINDEN

MULBERRY

NANNYBERRY

OAK

PINE



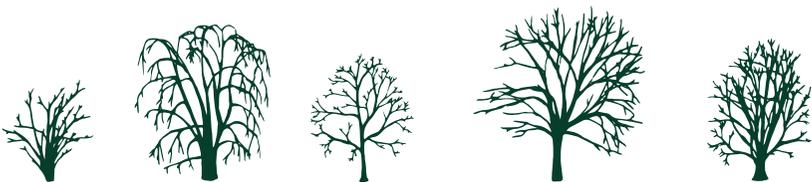
QUAKING  
ASPEN

REDWOOD

SYCAMORE

TREE OF  
HEAVEN

UMBRELLA  
TREE



VIBURNUM

WEeping  
WILLOW

XANTHOXYLUM

YELLOWWOOD

ZELKOVA

TREES TYPEFACE (A REWILDING TOOL) *Katie Holten*



A



B



C



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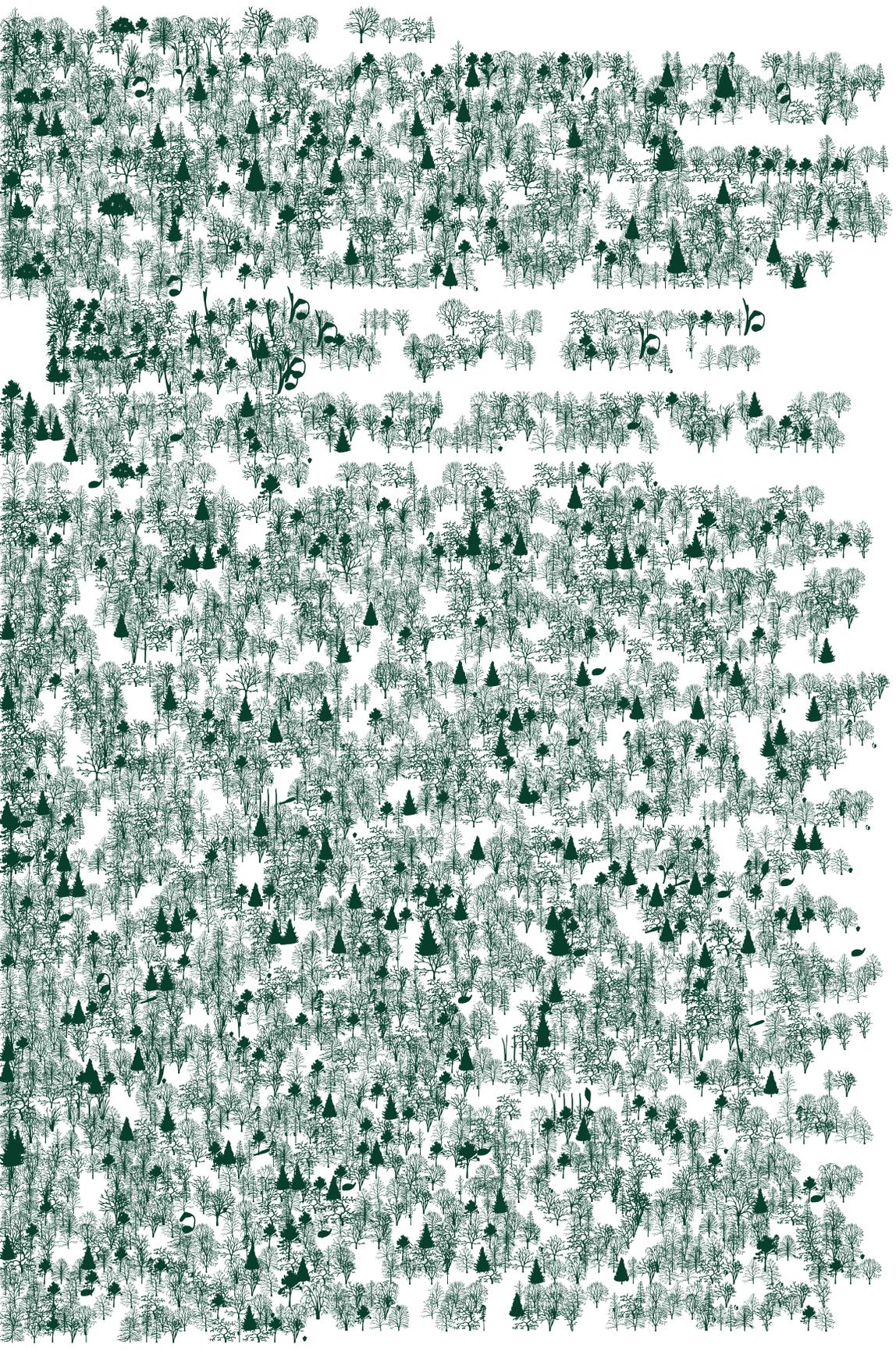
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S A P L I N G S



# The Ojibwe New Year

WINONA LADUKE

**APRIL 16, 2022**

Land determines time. Giiwediniing, or up north, we have six seasons, including a couple shorter seasons: “freeze up” and “thaw.” The Cree and Ojibwe people are the northern people here; to the west the Dene, Gwichin and Inuit have different descriptions of the seasons.

What’s for sure is that the freeze up, Gashkaadino Giizis or November in Anishinaabemowin, is called the Freezing Over Moon. March is referred to as Onaabaanigiizis, or the Hard Crusted Snow Moon.

In the Anishinaabe world, and the calendar of our people, there’s nothing about Roman emperors like Julius or Augustus. Those are not months to most of us. In an Indigenous calendar time belongs to Mother Earth, not to humans.

Bradley Robinson, from Timiskaming, Quebec, writes these seasons, not only in Cree and Ojibwe, but in syllabics, the orthography of the north:

- Ziigwan (spring): ᐅᐅ
- Minookamin (the good Earth awakening): ᐅᐅᐅᐅ
- Niibin (summer): ᐅᐅ
- Tagwaagin (falling leaves time): ᐅᐅᐅᐅ
- Pijji-Piboon (on the way to winter, the freezing time): ᐅᐅᐅᐅ
- Piboon (winter): ᐅᐅ

If language frames your understanding of the world, those who live on the land, have a different understanding than those who live in the memories of emperors. There’s no empire in creator’s time.

**The Ojibwe new year has arrived.**

That’s what I know. Gregorian calendars are based on commemorative times, while the Anishinaabe view the new year to begin as the world awakens after

winter. Indigenous spiritual and religious practices are often said to be reaffirmation religions, reaffirming the relationship with Mother Earth.

The maple sugarbush, that's really when the year begins, when the trees awaken. We are told that long ago, the maples ran all year, and the trees produced a sweet syrup. Our own folly changed that equation, and today the maple sap runs only in the spring, and it takes 40 gallons of sap to make a gallon of syrup.

We learned to be respectful of the gifts provided by Mother Earth. That's a good lesson for all of us. We go to the sugarbush now, and we are grateful for the sugar which comes from a tree. This sugar is medicine.

As spring approaches, we prepare our seeds of hope, and we think about the future plants, foods and warm ahead—aabawaa, it's getting warm out. Minookamin, the land, is warming up and with that, the geese and swans return in numbers to our lakes, thankful to be home. After that 5,000-mile flight, it seems that we could make sure their homes are in good shape, their waters clean.

I've been worrying about that Roundup stuff and the unpronounceable chemicals big agriculture is about to levy on these lands. I've always maintained that if you put stuff on your land that ends in "-cide," whether herbicide, fungicide or pesticide, it's going to be a problem. After all, that's the same suffix as homicide, genocide and suicide.

Don't eat stuff that ends with -cide. So, heading into a local Fleet Farm, or Ace Hardware, there's going to be a lot of that in the aisles. Take Monsanto's Roundup, that's the stuff we are going to see all over these stores; there are thousands of lawsuits about the non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Or maybe paraquat, associated with Parkinson's disease. An estimated 6.1 billion kilos of glyphosate-based weed killers were sprayed across gardens and fields worldwide between 2005 and 2014 (the most recent point at which data has been collected). That is more than any other herbicide, so understanding the true impact on human health is vital.

A 2016 study which found a 1,000% rise in the levels of glyphosate in our urine in the past two decades—suggesting that increasing amounts of glyphosate is passing through our diet.

From the micro-plastics in our blood to the weedkiller in our urine, I'd like a little less weird stuff in my body, and maybe we move toward organic—the

geese and bees like that better. That's one of my prayers for this New Year. Along with my New Year's resolutions: to listen better, to not lose my mittens, be with my family, and to grow more food and hemp. It's time to make those plans.

As climate change transforms our world, I am still hoping we can keep a few constants, like our six seasons.

This is what I know, the geese return, and that's a time. When the crows gather, the maple trees flow with sap and the world is being born again.