

old-growth 2015 Gail Grinnell
Fellowship Exhibit – Artist Trust

The colonnade of old-growth timber that supports this installation space is awe inspiring and haunting. My awareness of the rarity of this massing of huge milled trees includes a feeling of loss and this recognition heightens my response. They bring to mind my early memories of visiting western forests full of giant ancient trees with my parents. At the same time I think of a second growth forest recently burned by forest fire where I spend time with family and work in my studio. That fire was dramatic and fast moving. Whole trees exploded sending up shafts of flame twice the height of the tree. I could see the trees torching on the mountain from the valley below. After the land had cooled those trees had become deep holes in the ground the shape and size corresponding to the former shape and size of the trunk of the once live tree. When I looked in the hole I could see the openings to lateral tunnels moving away from the center. Where there had once been the large roots there were now meandering voids that as time passed became filled with all manner of life – mice, snakes, insects and all sorts of things that I couldn't see with my own eyes.

For this exhibition I am adding a singular column to the line up of these supporting posts made from the old-growth giants.

My thoughts and emotions about these forests are layered and complex and it is in this spirit that I offer the following narrative – part true and part fiction:

The small apartment building that I live in is snuggled up against an immense freeway that cuts through the city. A short walk down the alley behind my place takes me to a path that leads under this freeway and opens to the neighborhood on the other side. The structure spans a steep slope at this point and you can see views of the city and the lake while standing underneath it. The roadway soars overhead – vastly high. It is loud, dirty and brutally beautiful in its construction. The scale and number of support columns bring to my mind an old growth forest. Giants holding up the sky with dirt foot trails weaving in and out between the huge tree trunks.

It was during one of my walks that I passed between two parked cars and when I stepped over the curb I saw that the land fell sharply away. Hidden in plain sight a steep sandy slope – almost a cliff was in front of me. I walked/slid to the bottom where there was a delicate desert eco system surrounded on all four sides by steep tall cliffs. When I looked up I could see the freeway overhead, a line crossing the very blue sky. It appeared to be at a great distance. There was no sound.

In the cliffs there were openings to caves with large round entrances as tall as multi-storied buildings. The light only penetrated the first few feet and they made velvety black circles on the cliff walls. In high contrast to the bright dry desert they looked to be every shade of black.

I could detect the smell of a forest floor on the breeze coming from the caverns and I hoped for trees inside – really big trees.

