

Gesche Wüffel  
*When Trees Are Dying*  
June 11 - July 24, 2021

Reception for the Artist by RSVP, Friday, June 11, 6-8pm  
Zoom Artist Talk with Gesche Wüffel, Dr. Larry Wheeler and Professor Peter White, Thursday,  
June 17 at 7:00pm.



Tracey Morgan Gallery is pleased to present *When Trees are Dying* an exhibition of photographs by Gesche Wüffel that explore the effects of human made climate change on forests. This will be Wüffel's first exhibition with the gallery.

"Trees have always been a reassuring presence. The reassurance they provide is partly their continuity. Rooted in place, we may recognize still living trees in the oldest photographs. Further, a tree that lives as long as we humans, 8 decades or at most 10, is deemed, among trees, to be a "short-lived" species. More typical tree lifespans in old growth forests exceeds three centuries and the oldest trees reach several millennia.

And yet trees now face unprecedented environmental challenges. Each tree species has an evolved optimum set of environmental conditions in which it does the best and each tree species has an evolved range of tolerances for variation in the environment. The problem is not that trees have never seen change before, it is that the magnitude and rate of change in the present time are pushing them to the limits that defines the simple proposition that their ability to turn sunlight into organic matter exceeds the loss of organic

matter through the energetic cost of living.

We now know that our species, through increases to the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere, the harvest and fragmentation of forests, and other effects, has produced a rapidly warming world. The effects of that warming are not uniform, but some places are warming faster than others. Artists help us see and interpret the world around us. In *When Trees are Dying*, Wüffel makes climate change effects on trees direct and tangible. In this exhibit she has created a dramatic illustration of climate change by treating trees —through her photographs — with warming, drought, fire, invasive species, increasing salinity and storms."\*

Using 4x5 film and a large format camera, Wüffel photographed forests in two U.S. states and climate zones (North Carolina and Massachusetts) to show the impacts of global warming. These impacts include warming, drought, fire, storms, flooding, invasive insects, sea level rise and saltwater intrusion. Wüffel used specific photographic processes to represent each impact. For example she invokes *warming* through solarized prints in the darkroom; *drought* with solarized prints roasted in a kiln until they are browned, blistered and sometimes cracked; *storms* by ripping the solarized prints into several pieces; *sea level rise* by mirroring gelatin silver prints; *saltwater intrusion* by adding sea salt from the North Carolina coast. The resulting photographs are presented as an installation with both color and black and white photographs.

Photography creates a plethora of carbon emissions such as traveling to locations, shipping, supplies such as paper and darkroom chemicals among others. Wüffel tried to stay local as much as possible to emit as little carbon as possible. The portion photographed in Massachusetts was taken at the beginning of the project while she was attending a residency at Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art and while a visiting researcher at Harvard Forest in 2019. The carbon emissions created with this project were offset through [www.carbonfootprint.com](http://www.carbonfootprint.com). This project was supported by awards from the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, the Institute for

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the Arts & Humanities, and the Department of Art & Art History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Würfel lives and works in Chapel Hill, NC. She holds an MFA in Studio Art from UNC Chapel Hill, an MA in Photography and Urban Cultures from Goldsmith's, University of London, UK and a diploma of Spatial Planning from the Technical University Dortmund, Germany. Her work has been exhibited at the Tate Modern, UK; the Contemporary Art Museum, Raleigh, NC; the Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, NC; Goldsmith's, University of London, UK; Blue Sky Gallery, Portland, OR; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MA, among others. Würfel is the author of *Basement Sanctuaries* (Schilt Publishing 2014). Her work has appeared in the New York Times, The Guardian, WIRED, Slate, and others. She is a recipient of grants from the German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), the North Carolina Arts Council, the Puffin Foundation, the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. Her work is in the collections of MIT Museum, MA and the Portland Museum of Art, OR.

For images and information please email, [info@traceymorgangallery.com](mailto:info@traceymorgangallery.com)

Caption: Battle Park, NC (3), version 1, 2019-2020, solarized and roasted gelatin silver print on glossy RC paper, 14 x 11 inches, unique

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\*Professor Peter White, excerpt from "Trees and Photography on the Front Lines of Climate Change: A Comment on Gesche Würfel's *When Trees are Dying*."

**TRACEY MORGAN GALLERY**

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