



the last stand

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"Trees are poems the earth writes upon the sky, we fell them down and turn them into paper, that we may record our emptiness."

Kahlil Gibran

Dawna Mueller is Canadian/Swiss photographer focusing on the relationship between humans and nature. Dawna's passion for nature and the environment began when she spent time in the Yukon working summers through University. Traveling around the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Alaska whenever possible, left an indelible impression on her and raised her awareness of the impact that humanity had on these fragile ecosystems.

It was after a move to Switzerland, that the confluence of the environment, humans and photography began and became the cornerstone of her practice. Focusing on the Swiss Alps, Dawna traveled to glaciers and mountains documenting the impact of the changing climate. Additionally, her work has taken her to the Arctic and the Antarctic, where she witnessed the effects of record high temperatures, warming oceans, melting glaciers and the detriment to the region's wildlife. Dawna notes that, "The planet is in peril and the weather patterns are causing havoc in all areas of the world, no one is immune from the destruction and devastation." Temporal and spatial concepts are the foundation of her practice and through her work Dawna creates visual narratives connecting humanity to nature.

Dawna is currently working on a photographic project documenting the ancient old growth forests on southern Vancouver Island. This area is under imminent threat of clear-cut logging and her practice is a photographic exploration of the ecological and temporal relationship within the forest and its relationship to humanity. Additionally, Dawna has been documenting the blockades for Focus

on Victoria, and Saving Earth Magazines and has been covering the enforcement of the injunction and arrests since May 18, 2021.

Dawna was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba and is Red River Métis. She has a Diploma in Photography from Cap Fotoschule in Switzerland. Additionally, Dawna studied Art and History at the University of Paris - Sorbonne, Political Science at the University of British Columbia and Law at the Allard Hall School of Law at UBC. In 2018, Dawna was trained as a Climate Reality Leader by Al Gore in Los Angeles as a part of his foundation The Climate Reality Project.

Dawna has exhibited her work internationally and her photographs are part of permanent and private collections worldwide, including Allard School of Law at UBC.

In addition to her ongoing work, Dawna is currently studying for a Masters of Photography at Falmouth University, in Cornwall, UK.



Photo by Ken Miner

Statement of Intent

The Last Stand is a photographic narrative of the ancient Vancouver Island Rainforest, and its ecological and temporal relationship both amongst itself and to humanity. The forest causes us to recalibrate spatial and temporal dimensions in complex ecosystems and it requires us to consider ways in which our own perceptions can inhabit distinct but coexisting space.

The intention of this series is to challenge how we think about time and space, and question its meaning and relationship between humans and nature in light of apparent contradictions and cognitive dissonance. My work questions both the magnitude and complexity of nature as well as the conflict for its survival amidst a fervent exploitation for its resources.

This Statement of Intent will contextualize these issues and provide an indication of key theoretical and practical contexts to locate my work within contemporary creative practice.

The aim of my research is to explore the ancient forest's temporal relationship to past, present and future; how it challenges us to think about time, and our complex and dependent relationship with it. Forests are intricate ecosystems with trees acting as interconnected structures and joined by a subterranean mycorrhizal web of roots, fungi, and bacteria that connects all of its organisms. My goal has been to photograph the diversity of the forest from close-ups of tree bark, to large-scale tree portraits and wide-angle landscape imagery, to the interaction with humans protecting it and those enforcing the exploitation of its resources. Photographing trees and forests is difficult because they are complex and visually confounding, as English novelist John Fowles succinctly states "woods defeat the viewfinder...they cannot be framed"

(2020: 63-64).

The complexity of this issue is that the British Columbia Provincial Government has granted logging licences to land it does not own, and to a company that does not practice sustainable logging and is intent on clear-cutting all of it. The land in question is on unceded Pacheedaht and Ditidaht First Nation's territory that historically belongs to them. There is less than 1% of old growth forests left on Vancouver Island and astoundingly, this is one of the few places on the planet where unsustainable clear cut logging practices continue. Since August 2020, hundreds of forest defenders, including members of the local Pacheedaht and Ditidaht communities have set up blockades preventing logging from commencing. A judicial injunction was granted in favour of the logging company on April 1, allowing for the removal of the forest defenders. On May 18, police enforcement began, and as of July 24, 478 people have been arrested and logging has resumed in certain areas with ancient trees falling daily.

In addition to acquiring content for my Sustainable Strategies Module, I was hired by two magazines as a photojournalist, which provided me with limited and controlled media access to the police 'exclusion' zones during the arrests. It was my goal to speak to some forest defenders and get their perspective of why they had uprooted their lives, often for months at a time to live in the forest for the purpose of protecting trees over 1000 years old.

I also wanted to research a place that has historical relevance to the current issue of conflict. This required traveling to another rainforest on an island in the Clayoquot Sound, 200 km from the Southern Vancouver Island Rainforest, which was the location of the largest act of civil

disobedience in Canadian history and is referred to as the 'War in the Woods'. More than 3000 people protested and over 800 people were arrested, ultimately resulting in a tripartite 'quasi' protection of Meares Island in 1993. As part of my research, I wanted to see this precedent setting area that has provided so much hope and inspiration for the current conflict. After driving 200 km, I went on a 4-hour kayak trip to Meares Island to see for myself the ancient forest whose protection resulted from the successful public demonstration. Additionally, I traveled within the Southern Vancouver Island Rainforest photographing areas that had previously been clear-cut highlighting the stark contrast between the ancient forest and its obliteration.

Historically trees and forests have inspired artists and photographers for generations, but this is also an important topic in the world of contemporary art and photography. Contemporary creative practice often invites audiences to recalibrate individual and collective perceptions, and one of my aims is, through the creation and dissemination of my work, to cultivate expanding ways to think about our essential and multifaceted relationships to nature. My body of work for this module shows both the endurance and symbiosis of the ancient forest. It also shows the fight for its survival and the conflict of humanity for the exploitation of its resources. My goal is to engage the viewer in an exploratory process requiring visual and cognitive reflection and as well, in the words of Thomas Struth, to 'just surrender and absorb the power of the natural scene' (Becirovic: 2020).

My intention for this module is to exhibit the results of my research and print these images using sustainable hemp paper. I am

part of an 'Old Growth Artists in Residence' Collective and we have scheduled an exhibition opening on August 9, 2021, whereby each artist exhibits work made in the rainforest. This is to be followed up in 2022 by a larger exhibition. Additionally, I am planning to show my Work in Progress Portfolio (WIPP) at the August exhibition as a video installation. I will also print my WIPP into a photo book printed from recycled paper. As well, I would like to experiment with video installation projecting images of trees and forests in areas where they have been clear-cut to show the juxtaposition. This video installation is a project for future modules and a continuation of my work in progress as I move towards my FMP. I am also planning an exhibition of this series with my gallerist Monica Reyes Gallery in Vancouver in 2022.

My practice relates to aspects of contemporary photography such as photojournalism, documentary style issues of social and ecological justice, landscape and environmental photography. The key proposition in my work for this module is to show through the complexity and expansiveness of the ancient old growth rainforest, the temporality of its existence and its current collision with humanity. My research has been a combination of reading primary and secondary academic sources on photography, forests, ecology, history and science; photographing the forest, clear cuts and blockades; and speaking with forest defenders and police on the front lines. Additionally, I have looked at other artists who inform my practice and who have created bodies of work on the forest and nature, as well as social justice and ecological issues.

Ancient trees are historic monuments that reflect a lifespan of centuries. Their rings store data like an organic recording

device that contains information about the past. This data provides information about seasonal changes, records patterns in growth and also records climate conditions like temperature and rainfall. The evidence of my research confronts us with the increasing precarity of aboreal life due to current unsustainable human activity. Italian artist Guiseppa Penone (Penone: 2009) succinctly summarizes that 'the tree is a being that memorializes the feats of its own existence in its very form.' The future is unknown but if it results in more of the present day clear-cutting; my images will serve as a memorial to the fallen Behemoths. The reality in this rainforest is that its current existence might very soon be its past. Despite the blockades, many giants have already fallen since enforcement began in May.

An important component of my methodology this module was to explore different photographic methods as well as alternative processes of photographic development. As an environmental photographer previously using a DSLR exclusively in my practice, I welcomed the opportunity to employ a variety of different methods from using large format and pinhole cameras, to experimenting with alternative processes like collodion wet plate and cyanotype. As well, I developed my own negatives and silver gelatin prints in the dark room. With my digital camera I experimented with techniques of multiple exposure and shutter drag to expand the narrative. And in post processing my digital images I looked to 20th Century inspiration from both art and photography.

The materials used in my practice are a Nikon D850 DSLR with a variety of lenses. As well I used a large format camera from 1936 to create tintypes using the collodion wet plate process, and negatives to

create silver gelatin and cyanotype prints. Other materials used were the chemicals required for the alternative processes, photographic paper for printing, and metal plates for the tintypes. I also rented a dark room space for processing and developing. While I enjoyed the processes of the collodion wet plate, cyanotype, and silver gelatine, I did have concerns about the sustainability of the chemicals involved. These processes all require various chemicals ranging in their toxicity and despite the recycling possibilities, there was still an element of toxicity that created reluctance in me to proceed with these methods in my future practice. As an environmental photographer, an essential component of my methodology is the issue of sustainability. I have devised strategies and workflow that are conscious of material consumption and try to reduce my carbon footprint whenever possible.

A consistent method in my practice is black and white post processing in the final presentation of my images. I have always appreciated the juxtaposition of light and shadows revealing the form without the distraction of colour, and for me it has always been the truest form of revealing. As Vilém Flusser notes in his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, "Black-and-white photographs embody the magic of theoretical thought since they transform the linear discourse of theory into surfaces. Herein lies their peculiar beauty, which is the beauty of the conceptual universe. Many photographers therefore also prefer black-and-white photographs to color photographs because they more clearly reveal the actual significance of the photograph, i.e. the world of concepts" (2000: 43).

In addition to the tools of my trade, travel is an important aspect of my methodology

since access to the forest is a necessity for my research and photography. This requires me to often sleep in my vehicle, hike and kayak long distances and ensure I am self sufficient for a number of days. As I photographed the forest defenders both before and during the arrests, having an opportunity to speak with them allowed me to incorporate the 'Tool Box' tool of 'Participation' into my practice. As well, my research introduced me to Rodney Graham's 2012 'Inverted Trees' series, which was informed by Robert Smith's iconic 1969 series 'Upside Down Trees'. This inspired me to use the 'Tool Box' tool of 'Appropriation' with my photo of Lonely Doug on page 25. I also used the 'Appropriation' tool in my digital multiple exposure photo on page 45, paying homage to the late Gordon Smith. My attempts to revisit areas that have been logged since my previous visits with the hopes of using the Rephotography tool have been obstructed by the police exclusion zones, but it is my hope that this situation will soon change as the result of a recent court decision recognizing media's right to access despite the exclusion zones. The culmination of my research this module has resulted in a series within my WIPP The Last Stand that is very much informed from Ian Wallace and his conceptual art of the intersection of painting and photography. Relying on the early Papier Collé of Braque and Picasso in 1912, and later Mondrian and other Modernists, Wallace's practice is the juxtaposition of contradictions between conceptual and pictorial, between abstract and representation.

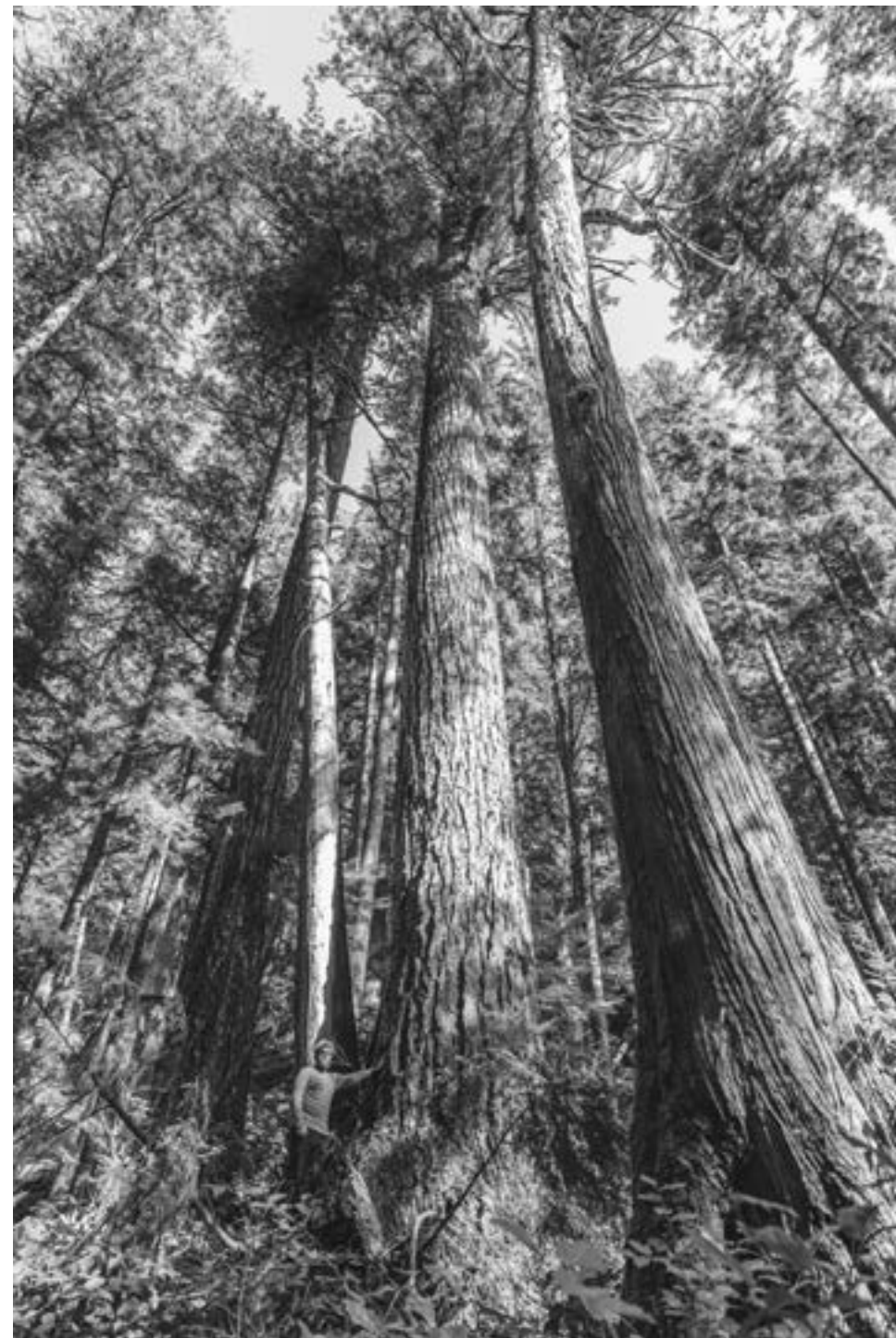
My work in progress series created during this module is called 'The Confluence of Cognitive Dissonance' and is framed within the context of place and time. The juxtaposition of contradictions as seen in Wallace's work is very much the approach

to the methods that critically underpin my project. The forest is a repository for history, producing information about non-human semiotics beyond the anthropocentric, and in the present it provides food, shelter and survival for millions of species including our own. The future remains to be seen. The confluence of humanity and nature is resulting in the obliteration of the natural world as we know it and through my images the conflict between the two is evident as they collide. The cognitive dissonance results from the vacuous rhetoric of those who say they are in favour of saving the old growth, to the opposite action of the accelerated clear cutting of it. In creating this series, I was compelled to use colour for the first time ever in my practice. My intention is that through the use of the colour red, to illuminate the intensity and range of emotions on the blockades: consciousness, solidarity, conflict, outrage, stolen land, violence, and bloodshed. Additionally, the visual disruption of the image reflects the increasing erosion of the forest's indexicality despite the human sacrifice.

Flusser states that "photographers' intentions are to inform others and through their photographs to immortalize themselves in the memory of others" (2000: 45-46), however, I disagree with him on this point. While my intentions are indeed to inform others through my photographs, they are not to immortalize myself, but rather to imprint the current issue of old growth ecocide in the Southern Vancouver Island Rainforest on the minds of viewers in hopes of enticing support, action and ultimately protection.

The Stand

























Alternative Processes

Pinhole Camera 4x5 - Negative & Silver Gelatin Print



Pinhole Camera 4x5 - Cyanotype



Large Format Camera 8x10 - Collodion Wet Plate Tintype



Digital Multiple Exposure

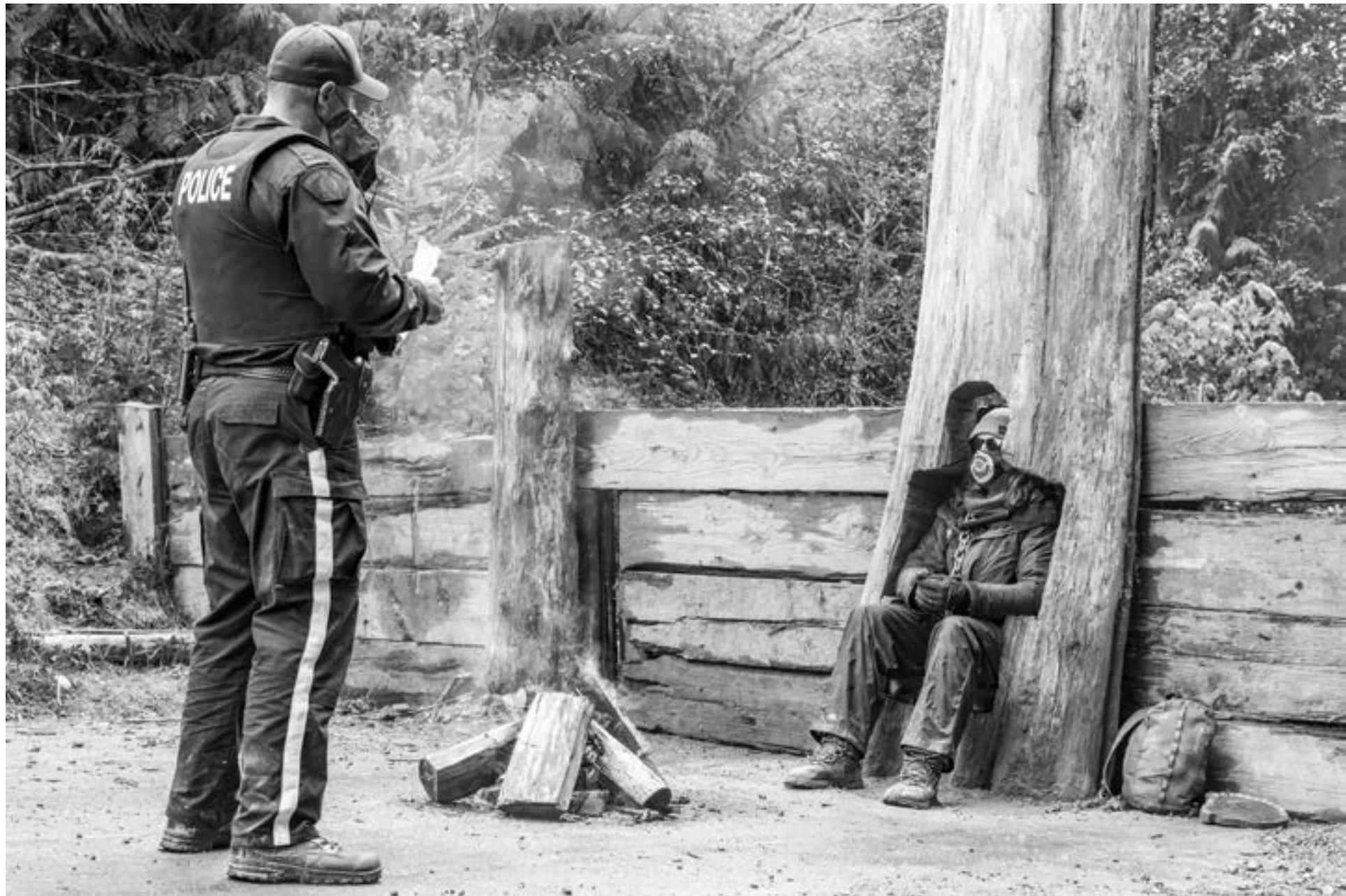


Forest Defenders











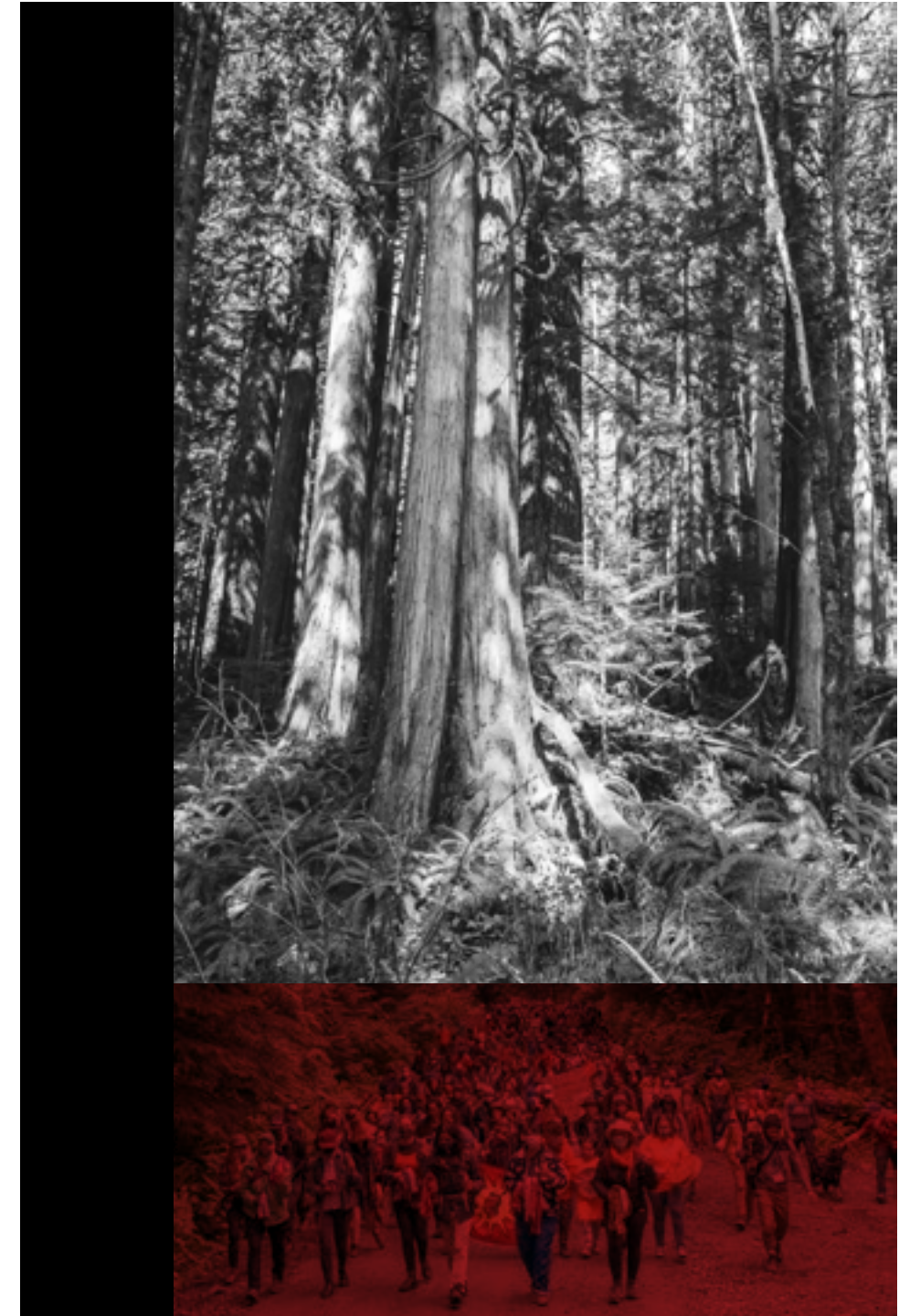






Confluence of Cognitive Dissonance









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Fairy Creek Blockade - <https://www.facebook.com/FairyCreekBlockade>

The Wilderness Committee - <https://www.wildernesscommittee.org/>

Focus on Victoria - <https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/>



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