

FIELD GUIDE TO A HYBRID LANDSCAPE

FEBRUARY 4 – AUGUST 2, 2025

DANA FRITZ

2025 FRIENDS OF THE BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART GIFT PRINT ARTIST

Dana Fritz's photographs make visible the forces that shaped the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands, once the world's largest hand-planted forest. Sand, wind, water, planting, thinning, burning, decomposing, and sowing all contribute to its environmental history. A conifer forest was overlaid onto a semi-arid grassland just west of the 100th meridian in an ambitious late nineteenth-century idea to create a timber industry, and to change the local climate.

This unique experiment of row-crop trees that were protected from the natural cycle of fire for decades, yet never commercially harvested for timber, provides a rich metaphor for our current environmental predicaments, including catastrophic forest fires and tree encroachment in the grasslands. This effort to reclaim with trees what James Fenimore Cooper called "The Great American Desert" has become focused in the twenty-first century on conservation, grassland restoration, and reforestation, with the aim of sequestering carbon, maintaining natural ecosystem balance, and mitigating large-scale climate change.

— Dana Fritz

Major Sponsor: **Greater Manhattan Community Foundation's Lincoln & Dorothy I. Deihl Community Grants Program**

Contributing Sponsors: **David and Judith Regehr**

Images of artworks courtesy of Dana Fritz

Related events

Free and open to the public

Artist Talk | Field Guide to a Hybrid Landscape: Nebraska's Hand-Planted Forest

Thursday, February 20, 2025, 5:30 p.m.

Beach Museum of Art

Trees in the Grasslands: Three Perspectives

Thursday, April 24, 2025, 5:30-7 p.m.

Livestream conversation with Dana Fritz, Hixson-Lied Professor of Art at University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Jesse Nippert, K-State University Distinguished Professor in the division of biology; and Carson Vaughan, author and freelance environmental reporter. Moderated by Curator Elizabeth Seaton

Visit beach.k-state.edu/calendar for link to join the virtual program.



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sand | wind | water
Sandhills near Thedford
and **Dismal Riverbank**
2017-2021, inkjet print,
16 x 20 in. each



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planting
Eastern Redcedar Thicket
and **Leaning Trees**
2017-2021, inkjet print,
16 x 20 in. each

Dana Fritz, *Fire Tower View*, 2021, inkjet print, 16 x 40 in.





In the Forest

In spring 2024, I decided that the best way to wrap my head around Dana Fritz's project to photograph a hand-planted national forest in the Sandhills of Nebraska was to meet her there and watch her work. A forest of conifers on a mixed-grass prairie covering hills of beach-like sand was difficult for me to imagine. I live in the Flint Hills of Kansas, where tall grasses and wildflowers send their roots deeply and solidly into limestone and flint.

Fritz met me at the forest entrance in June 2024. It sits west of the small town of Halsey, Nebraska, and stretches across 140 square miles. I had learned that some 5,000 acres of the park and a nearby 4-H camp had burned in 2022. Dana wanted to make more pictures of the fires' impact on the environment, including the clearcuts and singed trees piled up for sale. The black and white photographs of the forest she had shown me made it seem beautiful but otherworldly, not a site for vacationers. I wanted to experience the forest she had captured in her art.

The entire site was not the "ghost town" I had imagined. In certain ways it was like other forested national parks. Entering by car, one encountered a well-appointed visitor center. Picnic tables stood under the shade of trees. A few campers and hikers made themselves known. Across from the visitor center, stood an expansive tree nursery. Fritz walked me into greenhouses that exploded with life.

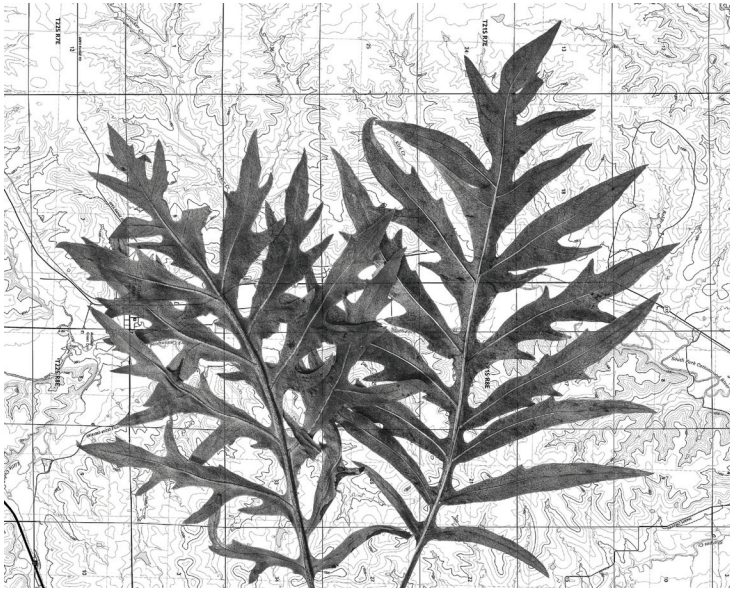
The drive through the forest made me feel glad I had a guide. The roads were rough. It was hot, and at one point we walked across a sand dune and stuck our legs in the low waters of the Dismal River, fed by Ogalala Aquifer springs. But I was now seeing the landscape in color, and it felt at once similar and different from Fritz's imagery. As we journeyed through the burn area, she pointed to trees that had survived and to emerging undergrowth, including self-sown tree seedlings. These signs of green life seemed to invite visitors to re-explore this acreage as a newly opened environment.

Fritz's photographs of the Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands are an important record of what the forest was like before the fire as well as after. The future of the site is uncertain. Should the lost trees be replanted, should the burned area remain undisturbed, or should the area be restored to prairie? Whatever is decided, those who love this forest in the Sandhills it is clear will continue to find enjoyment and solace in it.

— Elizabeth G. Seaton, Curator



Dana Fritz is Hixson-Lied Professor of Art, and a Center for Great Plains Studies Fellow, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her work has been exhibited widely across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Her artist-residency experiences include Villa Montalvo (California); Biosphere 2 (Arizona); PLAYA (Oregon); Homestead National Historical Park (Nebraska); and a Tallgrass Artist Residency (Kansas). Fritz's work has been published in numerous exhibition catalogues, among them *IN VIVO: the nature of nature*; *Encounters: Photography from the Sheldon Museum of Art*; and *Reclamation: Artist Books about the Environment*. In addition to several self-published limited edition artist books, she has published *Terraria Gigantica: The World under Glass* (University of New Mexico Press, 2017) and *Field Guide to a Hybrid Landscape* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023). *Field Guide to a Hybrid Landscape* won the 2024 Nebraska Book Award for Nonfiction "Nebraska as Place."



Dana Fritz, *Tallgrass Orientation*, 2024, inkjet print, 16 x 20 in.

Detail on cover

2025 Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print

Every two years the Friends of the Beach Museum of Art commissions a limited-edition print by a recognized Kansas artist for sale to the public. Kansas State University's Friends of Art started the gift print program in 1934. Dana Fritz's *Tallgrass Orientation* is the 2025 Friends of the Beach Museum of Art Gift Print. Fritz has written about the work:

Inspired by my 2023 Tallgrass artist residency in the Kansas Flint Hills, I layered compass plant leaves with a topographic map of the area where I collected them. The fingers of their giant leaves point to the poles and orient their flat faces to the east and west sun. Indigenous and settler travelers valued compass plants for orientation in a vast landscape with few large landmarks. I was struck by the resemblance between the shape of the compass plant leaves and the topographic representation of the land around Matfield Green.

For more information about becoming a Friend or purchasing this year's gift print, please contact the museum at **785-532-7718** or visit the museum's website. Friends of the Beach Museum of Art receive a 25% discount.



MARIANNA KISTLER
BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART

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