

# Trees of grace and transcendence

Schneider shares moments of respite in beauty as an antidote to the unease in our world

Wendi Schneider

Words by • Artdoc



© Wendi Schneider | Locust, 2016 pigment ink on vellum over white gold leaf

**Trees are silent protagonists in the work of Wendi Schneider, which is rooted in the serenity she finds in the sinuous elegance of organic forms. She shares moments of respite in beauty as an antidote to the unease in the world in which we live. “If I can touch someone else with my work, I’m deeply moved and grateful. I hope that viewers will appreciate the beauty and embrace the need to care for our endangered planet.”**

The series ‘States of Grace’ of Wendi Schneider, an American photographer residing in Denver, evolved organically. “I photograph what I’m drawn to and strive to immortalize the grace I find there, to make the intangible tangible, and to instill my images with the spirituality felt at the moment of capture. These moments are my states of grace.”

The series is extensive and is informed by nearly 40 years of photographic image-making. Her work originates from her youth, growing up in a family of artists in the lush, plush South. Schneider: “As a child who grew up in the shadows of the Holocaust, the murders of the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, and countless others in our systemic racism and antisemitism, I embraced the ideology of different strokes for different folks.”



© Wendi Schneider | The Cry of the Lonely Crow, 2019 pigment ink on kozo over white gold leaf

## Moon

Within *States of Grace* are images that can be curated by subject, theme, or treatment. For her Colorado Month of Photography exhibition in Boulder in 2019, Schneider chose the title 'Evenings with the Moon'. "In this selection of images, I contemplate the power of universal experiences to unify and find transcendence, engaging the moon as muse. Printed on vellum or kozo and gilded with precious metals, the subjects echo the luminosity of their celestial inspiration. My images of the night draw on the metaphor of darkness and light to express our shared longing for freedom, peace, love, and harmony amidst the chaos of the world. This synthesis of form and content, paired with poetry and music, allows the viewer to consider the commonalities in our collective consciousness. We all live under the same moon."









© Wendi Schneider | Crescent and Crow, 2018 pigment ink on kozo over white gold leaf

## Visual poetry

Wendi Schneider seeks to create visual poetry through fleeting moments of vanishing beauty. “I’m driven by a search for grace and the elusive glow of creative flow that exists when the awareness of time disappears. I relish the focus to discover how best to convey the essence of the ephemeral that elicits a quickened heartbeat. It’s that magical moment when the senses align. It’s calming and exciting, centering and enchanting, and for me, a spiritual experience. I feel that I’m given a gift of a moment which I am tasked with preserving.”

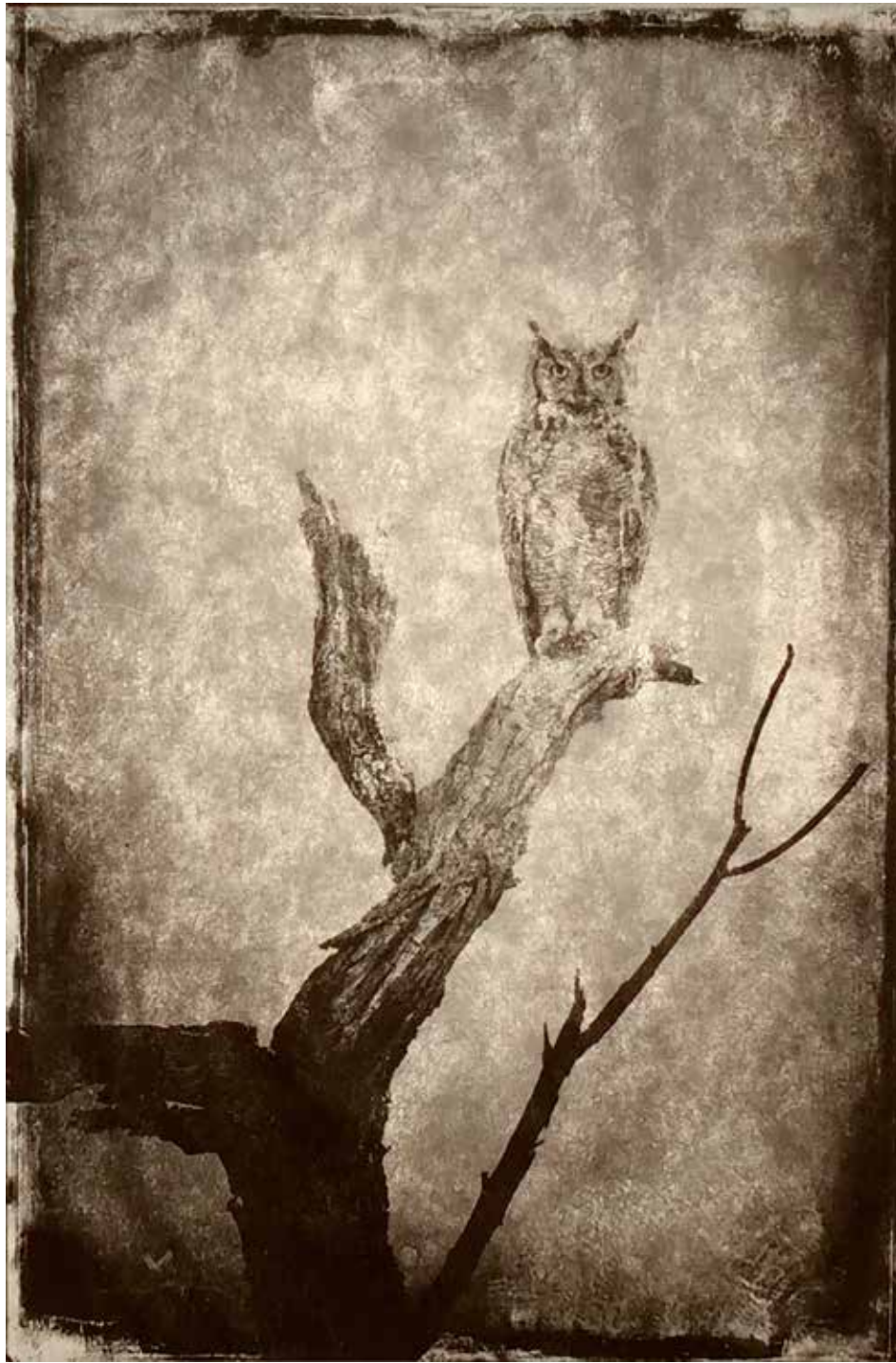
Schneider shares moments of respite in beauty as an antidote to the unease in the world in which we live. “I illuminate the necessity of recognizing and preserving our disappearing natural world. I make work for myself because I’m compelled to. If I can make my work, I am fulfilled. If I can touch someone else with my work, I’m deeply moved and grateful. I hope that viewers will appreciate the beauty and embrace the need to care for our endangered planet.”





© Wendi Schneider | Little Black Angel, 2019 pigment ink on vellum over white gold leaf





© Wendi Schneider | Full Moon Owl, 2015 pigment ink on kozo over white gold leaf

## Part of life

Many of her works depict trees in various forms, as well as birds and owls. The photo-works are not merely descriptions but serve mainly as memories and metaphors. Schneider about her youth: "When I was a child, my neighbours had a small farm behind our home. At night I would listen to the great horned owls calling to each other. It was magical and soothing. Near the farm, in the far corner of our back yard, I sought solace and solitude beneath the undulating limbs of a weeping willow tree, trying to figure out how I fit into this world. I feel we are forever intertwined with these delicacies in nature, as we too are part of life on earth. These symbols of nature inspire dreams and represent wisdom and freedom."





© Wendi Schneider | The Wisdom of Trees, 2019 pigment ink on kozo over white gold leaf



## Art history

Seeing her artistic photographs, it is not surprising that Schneider has a background in painting and art history. “Both my mother and grandmother painted when I was young, and I have paintings by them and by my great-grandmother in our home. I spent most of my childhood outdoors or drawing and painting and hours in the attic with a collection of my mother’s art history booklets from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I later studied art history, the decorative arts and painting at Stephens College in Columbia, MO, before transferring to Newcomb College in New Orleans to concentrate on painting. I think art history, and the design and iconic fashion magazines of the ‘70s and ‘80s helped cement my sense of composition or perhaps I was born that way.”



© Wendi Schneider | Cypress, 2017 pigment ink on vellum over white gold leaf

Artists and photographers that inspire her are various. “Many artists have played a role in my development. Edward Steichen, Robert Demachy, Frank Eugene, Gertrude Kasebier, and other pictorialists, Sarah Moon, but also James Abbott McNeill Whistler, John Singer Sargent, Claude Monet, Gustav Klimt, Lucien Levy Dhurmer and other Symbolist, Tonalist and Impressionist painters.”

**“I photograph intuitively – what I feel, as much as what I see.”**

Her art background does not impose a rigid copy of a historical style. “I photograph intuitively – what I feel, as much as what I see. Informed by a background in painting and art history, my images are layered digitally with colour and texture to manipulate the boundaries between the real and imagined and are often altered within the edition, honouring the variations.”



## Textured paper

Schneider does not compromise in her digital printing technique, choosing the very fragile Japanese natural Kozo paper, which is also known as Mulberry paper. “My artwork Crescent & Crow was layered digitally on my iPad and then brought into Photoshop. I had been working with vellum since 2012 and had played with encaustic wax on Kozo in 2015. In 2018 I began experimenting with the Kozo with gilding. The surfaces are quite different - the vellum is smooth and presents as a silken sheen and smooth finish when gilded; the Kozo is more textured and sparkles with luminosity. After the images are printed digitally on translucent vellum or Kozo, I apply white gold, moon gold, silver or 24k gold leaf behind the image, creating a luminosity that varies as the viewer’s position and ambient light transition. My process infuses the artist’s hand and suffuses the treasured subjects with the implied spiritually and sanctity of the precious metal, echoing the spiritual experience of the process of creating the image.”



© Wendi Schneider | Madrones, 2020 pigment ink on kozo over white gold leaf

Some images, like Cypress and The Wisdom of Trees, seem to have a natural tone and other images like Crescent Moon, are blue. Why did she print her photographs in different colours? “I’m more interested in how something feels than appears. Sometimes the capture does not call for a different interpretation. Sometimes it does. Colour evokes emotional responses in me and hopefully for the viewer. We all bring our personal histories into each emotional response.”

Wendi Schneider was born in 1955 in Memphis, TN. She lived in Columbia, MO for two years, New Orleans, LA for thirteen years, New York, NY for six years, and since the summer of 1994, Denver, CO.

<https://wendischneider.com>