

Diana L. Six, PhD, FRES
Missoula, Montana, USA
Diana.six@umontana.edu

Scientist artist interpreting nature and the sixth extinction

ARTIST CV

Media: Oils, acrylics, soft pastels, graphite, collage/mixed media, repurposed wool and other fibers, what I happen to find

Statement: I am a scientist and artist. As a scientist, I study symbioses from the genetic and microbial levels to the landscape level, most often using forest insects (mainly bark beetles) and their interactions with microbes as models. Much of my work in recent years has been investigating whether our natural forests have the capacity to adapt to a changing climate as well as increasing alterations by humans. My research has been conducted in North America, Africa, and Europe, which has allowed me to experience a wide range of cultures and ecosystems and encounter the loss of nature at a global scale. I began my career as an ecologist because I was excited to unravel the mysteries of nature and tell stories of life. However, now I find I am reporting less on life and more on death. I moved at some point from being an ecologist to being a coroner, documenting the loss of life of Earth (see interview here

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/21/climate-crisis-glacier-diana-six-ecologist>).

This shift in jobs has not settled well with me. I now use art as a way of expressing my grief, either through anger, more subtly expressed sadness, or to celebrate the beauty that remains. My creative practice shifts with my focus, moods, and location. I work in many different media. I work daily when possible. Large projects consume considerable time and planning and are usually done at home. Smaller works fill the time between big projects and are often done when I travel and explore. I love a balance of the two as they demand different types of creativity and focus and help me grow as an artist and communicator.

As a scientist, I have spent many years designing, implementing, analyzing, and presenting research projects. Good science is highly creative. It relies on finding the new and requires a curious mind that can step beyond that which is known. I think my love of the creative process in science is why I find art to be such a satisfying pursuit.

I have only had a serious art practice for the last 5 years, so my approach is still a bit amorphous. I typically start with an idea and play with it for a bit in my mind. Then, if it stays with me, I work to pull together the components I will need (if a collage or rug) or begin to lay out my pastels or paints (if a drawing or painting) and get to work. For collage or rugs, up front design is crucial and can take weeks. This tends to be true for my oil paintings as well although I allow greater flexibility in how they evolve over time. With acrylics and pastels, I am very flexible and open in the structure and process. Currently, I am playing with soft pastels to produce realistic and abstract interpretations, a process that has turned out to be incredibly fun and surprisingly effective.

I adjust fast to my surroundings, and I love being alone in nature. I have also spent many years working on public communication and enjoy stepping out of nature to share. My stories are not always comfortable (what is these days?), but they are honest and engaging.

Consultancies

Missoula Art Museum (MAM) - Below the Bark: Art of Disturbance Ecology. October 2021-February 2022. Over a period of about three years I worked individually with three artists (Tim Musso, Jim Frazer, Suze Woolf) helping them interpret their emotional responses to the large climate change-driven mountain pine beetle outbreak that resulted in millions of hectares of dead trees. Each artist was profound in their interpretations of this event and were quite different from one another in their approach and resulting works. There came a time when it felt natural to bring them together. The show was very well attended and formed the base for a month of art and science outreach to local schools and groups.

Residencies

Playa Art and Science Residency, Summer Lake, Oregon. Awarded residency to Suze Woolf who I joined to work on 'bark beetle books' constructed of wood and silk. July 24-27, 2018 (she would later be part of Below the Bark exhibit at MAM (see above).

Playa Art and Science Residency. Summer Lake, Oregon. July 2019. 10-day awarded residency. Playa is focused on the nexus of art and science. I focused on completing an intensive conceptual paper on the symbiosis between bark beetles and the fungi they rely upon for survival (published in 2023) and acrylic painting. Because this was during the COVID shutdown, only one person at a time could be present at the facility. The location is very remote (over an hour to a town/supermarket) with remarkable quietude and dark skies. Animals wandered freely on the campus in the absence of people. It was magic.

Playa, Art and Science Residency. Summer Lake, Oregon. October 2020 Awarded Residency. 10-day residency just (barely) post-COVID shutdown and limited to three people (with extreme distancing). I was invited to help draft a new mission loosely defined as 'An Education of Arid Places'. I also focused on a collage (using Playa's example as an ecosystem dying from water loss) and a painting related to climate change grief.

The Verdancy Project, Ponder Residency. Troutdale, Oregon. 7-day awarded residency. May 19-25, 2025. I will focus on small and microscopic organisms on site in ways that express how such small things run the world. I will probably focus on soft pastels and/or mixed media. Includes community presentation.

Hypatia-in-the-Woods, Art and Science Residency. Shelton, Washington. May 2026.

Workshops

Symbiosis – An education of arid places. Playa, Summer Lake, OR. August 19-23, 2021. I guided six participants in how to apply an understanding of science to direct art projects using the topics of

symbiosis and microhabitats to interpret ecological interactions on very small to very large scales. Each day involved a field trip followed by work in the studio with access to microscopes, etc.

Symbiosis – Connections: The art and science of symbiosis. Playa, Summer Lake, OR.

September 22-26, 2022. I guided five participants through the ecological and human landscape of the Summer Lake/Christmas Valley area. Each day involved a field trip followed by conversations and work in the studio.

Using art to communicate science: October 2022. Forest and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. Seminar followed by a two-hour open conversation with exploratory exercises. 68 participants. The seminar coincided with delivery of ‘Symbiosis: An Autobiography’, a collage I made that expressed my growth as a person and scientist to be placed in the permanent collection of The University of Pretoria.

Day of the Dead Insect Apocalypse Workshop October 2024. Missoula Butterfly House and Insectarium. In conjunction with Missoula’s annual Day of the Dead Procession and in support of seminar I presented at the insectarium ‘Behind the empty Windshield: The Insect Apocalypse’ that focused on the massive loss of insects that is occurring and what that means for humans and life on Earth. I made 160 block prints of various insects on repurposed fabric that workshop participants made into banners and clothing to wear in the procession.

Other activities

The Emergency: A sci-art collective: 2022-2023. I acquired a grant from the University of Montana to support a facilitative process and collective designed to bring together scientists and artists on campus to communicate pressing issues in ecology. The name of both process and collective, The Emergency, was based on the common definition of the term as *an unexpected and usually dangerous situation that calls for immediate action*, as well as the term's root - emergent - a phenomenon in both science and art that occurs *when an entity expresses properties that emerge only when its parts interact*. For one year, a group of about 22 faculty and graduate students met and created art focusing on the climate crisis. The group was led by myself (professor of forest entomology) and Eric Jensen (MFA student). At the end of the year, eight participants contributed to a month-long show at Gallery 709 in Missoula, MT, including a festive and very well attended First Friday opening.

Shows

Gallery 709, Missoula, MT – The Emergency. 2023 (multi-artist show, I contributed six collages)

Gallery 709, Missoula, MT- Insect Integra (as part of Day of the Dead) Nov 1-30, 2024 (multi-artist show, I contributed six acrylics, three colored pencil drawings, four collages)

Break Espresso, Missoula, MT – Missoula Sketchy Folks invited group show, January 1-31, 2025 (I contributed one colored pencil drawing, two pastels, one graphite drawing)

Frame of Mind, Missoula, MT – Juried art show, two pastels. May 2025.

Training

Botanical Illustration: series of four multi-week courses 2016-2018 - Nancy Seiler, Missoula, MT

Monoprinting: one day workshop 2017 – Bev Beck Gleukert – Missoula Art Museum, Missoula, MT

Liquid acrylics: one day workshop 2018 - Nancy Seiler, Missoula, MT

The art of mixed media (weekend workshop) 2019 - Patrick LoCicero – Gage Art Academy, Seattle, WA (online)

Landscape watercolor (weekend workshop) 2019- Suze Woolf, Gage Art Academy, Seattle, WA (online)

Oil painting Interior Scenes: eight-week course 2019 – Grace Athena Flott – Gage Academy, Seattle, WA (online)

Identity in America: four-week course (online) 2020 – Timothy Hyunsoo Lee - Gage Academy, Seattle, WA (online)

Painting I: Fall semester 2020. Jennifer Combe- University of Montana, Missoula, MT

Drawing dinosaurs: four-week course 2023. Jason Poole – Zootown Community Art Center, Missoula, MT

Pastel Landscapes: Three-day workshop August 2024 - Barbara Griffin – Hockaday Art Museum, Kalispell, MT

Digital drawing: four-week course September 2024 – Blaise Chambers – Missoula Life-Long Learning Center, Missoula. MT

Drawing like a Pro: four-week course October 2024 - Jason Poole- Missoula Life-Long Learning Center, Missoula, MT

Creating from the heart: The creative process: one-day workshop November 2024 - MaryAnn Bonjorni – Missoula Art Museum, Missoula.MT