

Nancy Lowe

Artist's Statement

My peculiar joy is the mischief of mixing art and science, finding their boundaries and crossing them. In ecology, an *ecotone* is a boundary area between two kinds of habitats, the way a beach is a boundary area between ocean and land. Ecotones are rich areas; species from both of the habitats wander into the edges, and there are other species that specialize in the boundary itself. My work is such an ecotone. I have worked in science labs and participated in scientific field work, and I have also worked in art studios using several media. Migrating between these worlds, I have observed that there are many ways in which the making of art and the doing of science are similar. Both artists and scientists blaze new paths into unknown territory, building on the collective past work of their peers. Both invent new tools and techniques in order to courageously scout these new paths. Both welcome failures as means of shaping the process of discovery. Both seek particular truths about the world in ways that connect to deeper universal truths. And, sadly, in our current society both art and science are being marginalized. I challenge the artificial (and relatively recent) divide that distinguishes between approaching the world as an artist or as a scientist, and I examine how we might repair this cultural rift through hybrid art-science activities. To do this interdisciplinary work, I engage in making (but exhibit only minimally), participate in scientific research (but publish only minimally), and probe art-science boundaries with others, through collaborations, teaching, presentations, and other kinds of activities.

Scientific illustration is often an entry point for those interested in the intersection of art, science, and the natural world, and this was true for me. For two decades I produced scientific illustrations of insects, plants, fungi, and other organisms in watercolor, color pencil, graphite pencil, carbon dust, and ink pen. I have often kept detailed drawings and notes of the natural world in nature journals. I also collect natural history records as photographs, uploading them to iNaturalist, which is a kind of collective, global, online nature-journaling app. In the late 2000s I began to be curious about other ways to bring art and science together. I produced a series of oil-on-panel *Species Icons*. I initiated a public participation project to convey concepts of evolution using branched series of drawings that changed over many iterations. I catalyzed and curated many collaborations between artists and scientists. In the past year, I have begun exploring art-science through mixed media, incorporating fiber, drawings, preserved specimens, graphs, maps, and scientific data into my work. Currently I am venturing into a series called *Mapping Change*, which is giving me an opportunity to broaden my view from the microscopic scale of individual organisms and their structures, to a macroscopic scale of the landscape and its biotic and abiotic interactions. Recently I began adding a new layer of human history to natural history themes, delving into the complex and often exploitative relationships between ourselves and the land. *Ghost Farms of The Gambia* contemplates a painful landscape: land on the Gambia River, left unfarmed by people kidnapped for the slave trade.

Bio

Nancy Lowe makes art with science themes, and is currently working in fiber, drawing & painting, and mixed media. Her artwork has been exhibited in galleries, museums, and public spaces in the US, Belgium, and the UK. She has catalyzed and curated several art-science exhibits and performances, at universities, academic society meetings, museums, and other venues. For over two decades she has taught art-science workshops at colleges & universities, biological field stations, museums, and K-12 schools in the US and Costa Rica. She worked for ten years as a research technician in several science labs focusing on pollination biology, microbial symbionts of insects, and large-scale ecology. Currently Nancy works as a grant writer at Penland School of Craft, and collaborates on art-science and education projects through her interdisciplinary consulting business, Art + Science In the Field: AS IF. You can see her artwork at nancylowe.studio, learn more about her art-science collaborations and teaching at asIF.center, and follow her #artscience du jour on Twitter @nancyartscience. She earned a BFA in Time Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.