

Exploring Shifting Landscapes

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INTRODUCTION



Exploring Shifting Landscapes addresses and documents current impacts of climate change on the landscapes of interior Alaska. It uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the relationship between people and place and to inform a broad audience about current environmental changes. Art broadens individual perspectives communicates and form connections in ways that words and charts cannot.

OVERVIEW

Landscapes are fascinating in the way that they constantly change and shift around us. I am deeply interested in the relationship people have with landscape, and wanted to dive deeper into that relationship by looking specifically at scientific work focused on the environment in Alaska and creating a group of pieces to inform and creatively study that scientific work. Plein Air Painting and arts/science collaboration have been proven to improve artists perception of the environment and natural dynamics of subjects. Artistic collaboration allows the exploration of scientific research in a way that draws the focus of research and progress to the origin of curiosity about the world around us. Visual representation presents itself in a more approachable manner compared to a research paper, and can be shared to a broader audience and help the audience understand concepts related to ecosystems, environments, and the world we live in. Collaboration with scientists will give the show depth and purpose in the community.



Field study at Vault Creek

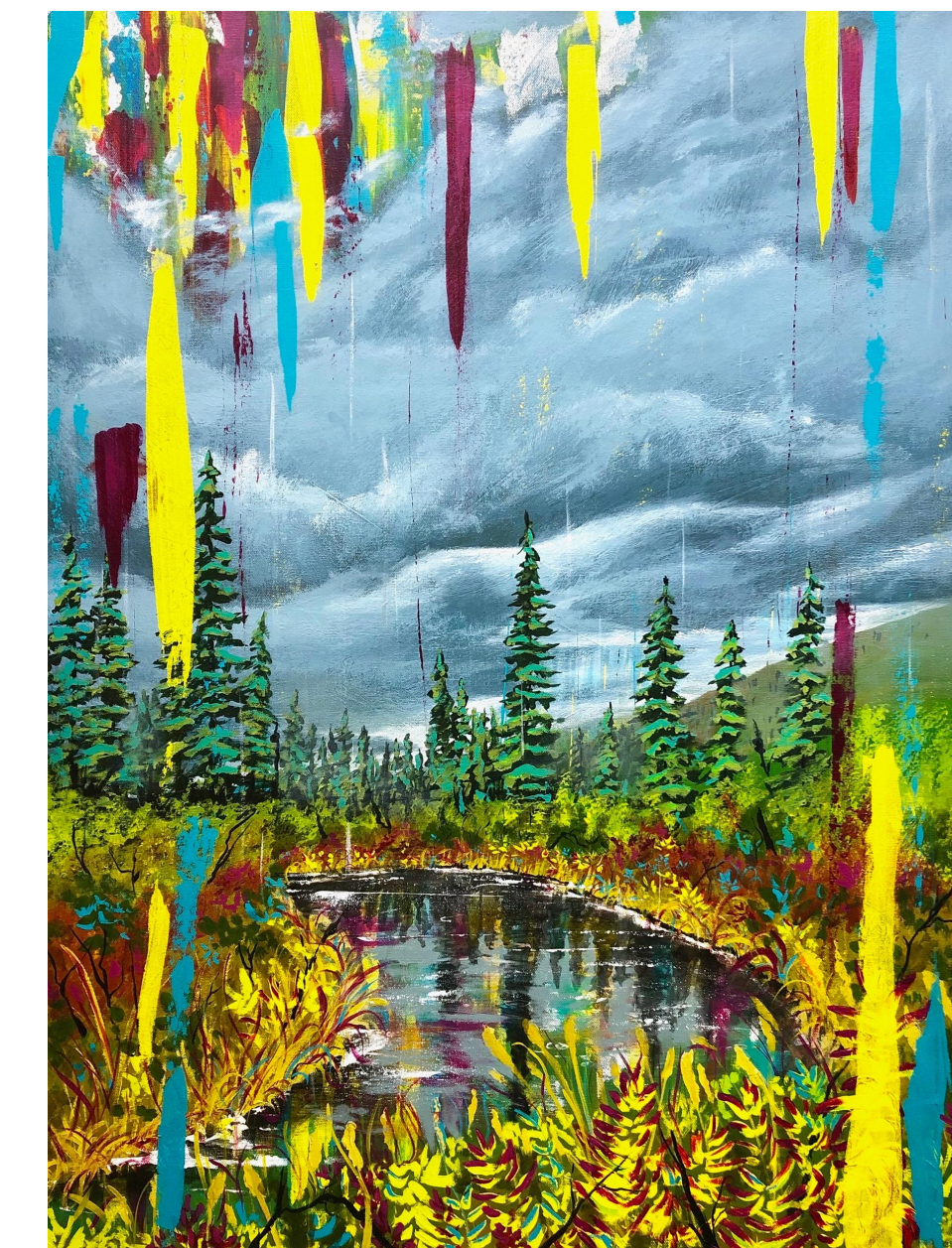


METHODS AND CONCEPT

I have been investigating these themes with stream ecologist Tamara Harms and fire scientist Zav Grabinski to learn and share information about their work; following scientists into the field to observe their work, speaking with them about their research, and reading through studies to form background knowledge of the locations I paint. I direct visual emphasis through the use of intentional colors. Bright, dramatic colors vary from the naturalistic landscape palette, in an effort to illustrate invisible chemistry while enhancing the visual effect of the work. Abstract and representational combinations make the work accessible to varying aesthetic preferences.



Poker Creek Research Site

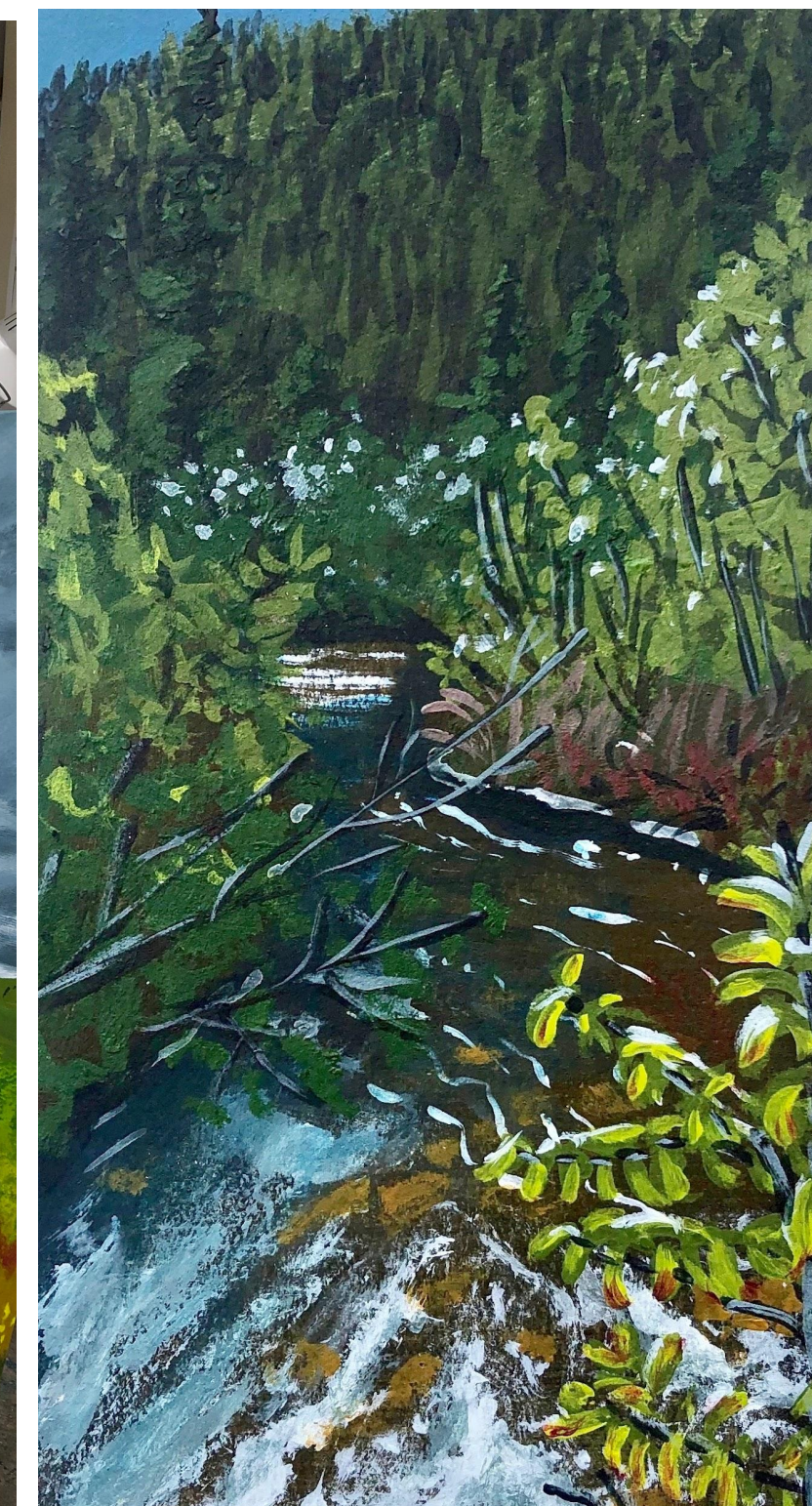


Poker Creek Painting

Abstract art does not appeal to as broad of an audience as representational work, which is why I wanted to include representation in my final pieces, even though I approached the concept abstractly. The colors chosen are bright and unnatural compared to the realistic elements, and are attention drawing. The abstract elements highlight areas with unseen chemistry, which is the basis behind the scientific studies. Both scientists I worked with looked at how areas change and recover from wildfire burn and permafrost thaw, and what the effects of those events have on areas.



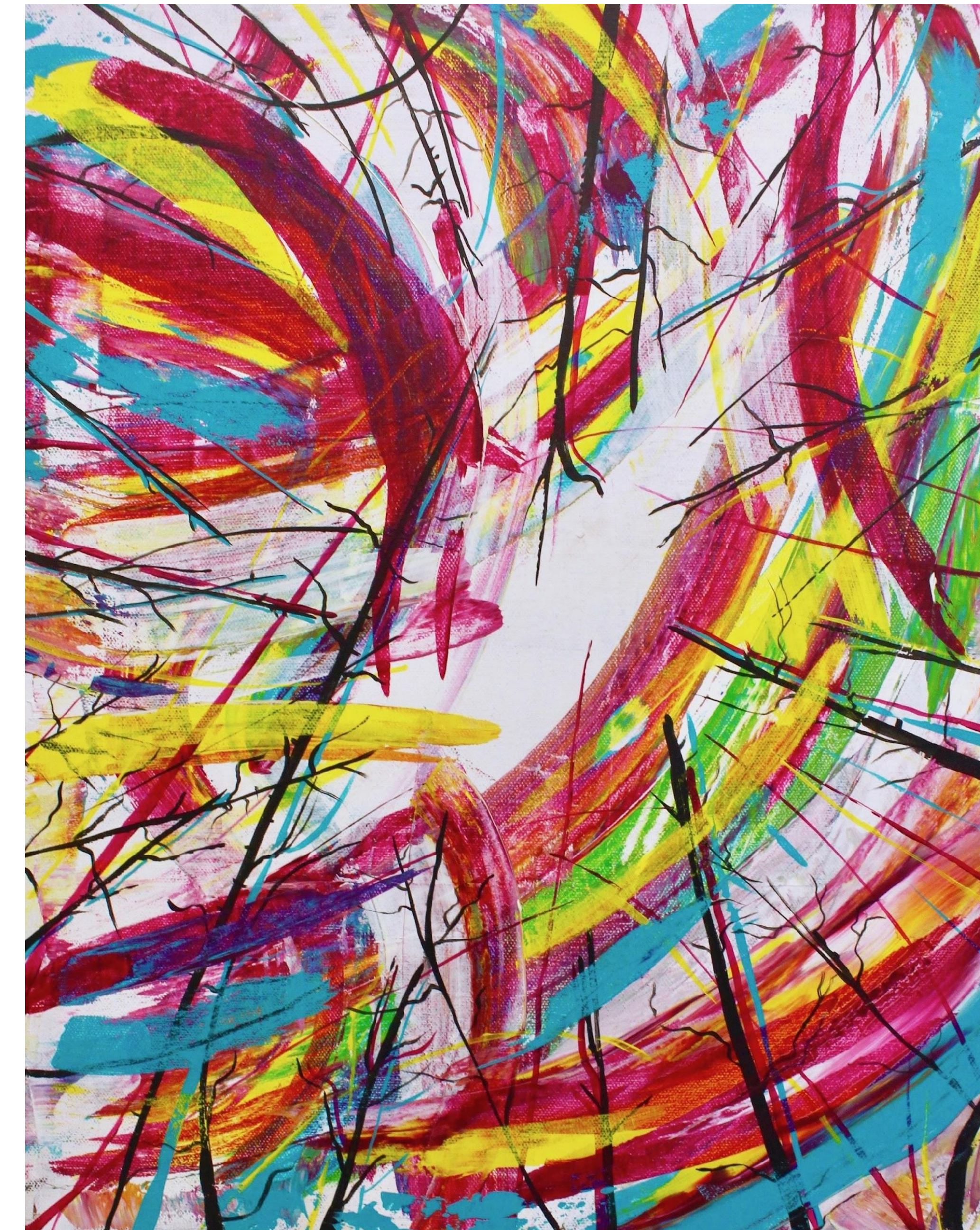
Painting studio



Poker Creek Field Study

RESULTS AND EXPERIENCE

The physical result of this project is a show on display in Arctic Java for two months. Not only does this reach the UAF community, but any public who happen to pass through the building as well. Each painting was labeled with scientific information from the site or information on why it was included in the body of work.



"Feedback Loop"

One of my favorite experiences field painting for this project was visiting the Yankovich Fire site to the north of UAF. As I was painting, an earthquake happened, which is normally hard to feel outdoors, but I was sitting still enough that I noticed the ground and plants move, which felt completely surreal.

The Poker Creek Painting in the previous section also depicts a large storm cloud, which overtook our outing, and was a good opportunity to discuss trends in increased storm and fire activity, as well as toxicity of rainwater.

The opportunity to participate in the field and learn up close about changes in the local landscape is incredibly valuable to my future work as an artist.

CONCLUSION

URSA has helped me present a scientific topic to the community. This project offered great experience for me professionally and academically, it challenged my painting techniques, my organization skills, and taught me how to collaborate with an interdisciplinary approach. I am excited to see where this show goes, and look forward to community feedback.



"Release and Revival"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was made possible with the help of many amazing people and mentors. Thank you to URSA for funding this project, and to my mentor Mary Beth Leigh and URSA Coordinator Erin Kirchner for all of their wonderful help with organizing this event and getting me in touch with scientists Tamara Harms and Zav Grabinski. Thank you to grad student Jacob Adams, and researcher Karen Jorgenson for their time with me in the field, and to my painting professor Sasha Bitzer for helping me with the painting and show process. This project could not have been possible without the help I received; I'd like to thank them all for helping me make this happen.