



Bank Street

Occasional Paper Series

Occasional  
Paper  
Series

---

Volume 2023  
Number 50 *Learning with Treescapes in  
Environmentally Endangered Times*

---

Article 10


January 2023

## Treescapes

Alexandra Délano Alonso  
*The New School*

Marco Saavedra

Follow this and additional works at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series>

 Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), and the [Educational Methods Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Délano Alonso, A., & Saavedra, M. (2023). Treescapes. *Occasional Paper Series*, (50). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58295/2375-3668.1493>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Paper Series by an authorized editor of Educate. For more information, please contact [kfreda@bankstreet.edu](mailto:kfreda@bankstreet.edu).

**educate**

# Treescapes

Alexandra Délano Alonso and Marco Saavedra

“Around me the trees stir in their leaves and call out, ‘Stay awhile.’”

Mary Oliver (*When I Am Among the Trees*)

We’ve each been looking to the trees for a long time. One of us painting, the other writing, with, by the trees. In the middle of the city and its noise, finding the branches. Standing, inquiring, returning. Why the trees, how we belong to each other, are questions worth asking again and again.

These paintings and poems are part of ongoing conversations, of many layers, of many trees, of what we lose and find under their canopies, in blooms, in dirt, and seasons.

What walking among the trees has taught us is that every art is an invitation to the mutuality of life. Through paintings, it means creating an opening of treescapes and orchards for people to become a part of and inhabit. And every exchange of poetry is a welcoming to community, listening, growth.



Figure 1. Sabzalizan (2019) emphasizes the need to understand that Indigenous communities represent more than tragic stories of the past

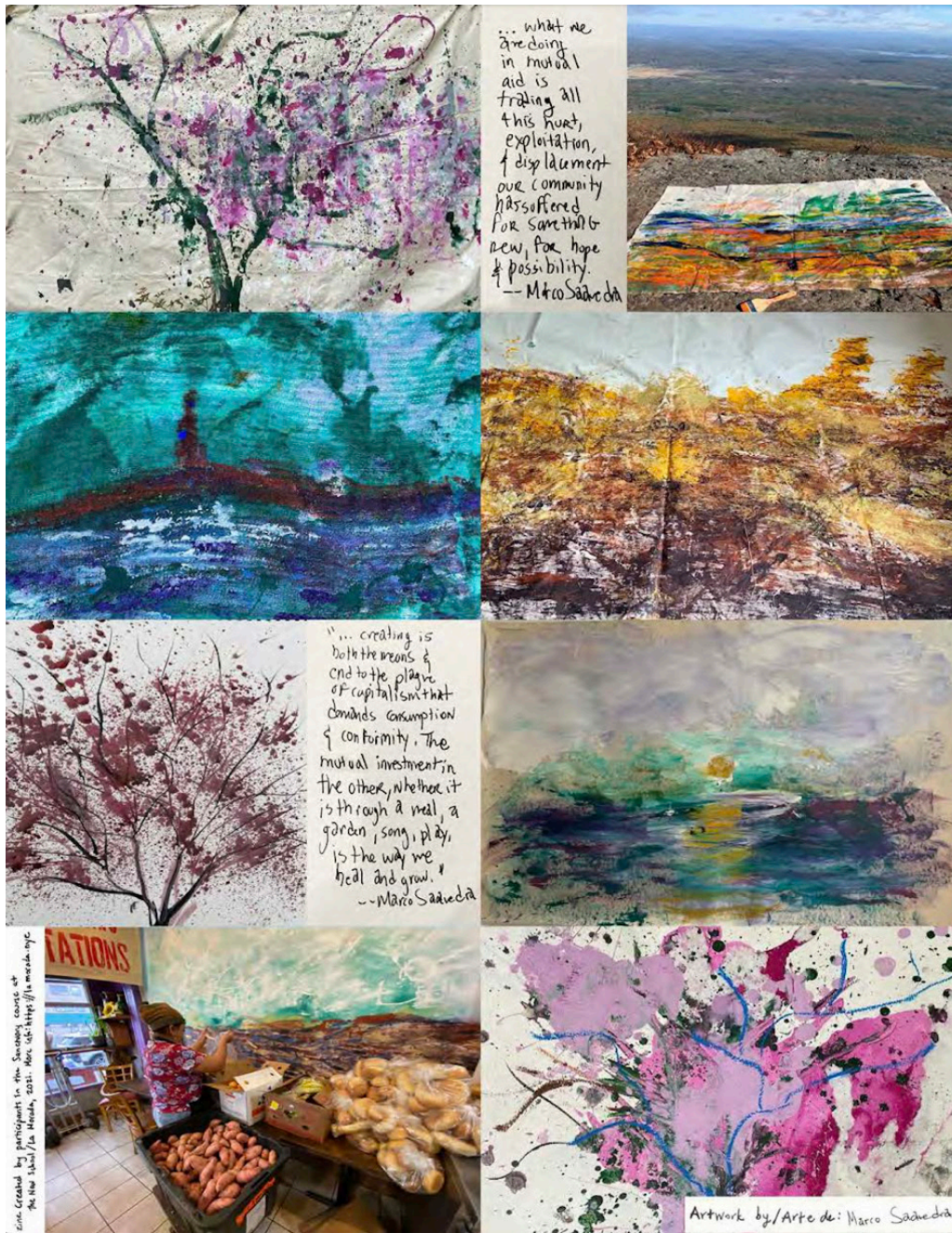


Figure 2. La Morada Mutual Aid Kitchen zine created with participants in the “Sanctuary and Accompaniment” course at the New School, fall 2021 (Nikkei Davis, Alexandra Délano Alonso, Katie Giovale, Lolo Kaase, Noor Lima Boudakian, and Anne McNevin). Artwork by Marco. For more information about La Morada, visit [lamorada.nyc](http://lamorada.nyc) and [archivesincommon.com/mutual-aid/](http://archivesincommon.com/mutual-aid/)

Every March, the miracle of spring in Lenapehoking appears with the dwarf iris as the last frost thaws away. Shaken from 4:30 PM winter sunsets, I (Marco) begin traveling with a pad and pastels to document spring awakening. And like “a king returning from his wars” (Tennyson, “Idylls of the King”), magnolias burst next in full white and pink flesh. These are increasingly becoming affected by climate change, as a late freeze might burn their buds, eliminating the possibility of full bloom. My muses are behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where I take my unstretched, unprimed canvases and acrylics.

“I don’t care if you’re dead! [Spring] is here, and she wants to resurrect somebody.” (Rumi)



Figure 3. Cherry tree in magnolia by Marco

Not caring about tax season, sakura (cherry blossoms) storm in. My preference are the weeping cherries at Branch Brook Park in

Newark, New Jersey. Like a pilgrim, I take my 45-pound hiking pack with me from the Metro-North Fleetwood Station, transferring to two subway lines at midtown. I then take NJ Transit to Newark Penn Station and the Newark Light Rail to the largest cherry tree collection in the United States. The hours amidst this majestic show have brought me the company of a coyote, snow, geese, children, and poets.

Crabapples, my favorite trees, follow. I enjoy the allées found at Daffodil Hill, Bronxville, Riverside, and Central and Shoe Lace Parks. What I love most about this tree is the fresh green leaf that first appears, followed by the rose and cream blossom giving it a Christmas-like contrast. And more than the spotted bark of cherries, the crabapple bark is scarred and contorted: delicacy and roughness all in one being.

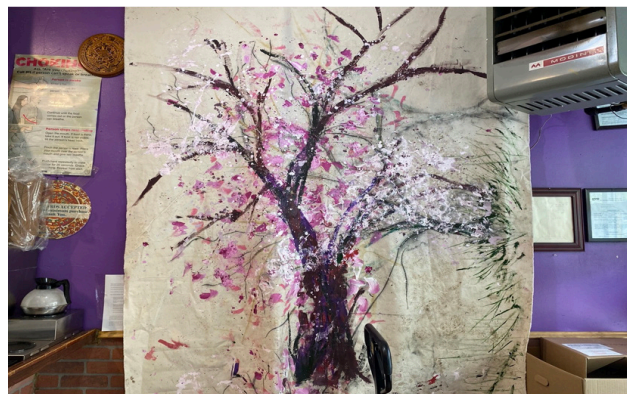


Figure 4. Revisited cherry tree at La Morada by Marco.  
“RISEN! With healing in her wings” (Malachi 4:2)

I try to recycle as much material as possible, and work on paper, cardboard, wood, and canvas. I also paint over my unfinished fall work to create depth and unite my natural calendar. If the Hudson River School saw Kaaterskill Falls as a natural cathedral, then this tree allée intends to be the natural cloisters buttressing our garden.



Figure 5. Golden trail by Marco



Figure 6. Cherry trees and art supplies by Marco

During the first weeks of the COVID-19 lockdown in New York, all I (Ale) could do was take photographs of the trees in my neighborhood, with a sense that there were absolutely no words to capture what I was feeling, and the only response was this openness in nature, this quietude, and this space that I needed to keep. At first, I thought it would be a few days or weeks of marking the quarantine, and then suddenly it was months of daily photographs of trees with no description, just a date, speaking for themselves, witnessing. And slowly the words came, in fragments; then the poems.



Figure 7. Photograph of a tree in Queens, New York, by Ale in *Brotos*



Figure 8. Photograph of a tree in Queens, New York, by Ale in *Brotos*

Even though I live in an area of Queens where there are few parks, and I wasn't going too far from home during my walks because we were in lockdown, I started walking differently around my neighborhood and observing the trees more closely, even the ones I know so well. And although these are urban trees, standing alongside cables, scaffoldings, roofs, signs, and cityscapes that are ever present, it was calming and revealing to keep looking up, to look at the sky through the branches and feel this opening when we were so constrained, confined, and here was life continuing, the trees bursting into flowers and leaves. We didn't know, we still don't know what's next. They knew what was next. And I keep returning to them, for breath, for ground, for voice.



Figure 9. Queen Kwanzan by Marco, haiku by Ale

there, where weeds burn  
where magnolias once fell  
the two rocks you lay



Figure 10. Adirondack Mountains by Marco, haiku by Ale

and what if they grew  
if held at the mountain's edge  
the broken branches

under this canopy, stay



Figure 11. Collage of trees in postcards by Marco, poem fragment by Ale



and carry leaves only

Figure 12. Painting over leaves by Ale and Marco, poem by Ale



Figure 13. allée postcards: art by Marco, poems by Ale





Figure 14. coo'o postcards: art by Marco, poems by Ale



Figure 15. Cherry tree by Marco, poem by Ale in *Brotos*

how we become  
part  
of  
each other

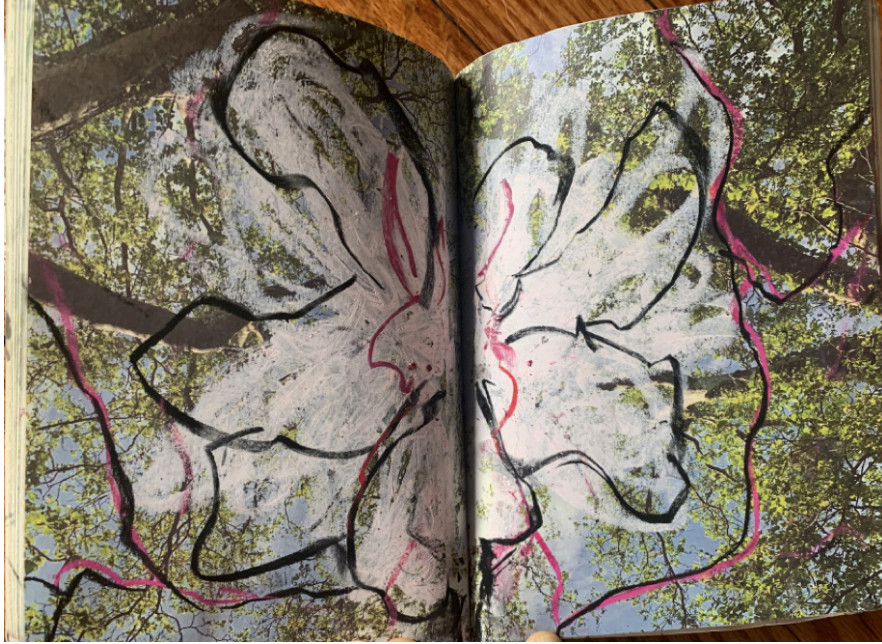


Figure 16. Magnolia by Marco over photograph by Ale in *Brotos*;  
poem by Ale in *Brotos*

what can't be contained

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**Alexandra Délano Alonso** is associate professor of global studies at The New School. Her research focuses on Mexico-US migration, memory politics, and transnational practices of resistance and solidarity at the intersection of art, activism, and community organizing. Her publications include *Mexico and its Diaspora in the United States* (2011), *From Here and There* (2018), and the co-edited volume *Borders and the Politics of Mourning* (2016). She is also author of the poetry collection *Brotos* (2021) and is co-director of the short film *Fragmentos* (2021). Her current projects include a book of haikus (towards & away) and the co-edited volume *Las luchas por la memoria contra las violencias en México*.



**Marco Saavedra** is a Mixteca painter. He works at his family’s mutual aid kitchen and Michelin-listed restaurant, La Morada, in occupied Lenape Territory (The Bronx, NY). Saavedra has co-authored *Shadows then Light* (2012) and *Eclipse of Dreams* (2017). As a member of the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, Saavedra infiltrated the Broward Transitional Center in 2012 to secure the release of dozens of immigrant detainees. This campaign was featured in the Sundance award winning docu-thriller *The Infiltrators* (2019). In 2021, Saavedra received political asylum. His latest art show “coo’o” invites you to walk together, to paint, to write, and to breathe.