August 5, 2021

Gripping black lumber crayons, we carefully and intently scribbled on sheets of white paper. All conversation quieted and a low rumble filled the air. Rapidly rubbing the crayons back and forth, up and down, we filled the paper entirely from one side to the other. We were making tree rubbings.

The large papers, encircling each tree at eye height, were being transformed from blank expanses to two-dimensional drawings of the intricate three-dimensional details of tree bark. It was a somber act, serious, poignant, with the resulting drawings seemingly bearing witness to our times.

It was the sound that was so surprising. The crayons rubbing against the bark made a quiet thundering. A kind of music. Walking along a path together there had been lots of exchange. Now, with twenty people absorbed with the rubbing, there was only a tree bark symphony of sound. Familiar. The beating of wings, or drums, calling us in.

The similarity to grave rubbing was palpable.

We looked around the woods, each tree with its wrapped rubbing. A line in the forest? A glimpse of the future? An awaiting burial ground? Whatever it was, it was unambiguously profound. And so compelling.

We carefully detached our rubbings from the trees, shared them with each other, rolled them up for easier carrying, and found our way back to the path. Twenty minutes later, we were at our cars.

December 16, 2021

This was a powerful experience, a powerfully connecting artistic experience: from the walk in, to finding a tree, to the quiet collective sound of the crayon bark collaboration, and the walk out. It took place in early August 2021, in a forest, in the midst of COVID.

Walking out that day, we were filled up with making art together, the joy of renewed connection, and a clear glimpse of the edge of our collective cavernous loss.

The experience was participatory, environmental, uniting, awe-inspiring, and so very grave.

In thinking about the BMAC Climate Change Artists in Residency project, I kept coming back to the tree rubbing. It feels like it addresses climate change from the inside out, more intuitively than not. And it is something almost everyone can do, anywhere there are trees, crayons, and paper. Central Park? California redwoods? My backyard? Your backyard?