

The Elm

I began watching the tree on February 12, 2020. I had started a project that involved watching nature's transformations and attempting to document some of those countless, endless processes. The tree was already dead from the previous year. It was easily 80 feet tall. I suspected it was what people in our town called a "Witness Tree," meaning it was present for The Civil War. I watched it almost daily for 16 months. I counted the birds that roosted in its branches. I examined sections of flaking bark. I collected twigs that fell. I took its photo dozens of times.

On June 17 2021, what remained of the tree was cut down and removed. I was able to go and watch this, too. The arborist tasked with the two-day job was a little confused by my presence, but worked undisturbed, and by the second morning we were chatting. He told me (rather matter-of-factly) the tree was an elm. "How can you know?" I asked. "By the smell," he said. He then confided that trees this size need leaf litter to protect and feed their roots, that the constant grooming of their habitats leads to their demise.

"Well, you should have been an Indian, then!" were his parting words as he drove away with the trunk, so enormous that had to be removed in chiseled, blocky segments.





Details from *The Elm*, charcoal and egg tempera stamping, 2021.



Still from video #2 of The Elm, 1 minute loop, 2022.