

# *Treehugger*

Martina Tan, B.S./B.F.A. '21

SMFA 2021 Senior Thesis

# artist statement



*Treehugger* is a site-specific installation on a dead but otherwise intact tree, intended as a community-generated gesture of care for one another and for the natural environment. Human intervention has reduced this lone tree on the Tufts University campus to a utilitarian structure that is nearly unidentifiable as a once-living organism. *Treehugger* enables a process of recovery and reflection centered around this tree via a crowd-sourced, human-sized "skin" of handmade paper made from recycled cardboard.

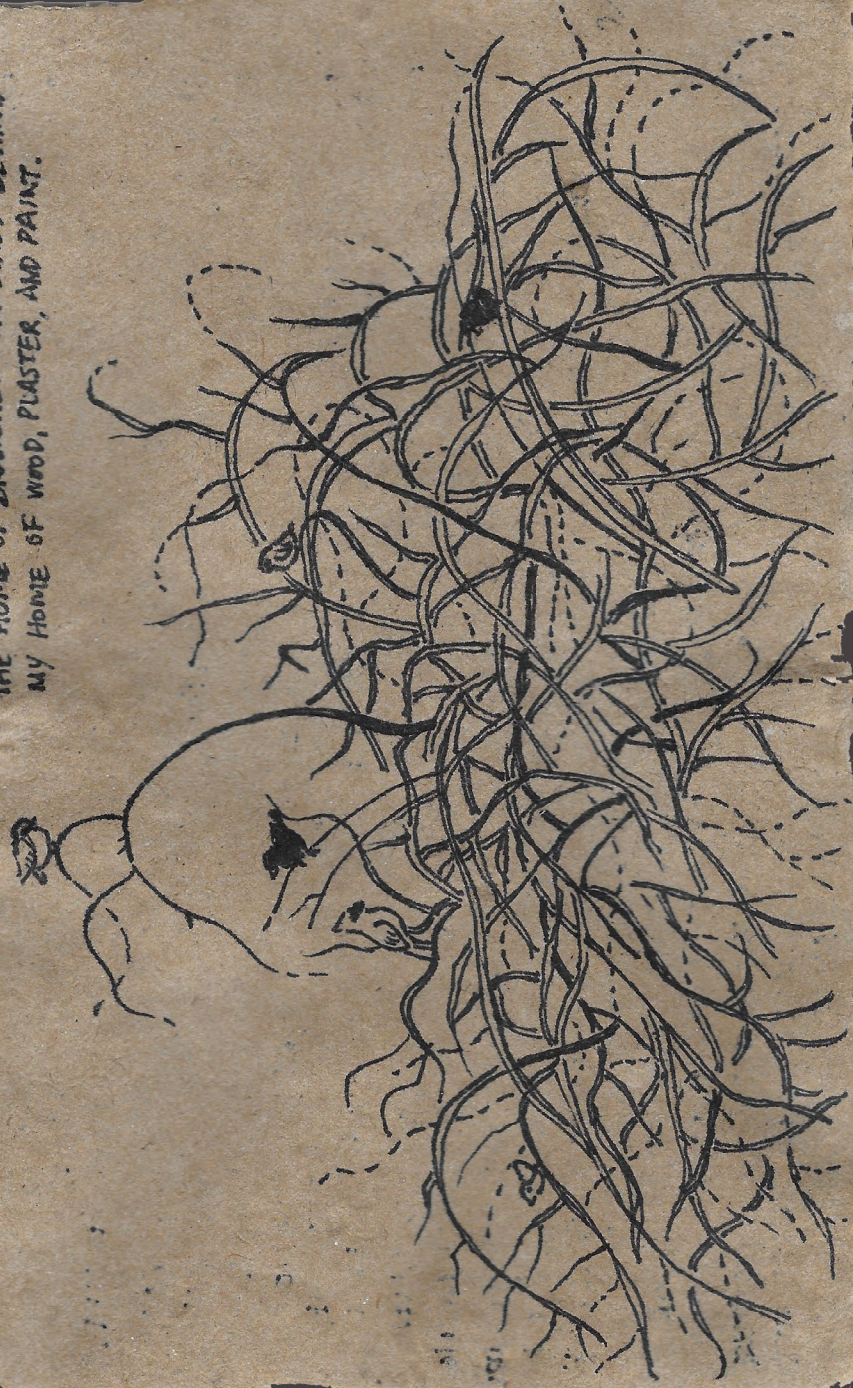
The responses on each page of the "skin" were obtained by inviting participants from the artist's personal network to take a walk wherever they lived while reflecting on the following questions:

- a. *How do you feel connected to nature and to your own skin via your senses or via your life experiences?*
- b. *Pick a plant, animal, or area from your walk. What relationship or memories do you share with it? If you have none, why not?*
- c. *What in the world allows you to breathe? To feel protected?*

These pages were returned by mail, then attached to the tree in Medford, MA for a week-long outdoor installation. This allowed each walker's respective journey to converge at a single site, in spite of the geographic spread of these reflective acts. The recording of the live-streamed performance at the site underscores the variety of relationships that the participants have with nature, with themselves, and with other people.

*Treehugger* has developed into a multimedia documentation of processes preceding and following the original installation, reflecting the continuous, non-linear nature of recovery in the context of both ecological and personal well-being. By suggesting commonplace encounters with one's environment as a basis for self-care, *Treehugger* encourages visitors to locate renewed potential in the everyday long after leaving the gallery.

THE HOME OF BRANCHES FOR BIRDS BEHIND  
MY HOME OF WOOD, PLASTER, AND PAINT.



3/15/2021

I AM PROTECTED BY THE ABILITY TO ADAPT TO CHANGES THAT MY MIND HAS BUILT FOR ME OVER MY 22+ YEARS OF LIFE. EVERYTHING HAS SOME WAY TO STAY GROUNDED AND RESILIENT AND FOR ME, ALTHOUGH I AM GRATEFUL THAT MY SKIN CAN PHYSICALLY HEAL OVER AND MY BLOODSTREAM CIRCULATES VITAL FLUIDS AND THE HUMAN BODY IS A WONDERFUL THING, ABOVE ALL ELSE MY SALVATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THAT I CONSCIOUSLY REMIND MYSELF TO BREATHE WHEN I AM ANXIOUS AND OPEN MYSELF TO NEW POSSIBILITIES WHEN I FEEL CORNERED. I REMIND MYSELF I AM POREOUS, MALLEABLE, AND NEVER AS SIMPLE OR IMMUTABLE AS I SOMETIMES AM TRICKED INTO THINKING: I'M THINKING ABOUT HOW TREES GROW TO MAXIMIZE THEIR EXPOSURE TO THE SUN. THEY ARE ALWAYS REACHING OUT FOR THAT LIGHT. EVEN IF YOU TRIED TO CREATE AN ALGORITHM FOR GENERATING A NEW BRANCH CONFIGURATION BY ANGLES, THICKNESS, PHYSICAL PROPERTIES, ETC. I THINK THERE WILL ALWAYS BE DIMENSIONS OF LIFE WE CAN'T CAPTURE OR COMPREHEND. THERE'S SO MUCH VARIATION AND THAT UNCERTAINTY OF EVER-EXPANSIVENESS AND ENTROPY IS WHAT KEEPS ME GOING. BECAUSE OF THIS I DECIDE TO BE HAPPY AND DILIGENT WITH HOWEVER THINGS SHAKE OUT.

— MLT





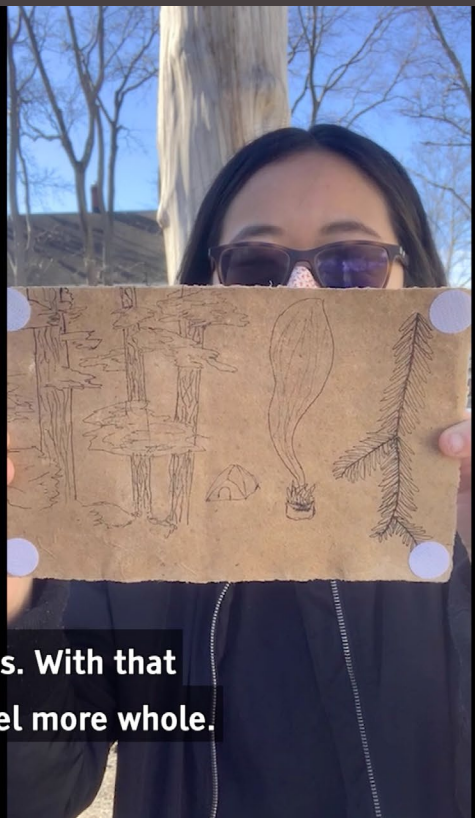
NO TRESPASSING

February 20th, 2021 2:46 PM  
Where does nature begin and I end? I feel strength in my legs as I walk, my muscles working together with intent. It feels great to move my body - stretching my hamstrings, swinging my arms - like uncrumpling a piece of paper. I've spent the last few days sitting at my desk, unmoving. My body feels hardened in this position, knees bent, hips at a 90° angle, shoulders hunched, head down. I feel thankful for this walk, standing up straight, arms and legs extended. My body is MOVING. My body! Move! It can move! I almost forgot! My body is young, flexible, limber, fluid, mobile. I can't sit at my desk and chair. I am made to move. I am made to feel. I am made to walk.  
Mary Kate Kelley

2/14/21  
It's winter and there's snow covering the ground. I'm not as cold as I expected to be. There's birds chirping and I guess I forgot how alive I could feel - even in the dead of winter.  
The tree I drew I have known for years. It'll last another 100 years. It'll grow roots home to a tree wife and edge of the woods. I used to be more imagination and I feel protected knowing living creatures have worked for millions of years. If they figured it out probably can too.



NO TRESPASSING



"The air burrows into my lungs. With that first breath outside, I already feel more whole."



wished voice...  
 redwoods sway above but stand  
 carpet hair tangled on a brush  
 in this ocean of a forest, slowly  
 This is the ground that birthed  
 I will someday return. Once I finish  
 I will give it back my body. In the

Feb 20th, 2021

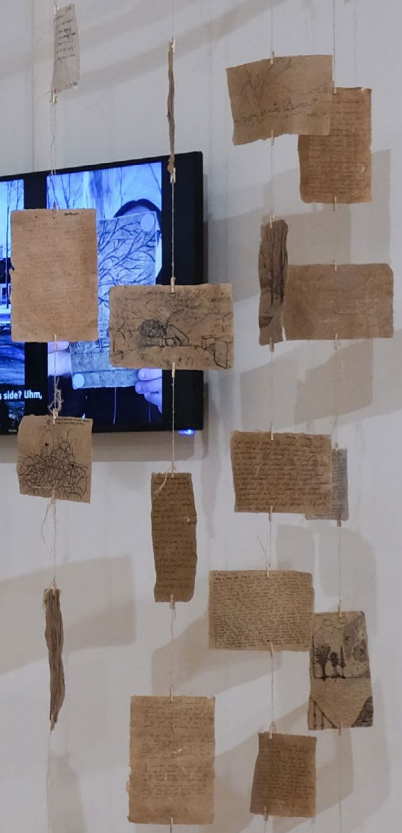
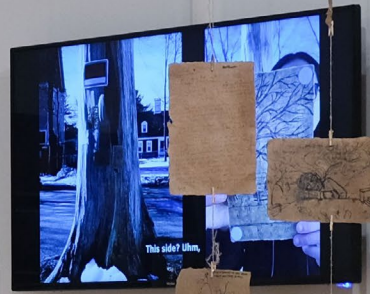
At the end of my time at Poets / on University  
 probably every experience I have left with my friends (especially  
 made laster walks we've had to take in the snow just  
 weather) feels like a memory as it happens -  
 can witness them though we are right next to  
 another. So I walked past each in the snow on my  
 once with them and then another without, I reflected  
 protected they made me feel - and now when I  
 be peering to my own last moments here with my  
 description with literally feeling like a child  
 into a snow globe - however challenging this  
 self college has been, I will always walk a  
 way for them.  
 Tina ♡



nature primarily with touch.  
 important way to really experience  
 touch moss - unfortunately  
 to the snow, so I made  
 and a lone evergreen  
 small wooded area.  
 the ground directly with  
 "feel" the crunch of the  
 it's an extensive

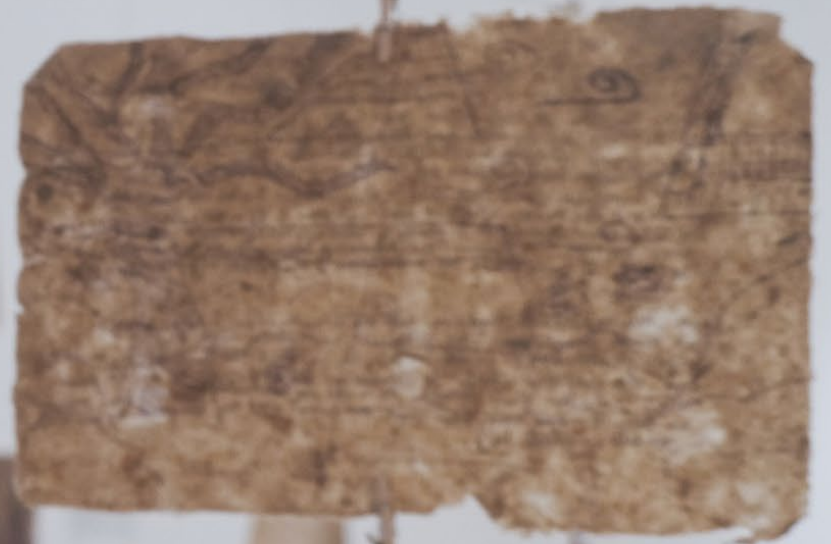


February 20th, 2021 2:44 PM  
 Where does nature begin and I end?  
 legs as I walk, my muscles work  
 It feels great to move my body -  
 swinging my arms - like uncrumpled  
 spent the last few days sitting a  
 in this position



Small text on the right wall, possibly a label or description of the artwork.









# about the artist

Martina Tan (B.S./B.F.A. 2021) is an interdisciplinary artist, designer, and student from Mount Laurel, NJ. Her current art focus arose from a lifelong fascination with nature and her own skin, and engages with practices of mental wellness, environmentalism, and community building. Outside of work, she can usually be found taking walks, obsessing over playlists, and consuming speculative/science fiction and fantasy stories.

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