

*Bivens Arm Nature Poem*  
*(Thirty-one Afternoons in Winter)*

PROCESS DESCRIPTION

On at least thirty-one occasions during the winter months of 1994, I visited Bivens Arm Park. The process was as follows: at the end of each trip to the park, I left one line on the "Visitor Comments" form. These comments were collected over time to form a meditative work called "Bivens Arm Nature Poem." From this method of working, I conceived a new way to exhibit site-specific writing. Each of the thirty-one phrases would be copied onto transparencies and then laminated. The phrases would be suspended on filament line and hung at the approximate site where they were originally written.

[Addendum: The exhibit should be temporary, a week at most.]

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Me, reading in French under a hot setting sun, and thirty feet away, a six-foot alligator, doing nothing.

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When will the outdoor be in my voice?

■

Soundscape: distant cars whir round a highway bend; nearby frogs emit a high-pitched vibrato; wind whishes leaves overhead; then a man's shoes pound the boardwalk, a bird's cry pierces all.

■

When I was a child, was I less afraid to touch this beautiful rot – wavy black gashes in gray green wood, chartreuse velour-like moss.

■

Everything around me trembles; I'm in synchrony with my surroundings.

■

Cold hands, encroaching bulldozers, but the lake's up, and I want a snake to swim toward me.

■

Female naturalist: "The young men come, even in the rain, holding their umbrellas."

Saw palmetto frond, severed, stuck amongst green plant fronds, the living and the dead coexist here.



Close to 5, dancing on the bridge, I raise my arms toward the blue sky, see a chalk-white half moon.



Kneeling, I open my right hand and press it hand against the damp soil, hoping the heartbeat of the earth will enter me.



Now I smell the swamp muck, but first I had to stand in it, let it seep over my stockings.



Draped around the base of a royal palm, a hair-veil of smilax – a wild pageboy with loops, tangles, knots, thorns; a few vines are alive, dead, alive again, a naturalist says, “Sometimes the inner core’s still green.”



As I’m walking, I feel like my clothes are falling off, and if I just keep walking, I’ll eventually be naked.



In my path, a lake of clear tea I’d like to drink; instead I dip my hands in, enter the underwater artwork – a Japanese arrangement of pine needles wood, rocks.



Sunlight plays over a scene, reveals a network of iridescent threads; what else is hidden here?



Got scared, got spooked. In two weeks, I’ve seen only one woman alone, a runner.



Rock music, blaring from nearby apartment, soft air wafting over my face, blood lichen spotting moss on a large oak – long dead, split asunder by lightning.



On the path, roots, cigarette butts, snake holes, purple leaves among brown ones, then crunching through the woods a slider turtle that would fill my arms – its dark shell tattooed in an unknown language, its head striped with slick yellow and green pigment.



Walking west, blinded by light, surprised by a pile of uprooted ardisias – bright green shrubs with red berries.



The wind before the rain blows seeds and flowers at my feet: red and chartreuse winged maple pods with fat little seeds inside and tiny yellow blossoms from the jessamine vine.



High in a huge water oak, breezes sway fringes of Spanish moss, it's important to master that rhythm – those undulations and flapping.



Liana vines, thick as my arms – shooting up fifty feet, graceful, tortured, twisted – you are my favorite.



The fiddlehead ferns are unfurling; I fell into the hesitating march of a bride.



I keep jumping on benches, wanting to conduct the forest – so charged and musical.



I saw a green garter snake and a woman's blue underpants: it must be spring!



A pile of Spanish moss lies like a coat of curly hair tossed onto the path.



When my friend's little girl grabs a lizard, it bites her finger and holds on; she demands her mother kill it with an ax.



First I want to be so still the forest can take me; then I want to throw a tantrum, see if the forest will respond.



From 13th Street an ambulance siren and smells of Chinese food – while leaves of low lying plants quietly flutter.



Slipping between the floor boards, bending over the walkway are tender smilax tendrils, tasting like earthy snow peas.



A black snake with red bands swims past, sinuously skirting the water plants; I want to jump in, apprentice to its power.

