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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

on Brushwood Center and to support our mission, please contact: Director of Development, Mirja Spooner Haffner at [mspoonerhaffner@brushwoodcenter.org](mailto:mspoonerhaffner@brushwoodcenter.org) 224.633.2424 ext. 6



**BRUSHWOOD CENTER AT RYERSON WOODS**  
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**BRUSHWOODCENTER.ORG**



# Before Dreams Are The Last Place We Find You

## LYDIA CHESHEWALLA

### SMITH NATURE SYMPOSIUM EXHIBITION



BRUSHWOOD CENTER AT RYERSON WOODS



# Before Dreams Are The Last Place We Find You

## LYDIA CHESHEWALLA

SMITH NATURE SYMPOSIUM EXHIBITION  
ART EXHIBITION RECEPTION SEPT. 7 | 1-3PM  
SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 23



## LYDIA CHESHWALLA

Lydia Cheshewalla is an Osage ephemeral artist from Oklahoma, living and working in motion throughout the Great Plains ecoregion. Through the creation of site-specific land art and ephemeral installations grounded in Indigenous land stewardship practices and kinship pedagogies, Lydia engages in multivocal conversations about place and relationship. By working within a framework of change and collaborating with beyond-human kin, she rejects Capitalist reliance on scarcity, immortality, preciousness, and waste production in the creation of value and remains responsive (responsible) to the realities of shifting ecologies in an age of climate crisis. Her work has been shown at Generator Space, the Union for Contemporary Art (Omaha, NE), Comfort Station, Harold Washington Library, the Center for Native Futures, and Elmhurst Art Museum (Chicago, IL) among others. She was awarded a 2020 Tallgrass Artist Residency, participated in the 2022/23 Chicago Art Department Think Tank: On Mending, and was a 2024

## ARTIST STATEMENT

Working with kin gathered from places called home, installations become multi-vocal sites of conversation that tell simultaneous stories of ecology, relationship, and self-location. Collaborating within the limitations of season, cycle, and change, the emergent work is always dictated by the needs and realities of time, place, and ecosystem. Every kin participating in the creation of the art has its own story, agency, and right to return. As such, every collaborator and its point of origin is logged, both in physical location for its post-install return, as well as in emotional memory which tells the stories of how relationship came to be.

LYDIA CHESHWALLA (SHE/HER/WE)

OSAGE NATION ENROLLED MEMBER

CHEROKEE, DAKOTA, MODOC, XICANX

[HTTPS://WWW.LYDIA-CHESHWALLA.COM/](https://www.lydia-cheshwalla.com/)

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## ABOUT THIS EXHIBITION

This exhibition is an ephemeral, site-specific installation. The work was created by Lydia Chesewalla during her August residency at the Center for Humans & Nature in Libertyville, Illinois. Forty miles north of Chicago, the Center is home to breathtakingly beautiful prairie, savanna, wetland, woodland, ravine, and riparian ecosystems. The work was very carefully transported to Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods for installation.

Chesewalla's practice is built on an ethos that views all beings as sacred, with their own agency, and with a right to complete their cycle of life and death. She works mainly with naturally shed material and seeds that are ready for collecting. At the end of installations, each being is returned to its original place in nature where it was gathered, closing the circle of creation.

A selection of Chesewalla's work will be published by the digital branch of Humans & Nature Press. The Digital Press celebrates diverse sources of wisdom about what it means to be human in an interconnected world.

### THE CENTER FOR HUMANS & NATURE IS THE 2025 SMITH NATURE SYMPOSIUM EXHIBITION PARTNER

The Center for Humans & Nature is an ideas hub. Humans & Nature Press shares ideas that build community and inspire action. Humans & Nature Farm is a place where ideas take root. The Center is a place to experience human connection with nature and consider our responsibilities to the whole community of life. Forty miles north of Chicago, the Center is home to breathtakingly beautiful prairie, savanna, wetland, woodland, ravine, and riparian ecosystems.

Before Dreams Are The Last Place We Find You was created during Lydia Chesewalla's Stories from the land residency. Stories from the land is a seasonal residency through Humans & Nature Press Digital, by invitation only. Each resident creates a piece of work based on their experience with the land at Humans & Nature Farm. A selection of Chesewalla's work will be published by the digital branch of Humans & Nature Press. The Digital Press celebrates diverse sources of wisdom about what it means to be human in an interconnected world.

## ABOUT THE SMITH NATURE SYMPOSIUM

On May 6, 1984, more than 350 people gathered for the first Smith Nature Symposium featuring Roger Tory Peterson. Organized under the leadership of Barbi Donnelley, Symposium Co-Chair, this jam-packed convening of nature-lovers became the first of four decades of annual Symposia memorializing the significant civic legacy of Hermon Dunlap and Ellen Thorne Smith, who donated their land and cabin to help form Ryerson Woods. Hermon, or Dutch, was chair and CEO of Marsh & McLennan, and led The Chicago Community Trust, Newberry Library, and many other Chicago Institutions. Ellen was a philanthropic leader and champion of nature with organizations such as The Field Museum and Chicago Zoological Society.

Today, 42 years later, this annual event carries on the tradition of honoring a leader in environmentalism who has strived to make an impact on the planet, but also awards two outstanding young students whose visions can make an impact also.

With the addition of an artist and full gallery exhibition whose work aligns with our honoree, the symposium is an event that continues to draw a large following in support of Brushwood's community-wide initiatives. Please consider joining us at this year's Smith Nature Symposium.

42ND ANNUAL SMITH NATURE SYMPOSIUM AWARDS DINNER  
with emcees Bill Kurtis and Donna LaPietra

**FLOURISH**  
EMBRACING INDIGENOUS AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

HONORING  
**ROBIN WALL KIMMERER**

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2025 | 5:30-9:00PM  
CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN

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2025 CO-CHAIRS  
Janea Harris and Lois Morrison



## ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

2025 ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP AWARD RECIPIENT

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of *The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World* and *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, which has earned Kimmerer wide acclaim. Her first book, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for outstanding nature writing, and her other work has appeared in *Orion*, *Whole Terrain*, and numerous scientific journals.

Robin tours widely and has been featured on NPR's *On Being* with Krista Tippett and in 2015 addressed the general assembly of the United Nations on the topic of "Healing Our Relationship with Nature." Kimmerer is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, whose mission is to create programs which draw on the wisdom of both indigenous and scientific knowledge for our shared goals of sustainability. In 2022 she was named a MacArthur Fellow.

As a writer and a scientist, her interests in restoration include not only restoration of ecological communities, but restoration of our relationships to land. She holds a BS in Botany from SUNY ESF, an MS and PhD in Botany from the University of Wisconsin and is the author of numerous scientific papers on plant ecology, bryophyte ecology, traditional knowledge and restoration ecology. She lives on an old farm in upstate New York, tending gardens both cultivated and wild.

# BRUSHWOOD MISSION

Brushwood Center works collaboratively with community partners, artists, health care providers, and scientists to improve health equity and access to nature in Lake County, Illinois, and the Chicago region. We engage people with the outdoors through the arts, environmental education, and community action. Brushwood Center's programs focus on youth, families, Military Veterans, and those facing racial and economic injustices.

# BRUSHWOOD VISION

We work toward a future of resilient and connected communities, both human and ecological, where all lead healthy and thriving lives.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT

ADOPTED FEBRUARY 24, 2020

Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods honors this land as the traditional home of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi nations. Many other tribes such as the Ho-Chunk, Miami, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki also called this area home. We celebrate their traditions and culture and their immemorial ties to this land.

Today, Brushwood Center continues to be a place where many people from diverse backgrounds find healing, vitality, and relationship with nature. We honor the multi-cultural traditions of the land, the history of native peoples, and those who continue to maintain and shape these traditions today.

Land acknowledgement statements are designed to bring more awareness and understanding of the history of indigenous peoples and their territories, but it should also be more than that; it should be a call for us to rethink our relationship with the environment and the histories of all peoples, and to challenge the legacies of settler colonialism in our society.