Since 2010, over 100 million trees have died in California alone--ravaged by beetles, drought, fires and more. Humans and trees are bound in reciprocity. In addition to shade, shelter and food, trees produce oxygen and take up the carbon dioxide that we increasingly spew into the atmosphere. In many cultures, trees are a symbol of life itself. What does it mean that the trees are dying?

This exhibition chronicles the ecological changes in a few locations in southern California from Torrey Pines State Park, Mount Cuchama, Mount Laguna and Pine Creek Wilderness in San Diego County, to Joshua Tree, Walker Pass and Alta Sierra further north. Coastal chaparral, pines, oaks, Tecate cypress, and more are represented in sumptuous photomontages that express the dynamic qualities of these environments. As opposed to the grandiose sublime, these visuals encourage active exploration, offering glimpses, or incomplete views at a variety of scales evocative of the enchanted vibrancy of life.

The visual exploration is grounded science. Text provides insight into the complex intertwined impacts of urbanization, globalization, invasive species, and climate change that are causing the trees’ decline. A tree stump with an ipad displays
diagrams of trees rings with historical data and models projecting climate to the
year 2100. Tree rings are often labeled with historical events and pressing on
selected rings reveals information about a local ecological event that has occurred
or might occur in that year.

Visitors will be encouraged to interact with the work. Reminiscent of Jewish
mourning rituals, outside the gallery, they may share their grief by writing of their
losses on stones. Or they can write their suggestions for actions to effect change
on leaves that will be placed on bare tree branches.

Ruth Wallen is an ecological and community based artist. Initially trained in
environmental science (biology and anthropology), she turned to art to address the
heart as well as the mind, ask questions outside of disciplinary boundaries and
help shape the values that inform community planning and development. She
works on a variety of media, on many scales, from intimate artist books and
performative lectures to large installations, web sites and public projects. Her work
is based on extensive research, careful listening, and paying close attention to the
local environment. She combines photographic imagery, text and more to create
totent metaphor, compelling narratives and opportunities for dialogue.

Her multilayered installations and performances have been exhibited in solo
exhibitions at Franklin Furnace, New Langton Arts, the Exploratorium, CEPA,
Sushi Gallery, the Athenaeum and more. She has published critical essays on
ecological art, and race and gender in visual culture. Ruth has been represented
in numerous national and international group exhibitions ranging from Virgin
Territory, at the Long Beach Museum of Art, to Weather Report: Art and Climate
Change, curated by Lucy Lippard for the Boulder Museum of Contemporary
Art. Public installations include interactive "nature walks" at Carmel Mountain, the
San Bernardino Children's Forest, and Tijuana River Estuary. Web projects range
from The Sea as Sculptress for Exploratorium and If Frogs Sicken and Die, What
Will Happen to the Princes? hosted by the California Museum of Photography, to
her current work on the local impacts of climate change, Listen to the Trees,
created in collaboration with scientists at Scripps Institute for Oceanography.