



TREES

IN THE MIST

Joyce Tenneson's mystical, gilded images challenge us to look at nature in a whole new way

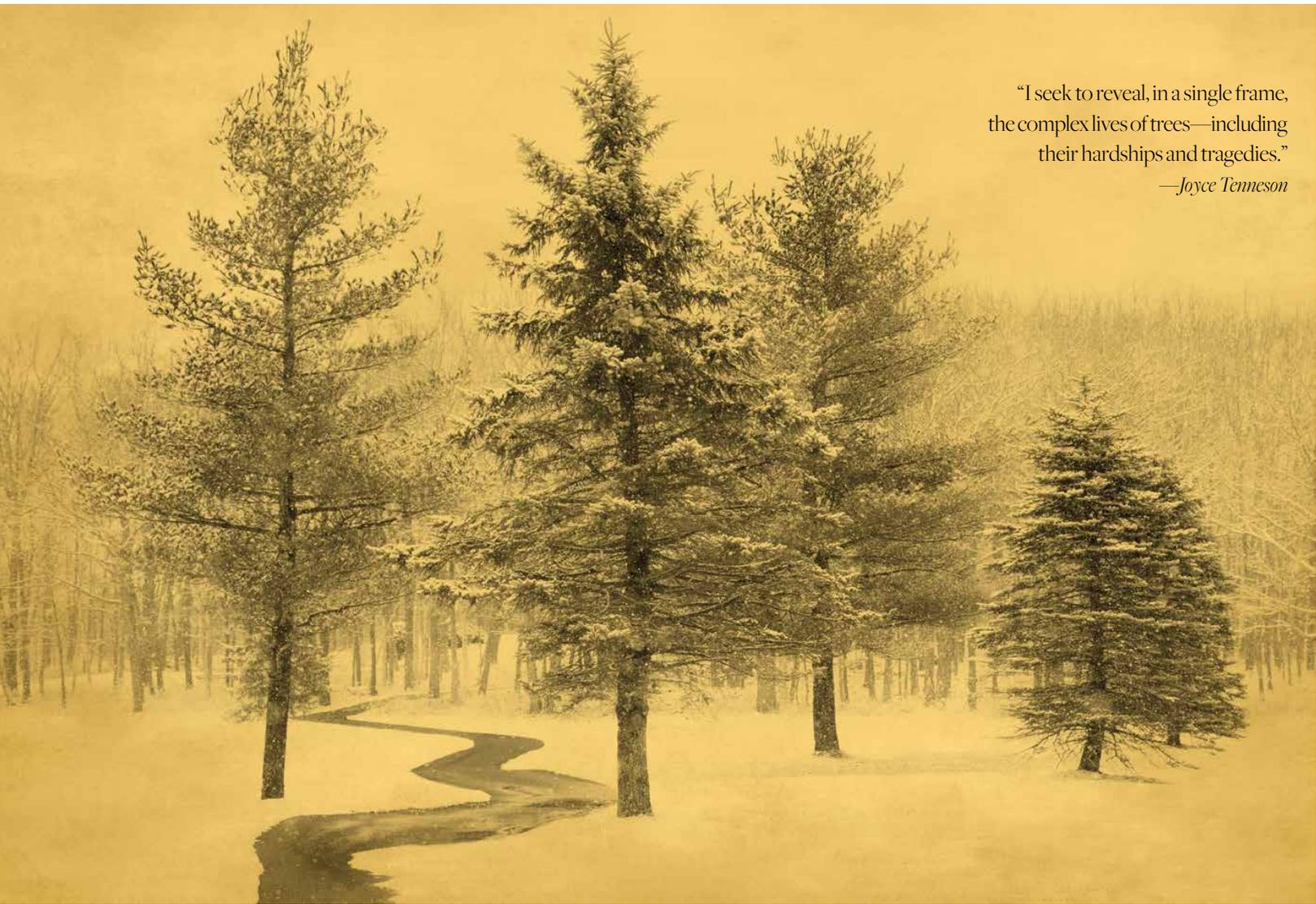
Live Oaks (opposite page) has a dark fairy tale–like quality. *Apple Tree* (above) is a favorite of Tenneson because of its amazing shape. “The way it was pruned makes the branches look like wings,” she says. “It’s almost like a bonsai.”

BY DAPHNE NIKOLOPOULOS

Place has such a profound effect on creative expression that art evolves, often markedly, as an artist’s environment changes. For photographer Joyce Tenneson, a move from New York City to mid-coast Maine resulted in a drastic shift in her work.

“In New York City, I was working almost exclusively with people,” she says of her famous images of women, which have been featured in international exhibitions, on the covers of magazines like *Time* and *Life* and books like Alice Hoffman’s *The Dovekeepers*, and even in an Absolut vodka ad. “I didn’t want to repeat myself. With every new life you have, things change and you need to find out who you are in that new life.”





“I seek to reveal, in a single frame,
the complex lives of trees—including
their hardships and tragedies.”

—Joyce Tenneson



Winter Path (left) is the quintessential wintry scene. *Birch Trees* (above) has a 3-D quality owed to light filtering through the fog.

Tenneson, who winters in West Palm Beach, turned her focus to nature and, specifically, trees. Ever since her exhibition on trees at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1978, she had felt a strong connection to the subject. But in Maine, where forests and orchards exude an almost mystical quality, it took on new significance.

“One morning, I woke up to a view of Rockport Harbor and saw the fog rolling in,” she recalls. “The fog became almost like a backdrop, isolating the trees and hiding everything behind them. I had an epiphany: When you remove all distractions, you can see the tree’s noble nature. That was going to be my next project.”



Tennessee's gilded images, like *Lake and Trees* (this page) and *Glowing Tree* (opposite page), allow viewers to weave their own stories.

For almost two years, she would drive within a 20-mile radius on foggy mornings, seeking the magical scenes that are now part of her *Trees and the Alchemy of Light* collection. But photographing the trees was not enough for Tennessee. Inspired by a trip to Peru, where gold was connected to the divine during the Inca empire, she taught herself the art of gold-leafing—a meticulous and rather fragile process of painting gold leaf onto a block of wood. She then transferred her tree images onto the gold and fused the two using various preservatives.

It was not easy, but for Tennessee, who has been named among the 10 most influential women in the history of photography by readers of *American Photo* magazine, it was a necessary step in bringing out the mystical, spiritual qualities of trees. "I've always tried to photograph things in a way that opens up a transformative experience," she says. ✦

Joyce Tennessee will lecture about *Trees and the Alchemy of Light* on March 23 at JL Modern Gallery in Palm Beach. Select works from the series will be exhibited March 23 to April 20.

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OF TENNESON'S PHOTOGRAPHY.

