



Andrea Packard

Andrea Packard | *The Fabric of Nature*

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Joy Pratt Markham Gallery, Walton Arts Center



## The Hybrid Art of Andrea Packard

Cynthia Nourse Thompson

Walton Arts Center is pleased to present *Andrea Packard: The Fabric of Nature*. This mini-survey of the artist's work combines 17 artworks completed in 2016 together with 19 key works from the past 11 years. In her essay for this catalog, Eleanor Heartney calls attention to how the richness and complexity of Packard's art unfolds over time and rewards sustained viewing from multiple perspectives. Most of her works are inspired by woodland scenes she experienced in New England and the Mid-Atlantic region where she has spent most of her life. Her figure groups and domestic scenes explore the subjective, layered, and often contradictory elements that infuse our relationships. Paying homage to her artistic forebears and inspirations, including artists such as Edouard Vuillard, Romare Bearden, and Paul Cezanne, such works celebrate artistic lineages and interconnections—relationships between people, both actual and imagined, across time.

Packard's artworks reproduced in this catalog are reduced to the intimate size of a booklet that we can easily hold, but digital reproductions cannot convey the monumental scale of her large triptychs or tall wood-carvings, the richness of her diverse textures, or the variability of her relief-like surfaces. In person, many of the works extend beyond our peripheral vision, inviting us to move forward and backward, developing a composite understanding of them over time. For example, viewing the 9-foot-wide triptych *Piney Woodland* from a distance, we immediately recognize a colorful grove of trees in the foreground which, as we look left to right, gives way to reveal warmly textured fields, a broad expanse of water, land beyond it on the horizon, and open sky. Approaching closer, the work transforms: trees and foliage devolve into a more abstract interplay of form and color and the diverse textures of collaged materials. Thin veils of paint mingle with printed and painted scraps of paper which are glazed with thin veils of encaustic; the arcing root of a tree reveals itself to be

a ragged strip of denim, and colorful fields of brush or wildflowers are, on closer inspection, composed of soft handwoven fibers, knitted yarn, and scraps of printed fabric. Moving between the narrative realms of illusionism, the musical rhythms of abstraction, and the hybridity of material culture, viewers can alternately explore different visual and tactile experiences and associations.

Packard interweaves diverse artistic influences into a hybrid pictorial language that is distinctly her own. The lyric or transcendent quality of works such as *Grove at Twilight*, *Treefall*, or *Warm Grove* recall early American modernists such as Arthur B. Dove, Charles Burchfield, or Marsden Hartley. Yet other works such as *Homage to Bearden and Cezanne (Generations)* call attention to the artist's affinity with the fractured perspectives we associate with Cubism, collage processes, and two very different artists: Paul Cezanne and Romare Bearden. Other works, such as *Summer Morning*, revel in the sensual and vibrant arabesques we associate with Henri Matisse and Edouard Vuillard, two artists who were fascinated by fabric. Composed with the eye of a painter, but a palette of color and texture that has been worn and repurposed, Packard's art echoes the resourcefulness of American craft traditions, from Victorian crazy quilts to the fabric abstractions crafted by Loretta Pettway and other quilters from Gee's Bend, Alabama. Integrating such traditions and many others into complex, multi-layered compositions, she offers an antidote to increasingly ubiquitous digital screens, logos, and memes. Here is an imaginative space that resists memorization, yet remains memorably nuanced, inventive, and engaging.

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Cynthia Nourse Thompson is consulting curator for Walton Arts Center and the director of the graduate programs in Book Arts, Printmaking, and Studio Arts at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pa., where she also serves as associate professor of Fine Art.

*Twilight Song*, detail, 2016  
mixed media on panel, 14¼ x 20 inches

# The Slow Art of Andrea Packard

Eleanor Heartney

In a poignant essay written in 2009, novelist Michael Chabon describes what he calls “The Wilderness of Childhood.” As he notes, this Wilderness doesn’t necessarily involve the natural world, though his own did, but it has to be a place where “a kid might exile himself for at least some portion of every day from the neighboring kingdom of adulthood.” He laments that the Wilderness, a zone of imaginative and physical freedom, has largely disappeared from the lives of today’s over-protected and over-scheduled children.

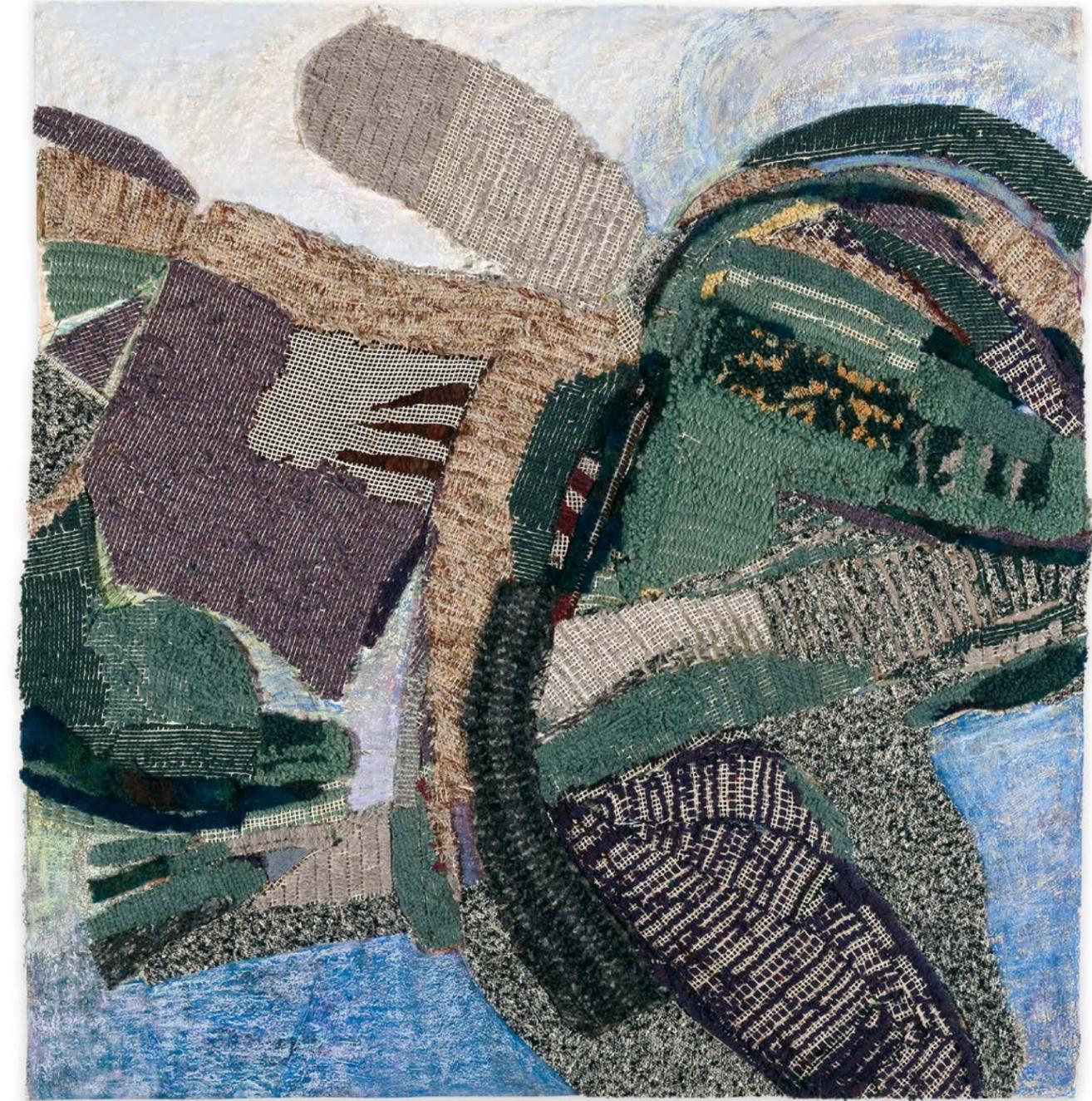
Andrea Packard is Chabon’s contemporary, and like him, her creative imagination harks back to days spent wandering through woods and former farmland near her childhood home in Connecticut. That world of rock walls, caves, vines and tangled trees looms large in her mesmerizing collages. The works are built up of snippets of patterned fabric and fragments of woodcut prints that retain their own identity while simultaneously conjuring unruly landscapes full of shadowed glens, crooked branches and undulating hills. The densely layered tableaux hover between abstraction and representation. The textures and patterns draw the eye to the surface by emphasizing the physical reality of the materials, while the compositions themselves resolve into scenes that play with multiple perspectives, depth, and recognizable form without ever completely abandoning themselves to pictorial illusion.

Checked, gingham, and paisley patterns butt up against rows of crocheted yarn and pieces of woven carpet. The irregular shapes of the fabric pieces and print fragments produce a crazy quilt quality, so it is not surprising to learn that Packard has belonged to a quilting group for over 25 years. Many of the fabric swatches are remnants left over from the quilting process. Other bits of cloth come from friends who donate interesting articles of clothing or from fabric sample books provided by a designer friend. The cut

up woodcuts are the artist’s own, fragments of old works. All the repurposed elements are haunted by their previous histories, a fact that becomes explicit in *Inheritance*, where Packard’s mother’s hand-knotted play rug became the jumping off point for a composition that might be an aerial image of a landscape of interwoven river and woods.

Packard’s life as an artist is suffused with an even more sweeping notion of inheritance. Her father, a former lawyer who found his calling as a children’s book writer, helped point her toward the possibility of a creative life, while her mother, a Montessori educator, encouraged an openness to learning and imaginative challenges. These influences, combined with the Quaker tradition in which Packard was raised, have led her to a working method that favors improvisation over planning. She prefers not to know where she is going, choosing instead to be guided by the colors, textures and shapes of her working materials. She connects this tendency to her practice as a Quaker, one of whose maxims is “way opens,” meaning the path will unfold through persistent inquiry.

Packard’s path has taken her to a life that encompasses curating as well as art making. As the director of Swarthmore’s List Gallery for 20 years, she has put together exhibitions representing more than 150 artists, many of whose works are very different than hers. This experience has broadened her own sense of the possibilities of art. Packard credits a number of the artists with whom she has worked with encouraging her to explore new approaches to theme and technique. For instance, a show of Israeli artist Orit Hofshi’s monumental carved wood panels propelled her to experiment with painted wood panels into which she cut deeply carved groves that mimic the rough bark of tree trunks. These recent works transform her longtime concerns, creating forest scenes that have a sculptural quality.



**Opposite**  
*Inheritance*, 2011, mixed media on paper  
mounted on linen, 54 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 53 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches  
Collection of Woodmere Art Museum



*Uprooted*, 2010, mixed media on paper, 52 x 50 inches

While landscape is Packard's dominant subject, she has also created collages that are ruminations on the importance and meaning of family. Packard construes family in a broad sense, so that it encompasses not only her own flesh and blood, but also her extended creative family. Thus for instance *Homage to Bearden and Cezanne (Generations)*, 2016, is a tribute to two historical artists whom Packard deeply admires, as well as two contemporary ceramic artists—Doug Herren and Chris Staley—who she presented in Swarthmore's List Gallery and who are represented by a blue vase and simple black cup. The centerpiece of the work is a canvas representing *The Card Players*, a composition by Cezanne, later reworked by Bearden and now given a new twist by Packard. Along with the card players and the head of her brother, glimpsed on the cover of a catalog on a side table, there are two other figures in the painting—the artist herself looming over it all, and in the foreground in a black hoodie, her young son, holding what may be a violin bow or a paint brush, poised between his love of music and art.

*Music and Melville (Family Group)*, 2016 is equally personal. Here Packard reflects on her own nuclear family. Realized with a welter of patterned fabrics, the work depicts her husband, holding the violin that her son is learning to play, as the artist turns from a piano stool to help him practice. Her other son is curled up on a wildly paisley sofa under a turbulent painting that conjures the narrative of *Moby Dick*, the book he is reading. Together, the work offers a portrait of a family united by love of music, art and literature.

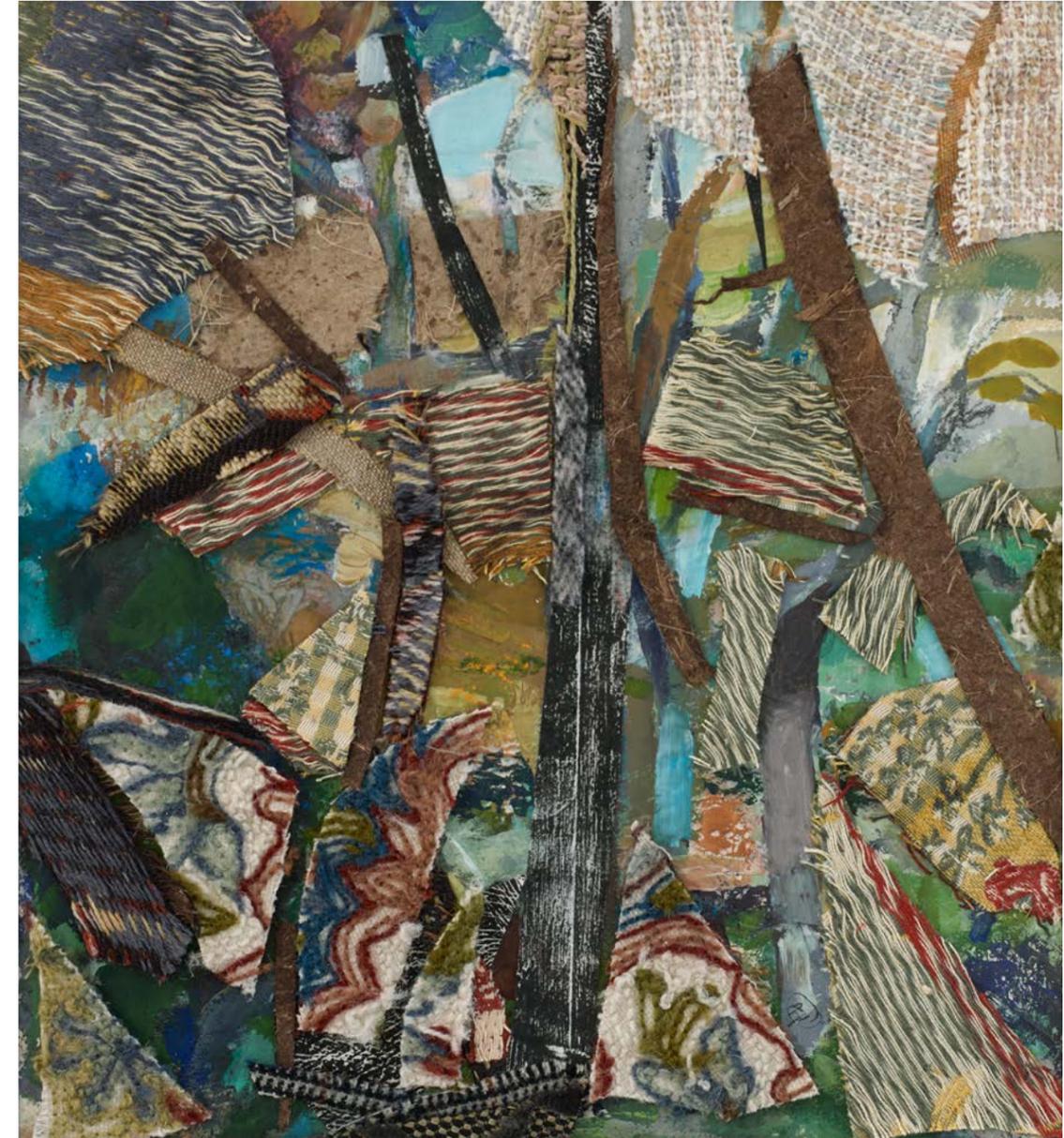
With their complex melding of material, color, and shapes, and their interplay of abstraction and representation, these works invite careful looking. This is slow art that unfolds over time and yields more delights the longer one examines it. Reflecting on the link between freedom and creativity, Chabon maintains that "Art is a form of exploration, of sailing off into the unknown alone, heading for those unmarked places on the map." It is a description that aptly suggests both Packard's open-ended working process and the journey on which she invites her viewers to embark.

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Eleanor Heartney is a contributing editor to *Art in America* and *Artpress* and has written extensively on contemporary art issues for many publications. Her books include *Critical Condition: American Culture at the Crossroads*, *Postmodernism, Defending Complexity: Art Politics and the New World Order*, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, and *Art and Today*. She received the College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather Award for distinction in art criticism in 1992 and was honored by the French government as a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2008.



*Treefall*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 14 x 12¼ inches



*Gathering*, 2015, mixed media on paper, 11 x 9¼ inches



*Beyond the Hills*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 36½ x 48½ x 2½ inches



*Dawn Prospect*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 24¼ x 24¼ x 2¼ inches



*Summer Morning*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 12½ x 15¾ inches



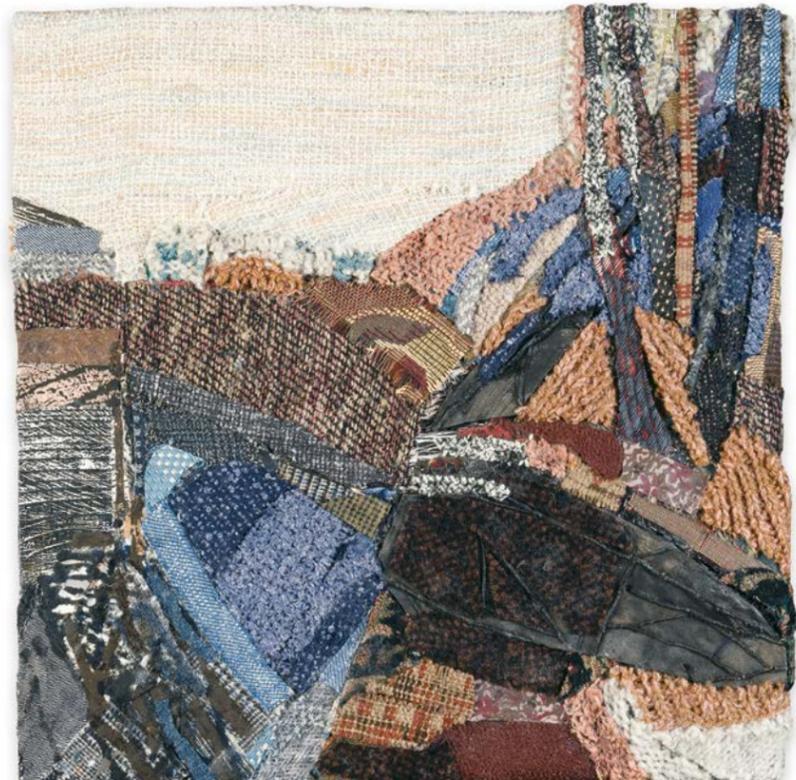
*Warm Ridge*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 23¼ x 17 inches



*A Shifting Slant of Light*, 2013, mixed media on panel, 18½ x 24½ inches



*Way Opens*, 2012, mixed media on panel, 18 x 14 inches

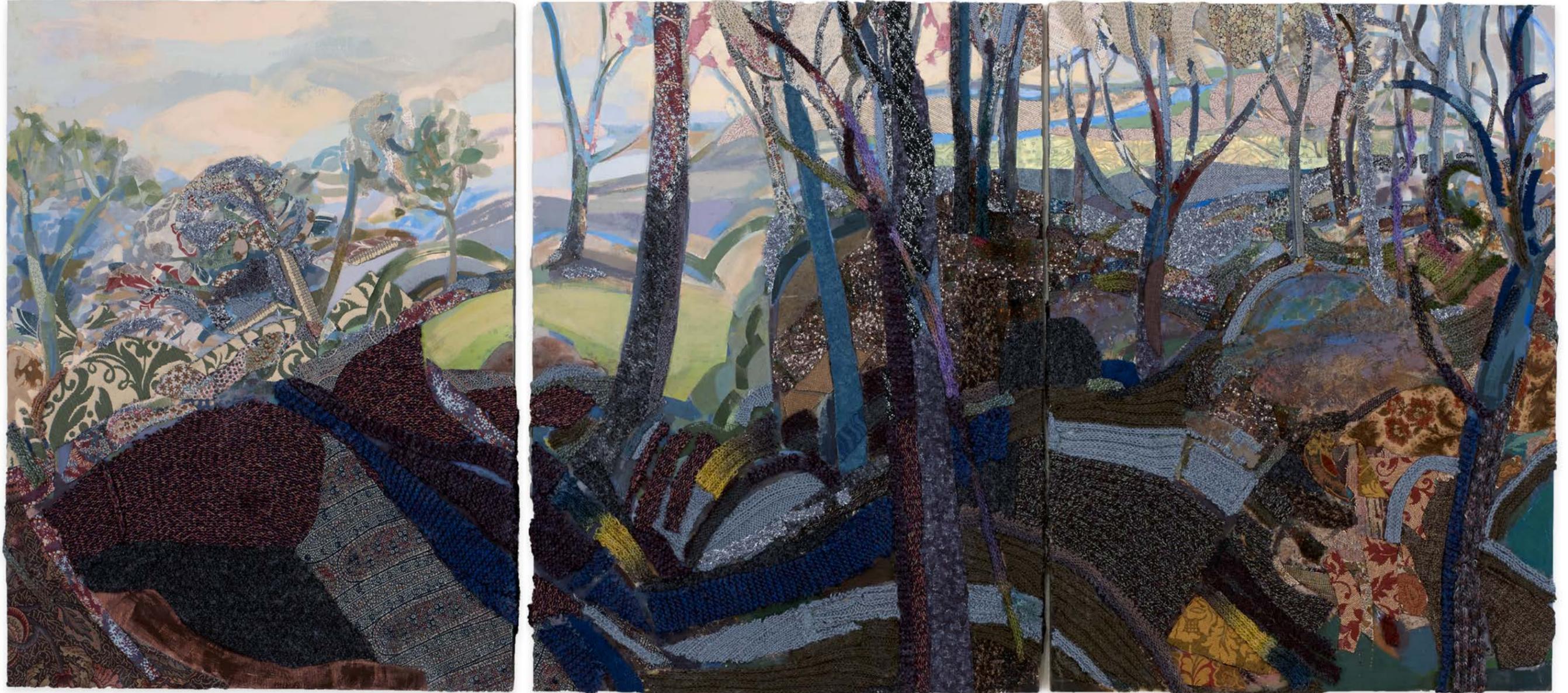


*Vista and Strata II*, 2011  
Mixed media on panel  
16 x 16 x 2 3/4 inches

*Vista and Strata III*, 2012  
Mixed media on panel  
16 x 16 x 2 3/4 inches

*Vista and Strata I*, 2012  
Mixed media on panel  
16 x 16 x 2 3/4 inches  
Private Collection

*Preserve*, 2016  
Mixed-media triptych on wood panels  
48 x 108 inches





*Piney Wetlands, 2016*  
Mixed-media triptych  
on wood panels  
48 x 108 inches



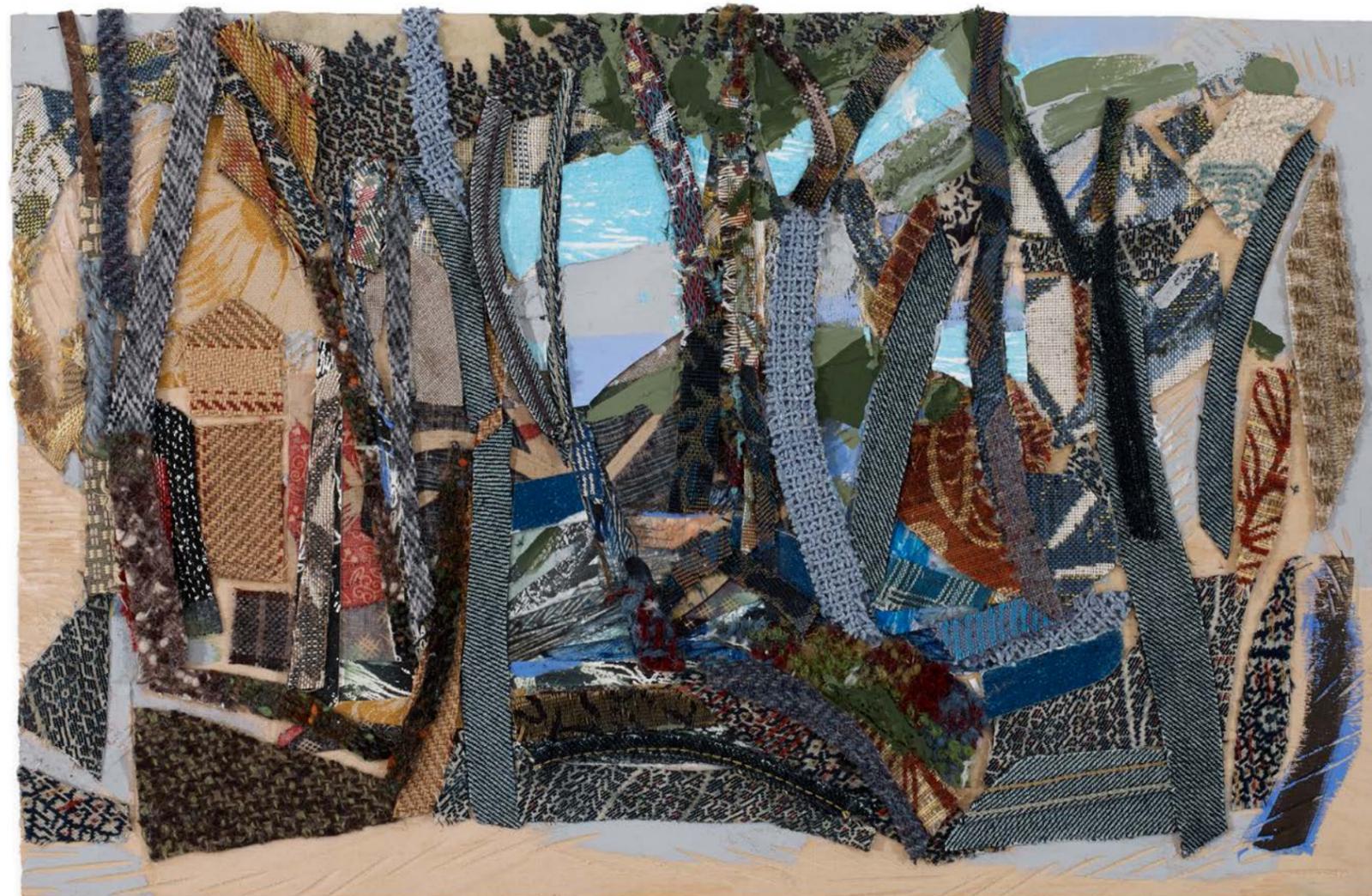
*Homage to Bearden and Cezanne (Generations)*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 47½ x 58⅝ inches



*Music and Melville (Family Group)*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 43 x 53 inches



*Chincoteague Dream*, 2015, mixed media on paper, 7 x 7 inches. Collection of Andrea McGeary



*Studio Dream II*, 2016, mixed media on carved wood, 13½ x 20 inches



*Safe Harbor*, 2005, mixed media on paper, 15 x 22 inches



*Dusk*, 2005, mixed media on paper, 19½ x 21¼ inches



*Leaning Toward the Light*, 2008, mixed media on paper, 8 x 5 inches



*Mountain Fold—Home*, 2006, mixed media on linen, 15 3/8 x 15 1/8



*Grove at Twilight*, 2016, mixed media on carved and inked wood, 72½ x 34½ inches



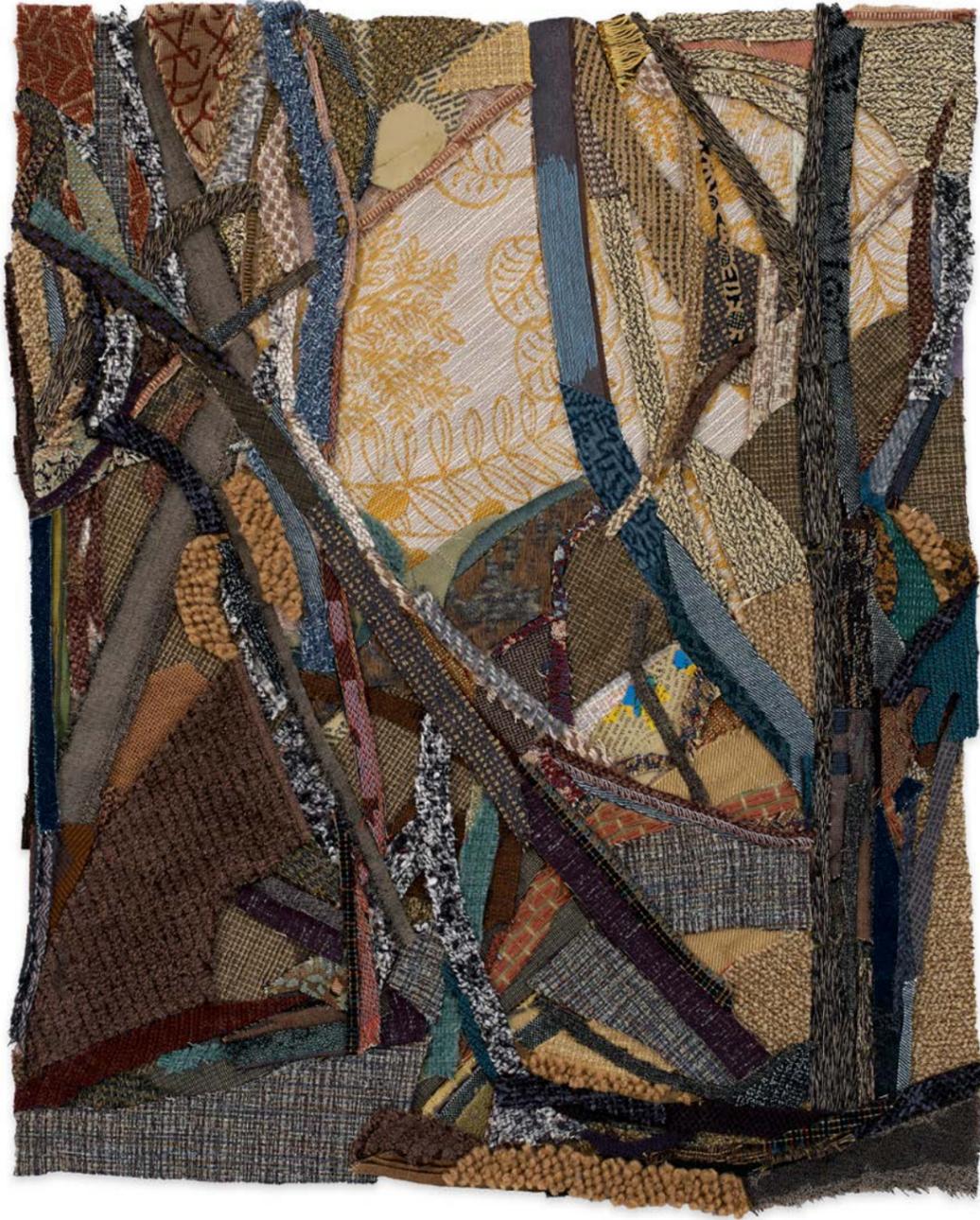
*Warm Grove*, 2016, mixed media on carved and inked wood, 72 x 40½ inches



*Midnight Glory*, 2012, triptych on inked and carved pine, 74 x 60 inches



*Understory*, 2016, carved, painted, and collaged wood panel, encaustic, 80 x 26 inches



*Primavera*, 2008, mixed media on paper mounted on linen, 24½ x 19 inches



*Moonlight Reverie*, 2008, mixed media on paper mounted on linen, 23¼ x 19¼ inches



*Immanence II*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 16¼ x 20½ x 2¾ inches. Collection of Elizabeth Ainslie



*Twilight Song*, 2016, mixed media on panel, 14¼ x 20 inches

*Lone Stand*, with detail opposite, 2016  
Mixed media on carved wood panel  
91 x 12 inches



## Biography

Born in 1963, Andrea Packard grew up in Connecticut and graduated from Swarthmore College, where she majored in English with a minor in Art History and received the Oak Leaf Award for outstanding leadership, scholarship, and contributions to the community. She went on to study painting and printmaking at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where she earned a four-year Certificate, the William Cresson Memorial Traveling Scholarship, and eight other awards for painting and printmaking. In 1994, she received an M.F.A. from American University, Washington D.C., where she received both the Glassman award for painting and the Sacknoff award for sculpture.

She has presented her paintings, prints, sculptures, and mixed-media works in over sixty exhibitions throughout the United States. In 1989, she co-founded Protean Gallery, a cooperative gallery in Philadelphia, where she mounted solo and group exhibitions 1989–1993. She is also an alumnae of the Center for Emerging Visual Artists, Philadelphia. More recently, she mounted four solo exhibitions at The Painting Center, in New York City (2003–2013). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions at commercial and non-profit venues throughout the country including Valley House Gallery, Dallas, Texas; Lohin Geduld Gallery and The Bowery Gallery in New York, N.Y.; Eagle Hill Institute, Steuben, Maine; the Boyden Gallery, St. Mary's College, St. Mary's City, Md.; and Cantor-Fitzgerald Gallery, Haverford College, Haverford, Pa.

Packard is also the recipient of residency fellowships which have enabled her to work at numerous creative communities, including the Joseph and Anni Albers Foundation, St. Mary's College of Maryland, the



Vermont Studio Center, and Chester Springs Studio. Her art works are held in the collections of various institutions including those of the Woodmere Art Museum, Philadelphia, Pa.; Walton Arts Center, Fayetteville, Ark.; the Mann Center for the Performing Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.; Arco Inc.; and Rohm and Haas, Inc.

Since 1995, Packard has directed the List Gallery at Swarthmore College, where she has curated more than 110 exhibitions in a variety of media ranging from painting, ceramics, photography, and sculpture to conceptual installation. She has also edited and written essays for more than 35 exhibition catalogs and served as a juror, panelist, guest-curator, lecturer, and instructor at institutions such as The National Academy Museum and School of Fine Arts, NY; the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.; Oglethorpe University Museum, Atlanta; The University of the Arts, Philadelphia, Pa.; and The American University, Washington D.C.

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## Walton Arts Center

[www.waltonartscenter.org](http://www.waltonartscenter.org)

This catalog was published on the occasion of the exhibition, *Andrea Packard: The Fabric of Nature*.

**Cover** *Primavera*, detail, 2008, mixed media on linen  
24½ x 19 inches

**Back Cover** *Homage to Vuillard (Family Group)*, 2015  
mixed media on paper, 16 x 16 inches

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