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Landscapes from New Mexico to South Carolina inspire Kent Ambler's woodcuts

Lily Robinson

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This artist profile is one in an ongoing series highlighting the role creative work plays in connecting people with nature and inspiring a culture of stewardship. If you are an artist whose work is inspired by nature and would like to be featured in a future ILCN newsletter, please reach out to lrobinson@lincolninst.edu. We will accept visual fine art, photography, poetry, personal essays, music, and more.

In a home workshop, set on the 12-acre swath of South Carolina land he owns with his wife, Kent Ambler uses a handmade etching press to transform wood planks into nostalgic landscapes and natural scenes. He lets the creative process guide his hand as he pushes metal into wood, rolls ink over rough cuts, and presses the grain-textured stamp against archival paper.

View Ambler's full portfolio at www.kentambler.net and follow his work on Instagram [@kentamblerart](https://www.instagram.com/kentamblerart).



"Aloof Owl", woodcut, by Kent Ambler



"Under the Crescent Moon", woodcut by Kent Ambler

Art has influenced the direction of Ambler's life since he was young. He has always been moved to create and doing so comes naturally. As a child, he said he was often in trouble for drawing in class. After high school he studied fine arts at Ball State University, where he first dabbled in, and fell in love with, printmaking. He walked into his introduction to print class with no experience, but the technique came so intuitively to him that even the professor was sure he had made woodcuts before.

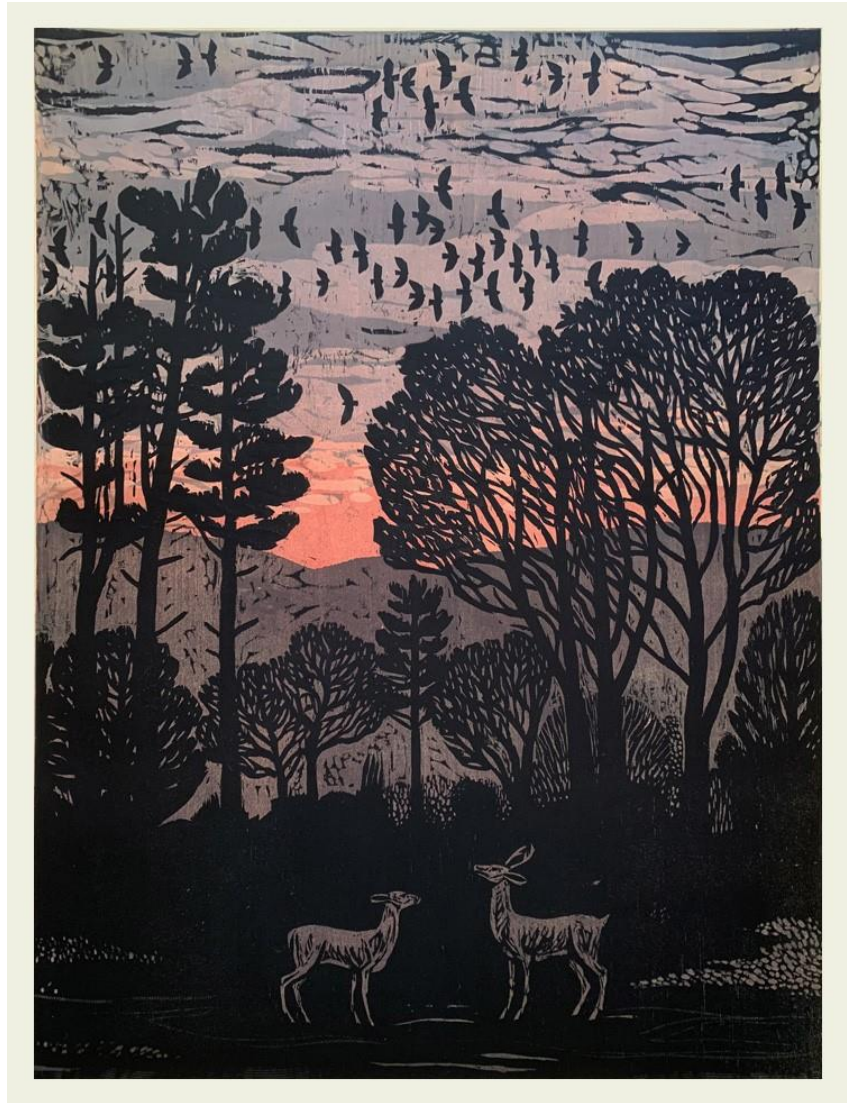
In 1995 he had recently graduated college and decided to transplant to New Mexico. There, the magnificence of the scenery drew him to begin working on landscapes. "The atmosphere, vast horizons, and big sky is so different than growing up near Lake Michigan in Indiana," he said.

But after a few years, Ambler began to yearn for the more verdant east-coast landscape. In 2000 he put down new roots in upstate South Carolina, where the landscape—"foothills of old mountains, small lakes, and woodlands"—was once again the heart of his work. "Art making is a very solitary introspective activity very similar to getting lost in nature," he explained.

Ambler does not set out to send a particular message with his work. "I will, for the most part, be absent when a person is viewing or living with my art, and they should be able to form their own feelings about a piece. It's visual art, so I think the viewer's own life experiences and feelings will shape how they connect with and respond to a piece."

The woodcut process that Ambler uses has been around for over a thousand years. He begins by carving an image into a wood plank, or block. "One of my goals is to emphasize the roughness and physical properties of the wood," he explained. He uses gouges and chisels to carve loosely, allowing carving marks to become part of the aesthetic.

Ambler typically carves a different block for each color that will appear in the final piece. This allows him to layer images, adding complexity and depth. By varying the ink on each layer, he depicts light in an



Twilight Hush, 2023 - woodcut, 32" x 24" by Kent Ambler



"Backyard Bird Count", woodcut by Kent Ambler

eerily realistic way. His pieces often show landscapes at dawn or dusk and capture the hazy stillness of the crepuscular hours.

He mixes his own ink and does all the printing himself, using the blocks and an etching press to stamp the images onto archival paper. He built his press several decades ago, in 1997, when he could not afford to purchase one.

Part of what he enjoys about the process is that he is never quite sure how it will unfold or what challenges he will run into. "I really make my best work when I'm not thinking about the work too much, sort of a meditative process," he said.

"Being an artist is a strange job and somehow, through persistence, it has worked out for me."

This is the 26th year Ambler has worked full time on his art and he has no plans to stop. "I don't have a retirement date," he said. "Why would I quit making things?"

More about the artist:



Kent Ambler lives on Paris Mountain in Greenville, South Carolina, with his wife Peggy, and their three dogs and two cats, all of whom appear in his work from time to time. In addition to woodcarving, he dabbles in painting and sculpting.

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