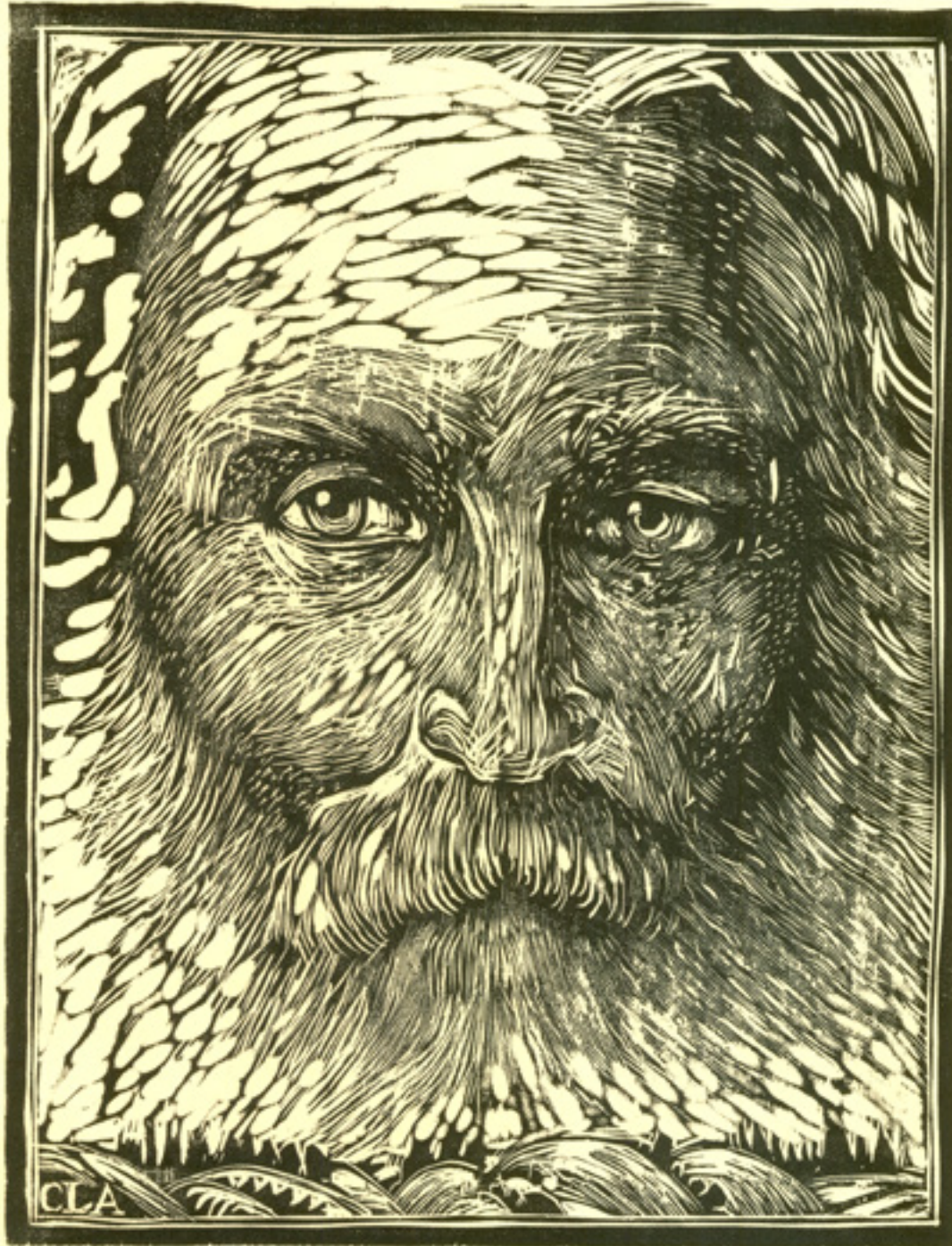


CARLOS LLERENA AGUIRRE

Muir Woods, 2012
Woodcut, 14 x 11 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

DAN BRUBAKER

The Range of the Redwoods: Past, Present, and Future

Examining the importance of coastal redwood trees

“Redwood time moves at a more stately pace than human time. To us, when we look at a redwood tree, it seems to be motionless and still, and yet redwoods are constantly in motion, moving upward into space, articulating themselves and filling redwood space over redwood time, over thousands of years.”

—Richard Preston, author of *The Wild Trees: A Story of Passion and Daring*

At one time, various redwood species called much of the Northern Hemisphere home. Paleontologists have found fossilized redwoods in Texas. They’ve found them in Pennsylvania. In Greenland. In Switzerland. Kazakhstan, Manchuria, and Japan. They’ve unearthed redwood remains on St. Lawrence Island—the fractured remnant of a land bridge once connecting Siberia and Alaska.

Today, the redwood species with the greatest global population lives only along the United States’s Pacific coast. Its protected range approximates New York City in size, a natural form of the cityscape stretched into a thin band of groves scraping western skies from southern Oregon to central California.

* * *

The Latin name botanists ascribe to this living redwood is *Sequoia sempervirens*: the “always-living sequoia.” But in its common name, we’ve stripped away this eternally optimistic pretense. We call it the California redwood or coast redwood, defining it by its only remaining refuge on an eccentric Earth given to climatic oscillations and increasingly overrun by humanity. This narrow coastal range is the redwood’s last stand.

The coast redwood is a living relic with an uncertain future. Evolving over millions of years, the tree boasts its share of adaptations both in form and function. But what remains unclear is how the endangered species is adjusting to relatively new human neighbors. On a human timescale, our relationship with the coast redwood appears to have softened; we’ve put the days of rampant logging behind us. But counted out in redwood time, our assault has simply slowed as the specter of climate change suffocates the future under a film stretched far.

* * *

Upon first meeting the coast redwood, it’s easy to be floored. Somewhere beneath its thick skin, atop its emerald crown, or in its imposing posture, the redwood still carries its Cretaceous charm. Looking up while inching alongside the world’s tallest life-form—trees seeming to poke holes in the troposphere—a walk in the woods shrinks into a slow-motion scuttle. We become beetles.

A recent transplant to the town of Arcata in Northern