

*Trends | art and conservation, the art of letter writing is not lost, a rural artist success story*

## Art and conservation: moving mountains and minds

From the sweeping landscape images of Ansel Adams to the contemporary works of John Sabraw and David Maisel, artists have long expressed the deeper connection of man and the environment, stirring greater awareness of the natural world in the eye of the viewer. Using art to inspire wonder in nature has also been at the core of Montana artist Claire Emery's body of work. First a naturalist, Emery is most at home in the mountains of the Northern Rockies. In her field journals she sketches the living things around her — wildflowers, birds and mountain landscapes — and then transforms her illustrations into woodcut prints for admirers around the world.

Emery has collaborated with conservation groups and organizations to bring deeper expression to their causes. One of her most recent commissions is a series of original woodblock prints for Glacier National Park's Many Glacier Lodge and its historical rehabilitation completed in 2017. To fully perceive the ecological, cultural and historic relevance of the Many Glacier Valley, Emery met with biologists, ecologists, anthropologists, historians and members of the Blackfeet Tribe before starting her artistic work. Her final compositions capture the serenity of the landscape and its deep connection to the local people. One of her woodblock pieces for



*“Chief Mountain” by Claire Emery commissioned by Glacier National Park.*

the national park features Chief Mountain, called “Ninaistako” by the Blackfeet and considered a sacred mountain to the indigenous people. Through her unique ability to capture its spirit, Emery portrays the mountain with respect and dignity — honoring the place that has been a retreat for prayer and fasting for thousands of years.

Emery has also partnered with Montana Osprey Project to help

fund osprey research, conservation and stewardship in western Montana. Her original woodcut print, “Montana Osprey Project: Success at the Nest” depicts an osprey carrying a large trout. The image featured on colorful T-shirts has brought greater awareness of the osprey's recovery in Montana's upper Clark Fork River watershed, an area affected by heavy metal contamination.





*Claire Emery in her studio in Missoula, Montana.*

## A rural artist success story

Pursuing a career as an artist can be daunting — can I be satisfied focusing my efforts on one marketable medium, how can I grow my recognition and the market for my work, how do I make a living making and selling art? Fortunately, there are programs around the country that focus on developing artists into entrepreneurs and teaching them the skills to advance their techniques, build business skills, and market and sell their work.

Montana artist Claire Emery is a student of one of those programs. In 2004, she took a course with a Montana-based program called TRACE, Transforming Rural Artisans into Creative Entrepreneurs, where she strengthened her artistic skills and learned how to sell her work. It was during that program that Emery studied with a woodblock master artist and began her love for transforming her field illustrations into woodblock prints.

TRACE today has developed into the Montana Artrepreneur Program under the Montana Arts Council, focused on strengthening the creative economy of the state. MAP is taught by working artists and open to all visual artists aspiring to make a sustainable career in the arts.

And today Emery is a Montana artist success story, taking her love for sketching, woodcut art and printmaking to the international stage — selling her eco-conscious goods around the globe and at one of the largest paper shows in the world, the National Stationary Show.

## The art of letter writing is not lost

As an artist and printmaker Claire Emery says, “Handwritten is handmade.” Even in today’s digital world of communication, there is still something very personal about receiving a hand-written card or letter that tweets, emails and texts just can’t convey. For the receiver, a hand-written card is the next best thing to receiving an in-person visit. For the sender, choosing a personal piece of stationary and writing by hand provides a mini-refuge in a world fractured by too many distractions. It is also the opportunity to express the human spirit from one hand to another in a way that digital typefaces simply cannot.

As an artist and printmaker, Emery began printing her woodblock art on cards as an opportunity to share her work with a greater audience. Her art featuring beautiful western Montana landscapes and its flora and fauna conveys stillness and the beauty of nature. Each card is left blank for the sender to write a personal message. On the back of each card, Emery includes an inspirational quote that gives the reader a fresh connection to our natural world. And with her own descriptive prose, Emery illuminates the image with natural and cultural stories of place.