

THIN PLACES

KILIII YUYAN

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GALLERY A





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THIN PLACES

I will always remember those nights with the burning, glowing embrace of the fireflies. In the space around my body, they floated like a thousand miniature green-yellow lanterns, blazing long enough to be seen, but gone quickly enough escape my cupped hands.

It's embedded in me to see the fireflies as spirit beings here. I've never met a person who hasn't felt their otherworldly nature. Indeed, my Indigenous ancestors referred to wild creatures as "men in other shirts." For animistic peoples, our world is inhabited by spirits which only reveal themselves in particular circumstances or places. And yet, somehow, I think we all feel this regardless of where we come from.

And that spot by the pond out in the summer darkness with the fireflies? That's my quintessential thin place.

I suppose that's why, even as I walk through a world largely shaped by religion or science, I pause when I come across a thin place. I can't help but feel it, to be confused by it, to be transformed – ever so subtly – by it. It's sometimes full of grandeur and other times mundane. Encountering a thin place can be unpredictable, as when I'm walking across the tundra and the aurora borealis flares overhead. Many northern communities speak of communing with their ancestors in the northern lights.

The thin places are waypoints in my personal songline. I seek them out because they guide my way home—help me understand where I come from. I may be separated from my ancestral communities by history and hostile borders, but sometimes my ancestors are right there in front of me, blazing in the night.

Kiliii Yuyan



Photographer **Kiliiii Yuyan** illuminates stories of the Arctic and human communities connected to the land and sea. Informed by ancestry that is both Nanai/Hèzhé (East Asian Indigenous) and Chinese American, he explores the human relationship to the natural world from different cultural perspectives and extreme environments, on land and underwater. Kiliiii is an award-winning contributor to National Geographic, TIME and other major publications.

Survival skills, cold-water diving, and a penchant for listening have been critical for Kiliiii's projects in extreme environments and cultures outside his own. On assignment, he has fled collapsing sea ice, weathered botulism from fermented whale blood, and found kinship at the edges of the world. In addition, Kiliiii builds traditional kayaks and contributes to the revitalization of Northern Indigenous/East Asian culture.



Kiliii Yuyan is a National Geographic Explorer (2021), one of PDN's 30 Photographers (2019), a Grist 50 Fixer (2022), a member of Indigenous Photograph and Diversify Photo. His work has been exhibited worldwide and received some of photography's top honors. His public talks inspire others about photography, Indigenous perspectives, and relationship to land. Yuyan is based out of traditional Duwamish lands (Seattle) but can be found across the circumpolar Arctic much of the year.

PROVOCATION

“I had a powerful moment where I understood the need to branch out beyond my regular work and dive further into animism, the spiritual framework behind my Nanai and Chinese ancestries. And since animism is about relationship to land, it’s a perfect candidate for landscape work.

But the big question was: how to turn something so abstract and beyond normal perception into photography?...

As soon as I asked the question, the answer appeared in front of me, as the forest I was hiking through transformed into a river of floating orange spirit lights, dancing above my head and on the trunks of the fir trees. I had never seen anything like it before, but I knew that the moment and the particular place had given me insight into how I would approach the idea of animism, now my ongoing project titled, **Thin Places.**”

• Kiliiii Yuyan, from <http://blog.kiliiii.com/art-in-the-plague-year/>



INVITATION TO CREATE

Have you ever had a moment where you felt very connected to the world around and beyond you? Have you ever experienced a “thin place”? If so, imagine yourself there. If not, imagine yourself inside one of Kiliii’s photographs.

What does it feel like?
Is this place cold or warm?
Soft or prickly?
Does it remind you of something else?

How might you depict these feelings through your own imagery?

Use any materials you like to visualize the feeling of being in a “thin place”.



BEHIND THE SCENES



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BEHIND THE SCENES



GALLERY TOURS



SELECTED IMAGES



The Claw, 2018
Archival Inkjet Print



Moonlife, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print



Kodamas, 2020
Archival Inkjet Print



Icehenge, 2021
Archival Inkjet Print

SELECTED IMAGES



Eye of the River Spirit, 2022
Archival Inkjet Print



Understories, 2021
Archival Inkjet Print



Portrait of the Artist



Rare Waters, 2019
Archival Inkjet Print

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTICLES:

[Strange Fire Collective Interview](#)

[Humble Arts Feature - Finding Homeland Through Ice and Snow](#)

[LensCulture - Unbroken Lineage: The Keeper of Knowledge](#)

[Communication Arts Feature](#)

[World Photography Organization Interview](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions - Becoming a Nat Geo Photographer](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

VIDEOS AND PODCASTS:

[Storytelling Fellow Video by NIA TERO](#)

[National Geographic Podcast - Camping on sea ice with whale hunters](#)

[Creative Live Podcast - Connect to the Land](#)

[Outside Podcast - Life and Death Among Polar Bears](#)





THANK
YOU

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