

# Culture ViewMIA

Posted by Jordan Levin on January 3, 2019

An escape from Miami hustle to the quiet of the Everglades seemed like an ideal way to mark the end of a frenzied 2018. But choreographer Dale Andree's *Everglades Imprint* offered much more: a spiritual journey, a transformative moment of immersion in the wilderness at Florida's heart, a place that is mostly abstract to most of us city dwellers.



Dancers in

Dale Andree's "Everglades Imprint" in Long Pine Key, Everglades National Park. Photo courtesy AIRE. A pioneering Miami dance artist and thoughtful teacher and artistic mentor, in recent years Andree has been focused on the [National Water Dance Project](#), where she's the [founder and director](#), creating and organizing outdoor performances that draw attention to the centrality of water in our lives. A sensitive, intelligent dancemaker already attuned to the natural world, Andree was ideal for [AIRE](#) (Artists in Residence in the Everglades), a wonderful Miami group that brings artists of all kinds to the Everglades to make work in and about this strange, unique ecosystem.

Close to 200 people traveled to Andree's performance on Sunday Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>, an impressive turnout given the considerable trip to get there: along the swooping highways to their sudden end in the quiet, eclectic concrete village of Florida City, past the tourist bustle at Robert is Here, then agricultural fields to the open Everglades prairie. In the midst of a holiday week and the government shutdown, it was an odd combination of quiet and busy; lots of people taking advantage of no park entrance fees and volunteers from non-profit NAME TK manning the Ernest F. Coe Visitors Center. There artgoers crowded into SEREPENS, an exhibit by sculptor Robert Chambers, another AIRE resident, inspired by the saw palmetto – the prickly, tenacious plant whose vast root system symbolizes the intricate interconnectedness of the Everglades.



Watching

Dale Andree's "Everglades Imprint" in Long Pine Key, Everglades National Park. Photo by Jordan Levin. But we weren't immersed until we traveled to the site of Andree's performance, in Long Pine Key, deeper in the park. Following a trail through the pine forest, spindly tufted trees bisecting the sky, we encountered four storytellers, of wind, fire, history, water and spirit. Alexis Caputo narrated a poem about the devastating 1928 hurricane, park volunteer Carmen Farreiro spoke of the pine forests' cycle of fire and rebirth, and Steve Tennis of the region's history, the Spanish massacring the Calusa and the Seminoles escaping to Florida's interior. As we walked, people gradually stopped chattering, and you could hear the wind in the trees. Last, and most powerful, was Seminole/Miccosukee musician Samuel Tommie, playing an eerie, questing melody on a wooden flute and relating how he was born on an Everglades tree island, raised taking water from the ground and spiritual sustenance from the landscape. "The Everglades was a physical shelter that took care of us," he said. "I know what it's like out there."





Seminole/Miccosukee

musician and artist Samuel Tommie. Photo courtesy AIRE.

So it was with a sense of momentousness that we finally emerged into a wide open field, where Andree stood isolated in the tall grass, a lone, gesturing figure, drawing the crowd which strung out along the trail that bisected the field. It was so odd to see so many



people, standing quiet and watching outdoors. Five dancers crowned with branches emerged slowly, as if summoned, from the tall grass – like moving, humanoid plants.



Summoning spirits – dancers in Dale Andree’s “Everglades Imprint” at Long Pine Key, Everglades National Park. Photo by Jordan Levin.

Crossing the trail, they moved into a field that opened to the west, with a wide, infinite-seeming vista. Slowly, always slowly, they opened and swung their arms, tilted and turned, seeming to scoop up the air, to embrace and acknowledge the landscape around them. Andree and Tommie stood quietly a little distance past, like sentinels for the land, and the dancers gradually moved towards them, as if summoned once again into the west, following their leaders. A breeze came up, as if on cue, and the human forms sank back into the grass, like spirits returning to their origins. Magical.