

Elise Kirk
Project Statement, *Mother*
www.elisekirk.com
elisekirk@gmail.com

The *rural cemetery* became popular in the mid-nineteenth century as health concerns from overcrowding pushed burial grounds outside the city. And so it seemed fitting that during the forced isolation of the early-pandemic I would social-distance at Oak Hill, the rural cemetery just up the road from me at the edge of my Kansas town.

Like most rural cemeteries, this landscape was also designed as a Romantic park-like space for visitors to convene with a *Nature* seen as separate from society. Here, during months of solitary walks, I was confronted with cyclical time, death and renewal, and the nature of an enmeshed world—as evidenced in the relationship between our organic bodies and the Earth. Over the years many of the graves have joined with the land, and I am struck by the remains of those bearing simply the name *Mother*—anonymous women memorialized only by the way they related in life to others. Rearranging this patriarchal symbol into repetition during a time of collective estrangement, I also read a primal cry for secure connection, and location markers for an essential home place.

As the world began to re-open, I traveled to New York, my once-adopted city, and photographed in Brooklyn's Green-Wood cemetery, after which Oak Hill was modeled, and where I found the same mother stones. I made these pictures over the course of a year, one cycle of seasons within an eternal cycle of time and regeneration.