

INTIMATE FOREST

Trees are of exceptional interest to many people and of enormous consequence to all living things. Trees have figured in every known religion and belief system on earth: The Tree of Life, of Knowledge – from Yggdrasil in the North, to the Bodh Tree in the East, to more or less “primitive” spirit trees, even to the battle cries of the Environmentalists.

There is something magical about a tree and especially, a big tree. A tree of great size conveys strength, stability by its massive trunk, a sense of awe in its towering height, and lightness and flexibility in the branches that reach up to the light.

All trees serve us in an endless number of ways, some modest – a bit of shade on a summer day or shelter from a shower, many practical, as providers of lumber, fruits and nuts, humble firewood and high tech medicines. Trees give us oxygen to breathe, help balance weather, and stabilize the soil. Few are the birds, animals, worms, bugs, all the way down the life chain to fungus and microbes, who would not sing praise to our trees, if they could – and some actually do!

In the INTIMATE FOREST exhibition we present some samples of 14 contemporary artists' vision and approach to this timeless subject, whose scope and spirit are limitless!

Anders Knutsson, Co-curator

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Audrey Anastasi

Whether the subject matter is figuration or nature, I approach all my subjects directly and unabashedly. Even though recognizable as trees, I consider the birch works to be process oriented abstractions. Every painting or drawing in this series is an opportunity to be experimental, even playful, as I lay down the paint or mixed-media materials on canvas, paper, glass, or Mylar. With figurative elements, and dense repetitions, these are the forests of childhood fairytales, where one is hopelessly lost. And yet, there remains a suggestion of endless continuity and the power of renewal in nature.

Considering myself primarily a feminist artist, painting other women, most of my work focuses on the human face, figures, animals and nature. I prefer direct observation, and I work very rapidly. And, as with all my paintings since 1990, in my quest to discover and reveal what is most essential, my work is painted almost exclusively with my non-dominant left hand.

Scott Bennett

My "Tree Portraits" came about as a natural outgrowth of my landscape painting. While walking in the woods I would often find myself standing in front of a tree, fascinated with the color and texture of the bark and the wonderful outline and shape of the trunk. I wanted to paint that feeling; the feeling of being in the presence of a living thing that has so much soul, character and grace.

Subject matter is personal, and at best transcends its particular nature so that the larger themes common to all great art come across. It is a doorway for the viewer to enter the artist's abstract world of color, value and form.

I make both non-objective and representational pictures, but I am a landscape painter at heart. Art making is not a straight line, and over the years I have allowed my curiosity about picture making to guide me. My artistic output has been diverse.

There is a feeling that I get standing in front of certain paintings, like that little Cezanne still life at the Met that no one ever seems to be looking at, or a Rembrandt self portrait, a Marin, or a great Matisse,... and that feeling is my guide for how I judge and evaluate my work, and all work for that matter. It has to satisfy on a certain level. It's difficult to put that feeling into words. But I do know how it feels. That is what keeps me going.

Beatrice Coron, Cut Stories Statement

Born in France, Béatrice Coron lived in Egypt, Mexico and China before moving to New York. Coron tells stories to engage the public in illustrations, bookarts, fine arts and public art. She adapts her papercut designs in metal, stone and glass. You can see her work in major collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Walker Art Center and she spoke about her creative process at TED.

Stories explain everything, from mythical legends to journalistic reports, from marketing strategies to political ideologies: the story is always for free, and it's the bait, the cure and the hope.

For the last 15 years, I have been exploring visual storytelling in artist books, paper cutting and public art. Collecting memories from individuals and communities, I stage narrative allegories in silhouette to create a dialogue with the viewer in playful fantasies.

These visual chronicles record archetypal stories that transcend time and space. My goal is to invite the public to pause and bring their own ideas finding personal interpretation to reclaim their imaginative powers.

Rodney Dickson

The paintings of mine in this exhibition were painted En Plein Air which is unusual for me as I am mainly working on non figurative large scale paintings in my studio. Throughout my life I have enjoyed immensely to work outside in nature when the opportunity arises. Therefore, these kinds of paintings are very rare for me, even people who know my work well are likely not aware I sometimes do this kind of thing.

Julia Forrest

A woman presents herself within the landscape. She turns a mirror towards the viewer, breaking up the solid environment. She interacts with the landscape she wanders in, blending into the background, changing with scale, or holding a part of the landscape itself. The whole image becomes a pictorial illusion and as the photographer, I am in complete control of the composition.

In reference to greek mythological stories of goddesses, these women look gentle and fragile, yet possess a strong power. Without seeing their faces the identity becomes unimportant, the focus being on their performance. The variety of mirrors I use help them blend into their surroundings, the mirror serving as an illusion to show off their power by changing the landscape at will.

Using a medium format film camera and no digital manipulation, I create an illusion within the lens. I am inspired by Pictorialist photographers and how they create a purely photographic reality in their images. Early 20th century photographer Anne Brigman seamlessly meets the human figure with a surreal landscape. Her figures have the same powerful presence that I strive to create in my photographs. Shooting in black and white, I make a historical reference to this period. I use Infrared film to emphasize the grain and to create a more surreal and distant reality. I challenge the notion of the landscape by referencing what makes a photograph: the women use their mirror to re-frame what I have framed and capture in their mirror like a camera captures in the lens.

Biography

Julia Forrest is a Brooklyn based artist. She works strictly in film and prints in a darkroom she built within her apartment. Her own art has always been her top priority in life and in this digital world, she will continue to work with old processing. Anything can simply be done in photoshop, she prefers to take the camera, a tool of showing reality, and experiment with what she can do in front of the lens.

Julia is currently working as a teaching artist at the Brooklyn Museum, Medgar Evers College, the Newark Museum, and Lehigh University. As an instructor, she thinks it is important to understand that a person can constantly stretch and push the boundaries of their ideas with whatever medium of art s/he chooses. Her goal is for her audience to not only enjoy learning about photography, but to see the world in an entirely new way and continue to develop a future interest in the arts.

Julia was recently awarded five artist residencies and two grants at Snug Harbor in Staten Island, Soaring Gardens in Pennsylvania, Salem Art Works in New York, The Rensing Art Center in South Carolina, and the Urban Glass Project in Brooklyn, New York.

Thomas Hagen

Thomas Hagen's oil paintings are a combination of the real and the imaginary. His landscapes and still lifes are a presentation of scenes that are combined. He works on reconstructing an image until it is totally his own, like stage sets for an imaginary play, or constructs of life that are never finished. He paints leftover places that have not been ruined or removed.

Hagen received his BA from the University of Southern California and his MFA from the Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles. His art is represented in numerous collections here and abroad. He lives and paints in Brooklyn with his wife and fellow artist, Anna Annus Hagen, along with three cats and a bird.

Kathleen Hayek

The motivating passion that drives my creative work is my lifelong pursuit of the essential truth and beauty of natural life cycles. I am curious as to how we humans deal with natural laws and energies happening at the edges of our daily consciousness.

I use symbols of portals, homes, paths, trees, forest, wetlands and mountains to represent both the human psyche and natural life force, placing them in landscapes abstracted from my urban, rural, past, present, and dreamed experiences. My primary media are paints, inks, and papers. And I've recently begun adding the twigs, leaves and grasses I find on my morning treks through the woods as media and tools. I find that the immediacy, unpredictability, and fragility of the watercolor, collage and printmaking processes on paper work best for narrating the ongoing, ever changing circumstances of a life's journey.

I was raised on the bayous of southern Louisiana. My pursuit of an MS degree in Arts Administration from Bank Street College and Parsons School of Design brought me to New York, NY, which was my home for 30 years. I migrated to Brooklyn in 1987 and co-founded the South of the Navy Yard Artists (SONYA), an artist collective in Ft Greene/Clinton Hill in 1999. Recently I transplanted myself back to the countryside and have established East Brook Studios in a repurposed dairy barn situated in the western foothills of the Catskill Mountains, where I practice papermaking, printmaking and watercolor painting.

Mary Hrbacek

Trees are essential for the sustainability of our planet. They inhale carbon monoxide and exhale the oxygen that enables us to breathe. Without them, our environment would be barren. Through the action of photosynthesis, leaf chlorophyll absorbs the sun's rays, synthesizing nutrients that are transported through root systems that penetrate as far as 70 feet into the earth's core. Their ecosystems create habitats that nourish and support countless species of birds, animals, insects and microorganisms, providing shelter and shade from the harshness of the sun's rays. Trees are directly relevant to the existence of the peoples of the world, and to the problems caused by the disastrous climactic upheavals that challenge the global environment. My tree painting work pivots on an extreme charcoal drawing practice that shifts from solid mass to line, inscribing meaning through the carved white space that contrasts with deep black elements which mine the charcoal media's limits. My hybrid paintings take transformation to the borders between imagination and belief, yielding semi-abstract human-tree amalgams morphing possible meanings, which test the similarities between human anatomical features and tree forms. They symbolize the ultimate interconnectedness between mankind and nature. Trees hibernate in winter and are reborn in spring, providing symbols of hope and resurrection. They rejuvenate us by expanding our imaginations, illuminating our minds. Trees are at the center of the sustainable development that seeks to preserve a sense of wonder at the beauty of nature and the infinity of its majesty. They are a playground, a place for contemplation and a source of life whose presence makes cities livable. When the wind blows, their swaying motions suggest that they are dancing to the rhythms of the breezes. In my art, I focus on the essence that originates within, to accentuate its variability through the visual language of color and form. We must save the trees to sustain life on our beautiful earth.

In recent years, **Mary Hrbacek** has had three solo shows at Creon Gallery, NYC. Her most notable museum shows include those at The National Academy of Design, and The Muscarelle Museum of the College of William and Mary, "American Drawing Biennial VI," where she was awarded the Juror's Choice prize by Ann Philbin, The Drawing Center, NYC. In 2010, Hrbacek took part in Art Beijing, China, and she also presented her drawings in a two-person show at Elliott Louis Gallery, Vancouver, curated by Lynn Ruscheinsky, founder of the "Drawn Festival." In 2012 she exhibited at Fran Hill Gallery, Toronto, Canada, in a show curated by Edward Rubin, NYC. Most recently, Hrbacek participated in "Covert Narratives," curated by Thalia Vrachopoulos, the Tenri Cultural Institute, NYC, 2013. Hrbacek studied painting, drawing and sculpture at the San Francisco Art Institute and at the Art Students League of New York.

Ed Rubin Interview 2013:

<http://www.nyartbeat.com/nyablog/2013/05/peopled-forest-of-my-mind-a-conversation-with-artist-mary-hrbacek/>

Tom Keough

For the past twenty four years Tom Keough has painted in oil or worked in watercolor. Before that Keough worked for over a decade in black and white making pen drawings or linoleum prints. He started to paint in oils in response to the more immediate elements of the world close at hand especially the urban environment of our city and the beauty of the Catskills. Keough has exhibited regularly at the Hal Bromm Gallery in Tribeca. He has exhibited work extensively in a wide variety of venues including the Museum Of Modern Art, the Moenchehaus Museum in Gussler, Germany and The Place/Kayenberg Design Studio in Hamburg, facilities of the United Nations, the U.S. Capital Rotunda, the U.S. Senate Subcommittee Chambers, St. Peter's Church in Manhattan, and St Thomas Cathedral in Rockefeller Center, the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment, the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, the Riverstone Art and Design Gallery.

Keough has artwork permanently installed in the collection of the New York Life Insurance Company, the Brooklyn Hospital, Brooklyn Woods and the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. Recently the Addison Ripley Gallery in Washington D.C. installed a large print in the U.S. Embassy in Jamaica, West Indies.

Scott Stiffler of The Villager, said: "Focusing on quiet NYC settings, Keough's ominous yet melancholy vision of urban alienation will seem both familiar and strange to anyone who calls this densely populated city home. Mysteriously empty streets, dark alleys and overlooked corners are transformed by the effects of manmade light and heaven-sent snow. Frozen in time and devoid of activity, they convey a sense of solitude normally achieved only in empty backlot visions of Gotham"

Anders Knutsson

The trees were painted from actual living trees. Starting from sketches and drawings in the field, I develop larger "finished" drawings in the studio that are then developed into paintings in acrylic on white-primed linen.

During the 1990's I worked primarily from local trees. They developed from loose, expressive to more precise renderings. It seemed important to me, that they also were documents for the future. Now looking back, many of them are already gone. Storms, disease or just being in the wrong place have taken them. In the 2000's I got several large commissions that allowed me to travel extensively and see some truly remarkable trees, like the Bristlecone Pines in East Sierras, CA, the oldest (some near 5,000 years) on Earth and wildest I have ever seen and the Bentenki in Senegal.

It has been the very big and old, visually complex and individual trees that by far have attracted my attention and challenged me as a painter. Like most people, I am awed by them. That awe or reverence comes, even if we don't think of it in our daily activities, from a very deep source in all of us.

Pamela Matsuda-Dunn

The image for the Tree of Light and Dark came out of my drawing series about archetypes in creation myths. A common narrative begins with a story of light coming out of the darkness. This particular image was inspired by an Iroquois legend about a woman who dreamed about a tree that lit up the darkness when its white blossoms opened, but brought darkness when the blossoms closed.

My work deals with the transformation of objects and the transformative power of ideas to shape our view of the world and how we experience it. Conceptually, my fascination with myth and science – the tales we tell ourselves to explain our world – is the common thread. It intertwines our desire to control our fear and to feed our curiosity of the unknown. I like to tweak that, both the fear and the logic.

Eric Pessa

My goal is to actualize abstract ideas in wood as elegantly as I can. Each piece is carved by hand from a single log with chisel and mallet. Starting with a very simple model in either clay or wire, I select a log whose size roughly corresponds to the model. I avoid logs with unusual shapes which might suggest a form within, preferring the blank canvas of simple, straight-grained, unblemished sections of a tree. The model is used only as a guide in the initial rough carving; it is discarded as soon as I begin to visualize the emerging sculpture.

It is perhaps not surprising that my background is not in art but rather in mathematics. Though not so evident in these pieces, symmetry and geometry play a significant role in my work. I still make my living as a computer programmer.

In contrast, my formal art education is practically nonexistent. Through my late 20's, I had little interest in art, much less in creating it. It was only in the mid 1970's, after being introduced to the work of Jose de Rivera and Naum Gabo, and later to Moore, Brancusi, Arp, and others, that a desire to create something with my hands took hold of me. I took a class at Brooklyn College and two others at the Brooklyn Museum Art School where I was fortunate to study with master stone and wood carver Masami Kodama, who took me under his wing, invited me to work in his studio for two years, and taught me everything I know about wood, tools, and the techniques of carving. I am forever indebted to him.

Alan Rosner

Two silhouetted fantasy landscapes mix up traditions from East and West, calligraphy and collage. And the calligraphy itself is a hybrid, English written vertically as if it were Japanese script.

In the first landscape the last lines from #4, in e. e. cummings', 50 Poems, are brushed within the birch 's symmetrical grain. It colors an image that is made from pieced together scraps of lacy rusted metal: a graceful tree rising above a floating fragment of landscape:

never no
body
nothing

Lao Tsu's text, "Knowing the whole universe without leaving my house", gets brushed onto a steel plate whose small cut out rectangle on bottom right edge becomes an open doorway. On the plate's atmospheric blue surface a lone cypress stands by an arched bridge, a hut floating nearby.

Visual legibility, simple means, uncluttered space here in the service of Dada beauty...

Richard White

My aim is not to complicate but to bring you to a point of responsiveness that extends your sense of perception.

At three years old I remember living in the Bedfordshire countryside in England next door to a farm.

My father loved gardening and grew all our vegetables.

On the weekend we would ride on his bicycle to the forest where we would go for long walks.

I remember the forest was at times carpeted by the most wonderful blue or yellow flowers and at other times there were huge ferns that would dwarf and intimidate.

Always present were the tall towering spreading Oak trees dominating the forest from the earth below my feet to the sky above my head.

As we would walk further and further into the forest the light would darken and our voices in the stillness would start to echo.

In and amongst the trees I would imagine strange forms, faces, and creatures peering out from the shadows and from vast and knarled tree trunks.

The trees, sometimes whispering, sometimes whistling and sometimes roaring, but, always tall and mysterious, casting strange shadows and shimmering patterns of color and light in many shades.

My imagination captured I was enchanted and a fascination born.