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LOOKING AFTER TREES



THE
ART
CENTER

WESTERN COLORADO
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

1803 North 7th Street
Grand Junction, CO 81501

JULY 5 – AUGUST 27, 2013

THE ART CENTER

1803 NORTH 7TH STREET | GRAND JUNCTION, CO

Looking After Trees is an effort to bring together the work of eleven artists around the figure of the tree. Trees represent an ideal form that is intuitively familiar but is different upon each encounter. The work in the exhibition describes personal and geographic histories as well as the immediate experience of looking at a tree. Through the artists' varied approaches, the tree forms a nexus for memory, emotion and perception. In-between abstraction and figuration, the tree and the forest hold a formal vocabulary that resists definition.

Included in this online publication are images of works and contributed writings from each artist.

Curated by Meredith Nemirov and
Raoul Anchondo

The Art Center is a community arts organization dedicated to improving quality of life by promoting the enjoyment and understanding of the visual arts and related arts through studio art instruction, educational programs for children and adults, exhibitions and the acquisition, care and display of a permanent art collection.

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Looking After Trees

We are coming to live increasingly in a world that we have built. Across the globe, small towns are becoming cities and the countryside is being transformed or left behind. In this context, our relationship to the natural world is extensively mediated. Trees can be seen as persistent reminders of a world exceeding functional urban life.

On city streets there is a carefully measured distance between the trees. Rectangular openings of soil in the sidewalk define the space from which they are to grow. However carefully they are planted, trees determine their own relationship to the environment. Branches interlace telephone wires and their irregular joints and limbs blur with the patterns of steel window-grates and bricks. With their budding and flowering in Spring, trees effect a city-wide shift in attitude; everyone becomes happier.

The title of this exhibition, *Looking After Trees*, proposes an encounter with trees. It includes an observer and a tree, but the word “after” suggests that the tree exists before it is seen. It is a distinction that gives form to the tree itself apart from the observer, as an ideal form.

“Looking after” also means taking-care-of and implies a sense of responsibility. In imagining this moment, looking is not passive contemplation; it is an active responsibility to the tree and to the world it finds standing before it. This responsibility does not imply any one specific action but more so a certain kind of attention. The observer receives crucial information in a heightened state of sensitivity.

This proposed encounter questions what it means to bridge between the universal and the particular. Trees maintain this twofold relation to

us: their height, constant movement and change are dynamic qualities taking place beyond a particular moment. They are meticulously documented, ordered and named by science, represented in poetry, art and literature throughout history and ever present in our surroundings. Looking at trees is an aspect of our desire to pursue knowledge. Although we can never know them completely, they are made familiar to us through words, images and objects of our own creation.

Raoul Anchondo



Joan Backes

TREE, New York
12 x 12 inches
Acrylic on panel
2011

My work has always been inspired by nature. I am a painter and installation artist. Since 2000, I have focused on the subject of trees in my paintings for many reasons.

When I was a child all of the elm trees down the block on the street where I lived were cut down because of Dutch Elm disease. This changed the neighborhood dramatically and quickly. It no longer felt like home. It felt cold and like a place that I did not know. It has taken many years for the trees that were planted to replace those elms to grow tall.

My focus on trees as a subject has led me to diverse readings and possibilities of study as I document various species of trees in my paintings. I have come to see how my paintings, done in acrylic paint (which is a plastic) on archival panel, could outlast some of the species, which I am recording.

The paintings are named for their geographical locations. Many species grow and repeat in diverse locations.

Joan Backes



Maria Ortega Estepa

Homologías de Recuerdo
Graphite, marker, ink on paper
60 x 60 inches
2012

WOUNDS THAT TOUCH THE HEART

Our bodies are a map that is the cartography of our life experience. This relationship expresses itself through a form that is both melancholy and poetic.

WOUNDS THAT TOUCH THE HEART was born out of a personal introspection that continues the theme of previous works like the series *Homologies of Memories*. This series presents to the viewer maps, roads and byways through the image of the tree rings, establishing a comparison between their own life and the life of the tree. The rings shown here as roads appear as new metaphors as a foreseeable destination. They present what is past and what is yet to be, depicting life as a vast sea of data. With this new series of works that will be presented at the Art Center in Grand Junction, Colorado, I invite you to think of the artistic expression as a journey and as a reflection upon our place in the world. The framework is a palimpsest, a maze of lines, a geography of unknown waves, echoes, textures and nebulous forms that focus our thoughts and memories on the tree as the principle figure; a monument from the past.

Maria Ortega Estepa



Gregory Botts

Remembering Aspen
Oil on canvas
36 x 24 inches
2006

I am a NY School Painter. This statement identifies myself with a painting style of of the eighties and large, tending towards abstract, oil paintings. The content of my work is a search for some belief that can suffice in the creation of my life. The form is that of Art History and mostly of the formal language found in my fellow NY painters.

There is a difference in my work in that I have painted out of doors in the landscape since my beginnings and it remains of primary importance. I painted with Fairfield Porter and Paul Georges in the very beginning and that has shaped my relationship to Alex Katz and other contemporary figurative painters that feel painting searches for some new way of seeing.

“How to See a Tree” is a title I might have used myself in my poetry as in my painting it is what I do over and over to position my reality. I paint each year mostly in summers out of doors, going out to paint the landscape.

The tree is very often the figure, the idea what is found in a painting.

There are many trees I go back to year after year.

The trees represented here are a grove in Aspen, Colorado I have painted for ten years. When I first painted them I was reading Pasternak poetry and came across, and here I paraphrase... That the Mythic could break into reality, as the “Rustling in the Woods,” one may hear, which gives that shiver-- on a crisp golden Autumn day.

I enlarge these paintings I make outside in the studio. I reach especially here for some feeling of transcendence which equals my experience out there. I have a more abstract system of heightening and deepening.

The modernist monochrome can point to this height. I was at a Tibet House Benefit in NY one year. When the monks on stage blared their trumpets in a crescendo, I said that's it, Heaven, *Here and Now* became the title to a painting.

I went home and superimposed a large square of orange color over a mountain snowscape of yellow Aspens in a first September snow. Here the square becomes a measured orange zip balancing a turn in another grey.

I was in Aspen also on September 11, 2001. In my disbelief that the incident could happen I searched for some answer. I looked out the window and a beautiful aspen trunk stood silent. Later I made some black and white paintings and was reminded of the event, it deepened the feeling, which for me in my experience is something revolving and changing very much like nature itself.

I see this all in a tree which is in many ways a metaphor for ourselves, our ideas, and our partner in a relationship with nature.

Gregory Botts



Mary Ellen Long

Connemara
Cast paper on tree bark
45 x 54 inches
1994

How I See a Tree

My work has always revolved around nature and trees have been a part of that constant inspiration.

As I walk thru forests in Colorado and elsewhere, trees...their stature, their remains, their fragments are photographed, cast in paper, or become part of my environmental site works.

In my environmental projects I have marked the configurations of fallen trees and branches with handmade paper tendrils, setting up intersecting lines and expanded patterns which are documented in photographs.

Elements of trees speak to me...their leaf patterns and shapes, bark textures and insect carvings, and standing burnt remains from fire.

Tree images that inhabit my creative work become my way to measure time and transition, seasonal change and memory, and the history and spirit of site and place.

Mary Ellen Long



Meredith Nemirov

Ebro One
Ink on paper
8 x 11.5 inches
2013

I have always enjoyed walking in the woods among the presence of trees. Only after I have made hundreds of drawings and paintings of them do they become an integral part of the place where I live. They are one of the first things I want to see and become familiar with when I am in a new environment. I will choose to take a certain road over another road just to see a particular tree. I will make special trips to see a very old heritage tree or a new species of tree. Concerning work, they are or have become my work, as they are almost exclusively my subject. I suppose I have chosen the tree because I was looking for a figure in the landscape. My landscape is peopled by trees.

I have drawn and painted trees through the changing seasons as well as from different visual perspectives in an attempt to distill and abbreviate elements of nature into distinctive abstract forms and marks. I use the trees to locate forms in space, movement on the picture plane, and as an opportunity to play with figure-ground relationships. I look at the movement created in the work as a metaphor for the passage of time and the natural change of the landscape.

The winter drawings with their bare branches reaching into a gray sky move with the breath of an invisible wind. While walking in the landscape I look at trees and at the land as hills overlap mountains, sky cuts down into the pass, and clouds move between branches and out of view. The early or late light catches the edge of tree trunks and they come to float on the surface, flat

and then the places in-between offering a deeper space. These are formal aspects of painting that I am interested in.

I used a seed pod dipped in India ink for the series of drawings on view in this exhibition. These drawings were done on-site in the Parque del Ebro in Logroño, La Rioja, Spain where I lived from October 2012 through May 2013.

Meredith Nemirov



Matt Christie

Clearing
Woodcut and lithograph on paper
37 x 25 inches
2011

Over the course of some years, my work involving tree images has continued to evolve. From forests of trees informing depictions of landscape to the solitary tree, serving as a reference to the individual and now to a more abstracted, stylized form. In this work the tree serves as self-portrait, at times watchful or isolated, but also aware of the inherent energetic driving life-force it contains.

Matt Christie



Laura Scandrett

Lung Tree
Charcoal on paper
68 x 52 inches
2011

My work is as much about a love affair with materials as it is subject matter. For many years I have only used charcoal on one kind of paper, allowing me to push and explore the limits of these materials while developing a language with them. My work of trees and the natural world began with an obsession with an old, outdated encyclopedia set from the 1930's for children, The Book of Knowledge. Through research I was struck by how much our concept of "knowledge" changes, sociologically, technologically and scientifically at different paces. I use abstraction as well as representation to explore these changes, aiming to ultimately create images seeming of another world with a strong sense of place. I am continually impressed by the steadfastness of trees throughout our ever changing world --- some are stalwart towers that outlive humans, while some have shorter lifespans and require care and pruning to serve our purposes. All stand as silent witnesses. No matter what takes place in our world, trees have the will to survive.

I use many different kinds of charcoal (made from burnt trees) on paper (made from trees), and attempt to push the materials to their limits by adding, subtracting, rubbing, sanding, erasing and stenciling, as well as drawing. I leave the edges of the paper untouched out of respect for the surface and to show the paper in its original form. The work is process and emotion based, and I hope that is what comes through in the result.

Laura Scandrett



Catherine Eaton Skinner

Heron Rookery III
Encaustic and mixed media on panel
54 x 10 inches
2010

When I stand beneath a tree, I experience it as the axis mundi, as a cosmic pillar connecting the energy between the earth and the sky. The tree becomes a meeting point of all directions, functioning as the omphalos (navel), the world's point of beginning.

Our family roots in the Puget Sound run long and deep. I grew up among old-growth Douglas firs and red cedars, the peeling bark of the madronas and the hollows of the big leaf maples. During the last year of my father's life I began working with the tree image, this strong vertical form evoking who he was as a person and his love of the area. It seemed natural to work with the concentric circles of the tree ring, which record history and thereby honor the passage of time.

Beside the northwest's sky-reaching trees, blue herons grace the waters, from the gentle lakes to the salt water estuaries. They are mesmerizing to watch: nesting in rookeries, gracefully landing in almost impossible spaces, filling the air with their primal voices.

Trees stand solemnly, reminding us to connect to the earth, to cherish the clean water that ensures our survival, and to look upward to the sky and light for our souls. Our cultural memory lies within the physicality of place as we continue to find ways to connect not only to our environment, but most importantly, to each other.

Catherine Eaton Skinner



Maria Arango

Departure
Wood engraving, ink on paper
12 x 9 inches
2003

“It has been said that trees are imperfect men, and seem to bemoan their imprisonment rooted in the ground. But they never seem so to me. I never saw a discontented tree.

They grip the ground as though they liked it, and though fast rooted they travel about as far as we do.

They go wandering forth in all directions with every wind, going and coming like ourselves, traveling with us around the sun two million miles a day, and through space heaven knows how fast and far!”

–John Muir, June 1890

Linnie Marsh Wolfe (ed.), *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979, p. 299.

Maria Arango



Rob Snyder

Icanchu
Cast glass
13 x 13 x 40 inches
2013

Approach

Making art is a direct reflection of my journey through life. My approach is centered in letting go of preconceived notions of both process and outcome. This requires a quiet yet playful frame of mind, allowing me to create without questioning direction. It is a slow unveiling of form out of chaos and spaciousness—allowing enough stillness in mind, and then saying yes to what appears. The Sufi poet, Rumi, eloquently speaks of this as being played like a hollow reed.

This approach is supported by the beauty and solitude I experience living on Vashon Island. In a paradise of woods, gardens, streams, and sea—a place far removed from the hustle and bustle of contemporary life—I find the quiet pulse of life revealing her self.

Concepts and Medium

Conceptually my art weaves stories relating to essence and matter, chaos and form, fragility of nature, and the developing human spirit. I see everything as a dance of life; everything in constant motion, transforming and evolving in a universal flow of upward movement. This is seen in both the natural world, and in human consciousness. Patterns in life will always collapse if they are not supported by an upward movement. Nature does this so eloquently; we as humans, a bit more clumsily. But nevertheless, we are constantly moving and evolving, manifesting from the unknown—bringing forth form out of the formless.

Currently, I am focused on a kiln glass casting process that allows me to create final art pieces from multiple small-scale castings. These “constellations” have an installation quality and scale; they explore ideas around chaos and form, and focus on humans’ relationship to nature. I stack small glass pieces molded from tree branches; the piles depict the upward and transformative universal movement—creating intentional and precarious forms. Glass is the perfect vehicle and medium. It is able to express the emergent forms in their complete and vulnerable essence; solid and translucent, resilient and fragile.

Rob Snyder



Gayle Gerson

Regatta Trees
Mixed media collage on panel
18 x 24 inches
2013

I did my first forest collage about 4 years ago when I was inspired by a photograph a friend took on a walk in the woods of the Adirondacks. I am intrigued by the way the light shines through the the trees so I try to create the impression of that light through my art. Doing so I pull from my childhood memories of the Adirondacks and all the feelings that being “in the woods” evokes. Being a dedicated collagist I am committed to the idea of reflecting not only subject matter but the particular culture and historical era in which I find myself. I can't help but respond to my beloved trees through that cultural lens.

Gayle Gerson