



ARBOREAL

Elizabeth Bradford | Diane Cook and Len Jenshel | Ori Gersht | Sam Krisch | Rosemary Laing
Jason Middlebrook | Tom Nakashima | Roxy Paine | Quayola | Linda Foard Roberts | Eric Serritella
Claire Sherman | Michele Sons | Yuken Teruya

Thursday, January 24-Saturday, March 23, 2019
All galleries





Majestic, sustaining, enduring, but increasingly vulnerable—these words only begin to describe one of the earth's most critical life forms: trees. This selection of works by emerging, national, and internationally acclaimed artists explores the imagery of trees as a potent signifier, the metaphoric power of which extends from concepts about beauty and the power of nature, to time and timelessness, as well as the despairing realization about the disruption and impending desecration of our forests and the natural environment.

Trees matter. Essential for life, they provide oxygen, filter the air, and remove carbon dioxide. Their roots anchor, filter, and enrich the soil. They provide habitat for wildlife, shelter in the form of shade and building materials, and sustenance such as olives, nuts, and abundant varieties of fruit. Trees are also one of the oldest organisms on the earth, with some that can live up to an astonishing 5,000 years. Equally important, trees can have immense personal and cultural significance and are revered not only for their beauty but for inspiring and enriching the soul.

With a diverse range of artistic approaches and media—from the moving imagery of video installations to ceramic sculptures and from stainless steel representations of dendritic or branching structures to delicately hand-cut paper sculptures—artists in this exhibition probe this iconic symbol and its allusions to significant and often profound ideas.

◀ Jason Middlebrook
The Many Nights, 2016
Ink and acrylic on maple
98 ½ x 16 x 1 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York



Infused throughout much of the work in the exhibition is the prevalence of beauty—pristine, sometimes sublime, always powerful—and how trees can embody that while laden with underlying subtexts. August, even majestic, with sun filtering through its massive boughs, is the monumental image of Diane Cook and Len Jenshel's *Emancipation Oak*, 2014. This spectacular photographic image is awe inspiring—not only for its visual beauty, but for the importance of what it symbolizes. Located at Hampton University, one of the nation's leading historically black universities, it was under this oak in 1863 that the black community of Hampton, Virginia, gathered to hear the first Southern reading of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation abolishing slavery, and it was under this tree that formerly enslaved members of that community were first able to receive an education. Standing near the entrance of the university, the Emancipation Oak stands as a symbol of freedom and the pursuit of knowledge for all.

▲ Michele Sons
 #6 from *The Frost and the Boughs* series, 2016-2018
 Archival ink digital print
 20 x 32 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist

ON THE COVER:
 Linda Foard Roberts
Maple Tree, a moment in time, 2007
 From the *Grounded* series, 2003-2010
 Toned silver gelatin photograph
 28 x 36 inches
 Edition 2/15

Image courtesy of the artist and SOCO Gallery, Charlotte, North Carolina



Sam Krisch's photographic works of trees isolated in the wintery landscapes of Hokkaido, Japan, eloquently capture the pristine beauty of nature and the meditative power of silence. Poetic, even reverential, they convey a sense of universal timelessness—of time stopped, lapsed, or receding into the horizon. A delicate, mesmerizing beauty characterizes Japanese artist Yuken Teruya's astonishing miniature trees cut out of toilet paper rolls and designer shopping bags. Created with meticulous exactitude, these marvelous sculptural forms speak to the fragility and vulnerability of trees while making a statement about the transformation of humble, cast-off materials. Exquisite, almost breathtaking images of ice-laden Appalachian trees make up Michele Sons' suite of photographs, taken in winter—a season which, for Sons, offers a "time to see clearly, to find clarity and simplicity, wonder and beauty." Also rooted in the Southern landscape are the evocative silver gelatin prints by Linda Foard Roberts. Mysterious and elusive, the venerable trees she portrays have, for Roberts, stood the test of time and bear witness to the memory of a distressed and scarred past. In *Mercy*, 2006, for example, with rope threateningly coiled around the tree's trunk, she juxtaposes the beauty of the Southern landscape with the pain of its history. It is a trenchant image that can also imply the vulnerability of trees and the peril they face with advancing urban, industrial, and commercial interests.

▲ Yuken Teruya
Corner Forest, 2005
Paper rolls, painted steel, and magnets
Dimensions variable
Private collection, New York
Photo by Etienne Frossard



Also probing the notion of landscape as a witness to history is the work of Israeli artist Ori Gersht, whose prolonged exposures of gnarled ancient olive trees in Palestinian villages in Israel are beautiful but haunting photographs that speak to that landscape as a sacred, fragile, and contested space. This intersection of beauty and violence and the notion of landscape as a witness to history are evoked again in Gersht's stirring video installation *Forest*, 2005. Filmed in the remote regions in Southwest Ukraine, the site of Nazi atrocities, this beautiful forest scene becomes ominous as a massive tree slowly crashes to the ground, simultaneously conveying an acute recognition of place as a site of memory, history, beauty, and horror.

Vestiges of the past weave into the Italian artist Quayola's video installation *Pleasant Places*, 2015. The video transports, or rather dislocates, the viewer in time, merging past and present, realism and abstraction in a re-imagination of Vincent Van Gogh's countryside of Provence 125 years later. In this work the artist digitally morphs realistic images of windblown trees and fields where Van Gogh lived into swirling abstract scenes of disintegrating pixels, bringing to mind the underlying forces of nature and the dynamics of change.

Rosemary Laing ▲
Rose of Australia, 2017
Archival pigment print
39.4 x 78.7 inches
Edition 3 of 8

Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York
Image ©Rosemary Laing



The forces of nature and the dynamics of change are evident, too, in Claire Sherman's dynamic paintings of archetypal forest scenes. Abstraction and pictorial realism converge with a raw beauty in Sherman's large-scale paintings, immediately eliciting the sheer, visceral power of nature. Fragmented, often shattered picture planes speak to the strength of natural forces but also to the vulnerabilities that both nature and/or humans can inflict. With its fractured and broken limbs, the tree in the painting *Tree*, 2010, is portrayed as imperiled, if not on the brink of destruction.

The complex nature of man's relationship to place and landscape is also probed by Australian artist Rosemary Laing in two photographic works that represent staged interventions that allude to both the destruction of the Australian rainforest and Indigenous cultures. In these works Laing blurs fact and fiction, a "river" of manufactured fabric on the forest floor, acting symbolically as an invasion—an emblem of colonial occupation and the intrusion into and domestication of the natural environment. On the other side of the world, the vulnerability of the natural environment and encroaching urban development is an underlying concern for Elizabeth Bradford. Raised as a naturalist, Bradford's paintings of forest scenes in the Carolinas are motivated by a sense of urgency to preserve and protect the memory of nature's beauty before it disappears or is changed forever. The nature/culture divide as a theme continues in Tom Nakashima's paintings and prints. Throughout Nakashima's career he has consistently explored the imagery of tree piles—originally derived from piles of downed, tangled, and twisted tree trunks and branches from cleared apple orchards where he lived near Berryville, Virginia. In his painting *Edge of Chaos*, 2003, a tree pile represented in close-to-abstract form against a collaged background of newspaper clippings makes a statement about the human encroachment on nature—urban sprawl and the ever-advancing built environment.

Meticulously rendered with an astounding hyperrealism, Eric Serritella's Trompe-l'œil representations of birch trees, branches, and weathered logs are ceramic sculptures, built out of clay then carved and fired in oxidation with ceramic stains and oxides. Serritella's use of ceramic in his sculptures symbolically mirrors both the fragility and durability of the environment, which he remarks is "easily damaged if disrespected and yet invincible in its inherent beauty and longevity." His adept evocations of birch trees, which he refers to as "angels of the forest," speak to the splendor and tenacity of nature in the face of today's environmental assaults.

▲ Claire Sherman
Snow and Trees VI, 2011
 Oil on canvas
 84 x 66 inches
 Collection of Leslie Jones

Jason Middlebrook uses actual trees in his art, transforming planks and slabs of tree trunks into hybrid sculptural forms: “plank paintings” that exist somewhere in between painting and sculpture. Using tree planks as his canvas, Middlebrook applies hard-edge lines and glossy, industrial colors to paint abstract geometric compositions onto the wood grain. His vibrant geometric shapes and gleaming surfaces seemingly reference the manufactured while incorporating the organic form of the sculptures’ structures.

Fluidly melding the manufactured and industrial with the organic is internationally acclaimed artist Roxy Paine, who is represented in the exhibition with two of his tabletop stainless steel *Dendroids*. These small-scale sculptures reference Paine’s signature arboreal or tree-like sculptural forms that speak to branching or dendritic structures—anatomical, industrial, and ecological systems that range from vascular and neural networks to industrial and engineering systems, computer board circuitry, tree root systems, river deltas, and fungal mycelium (the connective tissue that allows a single organism to spread underground). This exploration of dendritic structures delves into questions about the colliding forces of industry and nature, the natural and the artificial, and—by extension—control and chaos, growth and destruction.

In serving as subject matter for these artists, images of trees become compelling works of art, ones that spur contemplation and connection to a multiplicity of ideas. For many of us, trees are also perhaps first and foremost a constant reminder of life’s cycles with falling leaves in advance of winter, followed by renewal and growth in spring and summer. Even more so, they are an enduring reminder of the beauty, mystery, and grandeur of nature.

Margo Ann Crutchfield
Curator at large



Roxy Paine ▲
Untitled, 2012-2017
Stainless steel
49 3/8 x 22 3/4 x 18 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York
Photo by Chris Stach



LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

The artists

Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York

bitforms gallery, New York

Galerie LeLong & Co., New York

Miles McEnergy Gallery, New York

Jason Jacques Gallery, New York

Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

Private collection, New York

Collection of Leslie Jones

Audrey and Jeff Spiegel

Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia

Quayola ▲
Pleasant Places, 2015
4K video (still)
Dimensions variable

Image courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York

Many thanks to the artists and to the following for facilitating loans to the exhibition:

Steve Sacks and Aliza Morell, bitforms gallery, New York; T. Bush and Kayla C. Moser, Jason Jacques Gallery, New York; Sarah Durning Cope and Alex Pigeon, Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York; Jennifer Dalton, 601Artspace, New York; Lucienne Fernandez and Bianca Cabrera Galerie Lelong & Co., New York; Rachel Gonzales and Audrey Barcio, Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago; Eric Gleason and Michelle Hickey, Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York; Miles McEnergy, Miles McEnergy Gallery, New York; Glen McMillan, CRG Gallery, New York; Nicholas Knapp, Miles McEnergy Gallery, New York; Michele Perez, Josée Bienvenu Gallery, New York; and Cindy Peterson and Mary LaGue, Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia



WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Elizabeth Bradford

Lives in Davidson, North Carolina
elizabethbradford.com

All works acrylic on canvas
 Courtesy of the artist

Merchants Millpond, 2018
 48 x 36 inches

Rain on Lake Lila, 2018
 60 x 48 inches

Live Oak Stump, Bald Head, 2016
 48 x 36 inches

▲ Eric Serritella
Electorate, 2017
 Ceramic
 12 x 27 x 7 inches
 Image courtesy of the artist and Jason Jacques Gallery,
 New York
 Photo by Jason Dowdle

Diane Cook and Len Jenshel

Based in New York City
cookjenshel.com

Works courtesy of the artists

Pando, 2015
 Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*)
 Pando Clonal Colony, Fishlake National
 Forest, Utah
 From the project *Wise Trees*
 Pigment print
 Print size: 15 ¼ x 22 ¼ inches

The Dueling Oak, 2015
 Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
 City Park, New Orleans, Louisiana
 From the project *Wise Trees*
 Pigment print
 Print size: 15 ¼ x 22 ¼ inches

Emancipation Oak, 2014
 Southern Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*)
 Hampton University, Hampton, Virginia
 From the project *Wise Trees*
 Digital image on Phototex
 Approximately 120 x 180 inches

Ori Gersht

Israeli, based in London
origersht.com

Works courtesy of the artist and Yancey
 Richardson Gallery, New York

Forest, 2005
 Video
 Edition of 7 + 2AP
 Duration: 13 minutes

Ghost Olive No. 18, 2004
 C-Print mounted on aluminum
 AP 1/2
 40 x 30 inches

Ghost Olive No. 17, 2004
 C-Print mounted on aluminum
 AP 2/2
 Framed: 41 x 33 ¼ x 1 inches

Sam Krisch

Based in Roanoke, Virginia
samkrisch.com

Digital prints, courtesy of the artist

Treeline, 2018
Hokkaido, Japan
36 x 72 inches

Kanji, 2018
Hokkaido, Japan
36 x 36 inches

Emerging I, 2011
Roanoke, Virginia
34 x 54 inches

Rosemary Laing

Australian, based in Sydney
galerielelong.com/artists/rosemary-laing

Rose of Australia, 2017
Archival pigment print
39.4 x 78.7 inches
Edition 3 of 8
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Lelong & Co., New York

groundspeed (Rose Petal) #15, 2001
C type photograph
43 5/16 x 83 1/8 inches
Collection of the Taubman Museum of Art
Purchased with funds from the Cherry Hill Endowment

Jason Middlebrook

Lives in Hudson, New York
jasonmiddlebrook.com

Works courtesy of the artist and Miles McEnery Gallery, New York

The Many Nights, 2016
Ink and acrylic on maple
98 1/2 x 16 x 1 inches

Inspired by the Western Geodes, 2014-2015
Acrylic on elm
104 x 25 1/2 inches

My Love for Shoes and Growing Up in California, 2014
Acrylic on American elm
112 x 14 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches

Tom Nakashima

Lives in Floyd, Virginia
tomnakashima.com

Works courtesy of the artist

Nocturne Treepile, 2008
Relief print
33 1/2 x 29 3/4 inches

Edge of Chaos, 2003
Oil and newspaper collage on canvas
73 x 95 inches

Roxy Paine

Based in New York City
roxypaine.com

Works courtesy of the artist and Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York

Caption, 2017
Stainless steel
63 1/2 x 33 x 29 1/2 inches

Untitled, 2012-2017
Stainless steel
49 3/8 x 22 3/4 x 18 inches

Quayola

Italian, based in London
quayola.com

Pleasant Places, 2015
4K video
Edition of 6
Dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and bitforms gallery, New York

Linda Foard Roberts

Lives in Weddington, North Carolina
lindafoardroberts.com

Toned gelatin silver photographs
From the *Grounded* series, 2003-2010
Image courtesy of the artist and SOCO Gallery, Charlotte, North Carolina

Limbs, over one hundred years old, 2009
36 x 27 inches
Edition 7/15

Live Oak II, 2008
36 x 28 inches

Maple Tree, a moment in time, 2007
28 x 36 inches
Edition 2/15

Mercy, 2006
36 x 28 1/2 inches

Besieged, 2003
36 x 28 inches
Edition 5/15

Eric Serritella

Based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Ceramic, hand-built, hand-carved, and fired in oxidation with ceramic stains and oxides

Work courtesy of the artist and Jason Jacques Gallery, New York

Electorate, 2017
12 x 27 x 7 inches

Southern Birch, 2017
77 x 44 x 23 inches

Emergence, 2017
74 1/2 x 32 x 34 inches

Revealed, 2016
24 x 20 x 17 inches

Whisper, 2016
31 x 28 x 23 inches

Claire Sherman

Based in New York city
clairesherman.com

Oil on canvas

Snow and Trees VI, 2011
84 x 66 inches
Collection of Leslie Jones

Tree, 2010
96 x 78 inches
Collection of Audrey and Jeff Spiegel

Michele Sons

Based in Roanoke, Virginia
michele-sons.squarespace.com

Nine archival ink digital prints
From *The Frost and the Boughs* series, 2016-2018
Numbers 1-9
Variable dimensions, each approximately 20 x 30 inches
All works courtesy of the artist

Yuken Teruya

Japanese, based in Berlin and Brooklyn,
New York
yukenteruyastudio.com

Courtesy of the artist and Josée Bienvenu
Gallery unless otherwise noted

Notice Forest: Nordiska Kompaniet #2, 2017
Cut paper and glue
5 ¾ x 15 ¾ x 13 ½ inches

Notice Forest: Tiffany's & Co., 2017
Cut paper and glue
4 x 8 x 9 ¾ inches

Notice Forest: Prada, 2017
Cut paper and glue
3 ¼ x 6 ½ x 9.8 inches

Notice Forest: McDonald's (Prize), 2015-2016
Cut paper and glue
4 ¾ x 7.13 x 11 ½ inches

Notice Forest: Smythson on Bond Street, 2009
Cut paper and glue
2 ½ x 7 ½ x 6 inches

Corner Forest, 2005
Paper rolls, painted steel, and magnets
Dimensions variable
Private collection, New York



Elizabeth Bradford ▲
Live Oak Stump, Bald Head, 2016
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 36 inches
Image courtesy of the artist



▲ Tom Nakashima; *Edge of Chaos*, 2003; oil and newspaper collage on canvas; 73 x 95 inches; collection of the artist

GALLERY TALKS

MICRO TO MACRO—ALL ABOUT TREES

Join us for a series of gallery talks presented by Virginia Tech faculty that explores a broad variety of topics relating to the world of trees, from sustainability and conservation to dendrochronology and invasive species. Each talk is approximately 30 minutes, and free and open to the public.

Wednesday, January 30, 2019, 6:30 PM

The Forest as a Workplace: Carolyn Copenheaver, Ph.D.

Saturday, February 16, 2019, 5:30 PM

Art Through the Eyes of an Arborist: Eric Wiseman, Ph.D.

Wednesday, March 6, 2019, 6:30 PM

Charismatic Trees: Lynn Resler

Tuesday, March 19, 2019, 6:30 PM

Invasive Species—Trees as Victim and Victor: Jacob Barney, Ph.D.



For more information about exhibitions and events:

artscenter.vt.edu



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Gallery Hours

Monday–Friday, 10 AM–5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM–4 PM

All gallery events are free.

To schedule a tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu