

BEING WITH TREES

The Arborealists
The Urban Contemporaries
& Invited Artists



Artists Exhibiting

THE ARBOREALISTS

Philippa Beale

John Blandy

Buckmaster French

Stella Carr

Tim Craven

Annabel Cullen

Alex Egan

Paul Finn

Kerry Harding

Julie Held

Natasha Lien

Paul Ridyard

Nahem Shoa

Lesley Slight

Angela Summerfield

Peter Ursem

URBAN CONTEMPORARIES

Sharon Beavan

Frank Creber

Susanne du Toit

Ferha Farooqui

Annette Fernando

Michael Johnson

Sarah Lowe

Michael Major

Elizabeth McCarten

Melissa Scott-Miller

Grant Watson

INVITED ARTISTS

Day Bowman

Gary Cook

Alex Faulkner

Elizabeth Hannaford

Karen Keogh

Ursula Leach

Pat Phippard

Angela Rumble

Rachel Sargent

Susan Shields

Les Williams

Being With Trees

BEING WITH TREES brings a contemporary response to trees from both urban and rural environments. These painters and printmakers are associated with two contemporary organisations: the **Arborealists**, which includes artists from the South West, the South East, Yorkshire, London, Wales, France and Ireland, and the **Urban Contemporaries**, artists who live in London and celebrate trees and the vital role they play in all our lives in terms of our well-being, identity, sociability and our understanding of ecology and climatic change. The author Hermann Hesse observed: *'When we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy.'*

At a time of international anxiety about the existential threat of global warming, the role of nature and trees in the nation's capital city has never been more pertinent. It has been estimated that we need to plant two billion trees, as soon as possible, to avert disaster. Thus, this exhibition aims, with a political slant to raise awareness of the importance of trees in the lives of Londoners. Themes and issues are street architecture, urban decoration, ecological dimensions, wildlife habitats, the mythical, allegorical and the symbolic; in fact, our psychological equilibrium and well-being. Trees in opposition to, or in, harmony with buildings, as depositories of history and bearing witness, unexpected trees in unexpected places, iconic and loved trees, nuisance and unloved trees or diseased trees and trees as boundary markers, noise excluders or barriers against pollution. Trees are the lungs of London.

In 2013 when performance, installation and video dominated the art scene, there was little chance to show figurative painting in a major museum or gallery until Tim Craven and Steve Marshall, both senior curators for Southampton City Council, got together and curated at the St Barbe Museum and Art Gallery in the New Forest, *'Under the Green Wood: Picturing the British Tree'* (2013). From this exhibition, the Arborealists emerged as a movement. The art critic Andrew Lambirth wrote an illuminating review of the exhibition, which appeared at the time to be so at odds with prevailing trends. *Under the Green Wood* included

works by John Constable, Paul Nash, Samuel Palmer and Graham Sutherland alongside contemporary artists such as Graham Arnold, Philippa Beale, David Nash and Michael Porter whose focus on trees and forests have developed new perceptions of the language of painting.

Following *Under the Green Wood*, Tim Craven invited well known British painters whose work concentrated on trees to join him, establishing the Arborealist group as an ecological, conservationist art movement. It was important that the Arborealists renewed the art of painting with new perceptions of mark-making to develop a contemporary language that owed everything to observation. Thus the Arborealists became the first group in the 21st century to concentrate on this important topic at this critical time in our evolution.

In 2017, Rachel Cooke of The Guardian described the Arborealists as a loose collection of artists that came together believing they took their inspiration from the Brotherhood of Ruralists. She described their work as: *'broadly Romantic but not precluding the possibility of abstraction, as inspiringly lush produced by people who really can paint.'*

The Arborealist movement has had substantial critical success. Its first exhibition, *The Art of Trees* (2014) at the Royal West of England Academy, was described by The Daily Telegraph as 'spellbinding'. Artists from the UK and Europe now clamour to join the movement, particularly to participate in ongoing site specific projects. In 2016 George Peterken OBE, forester, ecologist and author, invited the Arborealists to respond to the environment of Lady Park Wood near Monmouth, the only scientifically monitored unmanaged woodland in the UK. The accompanying film *Lady Park Wood*, produced by Arborealist artist, Fiona McIntyre, which has been screened throughout the UK, shows many of the artists en plein air, collecting specific information for paintings.

From 2018, and in partnership with both National Park Authorities, the Arborealists have been working on Exmoor and Dartmoor. The results will culminate in a major exhibition, opening in April 2020, at the

Somerset Museum. Another tree partnership was recently launched with renowned author and expert on ancient British trees, Julian Hight.

Since its inception the Arborealists have had 16 exhibitions in the UK and France, currently exhibiting at The National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. Arborealists' publications* include: *Under the Greenwood*, *Picturing the British Tree*; *The Arborealists*, *The Art of the Tree*, which includes the essay by Dr Angela Summerfield 'Why do Artists Paint Trees?'; and *Drawn to London, Within the Shadow of the Tower*. Essays in these publications share the artists passion for the ecology of trees and their significance in the conservation of our fragile, natural environment.

The Urban Contemporaries is a fluid group of figurative painters founded by Frank Creber and Ferha Farooqui. Their aim is to explore different approaches to the concept of contemporary communities in urban environments by creating ambitious responses to the urban experience – responding in ways that are of interest to their individual practice. Using drawing as a starting point and painting as the common medium, the human figure in urban surroundings is a dominant motif. They aim to reflect the many varied 'voices' of contemporary society and create themed work that reflects upon the urban condition. Urban Contemporaries include Michael Johnson, Sarah Lowe, Grant Watson, Melissa Scott Miller, Susanne du Toit, Sharon Beavan, Michael Major, Annette Fernando and Elizabeth McCarten. These artists portray the integration of trees into London communities and the varied effects trees have on regeneration and the ever changing skyline. They bring a symbolic, apocalyptic dimension to the exhibition. *Being with Trees* includes work from artists who have caught a glimpse of the importance of trees within our culture and understand the polemic concerning the influence and the signification of trees and our natural environment. These include Angela Rumble, Elizabeth Hannaford, Les Williams, Day Bowman, Susan Shields, Gary Cook, Pat Phippard, Ursula Leach, Rachel Sargent and Karen Keogh.

We share 75% of our DNA with trees – without trees we die. They are our lungs, providing shelter and fuel for humans and animals. War crimes and destruction have taken place in forests. In many cultures, trees have been worshipped. The height of trees and the wonder of being in a forest inspired the builders of great temples and cathedrals.

Tree paintings contain messages about caring for our resources and point the way as to how we should treat all living creatures and other forest dwellers. We only have the same rights as the animals and we have a duty to preserve and conserve the trees and act with kindness to the natural world. Many genres of image making appear in this exhibition. The abstract, the romantic, the drawn, and the painted. Some of the artists exploring the abstract include Day Bowman, Elizabeth Hannaford, Angela Rumble, Ursula Leach, Kerry Harding, Elizabeth McCarten and myself. Day Bowman describes 'Growing up in a small, West-Country

seaside town', references the sea and the littoral. She finds the shapes of the many sunken forests, below the sand and mudflats from our coastal waters. Ursula Leach uses shape and colour to relate woods to landscape, while Kerry Harding's stoic and sculptural trees of the North Cornish coast, bend to the Atlantic wind. These motifs, the inevitable metaphor for art and life, have guided her for over twenty years. Elizabeth McCarten breathes most easily when amongst trees – connecting places through looking, drawing and painting. Growing up in London, parks and trees offered an escape from the harsh reality of the city. Elizabeth Hannaford was born on a Devonshire farm. 'I climbed trees, drew trees and sat reading in their branches as a child'. She feels our world is threatened, in London and worldwide, and her paintings are infused with anxiety, particularly for a group of English Oaks in Alexandra Palace Park.

In my own work I search for escape in the spaces between the trees – the branches, the leaves. My work is intentionally semiotic – it is always somewhere, it could also be anywhere. Camouflage and composition work together to create visually disturbing images. As an artist I feel most aligned to Angela Rumble whose tree-scapes portray a network of branches which are broken down to give obsessive and sometimes confusing detail, hovering between the abstract and the figurative.

Detailed figurative drawing enables other artists to describe trees. As a boy, Paul Ridyard was given a book of British trees with hand drawn illustrations, each species pictured on an unmodulated white background alongside a few images of detail. 'I was fascinated as much by the drawings in the book as the trees themselves and growing up in the Peak District I would take the book with me on long walks to help identify trees.' He still takes long walks, looking for extraordinary trees to create his fictional landscapes. Sharon Beavan loves the challenge of drawing trees in contrast to the geometric concerns of architecture. Pat Phippard responds to trees that have kept her company wherever she lives. 'When young I lived in them. Now I portray them, walk under them, and plant them.'

John Blandy's pastels of a lime tree charts a passage of time - Autumn 2018. They form part of an ongoing longitudinal study of a tree in Queens Park, London. Each image is completed in one session en plein air. He has been following this tree on a daily basis since March 1997, creating over 4000 images. This series of studies, equivalent to a daily workout, portrays the tree in a slow and constant state of change.

The trees in Les Williams' urban landscapes break up the lines of the buildings, bringing life to the City in which he worked for many years. His trees represent the enduring force of nature, creating the most elegant balance of chaos and order. Nahem Shoa loves drawing and painting all types of trees. Their gnarled twisted forms, strange branches, growths and unusual bark have captivated him for thirty years, 'Whether I draw or paint in front of them, their forms linger in my imagination'. Reminding us it demands total concentration

and powers of perception to draw and paint trees. Only now, at 50, he feels able to create their portraits. In 2018 Annabel Cullen spent four months drawing trees in London parks, commons and heaths, creating marks that provide a bridge between observation and imagination. Tim Craven's art describes forests and woods in the precious detail of realism. His paintings explore a tension between the sterile nature of the photograph and the stubborn hand-made qualities of painting.

The 'Romantics' of this exhibition, for whom life, a wood, a landscape, are viewed in mystic ways and reconnect us to a part of our existence that feeds imagination, health and wellbeing. Susan Shield's and Peter Ursem's prints have a sense of timelessness, full of story. The nature of printmaking reminds us of what was, as well as what is. Karen Keogh's 'Holme Oak' leads the viewer into a gentler, more wooded past while clearly illustrating a perilous present. She says: 'I have been drawn to the shape of trees since my early printmaking career. I love the stories they tell and the mysteries they hide and sometimes reveal.'

Buckmaster-French print illustrations of the trees on actual leaves, emphasizing how complicated and ambivalent our relationship with, and use of trees is. For Alex Faulkner the wood has always been a place of refuge and of transformation. A place to return to or escape from. Deciduous trees offer hope in literature – in religion, grace. She is comfortable with these homely myths and their place in our world. Close by, Lesley Slight reminds us of Maurice Butterworth's poem *Oak Tree Placid Empire* which eloquently explains why she paint trees. Gary Cook's work focuses on ancient trees and the wildlife associated with them. Up to 2,300 species, from birds to beetles, fungi to lichen depend on oak trees. 326 species live only on oak. 'Yet shamefully' he says, 'our actions are threatening trees which means our once vast ancient woodlands now cover just 2% of the UK.'

Alex Eagan's romantic works are a subconscious love story. She was drawn at first by the physical attraction of trees, their beautiful structure and breathtaking size. She wants to be with trees as they make her feel good, alive and aware. By contrast Sarah Lowe's beautifully painted dark mysteries offer us the reassurance that in some inexplicable way, despite their darkness, trees are also our protectors and friends.

Angela Summerfield's *Towards a Kinder Form of Nature* celebrates landscape painting with intense colour, sharp detail and a surreal atmosphere - simultaneously seducing

and warning us. Paul Finn asks us to reflect that nothing is as it seems, as we meander through his secretive and surprising landscapes, Frank Creber has cycled through Victoria Park for thirty years. His children have grown up playing in the park. 'We are often unaware of the trees, however they are always shaping our activity; enclosing us in contemplation and releasing us into open space for sport. They are intrinsic to our health and well-being.'

Natasha Lien's experiences of the magical spaces of Greece and North Africa, show that trees really are the lungs of the world. Even though millions of them around the planet are lost through fire. Ferha Farooqui's diptych *An inconvenience of trees* is a romantic evocation of life in the city – the noise, the crowds and the colour – in which her trees are blue. Farooqui highlights our complex relationships with trees. They shed leaves, attract birds and their noxious droppings and cast unwelcome shadows. Being rendered in blue, they become the most important aspect of the work. In this work she conveys the disappearance of two local trees in East London. Stella Carr's work sees city trees as the defining presence of London streets. Across European cities, trees have become bound up in perceptions of national heritage and character. In London they have become an ecological touchstone, exemplified in Carr's elegant work.

Amongst the exhibitors there are those, who are first and foremost painters of situations. Julie Held's work looks at trees in the urban setting. Grant Watson works directly on the canvas. Trees remind him of a natural world lying beneath the concrete. *In Light up my soul*, Michael Johnson hints at the way he converses with them through the multitude of meanings in his work. He respects that trees stand as themselves, unburdened by any of his impositions. To Susanne du Toit, trees prove to be a perfect vehicle for the expression of human emotion. In her recent work, trees in London are recorded and remembered, the buildings becoming subservient.

Melissa Scott-Miller paints the London she sees. Trees are always part of her vision, accommodating the buildings around them as their roots burst through the paving stones, their leaves providing shade for the city dwellers. For Rachel Sargent trees provide the fixed points against which we measure the shifting scenes between them. Her trees fix constant shapes against a fluctuating backdrop of leaves and light.

Finally, to quote Michael Major: 'In London we have trees squeezed into the tightest spaces and the same trees in our parks and gardens shaping the light and air around us. This duality of habitat enriches my painterly approach to our city.'

Philippa Beale

Vaux en Couhé

19th February 2020

Editorial advice by Peter Ursem

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Under the Greenwood, Picturing the British Tree
Sansom & Company ISBN 000002054

The Arborealists, The Art of the Tree
Sansom & Co 2016 ISBN 978-1-908326-86-7

The Arborealists – The Art Of Trees 2017
Plato Beale Productions (French/English) ISBN 978-0-9555510-5-5

Drawn to London - Within the Shadow of the Tower 2018
Plato-Beale Productions ISBN 978-0-9555510-7-9

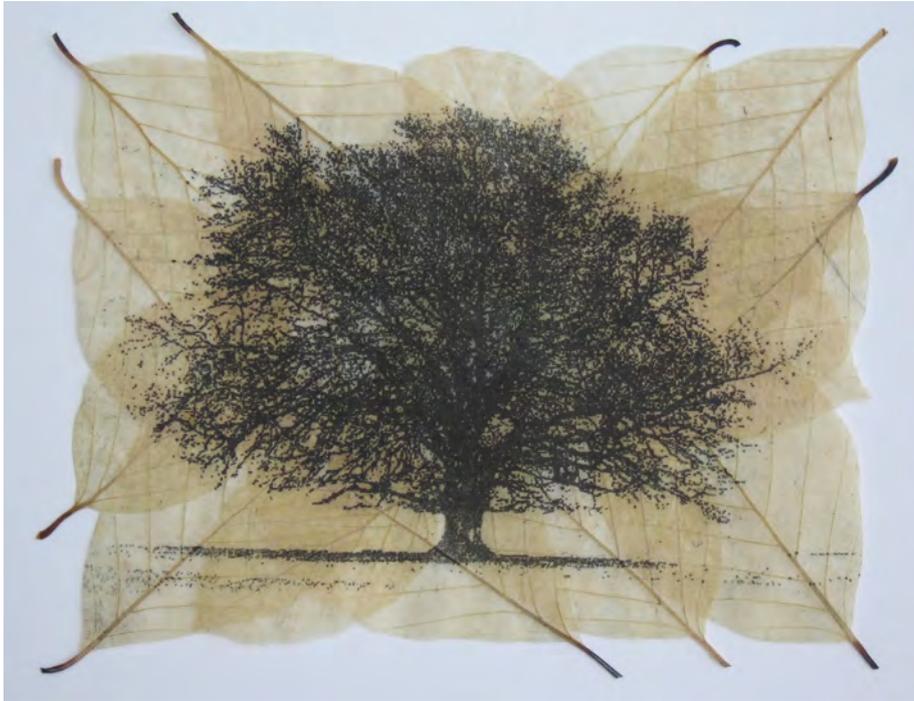
Philippa Beale 'Contrasts' 2019
Oil on printed canvas
69 x 95 cm



John Blandy
Following a Lime tree 'The Fall' 2019
Pastel on paper
131 x 138 cm



Buckmaster French 'Fagus II' 2013
Etching on Beech leaves
25 x 27 cm



Buckmaster French 'Ilex Aquifolium' 2016
Etching on Holly leaves
28 x 27 cm

Stella Carr 'Can Nature Live Longer, Not Without Love' 2019
Oil
72 x 99 cm



Tim Craven 'Wigmore Castle' 2015
Watercolour
40 x56 cm



Annabel Cullen 'London Plane, Wandsworth' 2017
Charcoal
74 x 56 cm



Annabel Cullen 'Horse Chestnut, Wandsworth' 2016
Charcoal and ink
71 x 52 cm



Alex Eagan 'Hints of Gladness' 2019
Acrylic on board
90cm x 60cm



Paul Finn 'Path' 2020
Oil on Panel
90 x 70 cm



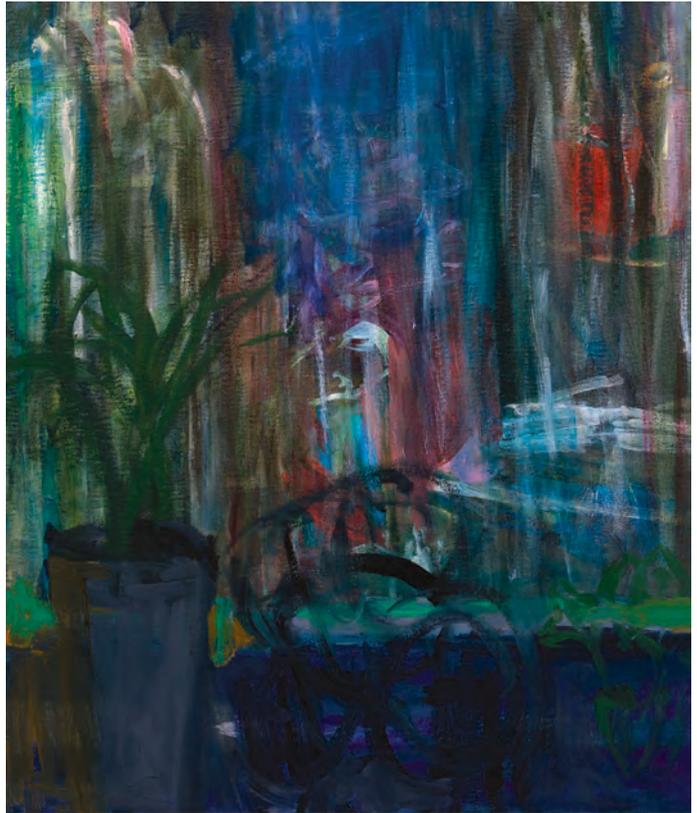
Paul Finn 'Oxleas Wood' 2020
Oil on Linen
90x70



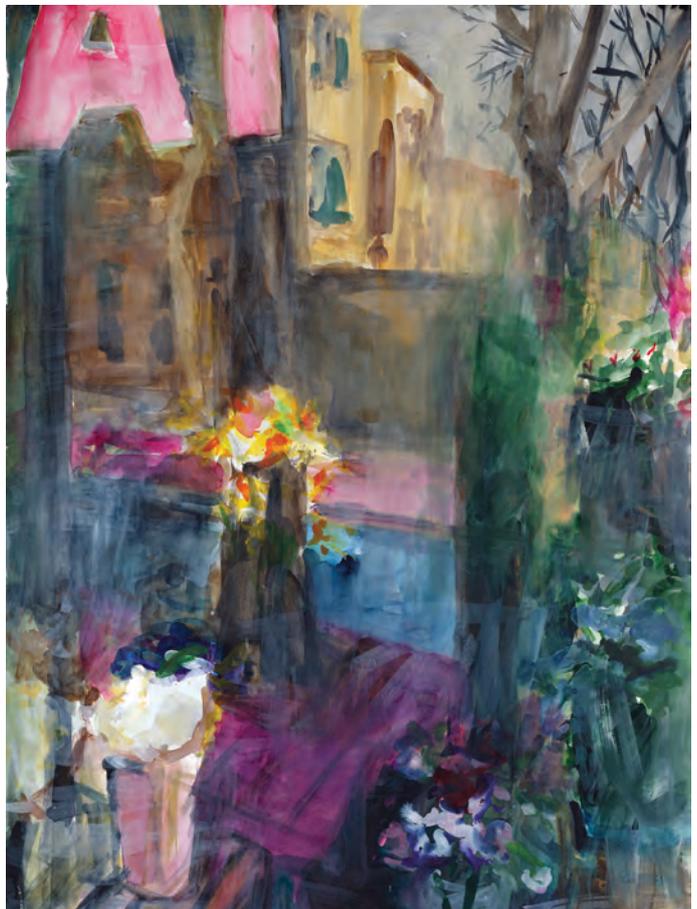
Kerry Harding 'Beacon Pine iii' 2019
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm



Julie Held 'Valentine's day' 2020
Watercolour on paper
82 x 66 cm



Julie Held 'Fireworks In The City' 2020
Acrylic and Oil on canvas
112 x 91.5 cm



Natasha Lien 'Almirikia Trees, Skala Eressos, Greece' 2018
Oil on canvas
104 x 66 cm



Natasha Lien 'Morning Draa Valley in Spring, Morocco' 2019
Oil on canvas
104 x 66 cm



Paul Ridyard Untitled (Canifern) 2015
Pencil on Paper mounted on Dibond
100 x 70 cm



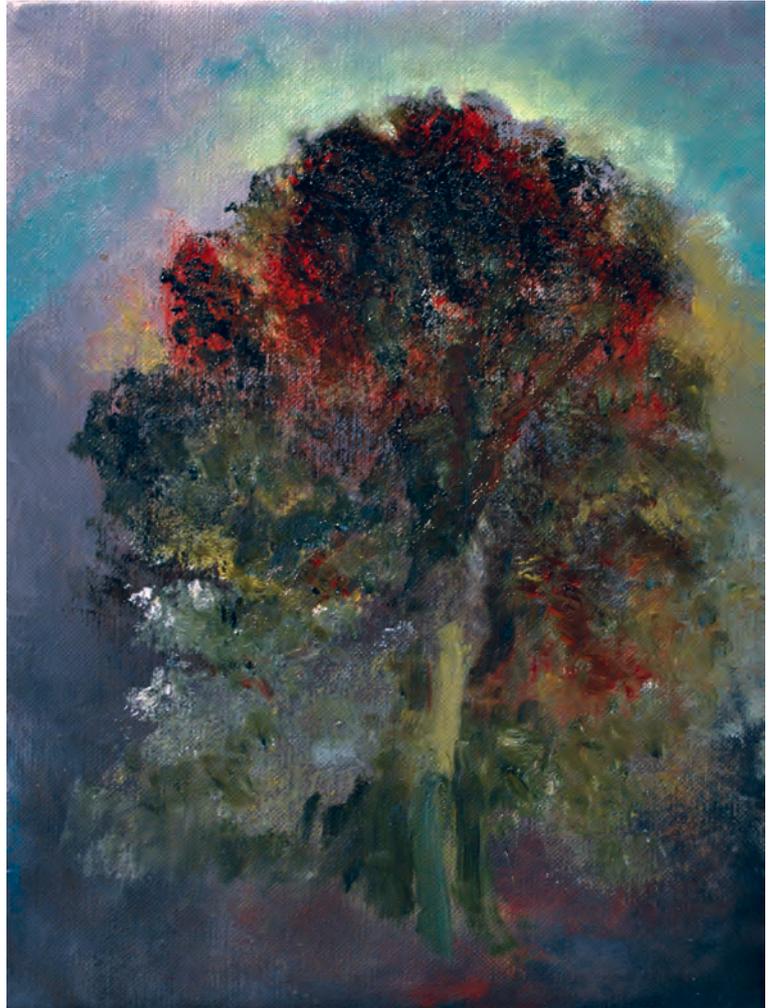
Paul Ridyard 'Root Ball II' 2015
Pencil on paper mounted on Dibond
113 x 122 cm



Nahem Shoa "London is my forest" 2020
Ink on Linen
101 x 76 cm



Lesley Slight "Tree Study" 2019
Oil on linen
30 X 20 cm



Lesley Slight "Sunset walk" 2017
Oil on linen
40 x 80 cm



Angela Summerfield 'Towards a kinder form of nature' (1) 2018
Oil on linen canvas
80x80cm



Peter Ursem 'At Blackfriars' 2020
Lino print
45 x 36 cm



Sharon Beavan 'The View from Rotherfield Street, Looking West' 2002.
Pencil on paper.
39 x 32 cm



Frank Creber 'Pagoda at Vicky Park' 2019
Mixed media
90 x 90 cm



Susanne du Toit 'Wellington Sequoias' 2007
Oil on canvas
100 x 100 cm



Susanne du Toit 'Hampstead Heath' 2007
Oil on canvas
50 x 50 cm



Ferha Farooqui 'An inconvenience of trees' Diptych 2020
Acrylic glaze on wood panel
60 x 120 cm



Annette Fernando 'I told you this would be true beneath the trees' 2020

Video



Michael Johnson 'Orchard, Fenton House' 2019,
Oil on board
22 x 32 cm



Michael Johnson 'Orchard, Fenton House 2' 2019
Oil on board
22 x 32 cm



Sarah Lowe 'Guardian of the carpark' 2020
Oil paint on panel
30 x 30 cm



Michael Major 'The Tree and Tower' 2019
Oil on canvas
21 x 26 cm



Michael Major "Blackfriars Garden" 2019
Oil on canvas
26 x 21 cm



Elizabeth McCarten 'Come Back' 2019
Oil on paper
65 x 65 cm



Melissa Scott-Miller 'Early Autumn, Highbury New Park' 2019
Oil on canvas
80 x 100 cm



Melissa Scott-Miller 'Cherry Blossom tree against Islington red bricks' 2019
Oil on canvas
51 x 61 cm



Grant Watson 'The climbing tree' 2020
Oil on Fabriano tela
37.5 x 32.5 cm



Grant Watson 'Every time you are near' 2020
Oil on Canvas
61 x 76.3 cm



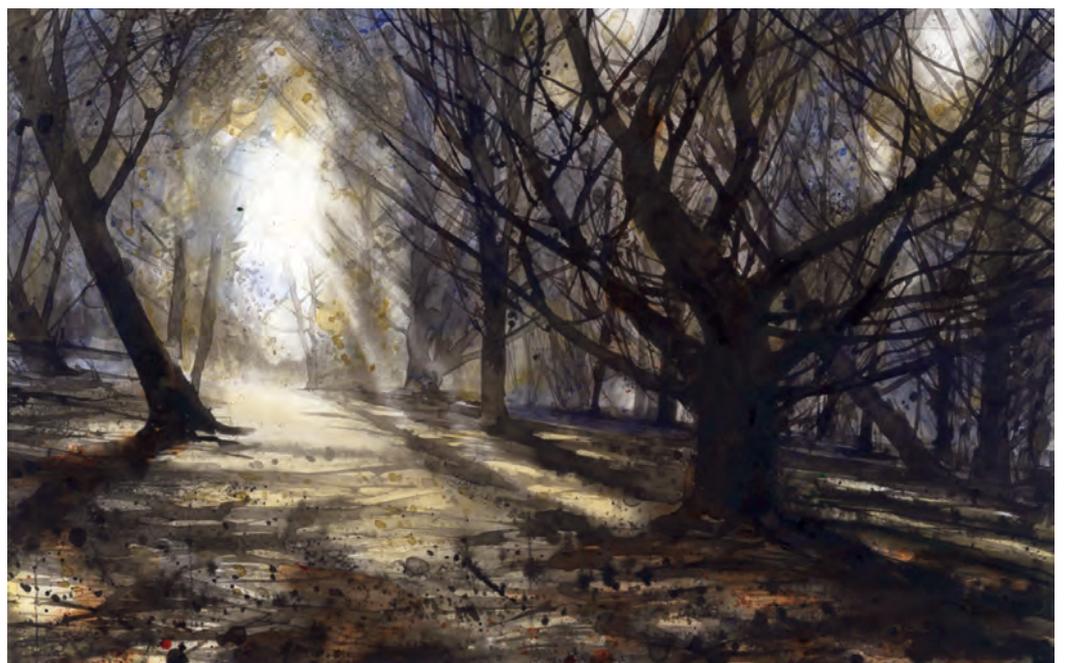
Day Bowman 'Sunken Forest 1' 2020
Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas
26 x 30 4 cm



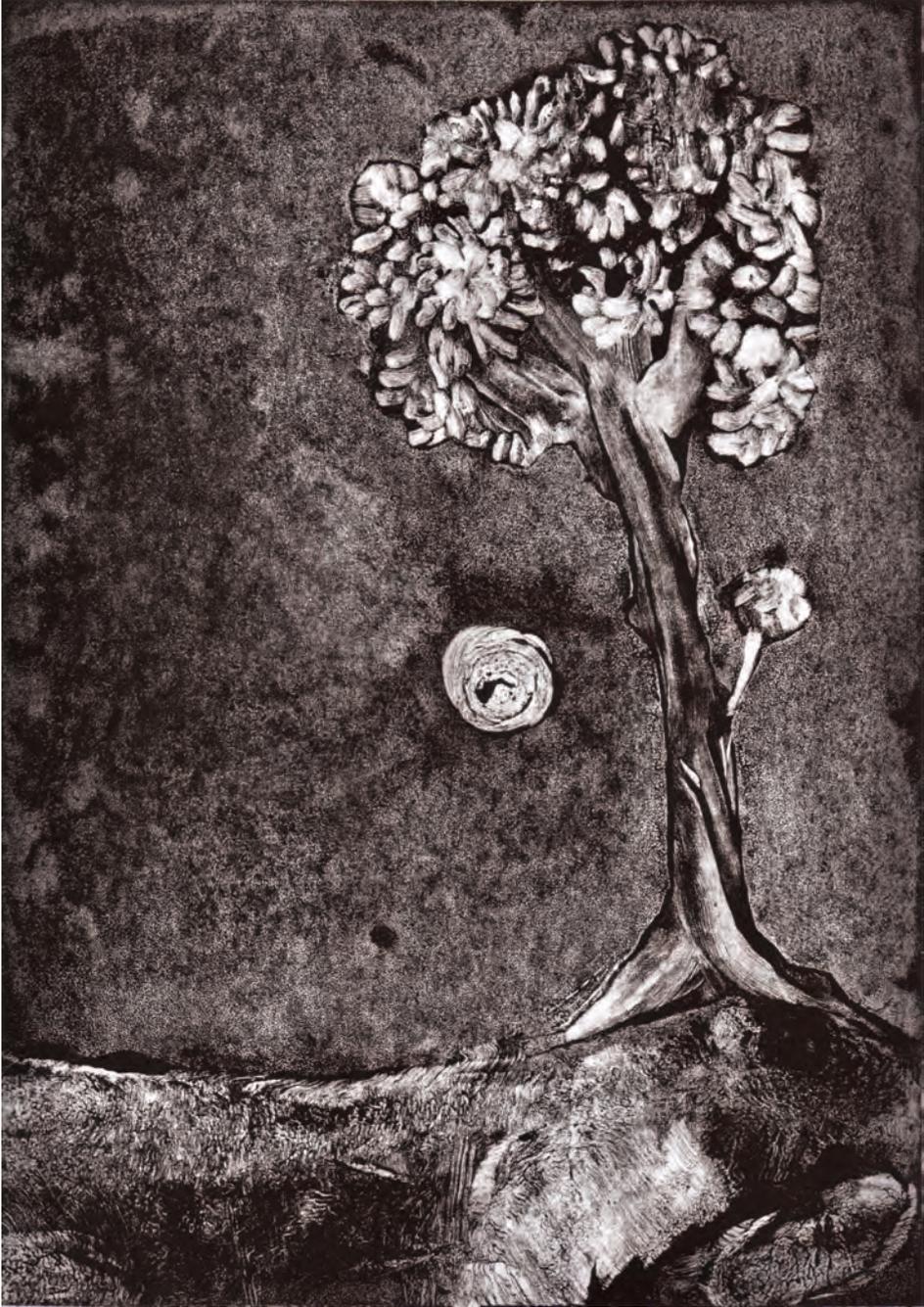
Gary Cook 'Yew Light' 2020
Ink, watercolour and charcoal
28 x 39 cm



Gary Cook 'Barn Elms Copse' 2020
Ink, watercolour and charcoal
28 x 39 cm



Alex Faulkner 'A New Kind of Tree'
Oil paint/ink on paper and oak frame
56 cm x 44 cm



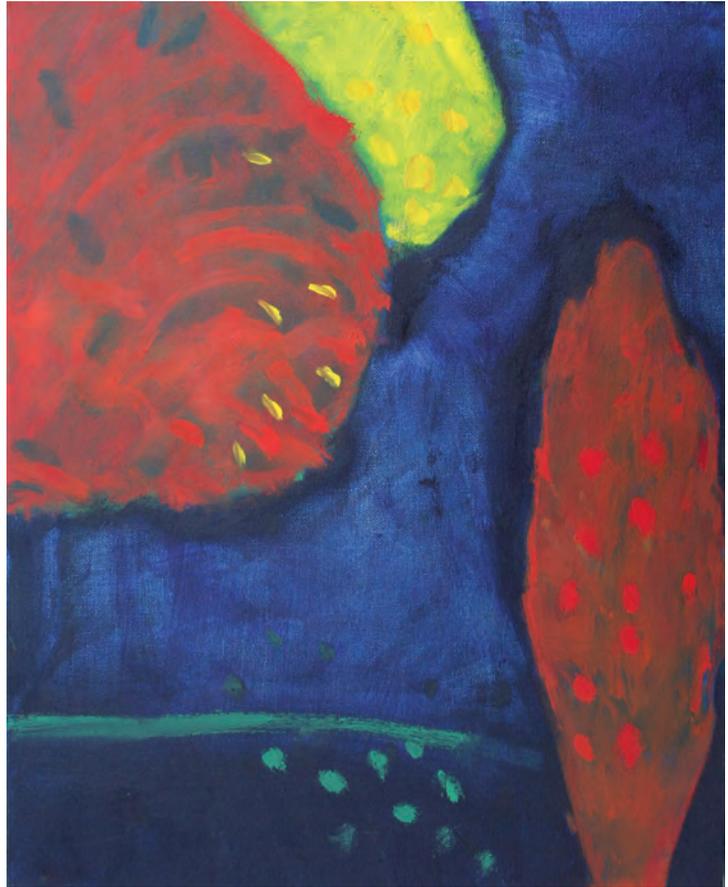
Elizabeth Hannaford 'Big Tree London' 2020
Oil on unprimed linen
120 x 120 x 5 cm



Karen Keogh 'The Holme Oak' 2018
3 plate etching
40 x 30 cm



Ursula Leach 'Path Through' 2018
Oil on canvas
40 x 50 cm



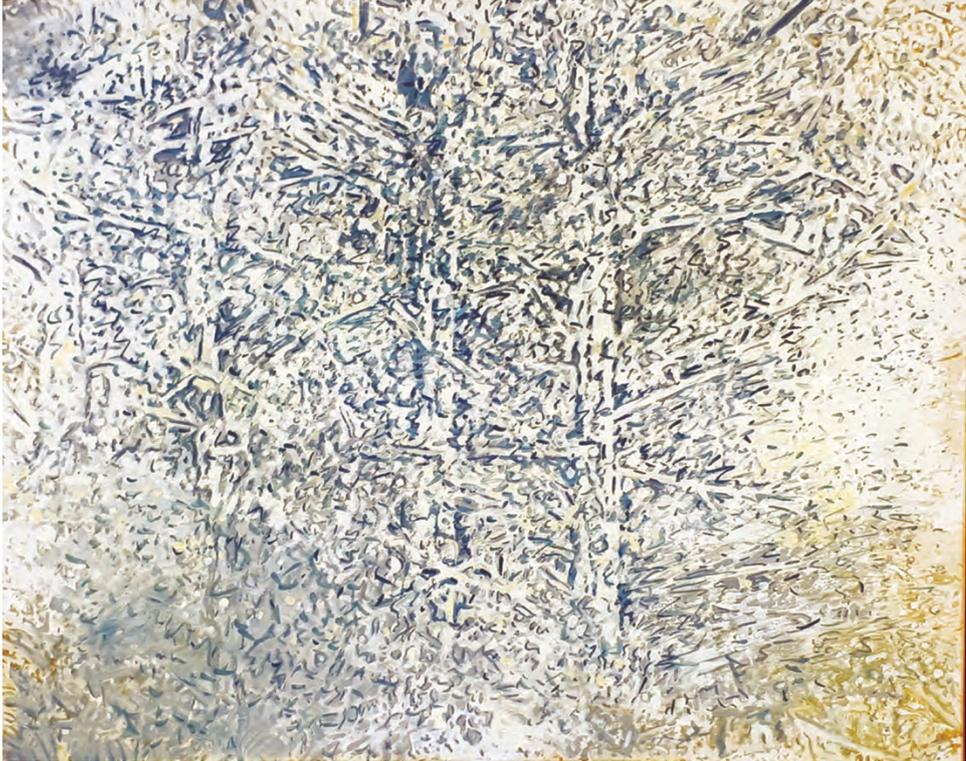
Ursula Leach 'Three Trees Autumn' 2018
Oil on Canvas
50 x 40 cm



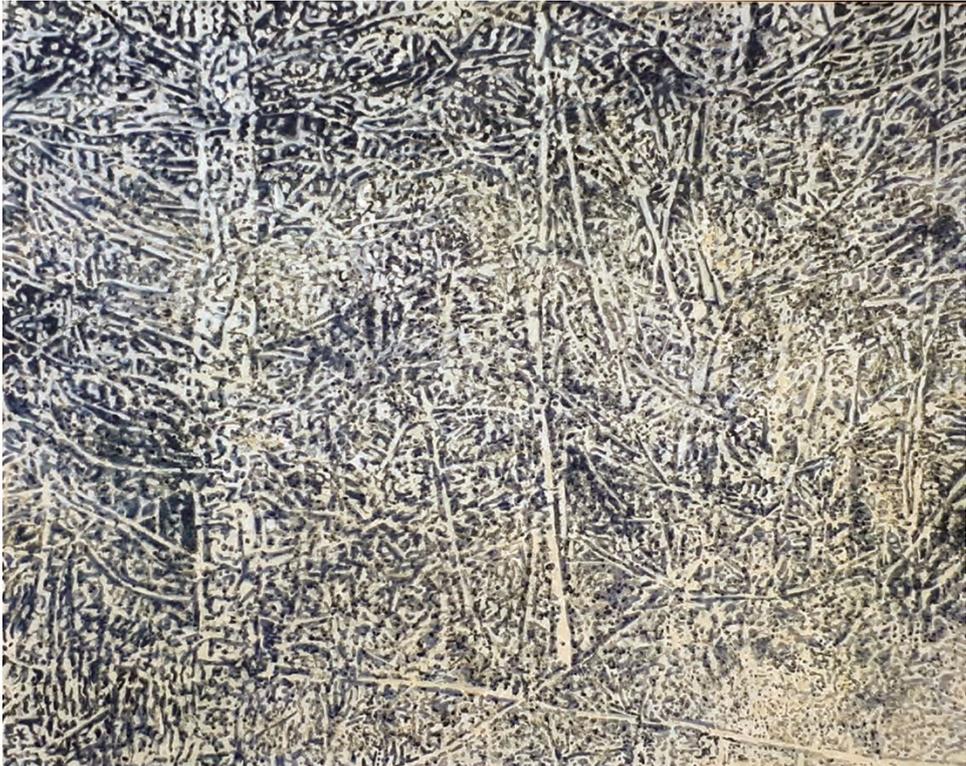
Pat Phippard 'Summer, Inner Hebrides' 2018
Watercolour
23 x 30 cm



Angela Rumble 'Larches 1' 2019
Oil on canvas
64 x 80 cm



Angela Rumble 'Larches 2' 2019
Oil on canvas
64 x 80 cm



Rachel Sargent 'Holding the light' 2019
Mixed Media
44 x 34 cm



Susan Shields 'Dog walkers, Barnsbury, Islington' 2020
Monoprint
50 x 40 cm



Les Williams 'St Paul's from New Change' 2020
Pen and wash
40 x 30 cm



Les Williams 'View across the forest' 2020
Pen and wash
30 x 40 cm

