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November 2013

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TREES, *SACRED AND MUNDANE*



In many ancient cultures and religions, trees were associated with a range of sacred and metaphoric values. From an abode of nature spirits to the biblical tree of the knowledge of good and evil, from a symbol of life to the raw material for totem poles, trees have inspired awe, fear, and love in equal parts. Today, for many people, trees are also emblematic of our relationship to nature, especially our stewardship of the environment in general. Photographers Joyce Tenneson, Gifford Ewing, and Gary M. Green approach the subject of trees in very different ways, from sublime to picturesque and near-dystopian. Their images reveal greatly divergent ideas about beauty and what constitutes a picture-worthy subject.

JOYCE TENNESON
GIFFORD EWING
GARY M. GREEN



JOYCE TENNESON

Born in Weston, Massachusetts, world-renowned photographer Joyce Tenneson now lives in Rockport. Her work has been included in exhibitions internationally and is part of many public and private collections. Tenneson's portraits have appeared on the covers of magazines that include *Time*, *Life*, *Esquire*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. Sixteen books of her images have been published so far, including the bestseller *Wise Women*. Tenneson is the recipient of numerous awards, including the International Center of Photography's Infinity Award for best applied photography in 1989, the Lucie Award for Professional Fine Art Photographer of the Year in 2005, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from Professional Photographers of America in 2012, among others. Tenneson was a presenter at the Polish Foto Art Festival earlier this year and will have a major retrospective at the Fotografiska Museum in Stockholm, Sweden, next year. She is represented by the Dowling Walsh Gallery in Rockland, A Gallery for Fine Photography in New Orleans, and the Holden Luntz Gallery in Palm Beach.

Tenneson may be best known for her inspirational and deeply empathic portraits, but she has also photographed flowers and shells to illuminate themes such as wisdom, intimacy, and transcendence. Tenneson has the rare vision to see the beauty in everything and everyone and make it visible to all of us. Whether portraying the nude or barely clothed human body at all stages of life, capturing sensitive and sometimes daring portraits of celebrities or ordinary people, or creating hauntingly beautiful images of flowers full of sensuous delicacy, Tenneson's photographs are immediately recognized as hers. Although her style varies, it is always perfectly attuned to the tenor of a series, ranging from ethereal, as if the image was created by nothing but breath, to relatively straightforward black and white. While Tenneson seems

in complete control of the photographic outcome, she says of her portraits, "My camera is a witness. It holds a light up for my subjects to help them feel their own essence, and gives them the courage to collaborate in the recording of these revelations." Tenneson's are works of great personal conviction and deep feeling, expressing her interest in discovering essences of our being, whether in natural forms, individual persons, or elemental relationships between people. While looking for such universals, her images succeed in remaining true to the specific as well.

Following an early series of tree images in the 1970s, she has recently revisited the subject under the title *Trees and the Alchemy of Light*. It is the rich symbolism of trees and their suggestion of the deep, mystical interconnection of all of life that

interests Tenneson. "As with my people portraits, I seek to reveal, in a single frame, the complex lives of trees—including their hardships and tragedies." Floating against a background of hand-applied gold leaf, individual trees or groups of them are portrayed in an often hazy atmosphere of uncertain depth. Some of the trees spread their crowns protectively, some are misshapen by natural or human force, while others seem to exude an aura of kindly authority, and still others appear bent by sadness. Referencing the ancient use of gold in sacred imagery, Tenneson's photographs possess the aura of icons and project an undeniable mystery. About *Twin Birches* Tenneson says, "This image haunts me. Looking at it from across the room, it transports me to a magical realm—outside of time somewhere, but with its own reality."



■ *Twin Birches*, 2012, mixed media on Plexiglass, 54" x 39," Courtesy of Dowling Walsh Gallery