

NEWS RELEASE

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***Arboreal*, Oil Paintings by Judith Peck, on View Through August 15 at Adkins Arboretum**

A slim woman lies tucked between the roots of a huge sycamore tree in Judith Peck's haunting oil painting "Give Me Shelter." Why she is there is a mystery, but a compelling story slowly unfolds in Peck's exhibit, *Arboreal*, on view at Adkins Arboretum's Visitor's Center through August 15. There will be a reception to meet the artist on Sat., July 13 from 2 to 4 p.m.



Judith Peck, *Give Me Shelter*, diptych, oil on board, 40" x 60"

The woman appears in many of these paintings, but it's actually the sycamore that is the central

character. Peck has painted it in summer and winter, in sunlight and mist, during floods and when fire threatens. She visits it frequently at Riverbend Park on the Potomac River near her home in Great Falls, Va., and readily admits it has become something of an obsession.

"Anyone who passes this tree on the mail trail notices it immediately," she said. "I feel this tree has elements that can represent many trees—the bark has varied textures and colors, the tree has old dying parts as well as young shoots, the roots are prominent and it is fun to paint. However, I am not painting about a tree, I am letting the trunk and roots stand as an allegory for the climate challenges we are facing."

An allegory is a story or narrative that can reveal larger meanings, and Peck is using the tree to explore both life's vulnerabilities and its tenacity. Lovingly rendering its gnarled roots and trunk, the pinkish wounds left by impacts of debris when the river was in flood and new green leaves

sprouting from slim shoots near its base, she captures the aliveness of the tree. You can practically feel the texture of its bark and smell the earthiness that surrounds it.

As an allegorical realist who uses her considerable skill as a painter to convey the tree's sturdy power and detail its colorful nuances, she evokes the rich symbolism of trees as representatives of strength, endurance, resilience and growth, all intimately connected with the natural cycles of life and death.

The woman is always shown close to the tree, as if seeking refuge there. Her gestures and the twists of her body echo the shapes of the sycamore's trunk and roots, but her face and positions tenderly disclose apprehension and distress, even as she seems to be drawing strength from the tree itself.

"Artist models are employed to help me convey an idea or narrative," Peck explained. "Often, I use the same model for a whole series. I feel this ties the ideas together and helps the narrative to flow. I've used this same method with my tree series. This tree is shown in drought and flood conditions, standing tall despite all that it has endured, with a model seeking its shelter, protection, food."

Not only a noteworthy painter whose work is exhibited frequently and included in collections internationally, Peck is a consummate storyteller, adept at capturing the subtleties in the woman's face and gestures so that they speak volumes. Likewise, she conveys the tree as a strong, enduring persona that has persevered through all weathers and seasons.

An allegory can be far more powerful than dry facts, and Peck's paintings have a way of telling stories that get under your skin before you even realize their import. Although these paintings never make any overt statements, they convey a complex narrative about the relationship of humans and trees, compellingly bringing to mind the multiple threats imposed by looming climate change.

"I see this tree as a microcosm of earth as well as a symbol of our lives," Peck said. "Trees are said to be the lungs of our planet. Their importance cannot be underestimated. They are beautiful to look at and we need them."

This show is part of Adkins Arboretum's ongoing exhibition series of work on natural themes by regional artists. It is on view through August 15 at the Arboretum Visitor's Center located at 12610 Eveland Road near Tuckahoe State Park in Ridgely. Contact the Arboretum at 410-634-2847, ext. 100 or info@adkinsarboretum.org for gallery hours.

A 400-acre native garden and preserve, Adkins Arboretum provides exceptional experiences in nature to promote environmental stewardship.

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Adkins Arboretum is a 400-acre native garden and preserve at the headwaters of the Tuckahoe Creek in Caroline County. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 100.

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