

Drawings are made for many reasons: warm-up exercises, studies for another work, notes on observations, explorations of a theme, expressive responses to a stimulus, and any of these can be independent works in their own right. The best observational drawings come straight from eye to hand, like unpretentious speech, declaring “this is what I saw, and how I saw it.” *Maine Drawings*, by Beverly Rhoads, possess this quality, but that does not mean they are mere shadows of their subjects. It is the *way* Rhoads saw what she saw that gives us more.

For example, we know that the horizontal option for a digital word document format is called “Landscape,” distinguishing it from the vertical option, called “Portrait”. This is a modern reminder of how sweeping and persistent traditions can be. But in her *Maine Drawings*, Rhoads subverts the placid, horizontal landscape tradition by substituting a consistently less stable vertical orientation. It is no wonder that they have some of the distinctive quality of portraits. Further, the comfortable distance common in panoramic landscapes is gone, replaced by closeup shots filled with dynamic diagonals. The agitated line, twisting forms, and often stark contrasts of light and shadow, put us in the presence of a vibrantly alive and combative Nature, wrestling out its existence. A skilled figurative artist, it is not surprising to see Rhoads attracted to the trunks and limbs of trees rather than to their foliage. Like Laocoön, these trees seem tangled by serpentine branches; or perhaps it is some drunken bacchanal instead, wild and teetering. Ancient Greek metaphors are permitted, since Pan is the god of the woodlands, a god whose name is literally at the root of panic.

And exposed roots play a prominent part here, for these trees seem not rooted and inanimate, but striding, careening, and always off-balance. Rhoads’ subjects, with their long lines of aching slow and cautious growth, becoming sweeping and gestural in her drawings, moving, in both senses of the word. She speeds up their time so that we can relate to them more as living, vivified beings, deserving of better care than we usually offer; they purify our air, we make them into paper and pencils. *Maine Drawings* closes that circle.

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