

# The Language of Branches

Patricia Ladd Carega Gallery, August 2016

New Hampshire, USA

## *Synopsis:*

*Anna Jeretic will tell us about her fascination with the shapes of branches, as if they were a kind of script. In her paintings and etchings she tries to bring out their various expressions as if they have a calligraphy of their own. One can “read” them as one reads a book.*

*Where she lives, in and around a studio in the woods near the forest of Fontainebleau in France, there is a lot to read. These artistic experiences with branches and light piercing the leaves lead her to questions about art itself and how the contemporary art world is evolving today in the wake of the environmental crisis. She has written several essays on the subject, as a complement to her visual work, and will share some of her main ideas with us.*

Thank you for receiving me here. Ten years ago, I had a show here, and the subject of the paintings leaned more on fantasy, they were more child-like.

Most recently I've been preoccupied with the different shapes branches and trees produce, and when I see one or a group of trees that are particularly expressive, I feel like painting them, sometimes making both a painting or an

etching of them. I'm living in a good place for this, because I live near the Fontainebleau forest. As you drive by there are branches leaning down to greet you, as depicted in this painting. And then I have a wild garden, where the grasses grow tall and catch the light. The light is particular in the area in general, well captured by the Barbizon painters, such as Theodore Rousseau's rainbow. I also live near the Fontainebleau castle and Paris. Here the trees are more cultivated, their branches are sawn off, or they are encouraged to make arks, like in the Fontainebleau castle park.

A little history: If you look at the art of the past, trees and their expressive branches are used as compositional devices, to have Saint Sebastian leaning on a tree for example. In the Baptism by Piero della Francesca, you have the Christ figure, and you have a tree next to it. They are esthetic equals. In Renaissance paintings, I like to look

at how the trees are painted, and they sometimes be very expressive and diverse, not just ways to fill up the space, but it really looks like the painter took joy in painting them.

Other painters seem bored with the leaves, they are all made in one way, are repeated, like in David, who look like they can't wait to finish with them; the people being the main concern.

When I took a family trip to Indonesia and took the boat along a river in Borneo, I understood the value of branches as a kind of writing.

I especially like to draw branches against the sky as we proceed down the river, sometimes with the silhouette of a proboscis monkey or a calao hornbill. The arachnidan details of the branches appear above the central mass of green suggest writing. The echo of an idea appears.

After getting in the habit of observing them a lot, it's as if some abstract intimate decrypting begins, and then it becomes more and more stimulating, as if taking a walk in the woods is like reading a book.

And then the Light plays a strong role in giving this strength.

In some cases, the branches evoke the complexity of thought, and the light is a kind of clarity brought into those thoughts. Other times, branches seem free.

There seems to be two types of visual, ones that bring a sense of chaos and others unity. With branches and light, both expressions are possible.

I enjoy painting leaves and branches against the sky. I alternate between graphics and abstract sources of light. It's like going from artistic challenge to release. Here I notice all the abstract shapes that appear between the lines.

There's a moment when you I stop copying and allow myself to invent. I like to say that the moment we go into a kind of a oblivious state of mind, we are letting our subconscious act, and thereby allow this natural language to express itself. It's a kind of paradox: the veering off into invention is when the artist extols nature the best. The artist is only an instrument to the underlying natural forces.

Sometimes I feel I'm an apprentice to the objectives of

Asian art, letting go of an academic style, but to paint the way nature would paint. This is a goal for a life-time.

Hokusai says he was just beginning to learn nature's language at 73. And I saw how he would paint a tree. The bark was calligraphy.

There has always been a problem in Western art to integrate writing in images. There is almost a war between them. It may be because the ideograms are based on images from nature, and our letters do not look great when they are painted, they originated in more utilitarian circumstances. But it also has to do with the way we perceive nature. In the great 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings in Germany and the United States, there was a separation between humans and the environment. In Asian painting there was an integration, a unity.

In the Louvre you can find tablets from 4000 BC, and the writing are branches, trees.

These paintings are often repeated in etchings. The branch, the tree or the group of trees leave a strong visual impression so I copy this. Then I realize the most difficult part is sometimes the background, because the light and color are what set up the idea. In etching the color and light also play an important role to bring out this compact succinct idea, which is unusual in the world of etching, which is an essentially graphic art.

Etching. In the printmaking there is even more chance for nature to come in. The technique I have chosen, sugar aquatint, with roll-overs in color bring sometimes very unexpected results.

One discovery I made this year, was when I painted on a copper plate some branches with light coming through them, there were quite a few shapes of birds in them, without realizing it. Then I started to see leaves as birds as well. So I began to wonder if painting is not like the original creation as well, the light, the plants, the birds, the mammals, the people...

Birds are symbolic of freedom.

It may be a healthy thing to integrate writing (and the world of thought) into our visual realm, and artists are very challenged by this.

Because the artistic image of thought itself is free, various, unmonotonous.

The reverse is true: if our visual world becomes an intellectual world as well, we may be saved. If we let nature integrate our thought structure. We come to the realization there is no separation and this will help us to keep us humble. If we can learn to be fascinated by everything, not only in the inspirational way, but through a kind of intellectual curiosity, what we see on the ground, here, there, as if we were reading a good book.