

REVIEW

# Exhibit could inspire Joyce Kilmer

Summit gallery displays trees as both metaphor and muse

ART

Among the Trees

**Where:** Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, 68 Elm St., Summit  
**When:** Through June 4. 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Fridays; 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays.  
**How much:** Free. Call (908) 273-9121 or visit [www.artcenternj.org](http://www.artcenternj.org).

BY DAN BISCHOFF  
 STAR-LEDGER STAFF

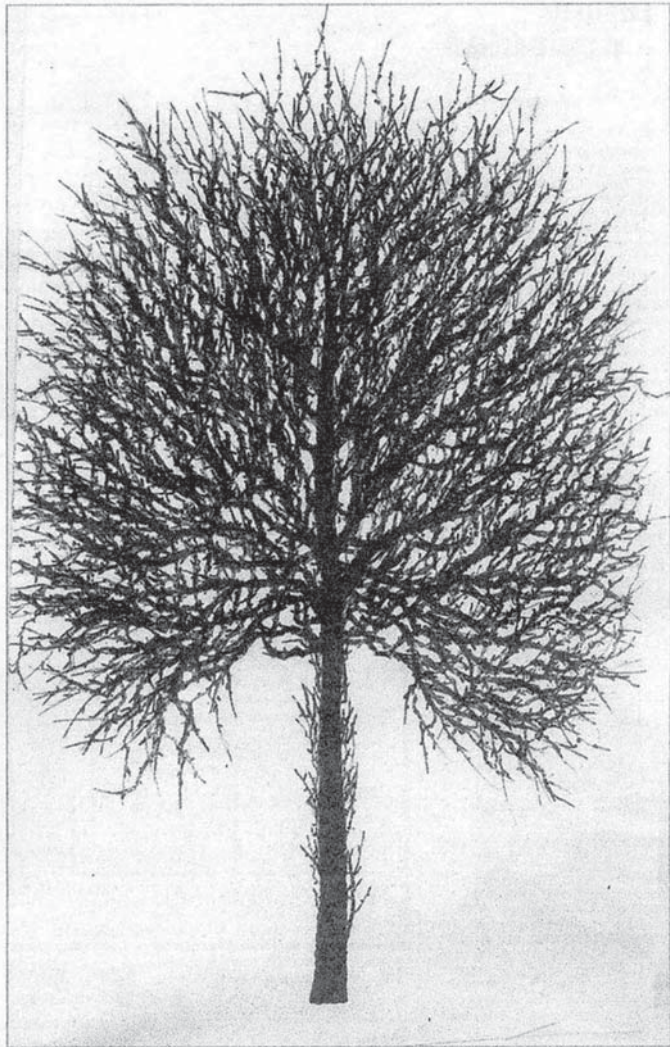
Trees are pretty — but what do they mean? As metaphor or just as themselves, trees mean everything. Germans give them personalities, Japanese miniaturize them, Americans take their pictures. Leafless, they are the skeleton of old age; arrayed in spring blooms they are the Impressionists' riot of palette-busting color.

And in the spring they make pleasant subjects for a pleasant show like "Among the Trees" now at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit through June 4.

For guest curator Kimberly Marrero, the theme is the tree as metaphor and muse for visual artists. The 27 artists, from as far away as Moscow and as close as Somers Point, make trees out of all sorts of things, cut them out of fast-food bags, maybe, or etch them on copper printed circuit board or paint them in three dimensions with dots of black ink suspended in clear resin (we'll come back to this one).

The only artist who did not make some sort of vegetable image is Brooklyn-based Jason Middlebrook, whose "Pileated Provider No. 2" is a motorized woodpecker mounted on the gallery wall that goes off, pockety-pock-pock-pock, every now and again.

The "Pileated Provider" is the most explicit work here suggesting that trees, as both metaphor and muse, have become vestigial in the past century or so. Once we walked



COURTESY OF ROBERT MILLER GALLERY

The "Among the Trees" exhibit at the Summit gallery includes "Titularia Cresceus," one of Dustin Yellin's labor-intensive resin-and-ink sculptures.

under great and spreading branches, like those we see in the video projection "Black Pulse Animation" and in the ink jet print on wax-strengthened tissues called "Structure of Thought 14," both by the Stern twins, Mike and Doug of Somers Point. Now, for the most part, we turn trees into paper bags, or simply release their carbon into the air, like spreading a friend's ashes in the wind.

That's hardly curator Marrero's fault, of course. In a show that is long on photography and works made from cut paper (like Jeff Grant's "Rural Spill," a paper town nestled in a paper forest that covers the center of the gallery floor), a generally upbeat tone is kept up throughout.

There are branches literally covered in rhinestones ("Community 4," by Marc Swanson), miniatures photographed to look like actual scenes (Lori Nix's "Treehouse"), even a jokey ceramic sculpture that takes Rip Van Winkle one nap further by showing a tree's roots overgrowing a sleeping man ("The

Arborist" by Bryan Crockett).

Really, one of the most appealing images in the show is a straight oil painting, "My Garden at 7 a.m." by Armando Morales, a picture of an enclosed courtyard in slanting tropical sun, the palms just touching the sunlight.

Dustin Yellin of New York makes the labor-intensive resin sculptures — a marvel in and of themselves, made by painting a thin layer of clear resin, placing a dot of black ink within it, then waiting for the resin to dry hard before adding another layer and repeating the process. He builds up marvelous black traceries that do look a lot like branches by this method, and in three dimensions, too. Think of them as polyure-pickled trees.



Jeff Grant's "Rural Spill" is a paper town nestled in a paper forest that covers the center of the gallery floor at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey.