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Roots of the Susquehanna River

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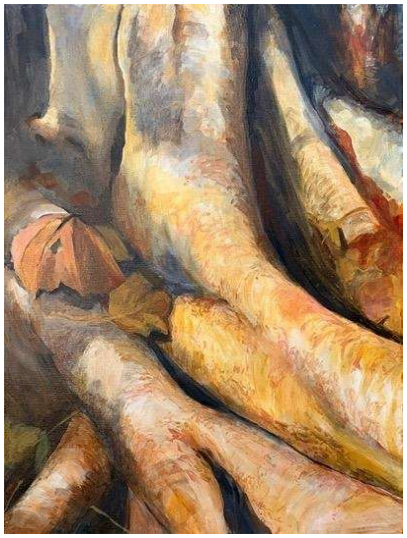
Abstract

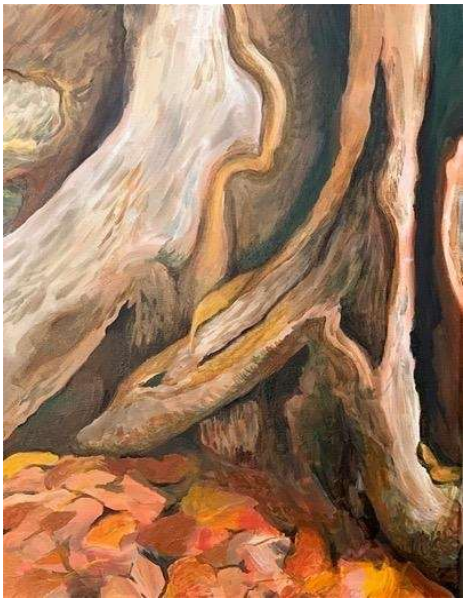
The purpose of this series was to reflect the beauty and strength seen in trees growing beside the Susquehanna River. Below the Conowingo Dam there is constant flooding caused by the release of water to control the flow of Susquehanna River. The flooding has caused erosion and has exposed the roots of the various trees that grow along the river. From observation, it is inspiring how the trees are still surviving after so many storms. For this landscape series, I wanted to explore closeup views of the root systems of different trees along the river.

Robert Louis Stevenson said, "It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanation from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit" (TreeClicks, 2021). The Susquehanna River traverses more than 700 miles from the start in Cooperstown, New York, and down to its connection with the Chesapeake Bay in Havre de Grace, Maryland. The Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay are connected to an ancient past. The Bay is part of the lower Susquehanna, a valley that the Atlantic Ocean has flooded for 15,000 years. The Susquehanna River supplies 20 billion gallons of freshwater into the Chesapeake Bay each day.

The Conowingo Dam is located on the lower Susquehanna River. During large storms and severe floods, the water flowing through the dam causes severe erosion below the dam. For this independent series, I wanted to explore the trees that grow along the lower Susquehanna River located on the last ten miles before the river empties into the Chesapeake Bay.



Photograph of *Foothold*. Williams, J. (2020). *Foothold*. Oil on canvas



Photograph of *Tenacity*. Williams, J. (2020). *Tenacity*. Oil on canvas

Photograph of *Leaf Fall*. Williams, J. (2020). *Leaf Fall*. Oil on canvas

Spring semester of 2021, for my final project in Advanced Painting, I painted a landscape series along the Susquehanna River. I painted plein air over several weeks within Susquehanna State Park. En plein air is a French expression meaning "in the open air," and refers to the act of painting outdoors with the artist's subject in full view. Painting outdoors allows an artist to incorporate natural light, color and observe the subject directly. I decided for this series I wanted my compositions to take a close-up view of the various trees growing along the Susquehanna river. My first step in my artistic process was to take multiple reference photos of the trees. I then drew sketches based on my photos. For the composition, I intentionally choose different types of trees to represent. The paintings were done in oil paint. I slowly built up the layers uses thin glazes almost similar to the way you paint in watercolor washes, which is a technique creating semi-transparent layer of color. A glaze in oil painting is a thin transparent or semi-transparent layer on a painting which modifies the appearance of the underlying color.

Photograph of *Tree Eye*. Williams, J. (2020). *Tree Eye*. Oil on canvas

When I meander along the Susquehanna River, a feeling of peace and tranquility comes over me as I see the massive trees that stretch their limbs overhead. It was a sunny Fall day when I went out to choose the trees to use in my series. The sunlight cast shadows over the leaves gracing the base of the tree and moss-strewn bark. On some of the trees, the roots wove in and out, creating a tangled

web of shapes and shadows. When I laid down on the ground to see the root system, I felt like I was looking into another universe or otherworldly planet.

I am reminded of how we have gone through so much this last year because of the pandemic. We have had to shelter in place, stay away from loved ones, and alter the natural flow of our life. I feel like we can take inspiration from the trees that have survived through the years, with all the ups and downs that come from flooding and erosion. Herman Hesse says, “Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth” (TreeClicks, 2021).

References

The 27 most inspirational quotes about trees. (2021). TreeClicks. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from https://www.treeclicks.com/most-inspirational-quotes-about-trees.

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