

The Complexity of Nature

by Parker Holland

How simple does a tree seem? When I look at a tree, I see an inanimate, virtually lifeless object. From the roots, up into the leaves, trees fail to exemplify any state of uniqueness. The tree, as it seems, is a boring entity. It does nothing, says nothing. People do not stare and marvel at trees. Recreating something so simple seems like a pointless task. If a tree seems lifeless, imagine what a recreation would look like. Creating an image of a tree that thoroughly captivates its viewers would present quite a challenge. But what if someone was able to accomplish such a difficult challenge? What if that same person could take not only trees, but nature as a whole, and give it life? Mirang Wonne, through her paintings and work in her *Fire Script* exhibit at the de Saisset museum, on display from April 10 to June 15, 2014, in Santa Clara, California, does just this: she exposes the beauty in nature.

Wonne torches images in a large mesh screen, using a product of nature (fire) to create vivid images of the natural world for us to wonder about. Her works are contemporary, and each person is entitled to their own interpretation, but it is hard not to marvel at her portrayal of nature. The exhibit is set up with a large piece with fourteen separate mesh screens hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the room, all portraying images of flowers. This is all one work of art, while her other pieces surround the center. Walking into the exhibit, you almost get a feel of a natural environment. Looking through the middle feels as though you are in a forest, full of large flowers, while her other works surround you (including images of trees, flowers, and other more ambiguous pieces). All of her “paintings” have a serene ambiance, making you feel as if you are alone in a quiet and peaceful world. Nearly all of her pieces contain curvy lines, and as you see these lines everywhere, you start to get a feel for the complexity of nature.

A piece that really stood out to me was a work called “BULKOT 9032” (2012). This piece hangs straight across as you walk into the room. The main feature of this painting is the large tree on a durable mesh screen. The trunk of the tree is not one large slab of wood lacking pattern and creativity; rather, the tree is made of many thin, copper-like flowing lines close together, stretching out to the rest of the tree. Many of the lines, near the top of the canvas, end up breaking off from the rest. All along the trunk, lines have broken off from the mass, revealing countless numbers of darker, purple/bluish flowers. A majority of the flowers are to the right side of the trunk. While this in itself gives the tree a distinctive, life-like feel, Wonne also adds a large painting on paper directly

behind the tree. The painting is made up of numerous bright colors, in no real distinctive pattern, almost splotchy. The colors were painted on, rather than torched. Without the tree in front, the painting would seem almost out of place. Through the tree, though, you can see the exquisite work that Wonne put into this painting. The colors are not completely visible through the first mesh screen, so they do not overtake the complexity of the tree. The colors add emphasis to the tree, giving it even more life. The beautiful colors seem to mesh with the picture, creating a gorgeous, vibrant image that adds to the prominence of nature in the room.

After viewing the exhibit, I could truly feel the beauty of nature surrounding me. Nature is so much more complex than we perceive it to be, and perhaps this is the message Wonne was trying to leave with her audience. The tree has so many exquisite features to it. The trees' leaves, for example, change colors during different seasons. they soak up sunlight, and give us the oxygen required for us to live. Each tree is unique and has different patterns than surrounding trees. Perhaps all of these things represent the several colors on the second mesh screen. Experiencing the unique creations of Mirang Wonne leaves you wondering, "What am I really seeing?" and forces you to question what you think is simple. At first I thought that trees were plain and boring, but viewing Wonne's work gave me a sense of curiosity about them. I realized how complex trees (and everything else created by nature) really are.