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Influences, Associations Abound in Brooks Show

By Edwin Howard

ONE OF THE PARTICULAR pleasures of art exhibitions is the opportunities they afford for tracing influences and associations. Just one of the many veins that can be followed in Memphis Brooks Museum of Art's superb 75th anniversary show "American Originals," leads from 17th century french landscapist

THE VISUAL DIMENSION

Claude Lorrain to the English master J.M.W. Turner to 19th century landscape artist Frederic Edwin Church (the only one of the artists actually featured in the show) to Memphis' own master painter Burton Callicott.

What links these otherwise highly individualized painters is their audacity in painting, not just reflected light, as most painters have been content to do, but the very source of light, the sun itself. Lorrain is credited with having been the first to do it; Turner was famous for it, and Church, who was familiar with Turner's engravings, borrowed the technique to impart a transcendental

message, linking light and faith. And that, as those who saw the Callicott retrospective at Brooks earlier this year, is just what the Memphis painter, who began with simple, light-haunted landscapes, clearly does with his latest paintings of light, particularly *One and Manifold No. 5*.

Another painting that leaps out at the viewer of this exhibition is Worthington Whittredge's pre-Impressionist masterpiece, *The Old Hunting Grounds*, painted in 1864. An art-historical connection similar to that of Church and Callicott, noted above, may be observed between Whittredge and contemporary Nashville painter Charles Brindley, whose works are currently on display at the Bingham-Kurts Gallery (see below). Both paint trees with uncanny skill, contrasting old gnarled ones in the foreground with fresh, luminous young ones in the background. In Whittredge's work, however, as in Church's, there seems to be a more overt symbolic spiritual message—that the forest is a kind of cathedral—along with obvious nostalgia for the vanishing Indian, symbolized by a decaying birchbark canoe in the foreground.

Lacking space and time to go into the other 39 paintings in the exhibi-

tion in anything approaching this detail, let me simply suggest that "American Originals" provides an unusually rich museum experience.

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THE ENDLESS (WE HOPE) cycle of death and renewal is represented by trees in Nashville artist Charles Brindley's "Points of Reference," an exhibition of oils on linen and graphite on paper at Bingham-Kurts Gallery, 766 S. White Station Road. We're all familiar with Joyce Kilmer's truism about trees, but it is no small matter (as Kilmer wanted us to know) to make a poem about a tree, and Brindley's exquisite paintings are visual poems of a high order.

Because I had just seen Worthington Whittredge's *The Old Hunting Grounds* at Brooks (see above), I was struck by his apparent influence on Brindley. There are striking similarities not only in subject and composition, but in the way Brindley uses the texture of the linen he paints on (Whittredge used canvas), layers his surfaces, and meticulously limns every line in the weathered bark of the dead trees that are the subjects of his elegiac paintings.

Typical, and perhaps best, of the lot is *Enclosure at Riverside*, his 5-by-6-

foot painting of a gnarled old dead tree, as sharply detailed as a Durer engraving, in front of a knoll surmounted by a luminous blur of leafy young trees. At the base of the old tree's skeleton, a multitude of pink wild flowers struggle up out of the rich rot.

Also on view at Bingham-Kurts through July 6 are marble, stone and wood sculptures by Memphis inimitable John McIntire, and a group of elegant Raku pottery vessels and terracotta sculptures of the female form by Mississippian Rod Moorhead.



Brindley's *Enclosure at Riverside*