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COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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If you go

What: Works by Charles Brindley
Where: Gallery 121, Leu Center for the Visual Arts, Belmont University
When: Through Aug. 14
Hours: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday
Contact: 460-6770

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

In addition to focusing on individual trees, Brindley paints bigger scenes such as *Landscape at New Market* in which he uses vivid colors to convey the essence of his subject.

Painter Brindley searches for the metaphysical amid the trees and stones

BY JONATHAN MARX
STAFF WRITER

Nature looms large in the work of artist Charles Brindley – not the serene landscapes so beloved of plein air painters, or the elemental forces captured in the canvases of J.M.W. Turner, but something even more rarified and ineffable.

In Brindley's graphite drawings and oil paintings, denuded trees rise up from the ground, their bent, poking branches forming an elaborate network of lines and textures. Stone outcroppings possess a monumental presense, their weathered surfaces draped in patches of light and a deep, unknowable darkness. Looking at these pieces, we know we are gazing upon something drawn from life, and yet they are imbued with an otherworldly quality.

"All art that moves people has some small measure of metaphysical property," the artist observes, "something that takes us beyond where we are at the moment, below the surface of substance. Sometimes it's sensed and not seen; that's what makes a piece of art great, I think."



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST
To create paintings such as *Beech Tree in Old Growth Forest*, Brindley spends time sitting quietly and contemplating his subjects.

It has been a decade since Brindley, 53, a Nashville native, was featured in a retrospective exhibit at the Tennessee State Museum. Much has changed in the city's art community since the late 1990s, but Brindley has continued to pursue and to refine his singular approach. Some of his recent work is on view at Belmont University's Leu Center for the Visual Arts, in conjunction with the Tennessee Arts Academy, an annual training and development program for art, theater and

music teachers. The public is invited to a reception honoring the artist, from 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday.

Now based in the nearby town of Adairville, KY, Brindley has eschewed the typical path of professional artist; he doesn't have gallery representation, and he's not affiliated with an institution of higher learning (though he does teach). Instead, he spends as much time as he can attuning himself to his subjects, even if it means sitting, just quietly, among the rocks and trees.

"I'm very process-oriented, as opposed to product-oriented," he says. "My work evolves in series, as a continuation of the different subjects I encounter. On one level, it is an evolution by which the pieces get better and more defined and heightened, but some pieces have become more abstract."

One example is his 2001 painting *The Green Man*, a close-up view of several stones, earthy yet brilliant with hues of yellow, green and brown.

"It starts out with extremely garish, vivid color and big shapes. I keep breaking

the composition down into smaller shapes, until it gets down to shapes that are an eighth of an inch, like pixels or tiny mosaics. Then I outline or contour each shape. A piece like that may take me 300 hours to complete."

Such dedication is an inherent part of the creative process for any artist, but it's at the core of Brindley's practice, not to mention his own life and experience.

"I'm pushing for that shift of consciousness that gives the answer to a problem," he says, "I relate it to a prayer experience. We would all like to think we could pray and pray one night, and then God just delivers the answer, but it doesn't quite work that way. We have to make that commitment, we have to keep going back and pray a lot, because you don't get a solution from meditating 10 minutes a day."

"In artistic development, just like with other things in life, you have to keep knocking on the door."

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