

THE TREE AROUND THE CORNER



BARBARA KERNE



Carving a woodcut in the studio.

THE TREE AROUND THE CORNER
Paintings and Woodcuts

BARBARA KERNE

February 7 – May 19, 2024

American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC

Curated by Vivienne M. Lassman



Night Village, 1994. Oil on linen, 25 x 24 in.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	
Jack Rasmussen	page 7
The Tree Around the Corner	
Barbara Kerne	page 9
Curator's Introduction	
Vivienne M. Lassman	page 10
The Tree Around the Corner: Paintings and Woodcuts	
Barbara Kerne	
<i>The Tree Connection</i>	page 13
<i>Column: Self-Portrait as a Tree</i>	page 32
<i>Woodcut Printmaking</i>	page 35
<i>Pulp Painting</i>	page 45
Barbara Kerne: Biography	page 52
Vivienne M. Lassman: Biography	page 57



FOREWORD

Official Washington and the art it produced in the second half of the twentieth century was rather minimal, and often without a subject, emotional predicate, or observational clarity. Color Field Painting, and the Washington Color School in particular, come to mind as movements absorbing all the critical and commercial oxygen in the region while limiting the means of their own expression. But, then and today, lurking just beneath the surface of the city's galleries and museums, Washington artists could always be found mining these Surrealist, Expressionist, and Realist veins ignored by art world fashion.

The Tree Around the Corner, this career overview of Barbara Kerne, shows an artist whose paintings and woodblock prints demonstrate that representational powers, emotional depth, and hallucinatory imagination are all present and inseparable in her art. In Kerne's words, these qualities translate into an art concerned with "landscape, myth, and memory." Produced over the past fifty years, Kerne's art has made a place for her in some heady artistic company. Edvard Munch, Charles Burchfield, and Vincent van Gogh come to mind as other artists consistently hitting this trifecta.

On behalf of the American University Museum, its supporters, staff, and artists, I want to thank Vivienne Lassman for proposing and curating this richly deserved exhibition. Lassman worked closely with the artist to create an exhibition that "... evokes the majesty of our woods and forests to inspire and prod the viewer's own memories and connections with nature in our interrelated ecologically threatened world..." More than deserving of this recognition, *The Tree Around the Corner* is necessary viewing for us now.

I must also acknowledge artist and teacher Helen Frederick's role in founding Pyramid Atlantic Art Center over forty years ago. Its dedication to the development of pulp paintings as a primary form of paper art made possible Kerne's extraordinary woodblocks printed on colored pulp paper. They are the crowning achievement of this exhibition, technically incomparable and meaningful beyond words.

— Jack Rasmussen
C. Nicholas Keating and
Carleen B. Keating Director,
American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center

Opposite: *Day and Night* (detail), 2022. Oil on linen, 39 x 39 in.





THE TREE AROUND THE CORNER

Barbara Kerne

When I was a baby, my family moved to a house
with a postage stamp backyard,
in the Sheepshead Bay neighborhood of Brooklyn.

My grandpa immediately planted two tiny
trees, a peach tree and a pear tree, in a tiny garden.
The two trees and I grew up together.
When I was 16 years old and just 5'2" high,
the trees had grown higher than the second-story window
from which I whispered my dreams and my sorrows.

Those trees, all trees, are part of my life.
For 30 years, I lived in a glass house in the woods,
watched over by oaks and sycamores.
Now I look over a beautiful large garden of tall trees.

I began to make pictures as soon as I could hold a crayon,
often of the trees I viewed from my window.
Trees, strong and solid creatures, whose moods change
with the weather and the seasons, remain fascinating to me.
All my trees have been my friends, and my subject matter,
wherever in the world I encountered them.

The tree that I now make pictures of,
a grand friend, over 100 years old,
spreading its branches in beauty is
the tree around the corner.

Opposite: *Earth Spirits* (detail), 1995. Woodcut, 30 x 40 in.

CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Vivienne M. Lassman

Barbara Kerne moves effortlessly between large-scale paintings on canvas to very small etchings on paper, while remaining focused on a singular subject. This singularity is unusual in an artist's oeuvre. Over the many decades I have known Barbara, we have engaged in extensive conversations about art in general and hers in particular. These thoughts reflect my dialogues with Barbara about her spiritual connection with trees and her artistic manifestations of that relationship, expressing a lifetime of personal emotional experiences.

This catalog is the culmination of her lifelong exploration of trees, their mystery and majesty, as exemplified in the *Watts Branch* series. While there is perhaps a single-mindedness in her vision, she approaches each of her inspirations from a different viewpoint and evokes the majesty of our woods and forests to inspire and prod the viewer's own memories and connections with nature in our interrelated ecologically threatened world, the importance of which we are reminded in all media.

Kerne uses multiple photographs to recall these silent vistas and places she has visited over the years and uses them as inspiration to start drawing which leads her to the painted composition, which is not a record of an actual scene. Notably, these environments are free of people and any trace of the human world—they are pure sanctuaries unviolated by our intrusions. The agitated, turbulent waters, whether horizontal rivers or vertical waterfalls, intentionally disturb the viewer. The diagonal compositions draw us to the light beckoning in the distance and pull us in, compelling us to engage with the vibrant colors and dynamic landscapes. The sun and the moon can be at the top of the image or at the bottom depending on what the artist wants to express.



The Tree Around The Corner Reprised, 2023. Oil on canvas, 37 x 37 in.

Color is one of the most important elements of painting for Kerne, and she starts by contemplating a full-color palette before selecting colors for her vision and that has evolved over the years, as have her gestures. Looking at her paintings, it is inevitable that one should draw comparisons with Van Gogh, (although her brush strokes are directionally significantly different), Edvard Munch, and other European artists. Barbara also references Goya and his dark underpinnings which are reflected in an aura of foreboding in some of her works.

Of great significance to Barbara are her woodblock prints, not only the dramatic black and white works, but also the woodblocks printed on colored pulp paper. This is a medium that is intensely personal and one that she taught for many years. The evidence of her understanding of the natural world projected in them is most clearly illustrated by her intimate prints of flowers and insects which have a calm that is not reflected in her paintings. There is also a sense of drama in these images that compels the viewer to look more closely.

Being immersed in Barbara Kerne's world is to be reminded of the fragility of our environments whether urban or rural, our role, and what we each choose to contribute.

THE TREE AROUND THE CORNER

Paintings and Woodcuts
Barbara Kerne

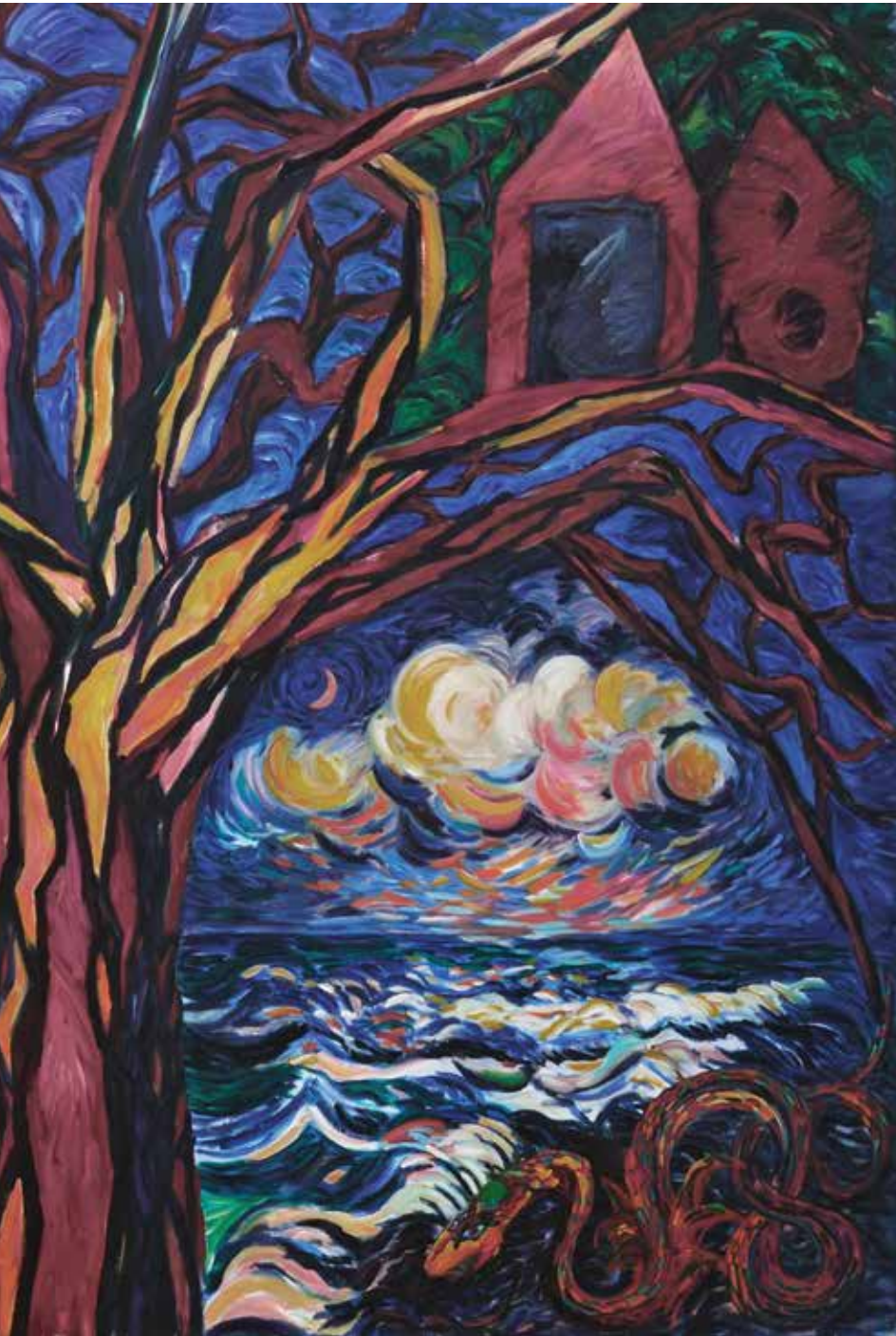
The Tree Connection

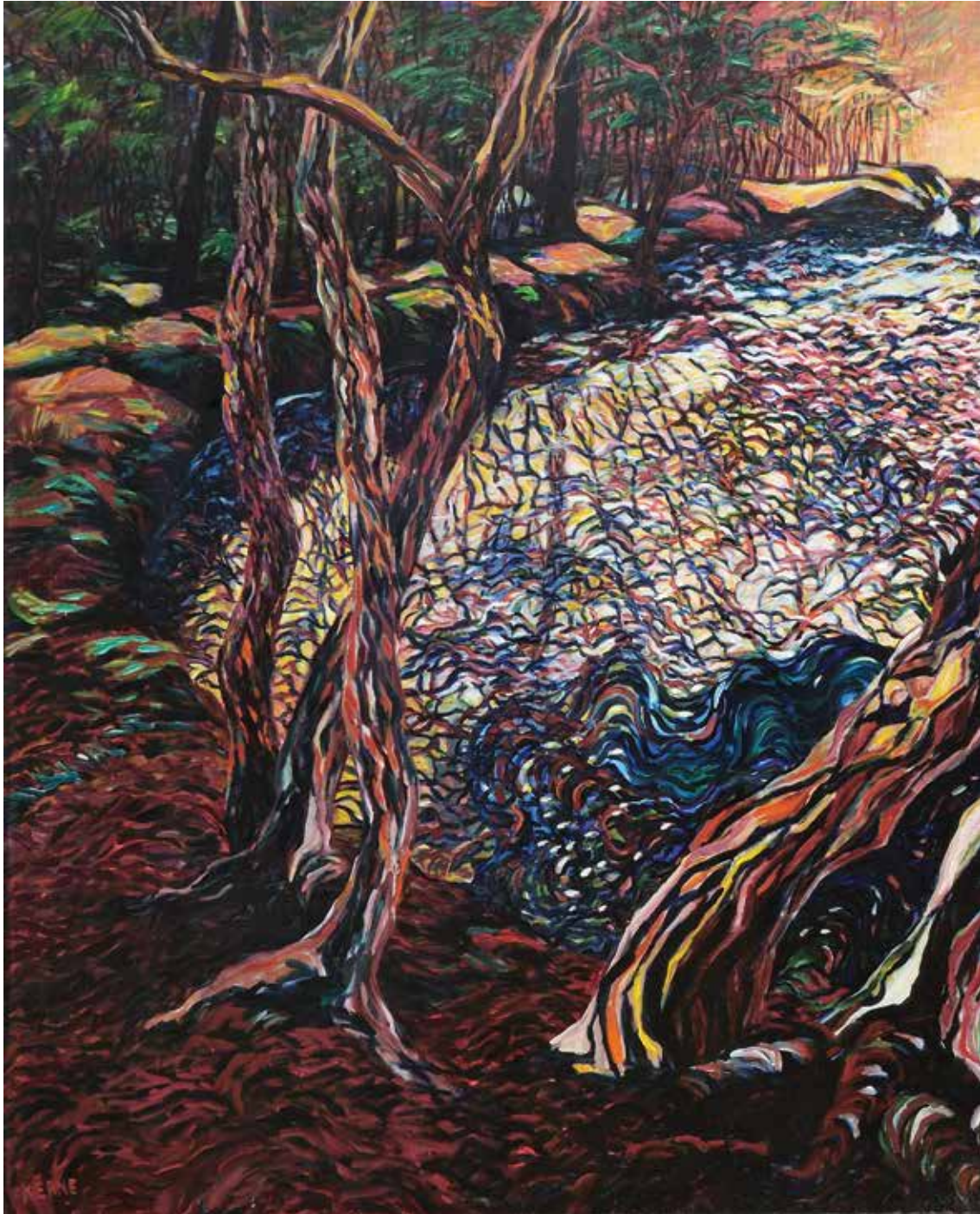
Barbara has felt a deep connection with trees from very early childhood when she began drawing them and has expressed her emotional affinity with them not only in imagery but also in writing. Nowadays, there are many books discussing scientific findings that were previously unknown about the life of trees, their evolution, and their ability to smell, taste, touch, and sense danger. Scientists refer to this arboreal communication as the “wood-wide web.”

Kerne’s art has evolved over the decades by focusing on the many different shapes that trees form over their lifetimes and their ability to adapt to environmental changes through behavioral changes and genetic variability. Much has been written about “the mother tree” in forests and the interconnectedness underground of tree roots and their symbiotic dependence on fungal networks. Intuitively, Kerne has tapped into these experiences in her examination of the life of trees from many different viewpoints, using emotionally powerful colors to express their different states and stages.



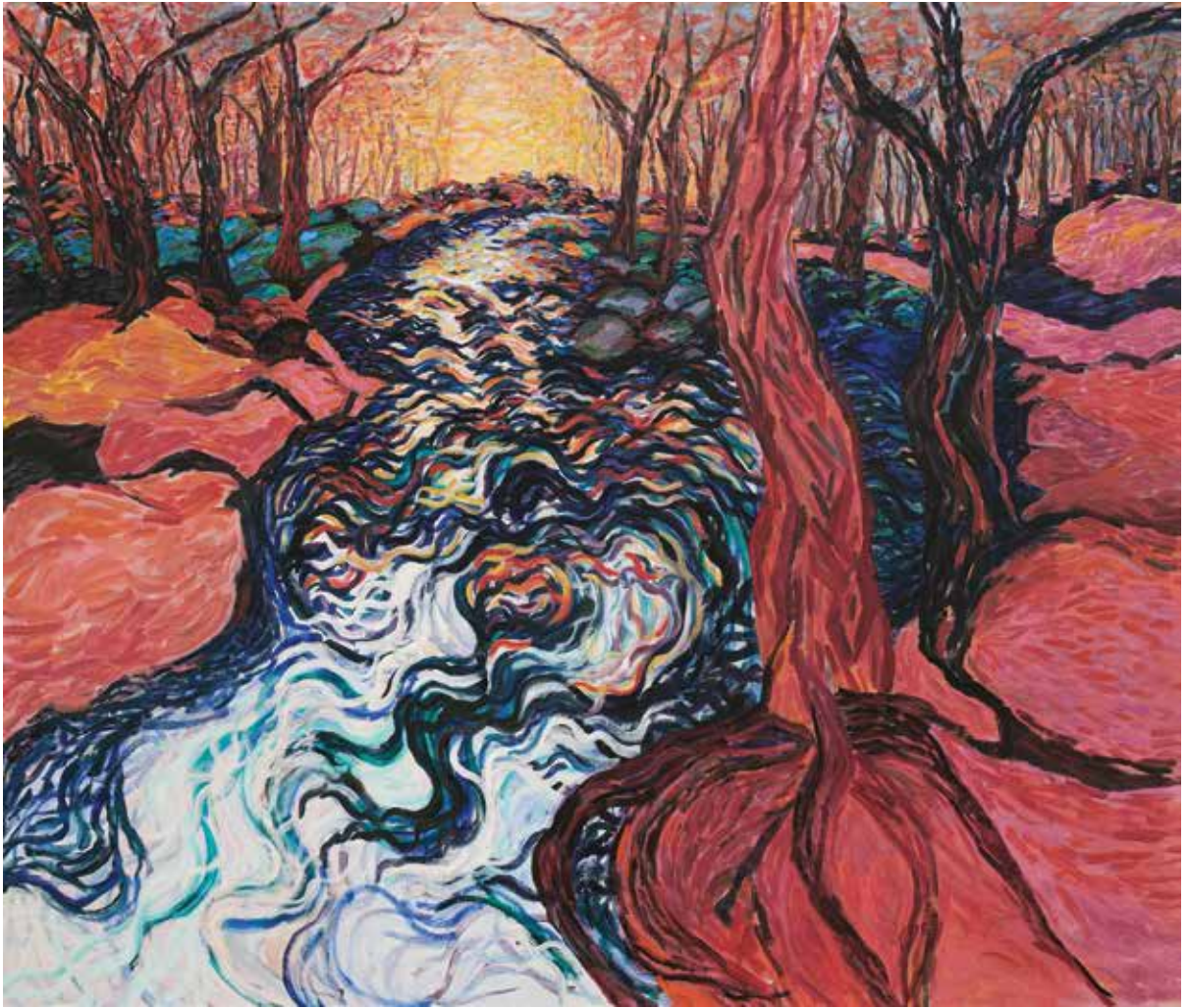
Homage to the Earth Spirits, 1987. Oil on linen, 78 x 105 in.





Morning Reaches Watts Branch, 1992. Oil on linen, 76 x 121 in.





Sunrise/Sunset, 2022. Oil on linen, 66 x 78 in.



Lake Toba, 2001. Oil on linen, 50 x 60 in.



After The Seventh Day, 1992. Oil on linen, 65 x 102 in.





The Tree Around the Corner: Before Dawn, 2023.
Oil on linen, 60" x 40 in.



The Tree Around the Corner: Yellow Sky, 2023.
Oil on linen, 60 x 40 in.



The Tree Around the Corner: Red and Green, 2023.
Oil on linen, 60 x 40 in.



Sun Rising, 1987. Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in.



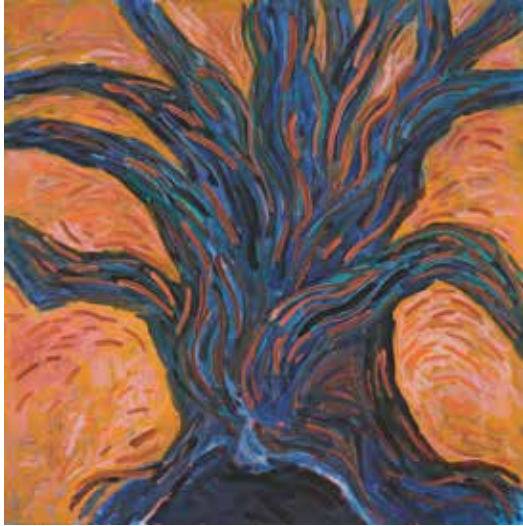
Red Beach, 1996. Oil on linen, 79 x 79 in.



Day and Night, 2022. Oil on linen, 39 x 39 in.



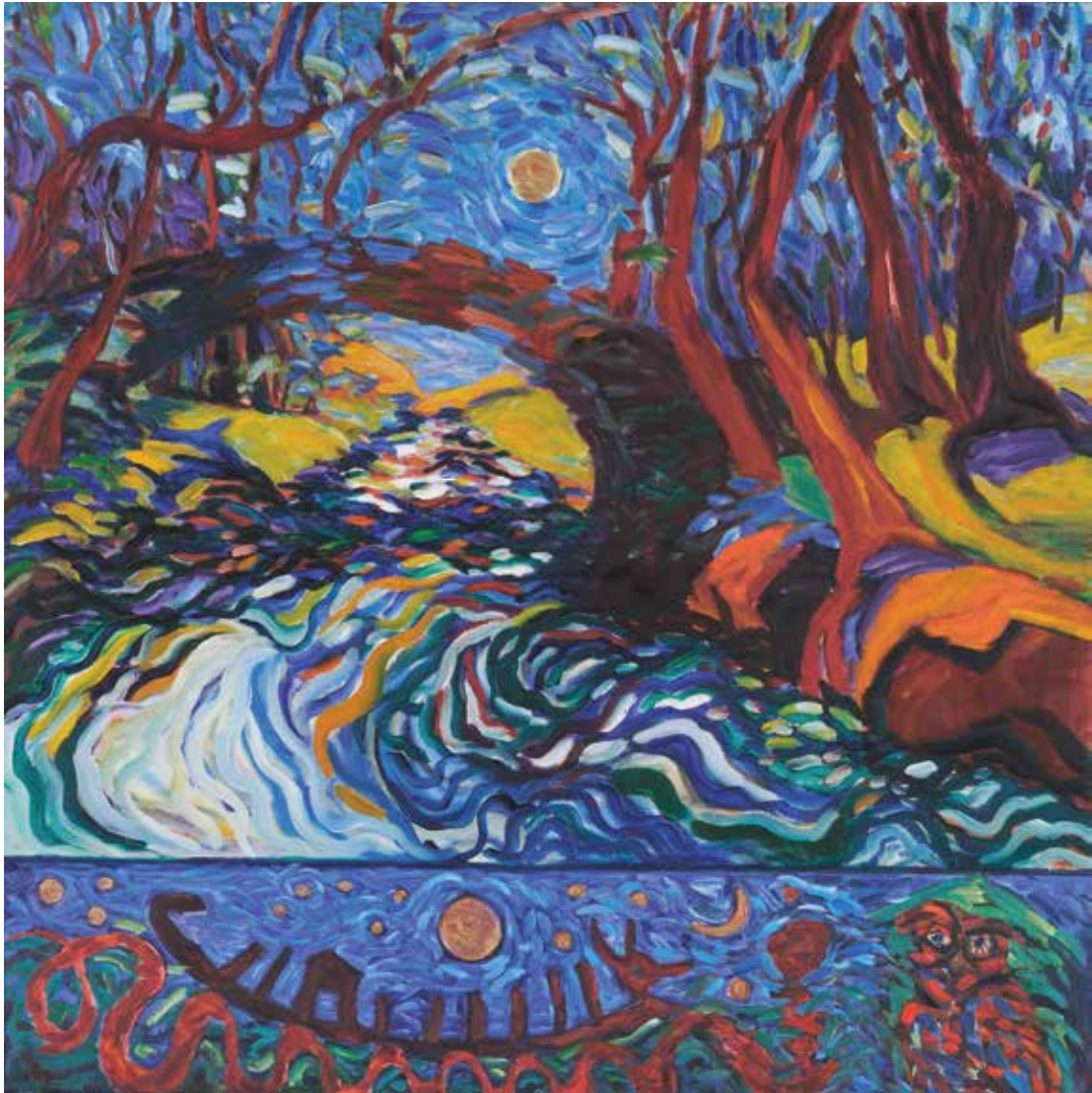
The Tree Around The Corner 1/4, 2022. Oil on wood, 36 x 36 in.



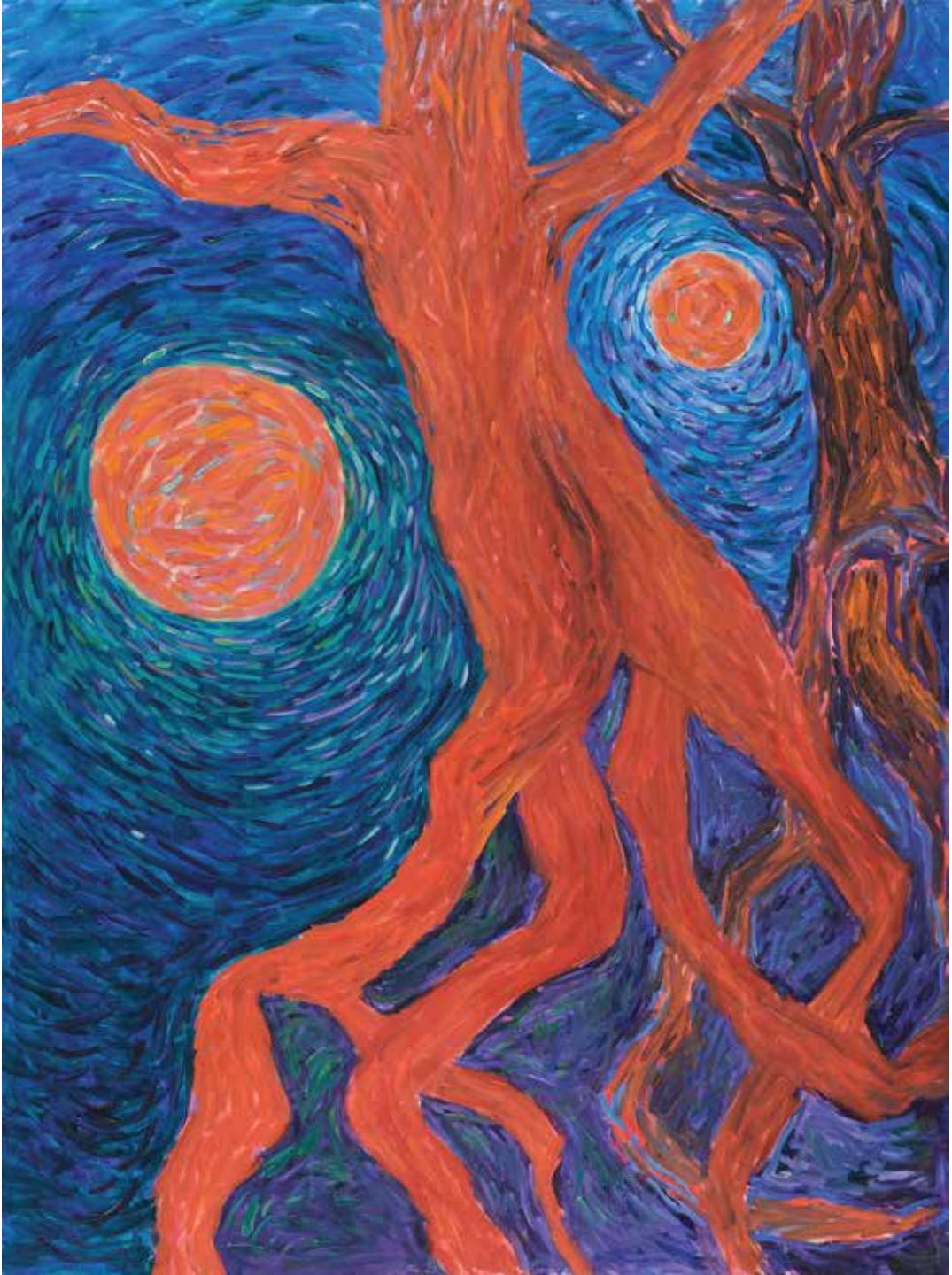
The Tree Around the Corner – Quartet, 2023. Oil on canvas, 25 x 25 in.



The Tree Around The Corner Reprised, 2023. Oil on canvas, 37 x 37 in.



Bridge, 1994. Oil on linen, 36 x 35 in.



Lovers, 2021. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.



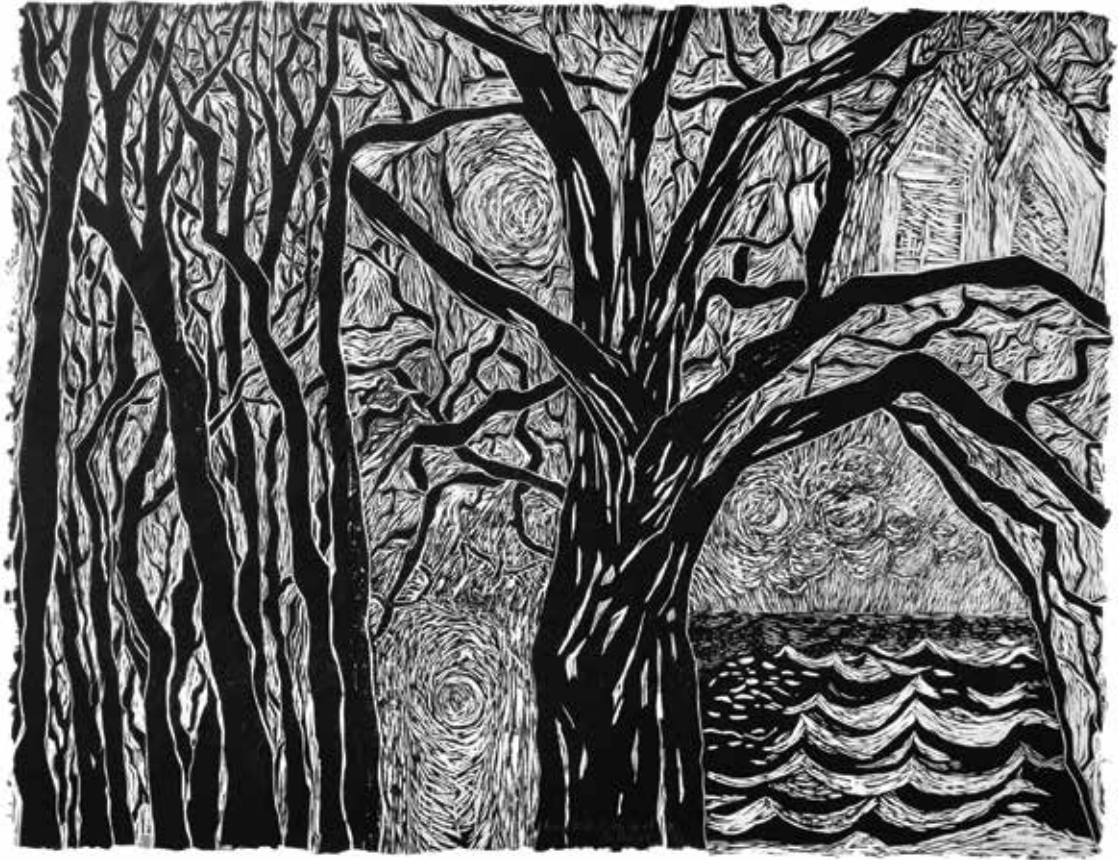
COLUMN SELF-PORTRAIT AS A TREE

When Kerne constructed the column, she deliberately designed it to be exactly the same height as herself – 5' 2." It was originally intended to go outdoors, has a top, and is sprayed with autobody sealant. Incorporated into the painting of this self-portrait are all the elements that are important to her: falling water, the sun and the moon, day and night signaling the passage of time.

VML

Self Portrait As A Tree, 2002. Oil on wood,
62 ½ x 18 x 18 in.





Homage to the Earth Spirits, 1995. Woodcut, 30 x 40 in.

Woodcut printmaking, dating back to the Middle Ages, is a relief process in which gouges are used to carve an image onto the surface of a wooden block. The raised areas that remain after the block has been cut are inked and printed, while the recessed areas that are cut away do not retain ink. A woodcut made by an artist is not a mass-produced image and is considered an original work of art.

The main body of my woodcuts is black and white with occasional hand coloring. I carve my own woodcut blocks and either print them myself on my own press or with a master printer.

BK

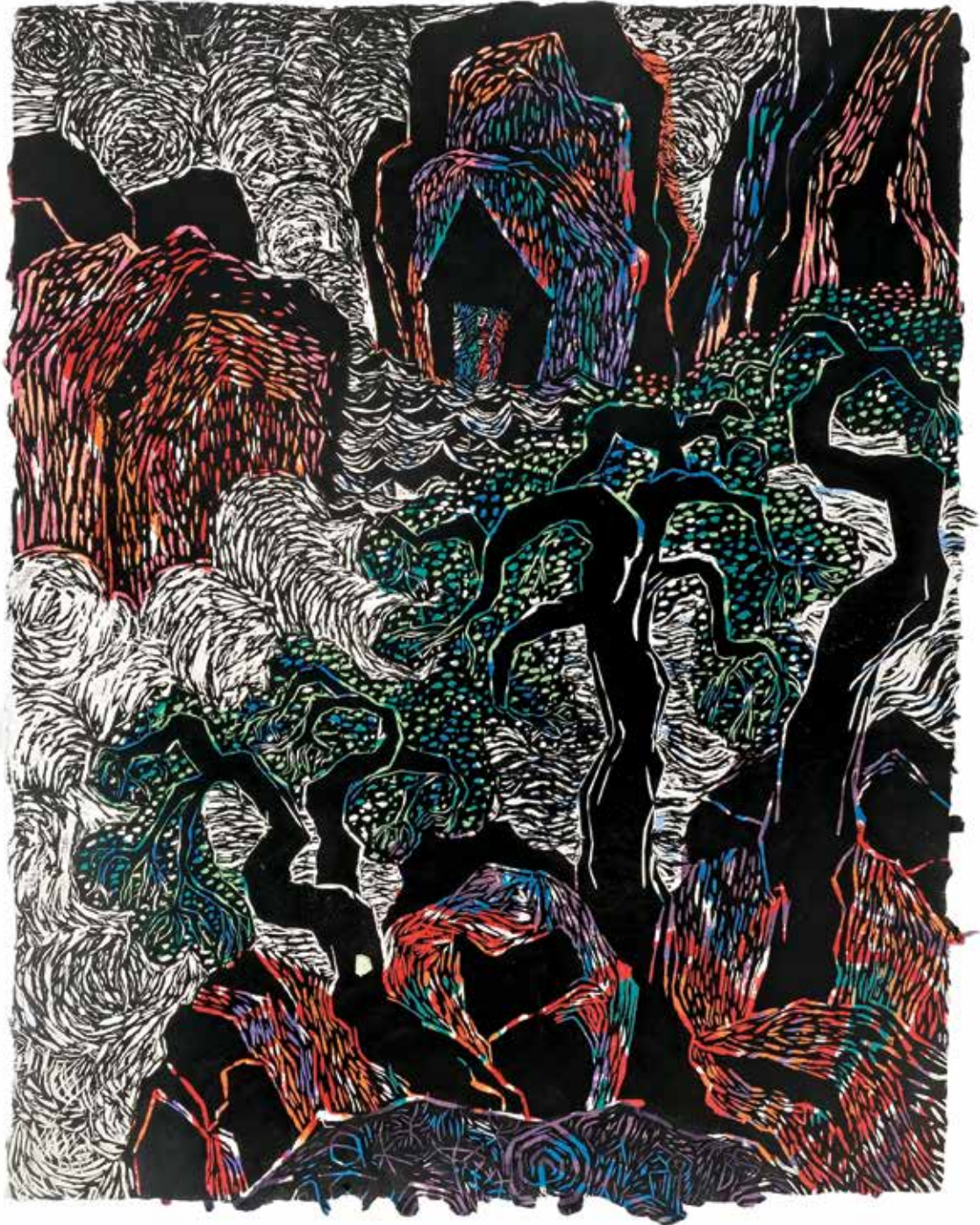


Silver and Gold, 1995. Woodcut, 30 x 40 in.

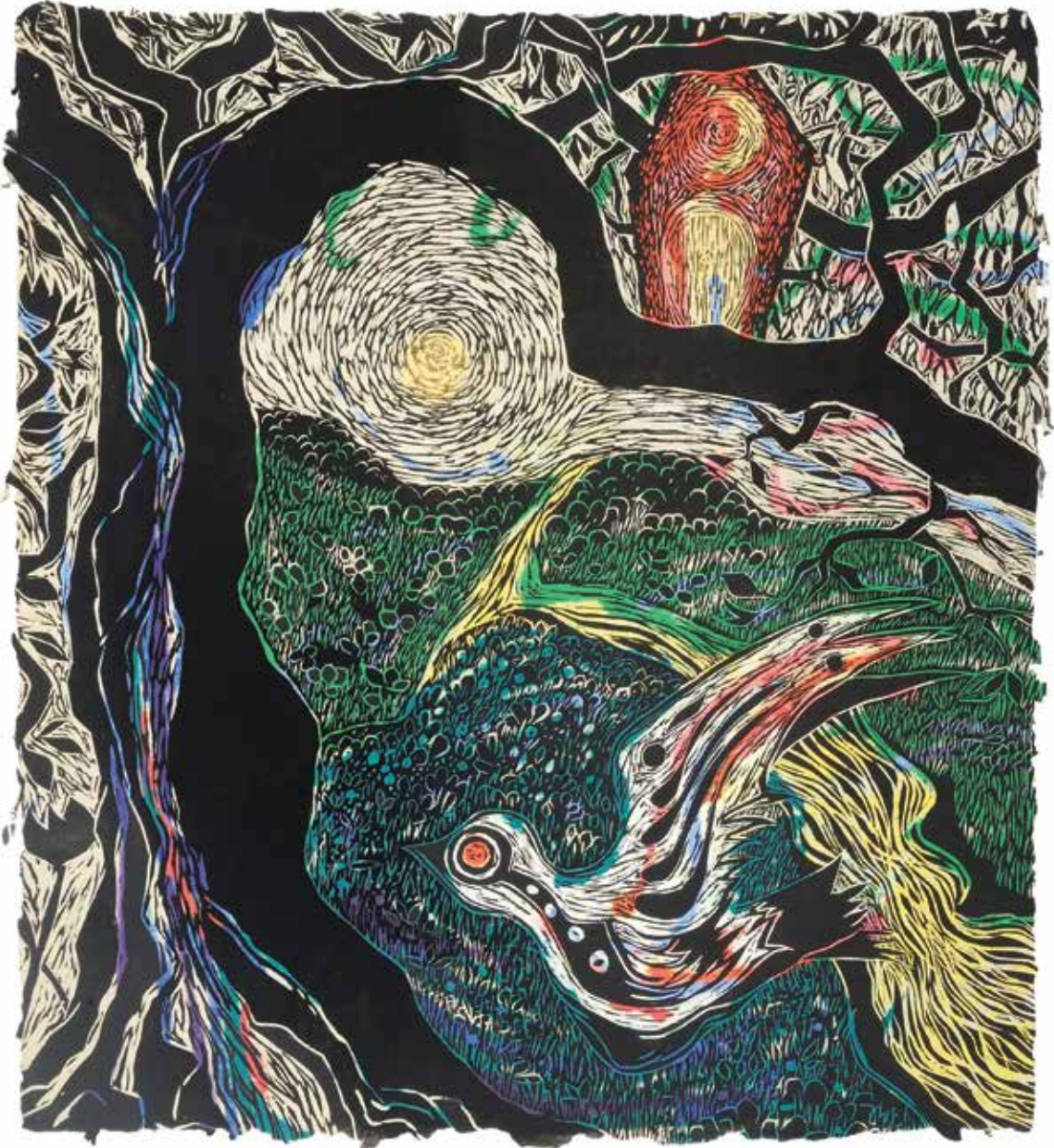




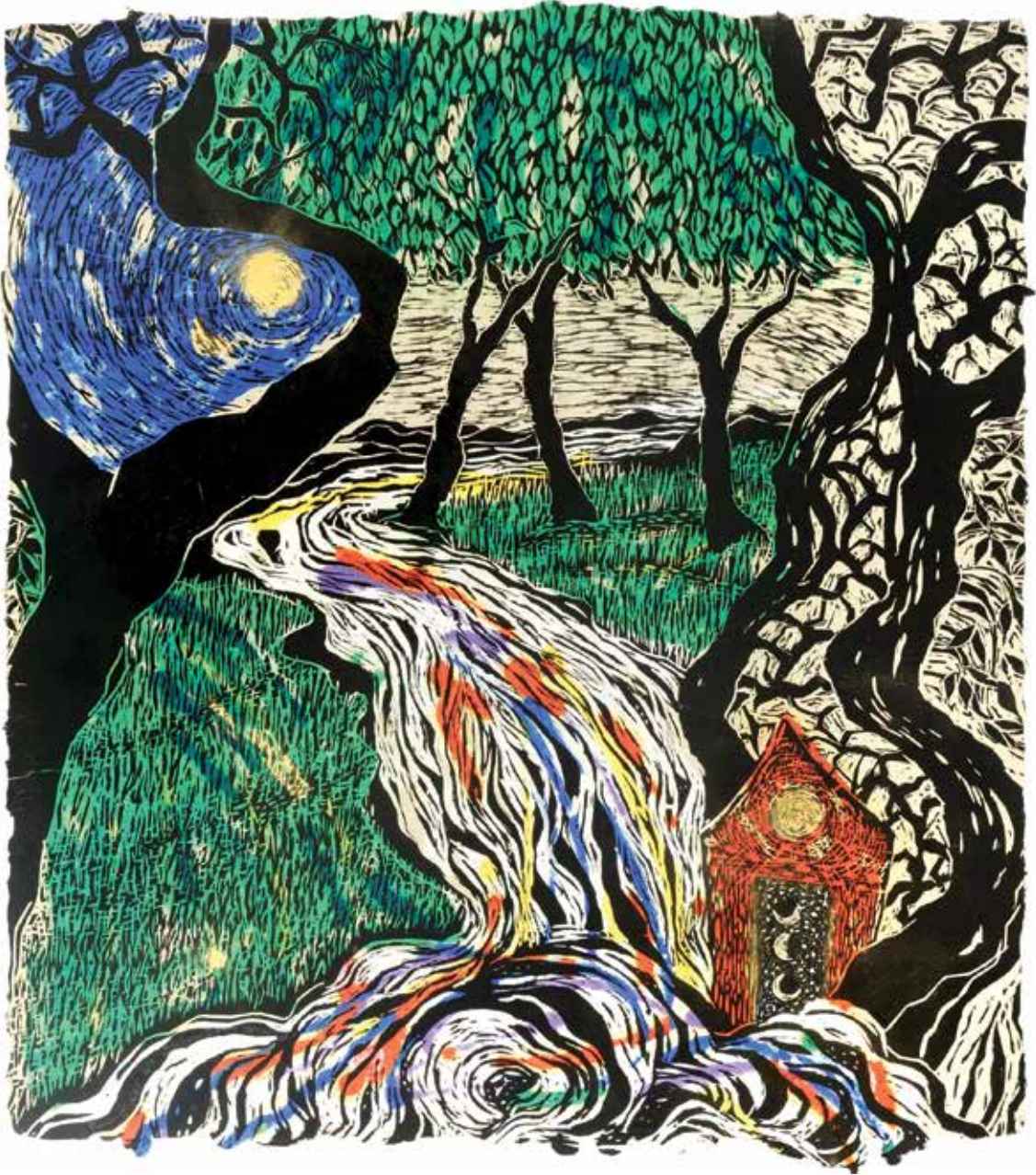
Falling Water, 2014. Woodcut, 31 x 24 in.



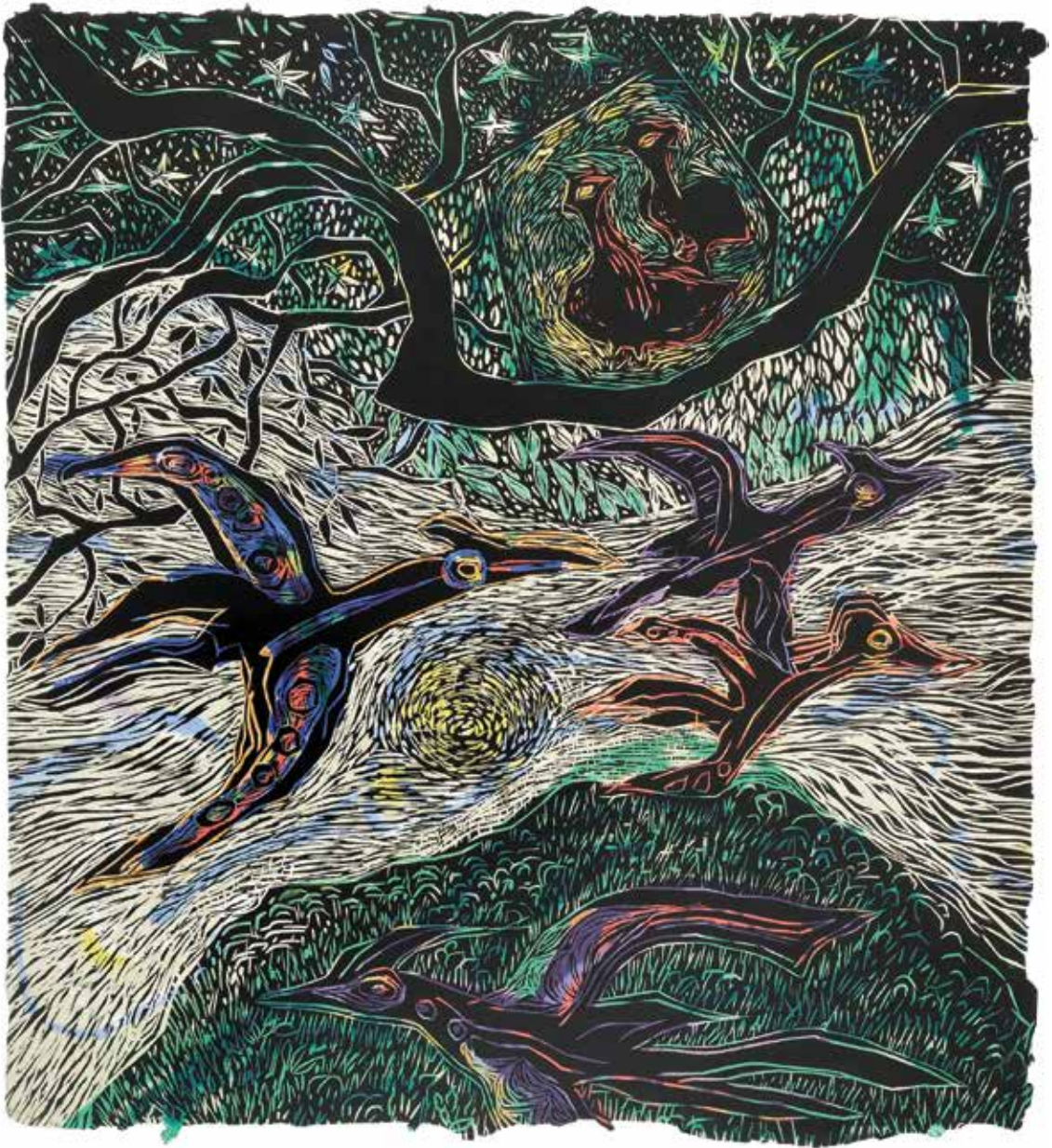
House in the Clouds, 2014. Woodcut, 31 x 24 in.



Dove, 2014. Woodcut, 25 x 23 in.



River House, 2014. Woodcut, 25 x 23 in.



Herons Flying Home, 2014. Woodcut, 25 x 23 in.



To Life, 2016. Woodcut, 20 x 25 in.

Pulp painting is a paper art technique involving the process of creating pulp, combining it with an adhesive, and reforming it into a sheet of paper.

The pulp paintings I make are merely the base for my black-inked woodcuts to be printed over them.

BK



Night Peony, 2016. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.



Moonlight, 2016. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.



Butterflies are Free, 2017. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.



New World, 2017. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.



Lovers, 2017. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.



Barbara Kerne sketch books.

BARBARA KERNE

BIOGRAPHY

Recently I was again startled when asked, “Are you still painting?” “Of course,” I answered, “how could I not be?”

Earliest memories of my urge to make pictures began well before I knew what being an artist was about, an urge that has never ended. Crayons and paper were essential and provided. I always made pictures of everything around me.

During WWII, as a very young child, I often accompanied my beautiful Aunt Florence (13 years older than me, 13 years younger than my mama) to the Naval Base at Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn, where she volunteered at the USO. Early memories are of looking over the water and of living in a house with a lively family and making pictures of the two wonderful trees in my backyard.

My art teacher at James Madison High School took our class to see the first Cezanne Exhibition in the United States, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. I still remember the awe I felt viewing *The Bathers*, the huge painting on the walls of the museum.

At Brooklyn College, where many artist/faculty were the Abstract Expressionists who commuted to Brooklyn to teach, I remember Ad Reinhardt telling us to make collages out of magazine tearings and then paint black all over them. We had



Joyce Kahn Weis and Barbara (right) at Pratt Institute Saturday School, ages 13.

no idea who he was or that he was at that time making his Black Paintings. Jimmy Ernst (son of Max Ernst) was a supportive teacher, a painter who taught us photography.

My young family moved from New York to Silver Spring Maryland, not far from University of Maryland, College Park, where I entered the Graduate Program. My mentor in graduate school, Sidney Gross, told me that though I had young children it was no reason to stop me from becoming a serious artist who exhibited my work. Sidney also told all of us (9) graduate students that we should find a position in a college or university to enable us to continue to make the art we wanted and not the art that could easily sell.

I believed him and accepted a position as adjunct faculty at Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland where I taught drawing, painting, and printmaking. I became the Director of the Printmaking Program and a Tenured Full Professor, and never stopped making pictures in my own studio. I loved teaching and I loved my students, many of whom became friends. After 30 years I retired from teaching as Professor Emerita.

I continue to make pictures and to work in my studio every day. Artists Never Retire.



Photo: Kenneth L. Fisher

Kerne in front of *Red Beach*.



Kerne in her studio.

EDUCATION

BA, Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY, studied with Jimmy Ernst, Ad Reinert
MFA, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, studied with Sidney Gross

FACULTY POSITIONS

Professor of Art, Montgomery College, Rockville, MD, Tenured
Professor Emerita, Montgomery College, Rockville, MD

EXHIBITIONS

Solo Exhibitions include Jane Haslem Gallery, Addison-Ripley Ltd. Franz Bader Gallery, and Cosmos Club, Washington, DC; Montgomery College, Rockville, MD; Artisans Center, Waynesboro, VA; St. John's College, Annapolis, MD; Anne Arundel College, Arnold, MD.

Group exhibitions include American University Museum, Library of Congress, and Corcoran Gallery of Art, and Cosmos Club, Washington, DC; American Embassies, Cairo, Gold Coast, Istanbul; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA; Portland Museum, Portland, OR; Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, PA; Danforth Museum, Framingham, MA; North Miami Museum, Miami, FL; Honolulu Academy of Art, Honolulu, HI; Norton Gallery of Art, Palm Beach, FL; Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD; Owensboro Museum, Owensboro, KY, McLean Project for the Arts, McLean, VA.

HONORS

Maryland State Arts Council, Individual Artist Award in the Visual Arts
Fellow at Centrum Franz Masereel, Kasterlee, Belgium
Fellow at Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Sweet Briar, VA.
Numerous commissions, purchase awards and museum collections.

COLLECTIONS

American University, Washington, DC; American Forest and Paper Association, Washington, DC; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; District of Columbia Commission on Arts & Humanities, Washington, DC; Academy of Arts, Easton, MD; Franz Masereel, Center for Graphic Arts, Kasterlee, Belgium; Federal Reserve Bank, Washington, DC; Grand Hyatt of Washington, D.C.; Johns Hopkins Oncology Center, Baltimore, MD; Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Montgomery County Contemporary Art Collection, Rockville, MD; Montgomery County Parks Foundation; Norton Gallery of Art, Palm Beach, FL; Portland Museum of Fine Arts, Portland, OR; Psychiatric Institute of Montgomery County, Rockville, MD; United States Department of State Art Bank, Washington, DC; United States Embassy, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; University of Maryland University College, College Park, MD; University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN; INOVA Hospital, Schar Cancer Institute, Fairfax, VA.



VIVIENNE M. LASSMAN BIOGRAPHY

Vivienne Lassman’s long record of diverse art projects includes co-curating the Washington Convention Center Art Collection with international, national and regional artists; curating the Bicentennial of the Octagon Museum; the *Noche Crist* exhibition and catalog at the American University Museum; Anamario Hernandez’ retrospective at the Mexican Cultural Institute; and the *Take Me to the River* exhibitions in Pretoria, South Africa, Vilnius, Lithuania and Montevideo, Uruguay.

Lassman has advised firms and businesses on building art collections and served as the curator for private collections. She was a partner in the Troyer Fitzpatrick Lassman Gallery and later oversaw the deaccessioning of the Gallery K estate. She has served on multiple boards including the Washington Project for the Arts and the Corcoran College of Art and has authored several essays and catalogs. Born and educated in Edinburgh, Scotland, after emigrating to the United States, Vivienne enrolled in the George Washington University Art History MA program before leaving to represent a group of artists called ACE—Active Cultural Events—who wanted to provide an alternative to exhibiting in commercial galleries.

Opposite: *After The Seventh Day* (detail), 1992. Oil on linen, 65 x 102 in.

First published in conjunction with the exhibition

The Tree Around the Corner

February 7 – May 19, 2024

American University Museum

at the Katzen Arts Center

Washington, DC

www.american.edu/cas/museum

Paintings and Woodcuts by Barbara Kerne

American University Museum

Beth Bright, *Registrar*

Alexandra Schuman, *Assistant Registrar*

Kristin E. Howard, *Marketing & Publications Specialist*

Jack Rasmussen, *Director & Curator*

Deborah Hanselman, *Associate Director*

Kevin Runyon, *Preparator*

Curated by Vivienne M. Lassman

Photography by Greg Staley, except as noted.

Design by Lloyd Greenberg Design, LLC

Vida Russell and Lloyd Greenberg, Designers

© The American University Museum

ISBN: 979-8-9882146-7-0

Front cover: *Homage to the Earth Spirits* (detail), 1995. Woodcut, 30 x 40 in.

Back cover: *Lovers* (detail), 2017. Woodcut, 23 x 20 in.

Special Thanks from Barbara Kerne:

Vivienne M. Lassman, Curator

Susan Goldman, Printmaking Legacy Project Video, "Barbara Kerne"

Andruid Kerne, Editor and Advisor

Elizabeth Kerne Fisher and Kenneth Fisher, Photographic Portraits

Allen Framing, Harry Biscar, Framer

Sidney Gross, 1921 – 1969

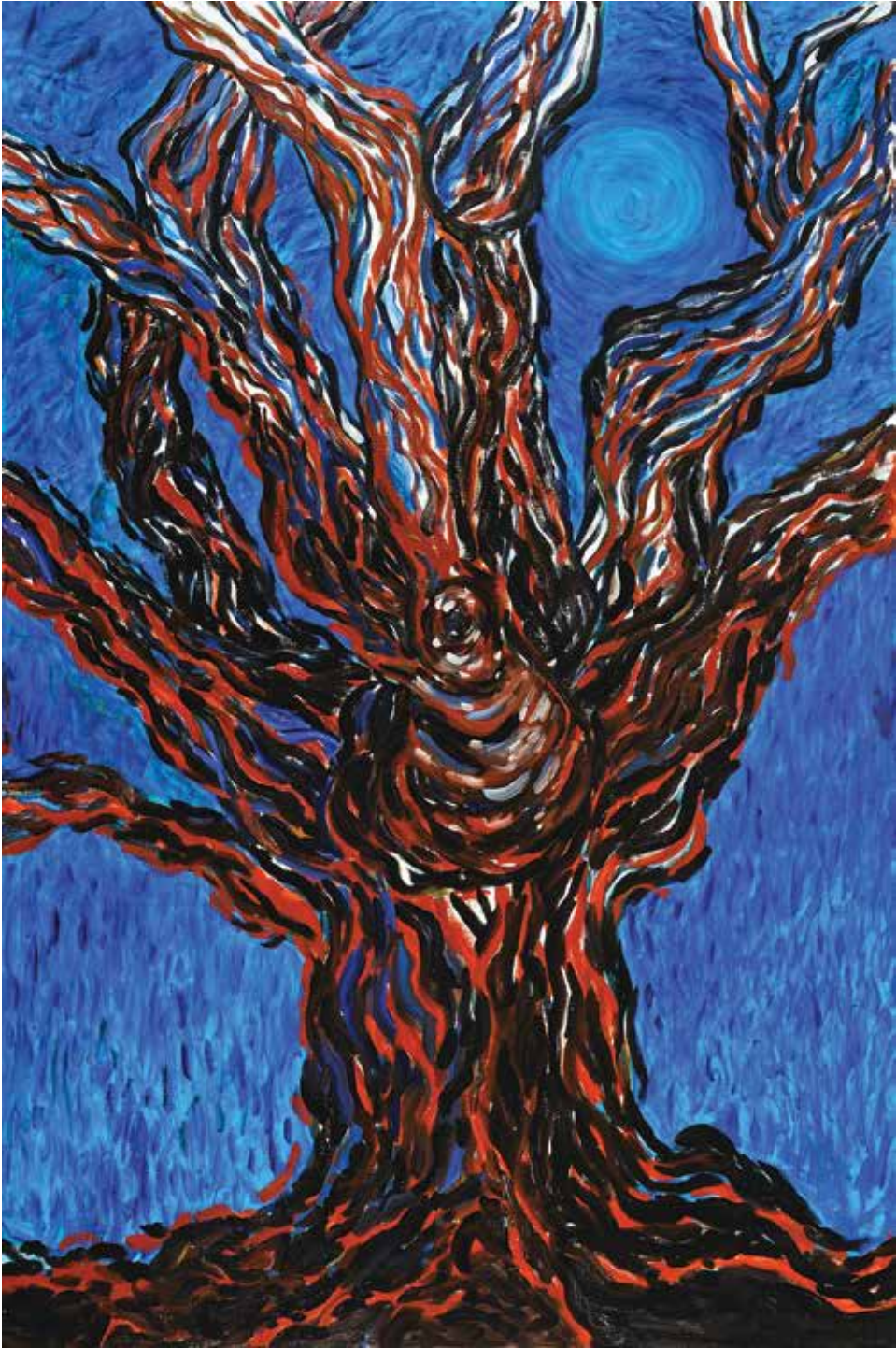
My extraordinary graduate school mentor, whom I believed when he told me,
"Even though you have a young family, you can do this."



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM
AT THE KATZEN ARTS CENTER

4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016

www.american.edu/cas/museum



The Tree Around the Corner: Blue Moon, 2023. Oil on linen, 60 x 40 in.

