

Boreal Birch

Art and Science in the Northern Forest

Exhibition Schedule

Pratt Museum, Homer: July 1 – October 2, 2011

Alaska State Museum, Juneau: November 4, 2011 – January 14, 2012

Well Street Art Co., Fairbanks: February 3 – 26, 2012

Educational materials related to this exhibition will be available online at

Pratt Museum: www.prattmuseum.org

Alaska State Museum: www.museums.state.ak.us

www.keslerwoodward.com

www.barrymcwayne.com

www.margoklass.com



Kesler Woodward
Margo Klass

Barry McWayne
Kimberley Maher



While most people think of birch trees growing in the temperate zone, paper birch, the major birch in Alaska, is a different species, *Betula papyrifera*, which grows in the Great Lakes region of North America.

Cover background: *Young Ones* (detail) by Kesler Woodward. Front cover images, clockwise from top left: *Calling* (detail) by Kesler Woodward; *Flora and Fauna* (detail) by Barry McWayne; *Portico* (detail) by Margo Klass. Back cover images: *Charred Birch* by Barry McWayne; *Intertwined* by Kesler Woodward; *Nenana Burn* by Margo Klass. Work by Margo Klass photographed by Patrick Endres, except cover image by Focus Unbound. All other photos provided by the artists. Brochure design by Dixon Jones/Rasmuson Library Graphics.

Margo Klass is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alaska State Council on the Arts.



Even those of us lucky enough to live in the woods sometimes take for granted the trees that surround us. People like vistas, and often Alaskan artists have been happy to oblige. But what these three artists and one scientist would challenge us to do is to drop our gaze from the distant horizon to what is near at hand, readily available and worth our while for closer consideration. Here we have birch trees seen up-close and personally. In some of Barry McWayne's black and white photographs, a viewer might feel his face pressed to within inches of the bark of a tree. In other of his pieces, viewers might be asked to consider the harsher contrasts of fire damaged birch trunks against a white background. Still others celebrate birch in wintry hoarfrost splendor. Kesler Woodward insists on the same intimate examination of individual birch trunks, arrangements

of overlapping branches and small stands of trees. But look at his use of shape, color, and texture. Woodward's paintings reveal the rich variation of birch trees in nature. Margo Klass may be the one of these three artists who responds most abstractly to the idea of birch—pitchforks, brushes, brass rods stand in for the trees themselves. Some pieces use actual elements of birch—twigs, branches, trunks. One makes use of a beaver-gnawed limb, recognition of a fellow architect working in birch. For as Kimberley Maher's observations

note, we people have used birch for all sorts of purposes, from the spiritual to the medicinal, to everything in between. Birch has served us Alaskans well as a source of fuel, a treat for the sweet tooth, and, as shown here, a rich variety of artistic exploration. Read the complex story of birch, take a look at the art, then go out into the world and take a harder look at the birch trees around you. Chances are you're going to see more than you did before.

—Frank Soos



Top: Kesler Woodward, *Out of the Blue*
Left: Barry McWayne, *Birch Pelt*
Right: Margo Klass, *Spring Run*

Birch—growing in the boreal forest

Birch is one of the six types of trees that grow in the Alaskan boreal forest, or taiga, which is part of the circumpolar boreal forest, named after Boreas, the Greek god of the North Wind. It is the largest terrestrial biome on earth and reaches across Canada, Scandinavia, and Siberia. While the specific species composition varies in different regions of the boreal forest, species of birch are found throughout. The boreal forest is characterized by low species diversity; cold soils and permafrost; precipitation that is mainly in the form of snow; and short, warm summers and long, extremely cold winters.

—Kimberley Maher

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