Kei London

PRESS RELEASE
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The tree in your living room is a political object. Twenty-eight artists explain why.

All Trees Are Political, from the Arborealists and invited artists, opens in Margate during National Tree Week and comes to the Batsford Gallery in Hackney for the run up to Christmas.

Every December we fell a young conifer, carry it into the house and hang lights on it, and most of us never ask why. *All Trees Are Political: Particularly at Christmas*, an exhibition of twenty-eight artists curated by the Margate artist Philippa Beale, asks that question. It opens at the Schwartzman Gallery, The Margate School, on Tuesday 24 November 2026, inside National Tree Week, and moves to the Batsford Gallery on Hackney Road, London, from Friday 11 to Sunday 20 December. Admission is free and every work is for sale, with prices from under £300.

The show takes the Christmas tree back to its roots. For thousands of years people have brought greenery indoors in the darkest months as a sign of life, renewal and protection: the fir and spruce of the Christmas tree, with its Germanic and solstice ancestry; holly and ivy in homes and churches; Tu BiShvat, the Jewish New Year for Trees; tulsi, the holy basil tended at the centre of Hindu homes. Different faiths, one shared instinct. Beale's claim is that the instinct is older than any of them, and that a tree is never only a tree: it is land, memory, faith and power, which is why it is political.

Philippa Beale says: "We bring trees indoors in the darkest month because something in us needs them close. That instinct is older than any of our religions and shared by all of them. Twenty-eight artists have each followed it somewhere I did not expect."

The exhibition image is Annabel Cullen's lithograph *Remnant, Oaks Park (1)*. Georgina Allen, who lives and works in Surrey and won first prize in En Plein Air at Rye Art Gallery in 2025, shows *Wimbledon Common*, a painting about the pleasure of being in one place at one time. Robert Amesbury Brooks, taught at the Slade by Euan Uglow, shows *Trees at Throop*, in which a tree is a matter of structure, colour and light before it is scenery. Frank Creber paints a willow that came down on a house and stopped short of catastrophe, and asks who is responsible for the risks we have learned to live with. The Kent artists in the show include the curator herself and Joanna Hyslop.

The Arborealists were founded in 2013 by the painter Tim Craven, for many years curator at Southampton City Art Gallery, and have exhibited across Britain since, with the tree as their subject. Their 2024 exhibition at the Batsford Gallery launched *Forests, Woods and Groves: Art from the Arborealists* (Batsford), written by Beale and longlisted for the 2025 Wainwright Prize for Illustrative Books. Invited artists join the group for this show.

Beale's own thread through the exhibition began in Gibraltar. While curating *Traces of Humanity* there and in Margate earlier this year, she worked with Professor Geraldine Finlayson, who with her husband Professor Clive Finlayson has led the excavation of the Gorham's Cave Complex, the Neanderthal site inscribed by UNESCO in 2016. "Families walking together, with trees of every kind in view," Beale says of the people who lived there. "We have an innate inclination to keep searching for Eden. The artists in this show are recreating it through their art."

The exhibition opens at the Schwartzman Gallery, the contemporary art space at The Margate School on Margate High Street, named for the school's patron Arnold Schwartzman OBE, the Margate-raised designer and Academy Award winning filmmaker. It runs until Saturday 5 December. The private view is on Friday 27 November, 6 to 8pm, and Beale gives a talk, *Being with Trees: 45 exhibitions in 13 years*, at 3pm on Saturday 28 November. The show then moves to the Batsford Gallery at 266 Hackney Road, with a private view on Saturday 12 December, 2 to 4pm, and the talk is repeated at 3pm on Saturday 19 December. Two books and a catalogue are on sale at both venues: *Forests, Woods and Groves: Art from the Arborealists* by Philippa Beale (Batsford, 2024); *Art Meets*

Ecology: Arborealists in Lady Park Wood by George Peterken with Tim Craven and Christiana Payne (Sansom and Company, 2020); and *The Arborealists at Staverton Park*, Tim Craven's catalogue of this year's exhibition at the Minories, Colchester.

The artists: Georgina Allen, Robert Amesbury Brooks, Rosalind Archer, Suzanne Baker, Philippa Beale, John Blandy, Day Bowman, Frank Creber, Margy Creber, Louisa Crispin, Annabel Cullen, Alex Egan, Ferha Farooqui, Laura Gompertz, Julie Held, Joanna Hyslop, Charlie Kirkham, Claire Leach, Natasha Lien, Dawn Limbert, Anna Maconochie, Seema Manchanda, Sarah Medway, Hilary Rosen, Angela Rumble, Tom Shipman, Maria Storey, Sandra Wroe.

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Listings information

All Trees Are Political: Particularly at Christmas. The Arborealists and invited artists. Curated by Philippa Beale.

Schwartzman Gallery, The Margate School, 31 to 33 High Street, Margate CT9 1DX. Tuesday 24 November to Saturday 5 December 2026. Open Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 4pm. Private view Friday 27 November, 6 to 8pm. Talk by Philippa Beale, *Being with Trees*, Saturday 28 November, 3pm.

The Batsford Gallery, 266 Hackney Road, London E2 7SJ. Friday 11 to Sunday 20 December 2026. Open Friday to Sunday, 12 noon to 4pm. Private view Saturday 12 December, 2 to 4pm. Talk by Philippa Beale, *Being with Trees*, Saturday 19 December, 3pm.

Admission free. All works for sale; the illustrated price list is available by QR code at the venues.

Notes to editors

1. **The Arborealists** were founded in 2013 by Tim Craven and are a collective of artists who take the tree as their subject. arborealists.com, @the_arborealists.

2. **Philippa Beale** is an artist and curator, a founder member of the Arborealists and a former President of The London Group. Her book *Forests, Woods and Groves: Art from the Arborealists* (Batsford, 2024) was longlisted for the 2025 Wainwright Prize for Illustrative Books. She curated *Traces of Humanity* in Gibraltar and Margate in 2026 and received the Gibraltar Special Recognition Cultural Award in July 2026. She lives and works between Margate and France. philippabeale.com.

3. **The Margate School** is an independent art school and cultural centre on Margate High Street. Its gallery is named for Arnold Schwartzman OBE, who won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1982 for *Genocide* and grew up in Margate.

4. **The Batsford Gallery** is the gallery of Batsford, the independent publisher, at 266 Hackney Road, London E2.

5. **National Tree Week**, the Tree Council's annual celebration of trees, runs from 21 to 29 November 2026.

6. **Images.** High resolution images of the works, with captions and credits, and a photograph of the curator, are available from the press page at keilondon.com/exhibitions/12. Interviews with the curator and with individual artists can be arranged.

7. Press and communications for the exhibition are handled by Kei London Visual Art Agency.

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