

**BARK: Drawings and Paintings**  
**March 13-April 5, 2015**  
**Berkeley Arts Festival**  
**2133 University Avenue**  
**Berkeley CA 94704**

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## **Art Historian Decides to Do It Himself**

**BERKELEY, CA**—It's been nearly 20 years since Berkeley-based artist and art historian **Joel Isaacson** retired from academia and resumed his first vocation, painting and drawing, and his **new exhibition at the Berkeley Arts Festival, opening on March 13**, showcases his latest work investigating the intricacies of the surfaces of tree trunks.

The title of the show is **BARK: Drawings and Paintings**, but Isaacson says he toyed with the idea of adding another subtitle as well: (Drawing Lessons), which is what this particular series of works has provided. "My fascination with bark is that it is so varied, so complex. It leads you on unexpected paths and byways," he says. "As an artist depicting bark, you need to use different touches: lighter, heavier, in between, a combination of firm lines, holding lines, stippling. Bark is a great feast for the eye, and for the artist who would draw it."

After studying painting and design at **Brooklyn College, the Slade School of Fine Arts in London, and Oberlin College** in the 1940s and 1950s, Isaacson took a 30-year detour that included a Ph.D. in the **History of Art** from **UC Berkeley** and a longtime faculty position at the **University of Michigan**. After retiring from Michigan in 1996, Isaacson and his wife, Helen, an English teacher, loaded up their car and drove across the country, with Berkeley as their eventual destination. Once settled, Isaacson refocused on making art, painting in oils, acrylics, and watercolors, and drawing with markers, brush pens, and pencil. Working out of a nine- by ten-foot studio in his home, Isaacson has explored such subjects matter as the national border walls and fences, and the beards of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century artists and writers, in addition to trees and nature.

A recognized authority on French Impressionism, Isaacson has written about the structure and line in Claude Monet's and Alfred Sisley's depictions of the outdoor world. In his own practice, working from photographs of trees that capture his eye on his walks through his neighborhood, Isaacson works over the particulars of each section of bark, adapting his technique to the grooves and grains of the surfaces. From the tree trunks, other images and associations emerge: a particularly luscious knot in the wood calls to mind the moon face of a barn owl, and the peeling spiky bark of a sago palm becomes a rooster's cockscomb.

Isaacson has exhibited throughout the East Bay and beyond. He had a solo show at the Flora Lamson Hewlett Gallery at the Graduate Theological Union in 2009, and has participated in groups shows including the ProArts Juried Annual and A Tribute to Peter Selz at b. sakata garo in Sacramento, and regularly participates in the member exhibitions at the Berkeley Art Center and the Richmond Art Center.

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**BARK: Drawings and Paintings** will be on view **March 13-April 5 at the Berkeley Arts Festival, 2133 University Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94704.** An artist's reception will be held March 20, 5-7 p.m. Gallery hours are 3-6 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Berkeley Arts Festival: [www.berkeleyartsfestival.com](http://www.berkeleyartsfestival.com)

**Further information** about Joel Isaacson and his work can be found on his website: [www.isaacsonpaintings.com](http://www.isaacsonpaintings.com)



*Large Bark 9*  
*Markers, brush pens, pencil on paper*  
*2013*  
*32" x 19 1/2"*