

## Shadow and Light



*Blossoming Apple Tree*

*The sunshine in you is making my breath sing, sing your name, your name to you, beautiful one.*

*-Susan Griffin*

Painting shadow and light can place us in direct contact with natural movement and change. We can see and feel the movement of life. This artful Nature encounter is great to do with trees when they are not in full leaf making the branches more clearly visible and opening large pockets of light.



I did it. I followed the imp-pulse, the green imp in me and stripped down to my bare nakedness and breathed in the

pungent scent of the apple blossoms with every pore of my flesh. With my back faced to the warmth of the waning sun, my front tingled with the cool ocean breeze. I sat in fullness there. The newly cut grass both provoked the adjustment of my seat and softened under my unshed winter weight. Oh how vulnerable and alive I felt as drunk bees wove overhead diving from cottony pink blossom to cottony pink blossom. I too felt myself open to their insistent probing as I succumbed to spring's apple opiate.

This seat with the apple blossom awning feels like a new creating place. It's a place to plant myself in the seed of creation. This morning when I first came out, my impulse was to move into the sunshine. In hindsight, I'm so glad I stayed with the shadows to experience the dappled beauty of this apple blossom world.

So I dated a page in my writing journal and opened to the rambling of pen, heart and hand oblivious really to the beauty of the moment. Suddenly the apple blossoms whispered their sweet movement on the page. Without thinking, I worked quickly to trace their shadow dance, for the spin of the earth made shapes shift and change in an instant. The shadows moved enough to be unrecognizable in the very short time it took me to pop up and run to my studio to get my camera. They changed their place before my eyes and were so fleeting that I felt little attachment to outlining them perfectly, for their lines would soon be of no consequence. I felt incredibly free.

Open to a shadowy place that draws your attention. Find a comfortable way to sit with these shadows for a time.



*Outlining then writing in the sunny spots*

Outline the shapes made by the shadows or alternatively outline the sunny shapes.

I soon discovered that words can fill shapes. What fun it was to place words within beautiful rounded movement. I loved this dancing shadowy conversation as apple tree life revealed itself in word and form. Tree branch and blossom became compelling as shadow and light undulated. In an instant I was drawn in and enfolded, drawing me out of the shadows. Mid word, the wind threatened to slide my page off the muskoka chair armrest as images scrolled across my page. My efforts to pinpoint this tree were being challenged by the elements.



*The wind freshens and the dappled pages take flight*

### Painting Shadow and Light

I had been writing a great deal lately. Drawing and painting were relegated to the shadows. This day I felt a beautiful opening to the world of form, colour and pattern happening again. I opened to what this apple tree had to teach. I wondered how shadows illuminate as I sat and breathed in their tracings.

I set up watercolour paint, water, and paper in order to engage with the dappled light on my page.



Gather a watercolour palette, paper, water container, wiping cloth and drawing pen.

*Tracing the light areas with black pen*

I traced the apple blossom shadows and then painted the light spaces in and around the shadows. I loved colouring this beautiful dappled light.

Paint inside the outlines. Its fun to choose the paint by running your fingers over the palette and letting your hand choose the colours



*Painting light*



*Outlining shadow*

For my second painting, I again started by tracing shadows but this time I gave *them* colour and left the sun lit areas alone. The shadows moved a great deal in the short time it took to paint them.



*Painting shadow*



*Painting shadow*

For my third painting I quickly painted the shadows free hand. This was a very loose and freeing exercise despite requiring decisiveness and complete focus.

These three paintings opened a new world of possibilities. Being in direct contact with the sun, wind, and creating with the tangible consequences of the Earth's spin were inspiring. I especially loved the simplicity of the first painting because it reminded me of paintings I'd done not long before of swirling shapes. The series is named Momentary Beauty.



*Dappled Light painting*



*Peach*

This time without  
outlining the shadows  
or sunny shapes,  
simply paint.

When all three shadow and light paintings were complete, I laid them down on the ground on top of the tree branch shadows that inspired their creation.



*Light and shadow paintings with apple tree shadow*

I immediately envisioned outlining the whole tree onto a larger piece of paper. So I ran to my studio to look for paper options and quickly returned with vellum because I loved how it is both smooth and shadowy, much like a foggy day.



*Tree banner*

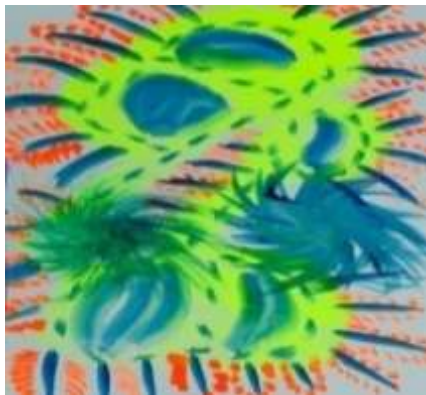
I laid frosty vellum under the shadows of the apple tree. I coloured the shadows free hand with coloured oil stick. I love the way oil stick glides along the smooth surface of the vellum. I realized quickly that I needed to outline the shadows first if I wanted them on the page. So, I traced the limbs, branches, leaves and blossoms in black marker and mused that it could be fun to work in watercolour or fluid acrylic to quickly paint the moving shadows.

Outline the light spaces or the shadows with pen or pastel

It is surprising to me how the strong black lines of the apple tree shadow tracings have not paralyzed my painting process. Ten years ago, I had a weeklong throbbing headache while attending a painting workshop that required me to draw black lines first then paint. Creating naturally from the inside-out was a new process for me. Drawing plants was familiar and pleasant for me but I found it difficult to integrate the two.



*sunflowers*



*Scream*

I created the radioactive-like “scream” painting, as an expression of that tension. I wrote on the back of this image: “my painting is feeling too tight somehow as though someone is editing my work. New ideas are tough to come by”

In contrast, painting inside the black lines this time felt inspiring. I enjoyed the small shapes so much and I also didn't mind leaving some black lines visible. Painting began with the traced outline of the apple tree shadows on the vellum at which point I took the banner to my studio where I could lie it down on a smooth surface. I found the grass to be too uneven and bumpy to paint on.



*Apple Tree in progress*

First I moved through the entire banner painting all the small round shapes with oil stick. Then I painted the main trunk and branches gold, which was an instant idea after having started painting the shadows themselves with gold stick while the vellum was still lying under the apple tree. I love the warmth and vitality of gold and its presence reminds me of many earlier gold paintings. When a small voice suggested I paint the spaces between the colours cream I felt a familiarity that was akin to visiting an old school friend. The familiar zen quality of the cream with the colours really took my breath away.

Enjoy the experience of painting in the outlined spaces... Or ignore the outlines and paint freely...

Now that I've found a whole new way to engage with nature, I'm inspired to paint a canvas banner dark purple/blue and lay it under the apple tree. Then I will trace the shadows with white chalk and begin to paint. I love the idea of dark blue/purple coming through in the unpainted spaces just like the black marker. I will paint the small shapes, the trunk and branches without worrying much about which is light and which shadow for they are all of the same living experience of this tree as the wind blows, the sun shines and the earth maintains its spinning orbit around the sun. I feel so excited to discover yet another way to express my love of natural pattern, colour and form while engaging with the daily cycle of light and shadow.



*Completed Apple Tree*