



Shirley Weisbrod works almost every day in the basement studio of her house that overlooks Lake Mendota.

She etched this scene from her studio window.

—State Journal photos by Joseph W. Jackson II

# Trees inspire artistry and poetry

By Genie Campbell  
Of The State Journal

Shirley Weisbrod would rather look at trees than just about anything else.

She is fascinated by the individual twists and turns of a tree's trunk and branches. To her, each tree has a personality of its own.

I envision groups of trees having conversations with one another. Some trees look like they're dancing. Others look very sad, describes Mrs. Weisbrod, gazing out at the trees surrounding her lakefront home in Shorewood Hills.

And when one tree particularly beckons to her, she sketches it and makes an etching. So taken is she with trees, that Mrs. Weisbrod can't complete an etching without one.

I was doing so many trees that I decided to stop and try a different subject matter.

But it didn't work. Whatever she etched, Mrs. Weisbrod managed to suck at least a part of a tree in.

I worked my way back to doing just

trees. There is just something compelling about trees that draw me to them. I see so many different things in different trees."

Rita Somers, a good friend and neighbor of Mrs. Weisbrod, also loves to pay tribute to nature. She is not an artist, however, but a poet, and she has written dozens of short verses. "Whenever I'm inspired . . . sometimes in the middle of the night."

## Compliment each other

For a long time the two friends talked about combining their work; last year they finally did it.

First available in November, "Etchings and Fragments," a small, soft cover book, is a matched collection of etchings by Mrs. Weisbrod and verses by Mrs. Somers.

"Neither one of us gear subject matter to suit one another. But our moods just seem to correlate," said Mrs. Weisbrod.

One day last spring the two women sat down and began matching etchings with poems.

"They complimented each other so well,

we decided to throw them together," said Mrs. Somers who is now in the process of contacting a subsidiary of Random House Publishing Company about mass producing the book. The women themselves published the first 500 copies of "Etchings and Fragments," (\$4), which are available in most area book stores, through Community Publications in McFarland.

"I did write a few poems for the book but mostly we just paired them up," said Mrs. Somers.

"We used the etching that best suited the poetry," added Mrs. Weisbrod.

A book-signing reception for "Etchings and Fragments" will take place Saturday, 4-6 p.m., at the Fanny Garver Gallery, 230 State St., where the original etchings for the book will be on exhibit.

A collection of Mrs. Weisbrod's work is also currently on exhibit through this month at the Bank of Shorewood Hills, University Avenue at Shorewood Boulevard.

Always interested in art, Mrs. Weisbrod primarily painted until she was forced to do an etching as a class project in a drawing class she was taking at Yale University

while her husband, Burton A. Weisbrod, professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was on a sabbatical in New Haven, Conn., for one year.

At the time, 1975, she didn't know the first thing about etchings, but coached by printmaker Gabor Peterdi, she became so involved in etchings that she has never returned to painting. It was also the beginning of her love affair with trees.

## Trees add 'life'

"I thought trees lent themselves to etchings. But what I do in etchings I can't do in paintings," she said.

"A lot of people think a painting is not complete without putting people in it. I feel the same way about trees. A tree puts life into my work."

Born in Chicago, Mrs. Weisbrod was headed for the Art Institute of Chicago when she met her husband who was planning to attend school at the University of Illinois in Urbana.

She followed him to Urbana and graduated with a degree in elementary educa-

tion instead of art because it seemed more practical at the time.

"There was a big shortage of teachers and I knew I could find a job," she recalled. "But I fell into a conformity I never really wanted."

When the Weisbrods moved to Madison with their two children in 1964, Mrs. Weisbrod taught nursery school for awhile and dabbled in painting classes at Madison Area Technical College. It was her husband that suggested she return to school for her degree in art.

She began studying at the UW-Madison in 1975, discovered her future direction in etchings at Yale the following year and graduated with a bachelor's degree in art from the UW-Madison in 1978.

In addition to her etchings, she also works in metal, incorporating the lines and figures from her sketches of trees into three-dimensional works of art.

Fall and winter are her favorite seasons because the trees are much more interesting to her with few or no leaves.

Explained Mrs. Weisbrod: "I think leaves hide a lot of a tree's personality."