These four seasonal photographs taken of the Baldwin Hill Elm in Egremont are part of “Portraits of American Trees” on view through Oct. 31 at Berkshire Botanical Garden.

**A love letter to America’s trees**

BY JENNIFER HUBERDEAU
The Berkshire Eagle

Tom Zetterstrom’s ‘Portraits of American Trees’ documents nearly 50 years of his conservation, preservation work

STOCKBRIDGE — Tom Zetterstrom speaks for the trees.

The Canaan, Conn.-based photographer has spoken for trees of all shapes and sizes for over four decades, with his photographs and as a political activist and conservationist.

“We’re at the stage in life, where those bodies of work represent a significant part of my history and a span of time and an amazing consumption of energy,” Zetterstrom said during an interview in the Berkshire Botanical Garden’s Leonhardt Galleries, where he’s showing “Portraits of American Trees.”

The show — a collection of 30 archival gelatin silver prints from his portfolio of American trees and several photos from his series, “Moving Point of View” — is on view through Oct. 31.

Zetterstrom established “Portraits of Trees” as a series, a portfolio, and that’s when I had my first foray into the world of field photography,” he said.

The images, always printed from black and white film, are delicate, evoke a sense of intimacy and most times appear, at first glance, to be hand-drawn works instead of photographs.

“Through the 1970s, he built a portfolio from tree to tree,” he said. “In 1985, a photograph of the Housatonic wetlands and an early photograph from “Moving Point of View” were among these pieces of his work purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Other museum acquisitions followed.”

“First of all, I had a business plan, I was exploring the landscape. I had been doing photography since I was in high school,” he said.

At the same time he was establishing a reputation as a fine art photographer, Zetterstrom was taking a series of photographs, not as part of an art project, but so part of a campaign against the Superfund highway planned to run from Norwalk, Conn., along Route 7 through Massachusetts and Vermont to the Canadian border.

Through the series, “Moving Point of View,” he monitored both healthy and sick elms along Route 7, from Blackstock, Conn., to the Massachusetts state line, said Tom Abbott of the Nature Conservancy.

The show — a collection of 30 archival gelatin silver prints from Zetterstrom’s “Portraits of American Trees” is on view through Oct. 31 at Berkshire Botanical Garden.

**If You Go**

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**What:** The Photography of Tom Zetterstrom

**When:** Oct 13-31

**Where:** Leonhardt Galleries, Berkshire Botanical Garden 2 West Stockbridge Road, Stockbridge

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Zetterstrom photographed the trees at the Baldwin Hill Elm in Lanesborough, he said, “It was right in time for the first Earth Day.”

One of his projects was in Connecticut, where he photographed the Baldwin Hill Elm. “I called ‘The Elm in Four Seasons.’” In 1997 and putting it together as a series that I called ‘The Elm in Four Seasons.’”

The Library of Congress bought the set, as did the Boston Public Library. “The American Elm is an incredible tree,” he said.

“The Baldwin Elm is exceptional—beautiful.”

It was under the branches of the Baldwin Hill Elm that Zetterstrom and Tom Abbott of the Nature Conservancy launched Elm Watch and its “Adopt An Elm” program. The Elm Watch group monitored both healthy and sick elms for Dutch Elm disease, while the adoption program provided sponsors to care for the trees in places that keep the trees healthy.

The Baldwin Hill Elm was adopted by and still cared for by the Houghton Tree Company. “The Berkshire Natural Resources Council has since conserved the farm land around it,” he said.

Although Elm Watch is no longer active, the Elm Watch program still survives in many of the 22 communities touched by the nonprofit.”

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