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I believe that all Finns have trees growing in their souls, such is the love for our forests, which for centuries have been considered the national treasure of Finland.

When I visit my homeland and see the vast forests of birches, pines and fir trees from the airplane window, the sight moves me more than any other.

As a teenager I used to love to roam in the woods around our summer house looking for wild blueberries in mid summer, and lingonberries and mushrooms later in the season. I remember the peace in the forest and how soothing and welcoming it was at times during my teenage years, often filled with turmoil and unhappiness.

The birch has appeared in my paintings and sculpture for many years. Not only has it symbolized home for me, but also the culture of the Finnish people. From furniture and vessels to tools and decorative objects, the birch has been used in Finnish households for centuries. You can find birches in folklore, poems and music praising their beauty and their magic.

I walk around Fresh Pond in Cambridge every morning. I have been doing it for so many decades that I know every tree and rock along my path. A few years ago a row of crabapple trees were dug up in the ambitious plan to rid the pond area of non-native species. I was sad to see them go as I had loved the pink and white blossoms in the spring, but to my relief birches had been chosen as the native replacements.

In several of my recent images I have also used bark as an inspiration. I like to look at bark from different trees, touch the surface, feel the grooves and ridges. As a little girl I used to whittle small boats out of pine bark and send them sailing on the river behind my grandparents' barn.

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