

ED NADEAU
MAINE FOLKLORE

COURTHOUSE GALLERY FINE ART

Nadeau's tragicomical narratives are populated by caricatures of people and objects and implicitly challenge our everyday logic.

–Britta Konau



COVER

Steamboat Wharf Incident (Opus)

2010

oil on canvas

42 x 52 inches

Percivals Land

1987

oil on canvas

32 x 42 inches

OPPOSITE

The Hat

1985

oil on linen

10 x 17 inches

ED NADEAU

MAINE FOLKLORE

OCTOBER 1 - OCTOBER 30, 2010

Essay by Britta Konau



COURTHOUSE GALLERY
FINEART

We Are All Mainers

Ever since he left graduate school in 1986, Ed Nadeau has been creating narrative paintings and drawings alongside his other bodies of work. He comes from a French-Canadian Catholic family and grew up in the Waterville area. This is important to note here because the artist's scenarios of transgression and absurdity grew out of this background—deep roots of folklore and oral narratives in French Canada and childhood tales of the Maine backwoods. However, Nadeau finds the ideas for his works in actual Maine news stories, events in his own life and combinations of both. For him real life is wondrous and weird enough.

Nadeau's tragicomical narratives are populated by caricatures of people and objects and implicitly challenge our everyday logic. The images remind strongly of the Theatre of the Absurd of the late 1940s to '60s which grew out of the realization that the certainties and unassailable beliefs of earlier times had been eroded. Vague moments of suspense reveal the foolishness of mankind when placed in the vastness of nature or when following its basest instincts. It is not surprising then that Nadeau lists among his literary influences Carolyn Chute's *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, Stieg Larsson's thrillers, as well as Stephen King. His



The Steamboat Wharf Incident #1 2010 oil on canvas 10 x 14 inches

artistic style could be called faux-naive, revealing the deep influence cartoons have had on him (especially *Bugs Bunny*). However, his skillful compositions and handling of paint give him away as a very accomplished painter who is drawn to the work of Anselm Kiefer, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and his teacher Jerome Witkin.

Nadeau walks a difficult line between reinforcing stereotypes about Mainers, possibly even angering viewers, and creating enough distance for us to be able to experience the humor in his scenarios. He succeeds by maintaining an authorial distance, always presenting his characters and dramas from afar, thereby dwarfing the figures and avoiding an obvious point of entry for identification. This emotional distance, however, allows the viewer to relate to Nadeau's images in a more open, humorous manner. Although the incidents may originate in remoteness, poverty, lawlessness, and insufficient education, they are rooted in simply being human; thus Nadeau's stories transcend the particular and become universal. We all can recognize a part of ourselves and situations which we sometimes find ourselves in.

Britta Konau is a writer and independent curator of contemporary art.



Nocturnal Railway Dance 2010 oil on canvas 34 x 40 inches



The Buck Saw 1987 oil on canvas 20 x 16 inches



The Hunted 1989 oil on canvas 68 x 72 inches

Ed Nadeau: Artist's Statement

The paintings in this exhibition represent narrative stories that I have nurtured for the past twenty-four years. My attempt to interpret the human condition through narrative painting began during my studies at Syracuse University in the late 1970s.

While at Syracuse, I studied human anatomy and painting with the American Expressionist Jerome Witkin. In his classes, Witkin underscored the importance of capturing the human form through compelling drawings developed by anatomical accuracy, a solid knowledge of color, and a heightened use of light. Along with this, he emphasized the importance of gesture and materiality in painting, which he personally adapted and elaborated upon from the Action Painters of the 1940s and 50s.

His positive influence as a mentor was immense. A change manifested in my work during the mid-1980s, shortly after graduate school with the creation of such paintings as "Misery Ridge" and "The Orchard."

At this time, I read Carolyn Chute's book *The Beans of Egypt, Maine*, which changed my work almost overnight from conceptual based mixed media pieces



Misery Ridge 1985 acrylic on canvas 57 x 75 inches

to straight ahead narrative paintings. Chute's book about the "white-trash" working class of Maine was the catalyst that finally allowed me to convey my ideas on canvas.

Reared in a large French-Canadian, Catholic, blue-collar family, I was influenced by the tall tales exchanged almost daily by people like my grandfather, parents, aunts, uncles and neighbors. The absurdity of the plight of Chute's characters was a common occurrence in a rural state like Maine, and it was akin to the tall tales of my youth, which I've been able to dramatize through my mind's eye.

My process is similar to fiction writing in that my narratives are not necessarily authentic depictions of actual people or places, but interpretations of an idea or event that developed over a period of time.

To that end, these paintings are an amalgam of childhood memories, artistic influences, current events, perceived together on the canvas as a genre to which the viewer will conceivably relate to as narrative.



The Airline 1985 oil on canvas 59 x 70 inches *private collection*



The Highway to Blue Hill 2010 oil on canvas 40 x 34 inches



The Orchard 1989 oil on canvas 25 x 16 inches



Mutiny of the Bounty 1988 oil on canvas 60 x 78 inches



The Shortcut 1987 oil on canvas 72 x 70 inches



The Avalanche 2010 oil on panel 25 x 15 inches



The Stolen Cord 1998 oil on linen 68 x 72 inches



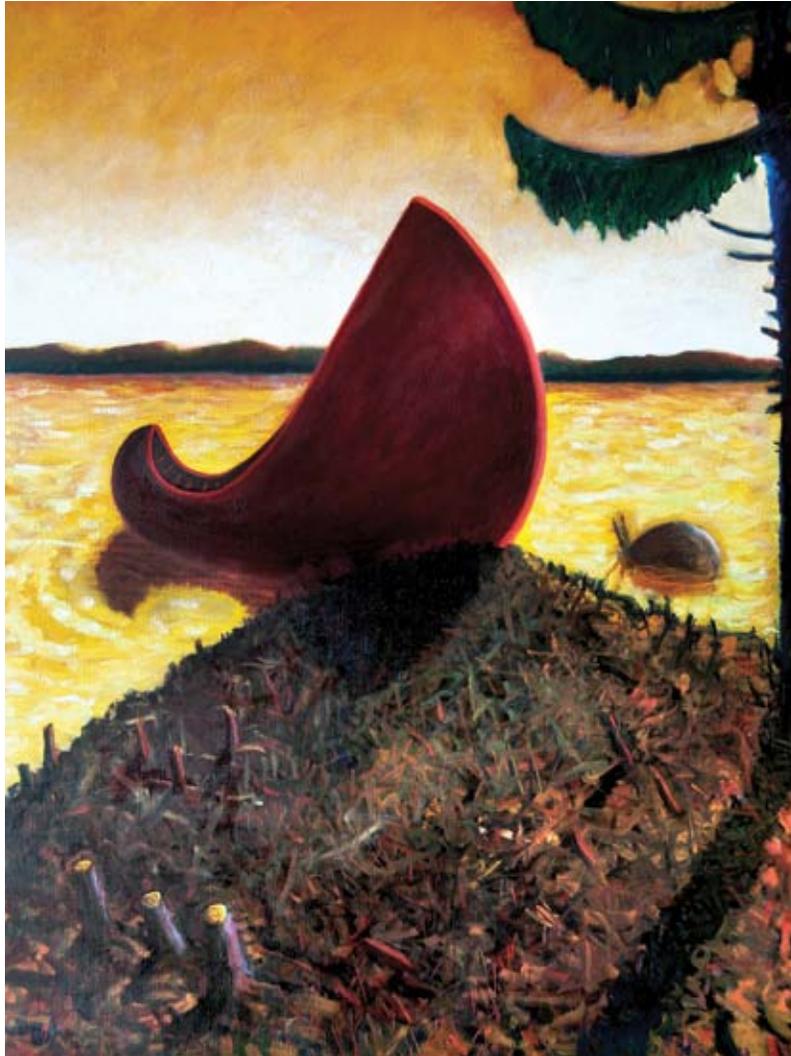
Americans on the Fence I 2010 oil on panel 10 x 14 inches



Americans on the Fence II 2010 oil on panel 10 x 14 inches



Ready for Winter 2009 oil on canvas 36 x 28 inches



Red Canoe: Homage to Tom Thomson 2010 oil on linen 42 x 32 inches



Umbagog 1987 oil on canvas 40 x 34 inches



Death of a Young Man 1987 oil on canvas 61 x 73 inches



Chain and Stump 1992 encaustic on panel 20 x 16 inches



Old Tree 2002 oil on canvas 36 x 28 inches



The Rope

2010
oil on canvas
48 x 36 inches

OPPOSITE

The Snow Sled

1998
oil on canvas
38 x 42 inches

ED NADEAU

BORN 1958, Waterville, Maine

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, Maine 2010
Whitney Artworks, Portland, Maine 2005

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (selected)

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, Maine 2008, '09, '10
University of Maine, Lord Hall, Orono, Maine 2007, '08, '09
Elan Fine Arts, Rockport, Maine 2005, '07
University of Maine, Carnegie Hall, Orono, Maine 2003, '04, '05
Nan Mulford Gallery, Rockland, Maine 2005
Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Rockport, Maine 1995, '97, 2005
Park School Gallery, Baltimore, MD 2004
Clark House Gallery, Bangor, Maine 1998 - 2003
Creative Arts Workshop, New Haven, CT 1999
Lewis, Bangor, Maine 1999
Villa Julie College, Baltimore, MD, 1998
Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, Maine 1997
White Art Gallery, Husson College, Bangor, Maine 1997
Ellsworth Public Library Gallery, Ellsworth, Maine 1996
School 33 Art Center, Baltimore, MD 1986 '87, '91, '93
Tuttle Gallery, McDonough, MD 1987
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD 1986

COLLECTIONS

Bangor Savings Bank, Bangor, Maine
Debbie Chatfield, Rockport, Maine
George Ciscle, Baltimore, Maryland
Greg Lipton & Sara Crisp, Cumberland, Maine
Robin Garcia, Bangor, Maine
Betsy Evans Hunt, Cape Elizabeth, Maine
Dr. Ann C. Reardon, Bangor, Maine
Robert Roth, Stonington, Maine
The Warhol Foundation, New York City, NY

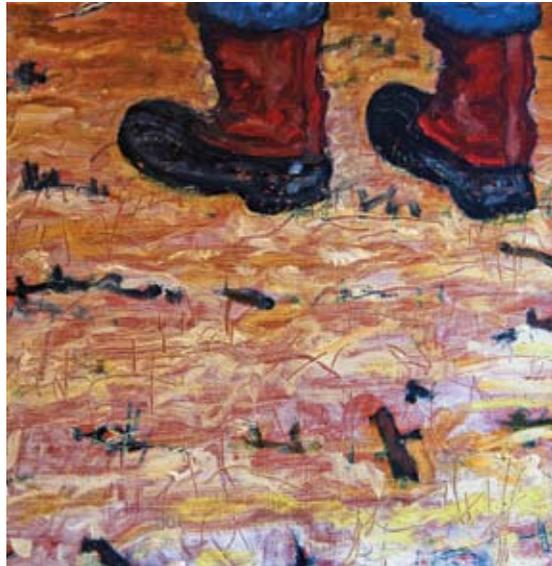
GRANTS AND HONORS

Maryland State Arts Council, Visual Arts Fellowship Recipient, 1987

EDUCATION

Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD, MFA (Painting), 1986
Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, BFA (Painting), 1980





Trodden 2010 oil on panel 11 x 11 inches

COURTHOUSE GALLERY
FINEART

court street ellsworth, maine 04605 courthousegallery.com 207 667 6611