What Came Before

COURTHOUSE GALLERY FINE ART

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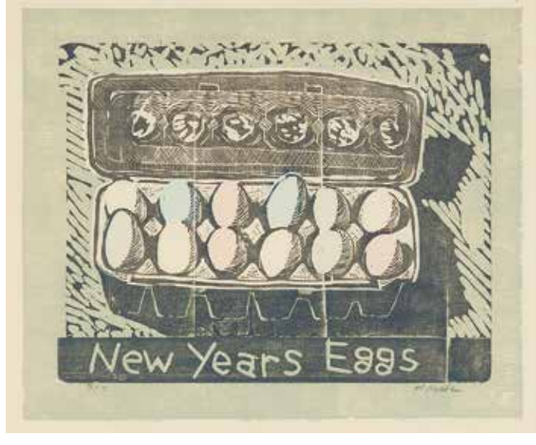

Holly Meade (1956–2013), *New Years Eggs*, edition of 7, woodblock print, 16 x 19 inches

COVER Janice Anthony, *Birdwatcher II*, 1993, acrylic on linen, 14.5 x 19 inches

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FINE ART

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What Came Before

This exhibition offers a rare glimpse into the formative stages of an artist's creative journey by highlighting early artworks by a diverse group of contemporary artists, many of whom have been working for five or more decades. These overlooked artworks have remained out of view, overshadowed by an artist's own productivity, or later periods of maturity and recognition. Placed together, the collective emerges with a fresh vitality, asking collectors and viewers to reconsider the power of a forgotten artwork when it returns into view.

Poised at a moment between reflection and renewal, "What Came Before" creates a dialogue about beginnings and the experimentation that shaped each artist's practice. Discovering these early artworks has been a thrill, and I hope this catalog helps share the experience by pairing each artwork with a statement by the artist. Some of the highlights include Tom Curry's first oil painting of Chatto Island, an early wood craving by Lise Bécu of a life-sized woman cradling a lamb, one of Jon Imber's first abstracted landscapes, and a 1983 plein air painting of row boats by Rosie Moore.

During this annual time of reflection, I am also reminded of the many legacy artists I have worked with since we opened the Gallery in the summer of 2006. Beginning with Philip Barter (1939–2024), who was in our inaugural exhibition "Ellsworth Revisited," which we will revive for the Gallery's twentieth anniversary in 2026, and Stephen Pace (1918–2010) before he and his wife Pamela left their beloved home in Stonington to live in a retirement community in Indiana. In 2007, we held a farewell

Maine by Gretna Campbell (1922–1987), oil on canvas 50 x 50 inches, ca. 1981

Birch Trees by Stephen Pace (1918–2010), oil on canvas 18 x 24 inches, 1973

solo show for Pace that helped launch the Gallery onto the to the Maine art scene, and that led to meeting and working with Martica Sawin, a New York art critic and author, who also summered in Maine. I later discovered she had been my art history professor at Parsons School of Design in 1970. My husband and I randomly bumped into Martica while having breakfast at the Bus Stop Cafe in the Village, our favorite breakfast restaurant. Turns out it was her's too, and she lived just around the corner.

In 2008, I met and worked with Holly Meade (1956–2013), whose prints I am still in love with, and Dahlov Ipcar (1917–2017) when we held a picture book exhibition to highlight Maine's talented illustrators. I visited Ipcar several times at her farm in Georgetown, Maine, and will always treasure "The Girl with the Gallery," a book Ipcar gave about Edith Halpert who founded The Downtown Gallery in the Village and helped launch American modernism. Ipcar's parents, William and Marguerite Zorach, lived across the street from the Gallery, and were represented by Halpert.

Other legacy artists include Carroll Thayer Berry (1886–1978), Gretna Campbell (1922–1987), Clark Fitz-Gerald (1917–2004), Chenoweth Hall (1908–1999), Jon Imber (1950–2014), Judith Leighton (1929–2011), and Emily Muir (1904–2003). I have had the pleasure to work all these artists or their families, and with many, many other artists over the past twenty years. Each one has enriched my life with their creativity and their passion. I hope "What Came Before" enlightens your spirit with these forgotten gems, and excites you as it has me, especially as we look forward to a new year!

— Karin Wilkes
Director, Courthouse Gallery Fine Art

Philip Koch

As an undergrad art student at Oberlin College, I enjoyed painting surreal fantasy worlds. Over time these paintings came to seem more clever than insightful, and I started looking for something more. In 1970, when I arrived for the MFA Painting Program at Indiana University, their art museum was holding a major exhibition of nineteenth century American painting. Since Oberlin's art department was oriented toward abstraction, most of these traditional landscapes were new to me.

The deep attachment these earlier artists felt for the natural world was genuine and moving. Their paintings inspired me to go outside and closely examine the spaces and textures of nature. *Fall at Lake Lemon* was painted over the course of four mornings at a lake near the University campus. As I worked on the painting, the excitement I felt for the nineteenth century painting traditions was ticking away inside me. I was delighted at how it turned out. *Fall at Lake Lemon* served as a guide and an inspiration for the paintings I would make for many years to come.

Fall At Lake Lemon
oil on canvas
16 x 19 inches
1971

Tom Curry

In 1995, I began painting a small, nearshore island in Brooklin, Maine, to explore my fear of water. The house I was renting at the time overlooked the island, which I had painted in pastels, a medium I had long appreciated for its immediacy. Painting in oils slowed me down, but I have not looked back in the thirty years since.

Over the years, the island has become more than a motif for me. This mountaintop in the sea suggests a refuge, safe and stable while the elements of sky, cloud and water whirl around it in the chaos of motion and change. With the island as a centering place, my paintings explore the constant and gorgeous changes all around us—how light moves across the landscape, the earth's shadow on the atmosphere, contrails arcing across the sky, mist, fog, sea smoke—these elemental and fleeting phenomena. This painting is my first oil of Chatto Island.

Chatto Island
oil on canvas
30 x 36 inches
1995

Ragna Bruno

In the summer my husband and I kayaked daily to Bean Island equipped with lunch.

We lay on the soft ground and looked at the clouds.

Inevitably we pronounced the same words: “What a beauty surrounds us. How wonderful is Maine.”

These feelings translated to this large-scale painting and encouraged me to paint in this format.

With the years comes a necessity to go to the essence in our life. This led me to a desire for more abstraction in my work.

Bean Island
oil on canvas
48 x 48 inches
1992

Lise Bécu

Growing up in a small town on the Gaspe peninsula in Quebec, the church was a very big part of our lives. I spent many hours admiring the statues and carvings during the long services. I loved the stained-glass windows, the big organ, the frankincense. I particularly liked Stations of the Cross carved by Medard Bourgeault, founder of the Ecole de Sculpture Surbois where I went at the age of seventeen.

Not until I was much older did I realize Bourgeault carved the Stations of the Cross in my church. Although I work primarily in stone, I was a wood carver for many years. White pine is a very good medium and plentiful in Maine. Only later in my life did I realize how much the religious art of my childhood influenced me, which is very apparent in *Woman with Lamb*, one of three pieces left from a series of life-sized women wood sculptures I made in the mid 1990s.

Woman With Lamb
stained white pine log
67h x 18w x 14d inches
ca. mid-1990s

Janice Anthony

My early paintings were influenced by my studies of English literature, especially of medieval poetry. I was fond of the Arthurian legends, and of the fantasy present in those myths and narratives. One of my favorite poems is still “The Defense of Guinevere” by William Morris, a moving description of intense emotions and symbolic colors. Over time my focus turned from literature to painting, and I envisaged landscapes with the remnants of a formal order, which evolved into imaginary gardens and mazes with architectural forms. Gradually the landscapes became wilder, and the architectural elements sank further into ruin, while the natural world proceeded to become dominant. The painted urn in *Birdwatcher II* is one of these lost formal artifacts, visited by a living bird in the present.

The natural world, as it transitions from woods into wilderness, has been my companion for most of my life, and took over my attention, a continuous presence, both familiar and friendly, evolving to become the subject of my paintings.

Birdwatcher II
acrylic on linen
14.5 x 19 inches
1993

Alison Rector

I painted *Warm Bath* in 1997 as I began a deep dive into painting interiors. This bathroom caught my eye in an old building in Belfast where I studied painting with artist Linden Frederick. The contrast between the cold light of the vacant hallway and the warm glow in the bathroom captivated me. Glimpsing into the bath felt like discovering a secret. I like the shapes of the claw foot bathtub, the old wringer washing machine and the geometry of the tiled floor.

Since *Warm Bath*, I've painted many interiors: public libraries, town halls, laundromats, bedrooms, and kitchens. The implied human presence is part of the story. By painting interiors, I understand light and space. The light from an interior window is consistent, the temperature and direction of the light reoccur with the time of day. I return to a room again and again, at the same hour, observe and paint.

Warm Bath
oil on panel
11.5 x 12 inches
1997

Jeffery Becton

Easter Sunday is an early example of how I was moved to go beyond straightforward black and white pictures to create more compelling and mysterious images with the introduction of color and content that I added post capture. At that time there was a purist ethic in play in the B&W photographic community that frowned on manipulation of photographic content post-capture and especially if digital (computer) manipulation was involved. My own realization was that anything is fair game if it moves the needle towards a deeper engagement with the viewer.

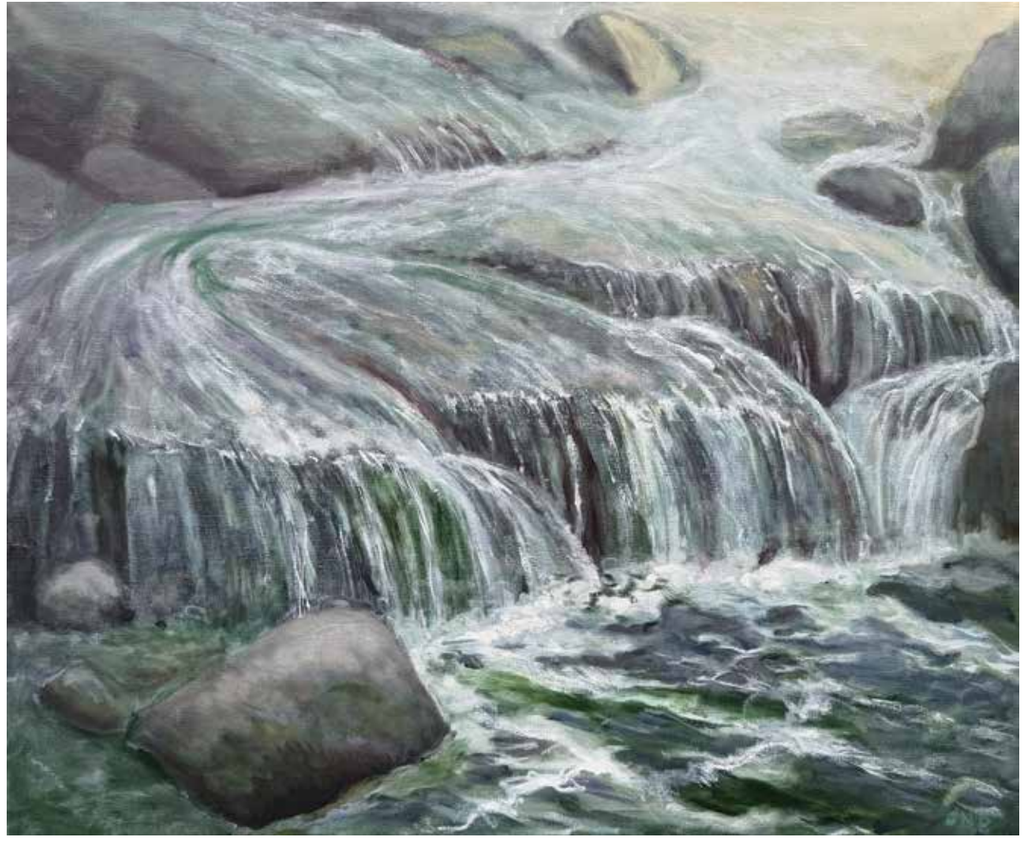
Easter Sunday
photomontage
14.5 x 14.5 inches
1994

Judith Belasco

As a young woman, I spent six summers painting this stream every day during the summer. I hauled large canvases into the woods. Sometimes I'd have an easel, sometimes not, sometimes I just sat in the middle of a stream on a large rock and painted. As a kid, my family spent a lot of time on the Jersey shore. I loved the ocean, the curl of waves, the foam on the beach, and I remember being frustrated because the foam would never hold still long enough for me to see the patterns. Growing up in an artist's family (father and grandfather were both Philadelphia painters), I was taught at a very early age to look at things carefully.

The daily discipline of carefully observing these rocks and painting this stream so many times was an invaluable precursor to my current work at Schoodic in Acadia National Park. Over time I finally developed the skill to capture the movement of the ocean and the foam. Likewise, the understanding that painting water both as it looks and as it feels is the key to believable fluidity. The joy I experience while painting water and foam has been gratefully a lifelong experience.

West Branch II
oil on canvas
28 x 34 inches
1964



Richard Keen

Ocean Hull No. 76 marks a pivotal moment in the evolution of my visual language, serving as a bridge between observation and abstraction. Drawing inspiration from working waterfront imagery, I began experimenting with the interplay of recognizable forms and dynamic, abstracted shapes. The bold use of colors in this piece was not only a means of capturing the vibrancy and energy of the harbor environment, but also a way to push beyond traditional representation and embrace a more expressive, intuitive approach. Through layering, gestural brushwork, and striking contrasts, I started to develop a personal dialect that would later define much of my work. Included in the group show “What Came Before,” this painting stands as evidence of early exploration: a formative gesture toward integrating real-world references with inventive abstraction, shaping the direction of my artistic journey. This painting was exhibited and archived in the U.S. Art in Embassies Program.

Ocean Hull No. 76
oil on canvas
30 x 30 inches
2010

Philip Frey

Around 2010, I began changing mediums—going from acrylics to oils—for both practical and aesthetic reasons. During that time, I was plein air painting and kept running into problems with the paint drying too quickly from the sun, heat, or wind. This made for a very frustrating experience. At a plein air event, a fellow artist strongly questioned why I was painting outdoors with acrylics for said reasons, as well as oils being a traditional, time-tested medium for millennia. If my friend's urging hadn't convinced me, a trip to the Colby Museum of Art placed me in front of numerous luscious and buttery oil paintings. I slowly returned to oils, a medium I had loved in art school and had seen and studied in numerous museums.

Ready to Go is one of the first paintings created during the early days of this transition. Oil colors opened up more options in terms of lengthened working times, ease of use outdoors (and indoors), as well as practical and aesthetic potential. To my sensibilities oils are naturally creamier, more pliable, and have a rich luminous feel.

Ready To Go
oil on linen
24 x 36 inches
2012

Rick Fox

In 2012, I began to experiment with adding more medium to my paint and began to consciously push color as I was immersed in my love of the Fauves. I wanted to bring more of the emotion of what it felt like to be in direct relationship to the landscape. With color, loaded brushes, and lots medium, I wanted to peek over the edge of control while remaining grounded in the thrills of the world I was witnessing. The excitement of painting on location at the spaces I gravitated toward in 2012 has stayed with me. I am still revisiting these spots today.

Evening Planes
oil on canvas
20 x 20 inches
2012

Rosie Moore

When I painted *Three Rowboats* (42 years ago), I was painting a lot of *en plein air* landscapes, and still-lifes from life in the studio, almost never using photographs. I can see elements in this early painting like shapes of color, texture and patterns of light that are still preoccupations today. I wrote then that “I loved the infinite variety of color and light in nature and the complications of space.” This is still the center of my work. I am often using motifs that I examined then, but in new ways. Earlier observations seem more intuitive. I am enjoying letting whimsey, imagination and experimentation into the work. In moving into mixed media with collage, I am trying to push the limits of my understanding. When I look at this past work, I can remember the joy of “getting it right.” I am still looking for that thrill.

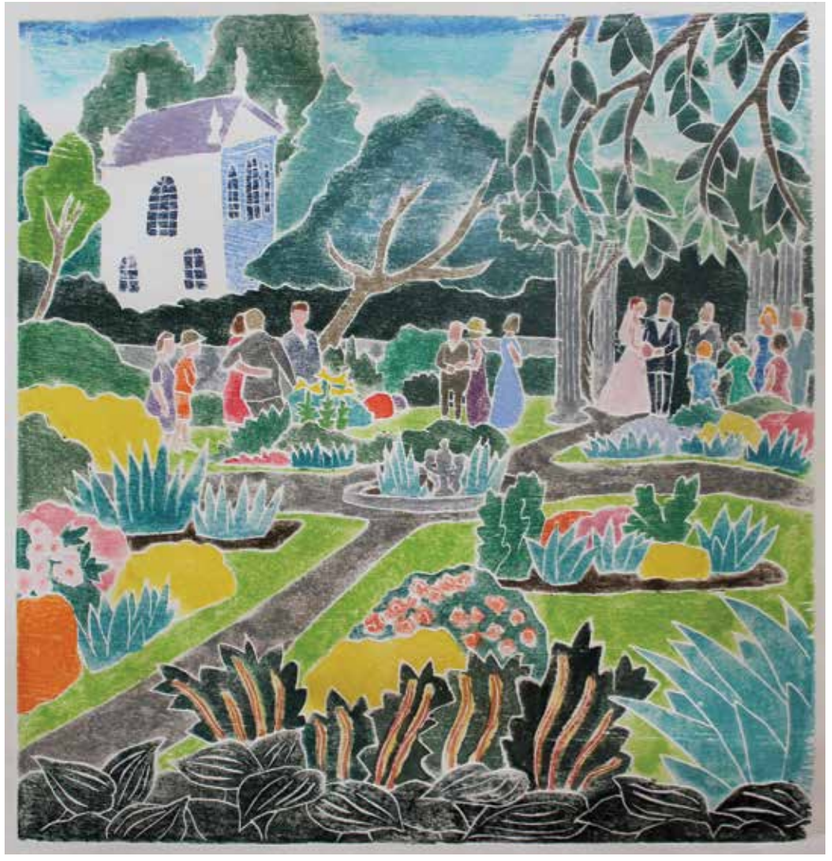
Three Row Boats
oil on paper
25 x 34 inches
1983

Kate Hanlon

I created *Garden Wedding* in 1999 as a wedding gift for a couple who were married at Glen Magna Farm in Danvers, MA. The ceremony took place outdoors on a gorgeous day, and the colorful flowers and festive attire of the wedding party, the bride in pale pink, made for a colorful scene. At the time, I was teaching myself how to make white line prints, and I wanted to incorporate as many details as possible. I designed the image to include many, many small shapes of flowers, figures, etc., forgetting that each tiny shape must be inked individually with a watercolor brush and liquid ink, and then individually hand-rubbed to transfer the ink to the paper. Then, a second application of ink is added, all around.

Garden Wedding was especially time consuming to print because of its overall large size and all those small shapes. I have since become more aware of the number and the size of shapes, how the shapes interact with each other, and the overall rhythmic linear flow of the design. Many of my urban prints have been influenced by *Garden Wedding* in that they are still complex, yet not as labor intensive.

Garden Wedding
white line woodcut
16.5 x 16.75 inches
edition of 25
1999



Jon Imber (1954–2016)

When our son, Gabriel, was born in 1994, Jon was anxious that painting for him would never be the same. His practice had been based on endlessly long uninterrupted sessions in the studio. Jon had been a protégée of Philip Guston, and he was trying to shake Guston's profound influence by turning to Willem de Kooning, another historical inspiration whose work Jon revered. Two de Kooning favorites from 1949 were *Attic* and *Excavation*, which became lifetime touchstones for Jon.

However, Jon quickly discovered working on panel, poke proof, and plein air sessions in which the excitement of the moment and all his implicit knowledge translated itself into the paint. *Silverhill* (1995), was an investigation into a drawing-dependent, reduced pallet that evolved into an extensive black and white theatrical series with Gabe as the primary figure, lovingly commemorating our son from babyhood to childhood. Jon includes himself on the right edge of the landscape, making it a self-portrait as well. This series was influenced by Picasso, and Jon's reverence for renaissance painting: *Silverhill* is the embarkation.

— Jill Hoy, *Jon Imber's wife*

Silverhill VII
oil on panel
20 x 30 inches
1995

Katherine Wilkes

The seaside air in California is thick with oceanspray, mood improving negative ions, and visible heat waves blurring and warping the shapes and colors of the scene. While living in Los Angeles, I spent many mornings and evenings contemplating the fluctuating greys, blues, and pinks of the Pacific Ocean and the hazy atmosphere by the beach.

One morning by the ocean in 2021, I was possessed to draw a basic sketch of the atmosphere with a map of realistic colors for the various shapes. Afterward, I painted the experience in my typical style, but with as little detail as possible. I was delighted with my results. I titled the painting, *Venice Haze*.

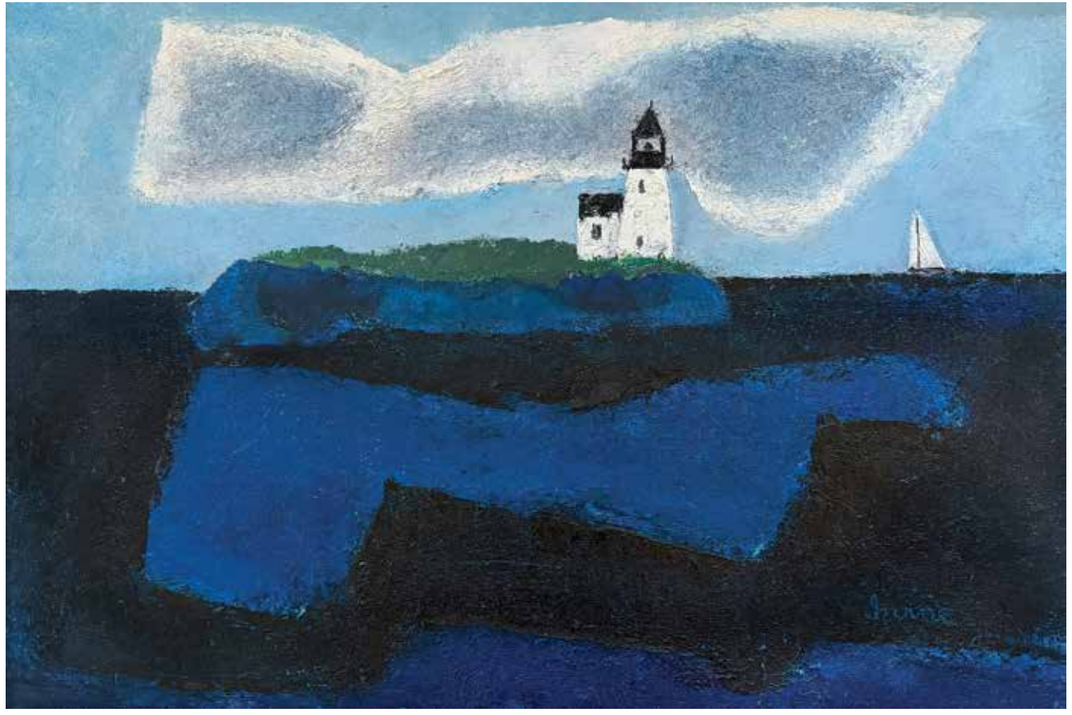
Prior to this, I painted large-scale, abstracted figures and animals in patterned settings. *Venice Haze* marks the period when I began painting landscapes, before moving to the New Mexican desert and then Maine, where I have expanded my landscape subject matter.

Venice Haze
acrylic on panel
14 x 18 inches
2021

William Irvine

Sometime ago on a visit to Italy I saw the work of Giovanni Bellini, a Renaissance artist, and I remember I was struck by the luminosity of his colors, in particular the blue. The painting had such an emotional depth that when I got home, I started to paint my own seascapes. I found myself using quite a bit of blue in my pallet, and so this particular painting has the title *The Bellini Blue Sea*, a nod to my muse.

Since then, I have continued to paint my vision of the sea, moving the clouds, sea reflections, and islands around to create a more powerful way to express myself. Sometimes the clouds edge into the sea, sometimes the sea flows into the sky. My intention is to rearrange these elements into a structure that holds that moment you connect with nature.



The Bellini Blue Sea
oil on board
20 x 30 inches
ca. 2005

Heidi Daub

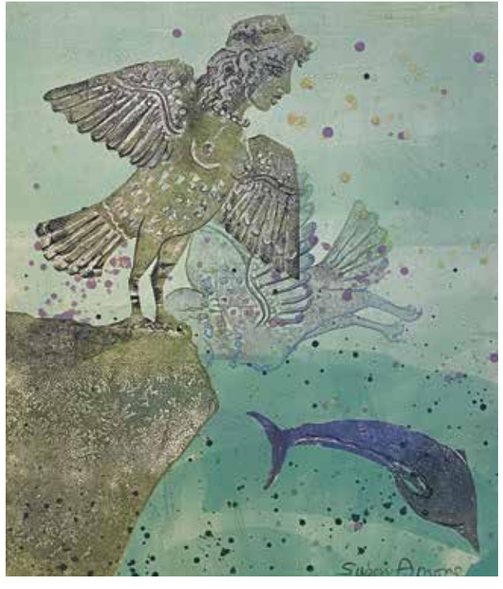
Where We Go is one of many works on paper created during a span of years when I was living rustically; clearing land and house building in Maine with my partner and small children, as well as maintaining a painting, writing, and music making practice. The following is my artist statement from that period:

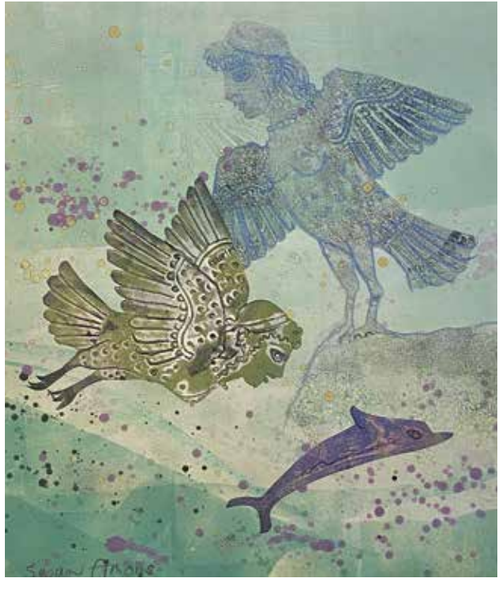
My paintings are about memory, a feeling, or those moments when the world around me is in sync, or unusual and the sentiment is one of fullness, awe or respect. This comes up through everyday living, influenced by the natural forms I see daily, the actions of people in my life, my writing, and is not something I seek out, but rather something that is noticed. The paintings come from a certain introspection, the images seem to be metaphor, and in this way are like poems to me, coming out of an awareness, a sense.

Where We Go
acrylic on paper
22 x 30 inches
1995

Susan Amons

My series of *Sirens and Dolphins* from 1996 represents a breakthrough in my monoprinting process; I discovered overprinting with Mylar shapes and ghosting images. My creative breakthroughs occurred after a month of intense printmaking at the Womens' Studio Workshop (WSW), in Rosendale, New York. WSW encouraged me to be bold, to try multiple-plate printing, and to use large rollers and viscosity layered inks. Eventually my subject matter evolved from the realm of myths and dreams to the natural world.





Sirens and Dolphins III
monoprint
14 x 12 inches
1996

Sirens and Dolphins II
monoprint
14 x 12 inches
1996

Joseph Keiffer

When I was in art school in the 1970s, I was encouraged to adopt certain styles. How did “style” intersect with truth, I wondered? I simply set about “seeing” what was out there—and painting it. This did not include any contrived ways of “seeing” such as cubism or expressionism. Nature and reality is what had drawn me to painting in the first place.

A style must come from within, not adopted like a new fashion. Such style I might have comes from looking at nature and reality. The painting in this show is the first time that I sat down in a field (2005) and risked my eyeballs to look directly at the setting sun. I have fiddled with this painting numerous times over a twenty-year period because I have become better at describing what happens at sundown: Not just to the sky, the sun, and the clouds—but equally important—what happens to the fields and the mountains. It is all complex, interwoven, and fascinating.

Sundown
oil on canvas
15 x 30 inches
2005

B Millner

January Barn was one of the first paintings I did for exhibition. I began my art career as a sculptor because it was easier to translate three dimensions into three dimensions than three dimensions into two. After not touching a brush for a dozen or so years, I woke up one morning and realized that you can't sculpt a sunrise.

I was frequently driving through the farmland of eastern Virginia in those days, and often passed this old abandoned farmhouse. I was taken in by its classic farmhouse design—no frills, clean, simple architectural lines. *January Barn* was the first painting in a series depicting mostly abandoned farmhouses in Virginia and Maine, where I was beginning to spend more time. I felt that I was doing my small part in preserving these old structures, which in the normal course of events, could expect one of two fates: either be torn down or rehabbed in vinyl siding. The latter is what happened to this barn. I have since moved on to other subjects, but my eye is still occasionally caught by a lonely farmhouse sitting on the edge of a field.

January Barn
oil on panel
18 x 24 inches
2002

Jessica Lee Ives

I like *Beehive, Frontside* for this show because it pictures my husband, Jonathan, hiking up the Beehive in Acadia at such an extreme angle that what came before that point in the trail recedes well below, the cove of Swim Beach just barely angling off in the corner. We married in 2013, and in 2014 we traveled all over the state running up mountains and jumping in water together. He taught me to snowboard and I hiked Katahdin for the first time. My paintings became much more alive and colorful with Jonathan in my life. Chartreuse yellow seems appropriate to express this. My favorite part of this painting is that Jonathan still owns and loves this shirt!

Evening Reflection: Soft Light was painted when there wasn't a swimmer to be found anywhere in my work. I would sit in my kayak on the south shores of Megunticook Lake in order to absorb every glint and reflection of evening sun off the water, the shoreline, the metal ladders on swimming docks, cabin windows. All this light laid the foundation for my later work, and such close proximity to the surface of the water finally got to me. Eventually I jumped in.

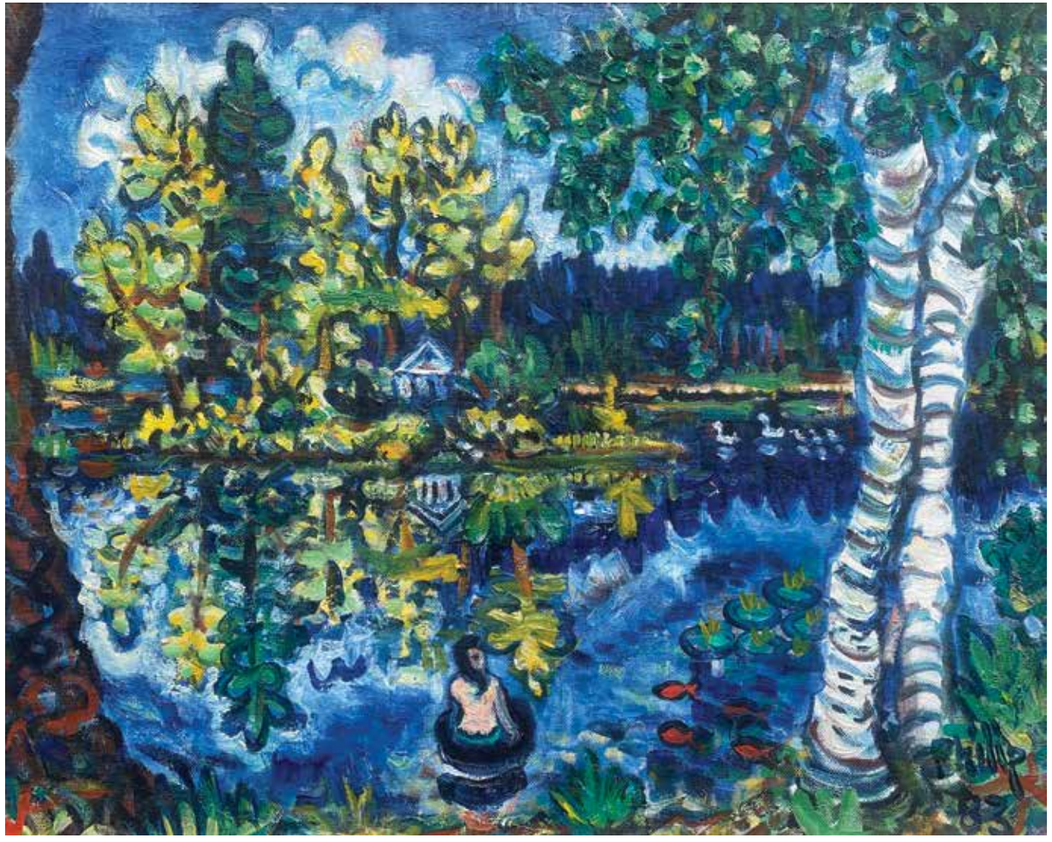
Evening Reflection: Soft Light
oil on panel
8 x 10 inches
2012

Beehive, Frontside
oil on panel
5 x 7 inches
2015

John Neville

Jeffrey Bergen, the owner of the ACA Gallery, had seen my work in 1993 at an exhibition at the South Street Seaport Museum in New York City. He contacted me and started handling my etchings. He suggested that if I wanted to be taken seriously as an artist, I should be painting in oil. In 1996, I started painting in oil. The first paintings were at the complete mercy of the paint. It turned out to be the most complex thing I had ever attempted to do. *Harbour Scene* was one of the first oils of mine exhibited at the ACA Gallery. It was shown in a group show beside a Judy Chicago piece.

Harbour Scene
oil on linen
24 x 36 inches
2004



A Day At The Lake by Philip Barter (1939–2024), oil on panel, 18 x 24 inches, 1983

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