



PHILIP FREY

COURTHOUSE GALLERY
FINE ART

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Inside/Outside

JUNE 15 – JULY 12, 2026

Essay by Jorge S. Arango



Inside/Outside (Study), 2026, oil on linen panel, 11 x 14 inches

COVER *Wharf Colors*, detail, 2026, oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches

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Coastal Rhythms, 2026, oil on linen, 18 x 24 inches



The Sparkle of Ravens Nest, 2026, oil on linen, 20 x 20 inches

PHILIP FREY *Light and Impermanence*

by Jorge S. Arango

The substance of painting,” believed the Fauvist artist André Derain, “is light.” But light is notoriously fickle. It delicately dapples and also brutally blazes. It moves from purple, red and orange to pale butter yellow and searing white. Then it repeats that trajectory . . . in reverse. It flickers, dims and disappears. Sometimes as quickly as it spreads, it evaporates into time and space. Light is a poignant and daily—even second-by-second—assertion of ephemerality in lives that often strive for the reliability and comfort of permanence and stability.

Philip Frey understands this fundamentally fleeting quality. “It has an ineffability,” he observes of light. “It is constantly changing—the shadows, refractions and reflections. I’m trying to get at the impermanence a bit by fracturing it and holding it loosely.” Though he admits to having “a strong foothold in representational painting,” Frey deploys abstraction as a way of “bringing the dynamism of natural elements that you experience in plein air painting—light, water—into the image.”

Abstraction denies stability and fixedness. We certainly grasp the objects in Frey’s images and assign them identity and meaning—a house, a wheelbarrow, people on a lake, a tree, and so on—but we also intuit the sense of a moment captured that has already faded into the past. Frey’s works keep time moving.

Frey, a Buddhist since the early 1990s, also perceives light at a level that goes beyond actual physical phenomenon. “There is a metaphor in Buddhist thought about



Wharf Colors, 2026, oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches



Island Life, 2026, oil on linen, 30 x 24 inches



Conversation On The Porch, 2026, oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches



Afternoon Ravens Nest, 2026 , oil on panel, 8 x 10 inches



Layers and Light, 2026, oil on linen panel, 5 x 7 inches

light (of wisdom or clarity) as eliminating the darkness of ignorance,” he explains. “When there is darkness, you can’t see, and when there is light, it illuminates things you don’t normally see. But I don’t want to be overt about it. I want to suggest the essence of something without overstating it.”

Ignorance in this instance, then, implies not something willful and intentionally ignored or excluded. It simply signifies all that we do not see, for whatever reason. There is so much that escapes our detection, and one function of art is to call attention to what we miss. A painter has many tools and techniques with which to accomplish this. Frey’s works in this exhibition, created during a residency at Great Spruce Head Island on Penobscot Bay, are a visual record of multifarious efforts to hone our attention so that we may sense the essence of something rather than the dispassionate factuality of it.

Frey’s oil-on-panel *Afternoon, Raven’s Nest* is a good example. To those who know the Schoodic Peninsula in Acadia National Park, the scene is instantly recognizable as this dramatic cliffside spot. Yet nothing about this painter’s interpretation is static. Light dances off granite rock faces and blue water—themselves no more than patches of mottled colors—and it illuminates pine trees in some areas but not others, indicating a certain temporary slant of the sun’s rays. The trees themselves look angular and unfocused, the absence of specificity and



Pier, Patterns and Fog, 2026, oil on linen, 18 x 24 inches



Clothesline, 2026, oil on linen, 24 x 30 inches

detail intimating they were perceived in the act of being jostled by coastal winds.

For *Clothesline (Study)* (p. 20), Frey contrasts quick, sharp gesture against subtly rounded, sunlit shapes. “What’s different in these comes from the experience of Great Spruce Head Island,” he says. “I was using a lot of flat brushes and began using more filbert brushes because I wanted to break that habit. This presented different possibilities for expression. It was a conscious effort to expand the repertoire of marks I was making that was influenced by Fairfield Porter (Great Spruce Head Island is Porter’s old family property). The *Clothesline* study uses a combination of these.”

We can see what Frey calls the “flat and chiseled” character of his usual brush most obviously in the woods, particularly on the pine tree to the right. But we also observe the rounded tip of the filbert in several darker green strokes to the left. The evidence of the filberts also appears on the rounded edges of the chopped wood in the log pile, while towels on the line resume the flat brush effects. The combination activates the surface, conveying rustling movement and temporality of condition.

Clothesline (Study) and *Red Wheelbarrow* also embody the theory of harmonic armature that Frey gleaned from Charles Bouleau’s *The Painter’s Secret Geometry*. Rather than rely on intuition alone, master artists throughout



Red Wheelbarrow, 2026, oil on linen panel, 12 x 16 inches



From the Kitchen, 2026, oil on linen panel, 12 x 16 inches



My Room At Camp, 2026, oil on panel, 10 x 8 inches

history have used diagonals, rectangles, and proportional divisions to create harmonious, balanced artworks. Bouleau studied the underlying structure of many successful artworks, and determined their visual power was achieved by using a harmonic grid to divide up a rectangular surface (a canvas, say). By placing elements at the intersections of these lines, the artist creates tension, energy and visual allure.

We can see each of these works doing the same. In *Clothesline (Study)*, two trees with the thickest stumps are placed along the vertical axes that divides the space into three long sections. The clothesline and wood pile both run along the two horizontal axes. In *Red Wheelbarrow*, the tripartite elements—a shed, the wheelbarrow and the woodpile with clothesline above it—do the same.

While this might suggest a contradiction to Frey's stated philosophy of keeping things moving, he mitigates movement with lively, animated brushstrokes, a similar role played by Paul Cézanne's quick jots. Cézanne, Frey admits, has always been an exemplar for him. Others have been Henri Matisse and Howard Hodgkin, both for their color and brushwork.

From Matisse, Frey also derives an interest in interiors, which we can see in *My Room at Camp* and *From the Kitchen* (p. 11). Being a Maine painter, of course, views through windows, as in both of these, and *Inside/Outside* (p. 1), also recall Lois Dodd. From Hodgkin's proclivity for



When We Were Kids, 2026, oil on linen, 24 x 30 inches



Barrow, Shed and Shadow, 2026, oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches



Boathouse Light, 2026, oil on linen, 24 x 30 inches

framing his scenes, sometimes within the picture and/or by painting the frame, Frey extrapolates the structural borders of these rooms' windows, as well as of a boathouse water-side opening in *Boathouse Light* (p. 15).

While this sort of framing might imply something fixed, the color and the light within the frame (and sometimes spilling onto it) are in constant activity. All Frey's paintings, he says, are "little slices of time, little moments." But it's clear that whatever the particular activity he is depicting has arisen from a preceding activity, and it rolls into the next active expression of ephemerality.

Looking at Frey's paintings reminds me of another sage observation, this one by the composer Robert Schumann: "The artist's vocation is to send light into the human heart." Which might make it interesting for us to place our attention on our hearts when we encounter a Frey work, just to see what might be stirring there.

Jorge S. Arango has been writing about art, architecture and design for about forty-five years. He is the author of fourteen books and is currently at work on a book about the contemporary art of Maine, tentatively scheduled for a spring 2027 release by Monacelli Press.

Changing Light, Receding Tide, 2026, oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches





Twilight, 2026, oil on linen, 30 x 40 inches



Winter Storm, Warm Lights, 2026, oil on linen, 24 x 30 inches



Clothesline (Study), 2026, oil on linen panel, 12 x 16 inches



Red and Gold, 2026, oil on linen panel, 8 x 10 inches



Bunker's Harbor, 2026, oil on linen panel, 8 x 10 inches



Barrow, Shed and Shadow (Study), 2026, oil on linen panel, 12 x 16 inches



Reading, 2026, oil on linen panel, 8 x 10 inches

PHILIP FREY



Philip Frey (b.1967) is best known for his bold paintings of Maine's coastline, landscape, and working waterfronts. His primary focus is color and light, and the inherent forms found in nature, interiors, and figures. He paints from direct perception, preferring the dynamic quality, richness and challenges of working from life.

In 2016, the University of Maine Zillman Art Museum mounted a solo exhibition of Frey's work. His work has been highlighted in numerous publications and several books, including *Philip Frey: Here and Now* (Marshall Wilkes 2018) by Daniel Kany and Carl Little; and *Art of Acadia*, and *Paintings of Portland*, both by Carl Little and David Little.

Frey studied at Columbus College of Art and Design and earned his BFA in painting from Syracuse University in 1990. He was awarded a Heliker-LaHotan Foundation Residency in 2012. Frey's work can be found in numerous private and corporate collections, including the Zillman Art Museum, The Jackson Laboratory, Harlan Coben, Dick Wolf Films, and Representative Chellie Pingree. Frey lives in Sullivan, Maine, where he maintains a studio year-round.

Frey's art occupies the nexus between contemporary painting and brushy traditionalism. If there is a focus to this new direction in Maine painting, his art is it.

— Daniel Kany

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2009, 2011, '13, '14, '16, '18, '19, 2020, '22, '24, '26
George Marshall Store Gallery, York, ME 2022
Edgewater Gallery, Middlebury, VT 2018
Carver Hill Gallery, Rockland, ME 2017
University of Maine Museum of Art, Bangor, ME 2016
Maine Art Gallery, Kennebunk, ME 2015
Gleason Fine Art, Boothbay Harbor, ME 2012

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, Ellsworth, ME 2006–2026
Greenhut Galleries, Portland, ME 2001–2004, 2014, '16, '17, '18, 2020, 2022–2026
Edgewater Gallery, Middlebury, VT 2017, 2020, '21, '25, '26
Maine Art Gallery, Kennebunk, ME 2008–2018
Thos. Moser, Freeport, ME 2008, 2016, 2017

Penobscot Marine Museum, (juried), Searsport, ME 2004, 2016
Gleason Fine Art, Boothbay Harbor, ME 2010–2016
Bert Gallery, Providence, RI 2014
University of Maine, Lord Hall Gallery, Orono, ME 2010
The Firehouse Gallery, Damariscotta, ME 2003–2009
Shaw Jewelry, Northeast Harbor, ME 2001–2008
Élan Fine Art, (juried) Rockport, ME 2007
George Marshall Store Gallery, ME 2006
Target Gallery, (juried), Alexandria, VA 2003
Clark House Gallery, Bangor, ME 1998, '99, 2000, '01
Argosy Gallery, Bar Harbor, ME 1997, '98, '99, 2000
McGrath Dunham Gallery, Castine, ME 1996, '97, '98, '99, 2000
Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, ME 1997
Spring Street Gallery, Belfast, ME 1997
June Fitzpatrick Gallery, Portland, ME 1996
Frick Gallery, Belfast, ME 1994

SELECTED CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Acorn Capitol Management, PA
Company C, NH
Dick Wolf Films, Dick Wolf, CA
The Jackson Laboratory, Bar Harbor, ME
Zillman Art Museum, Bangor, ME

AWARDS

Castine Plein Air Festival, First Place Award, Castine, ME 2014
Heliker-LaHotan Foundation Residency, Great Cranberry Island, ME 2012
Good Idea Grant, Maine Arts Commission 2004

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Little, Carl. "The Portland Show." *Art New England*, 2024.
Arango, Jorge. "Maine's Natural Beauty Masterfully Portrayed in...", *Portland Press Herald*, 2023.
Dahmen, Jane. *Talking Art in Maine*, Intimate Conversations, 2021.
Kany, Daniel. "Art Review: Regrets, he has a few..." *Portland Press Herald*, 2019.
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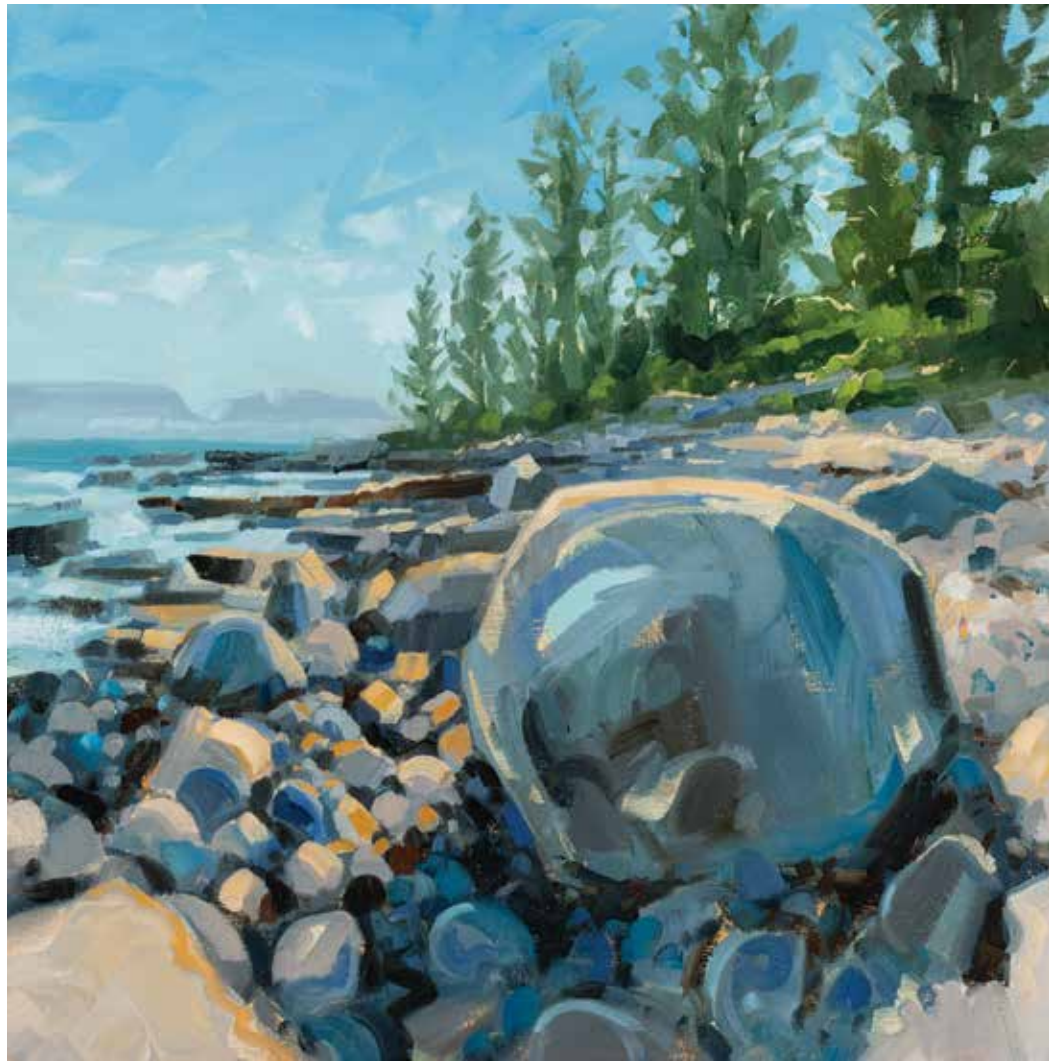
Kany, Daniel. "Greenhut's Biennial 'Portland Show' Sets a Standard." *Portland Press Herald*, 2016.
Burnham, Emily. "Finding Solace in Landscape." *Bangor Daily News*, 2016
Kinghorn, George. "Regionalism and Contemporary Artists in Maine: Opportunities and Challenges." *Maine Policy Review* 24.1, 2015.
Kadour, Ric Kasini. "Philip Frey: Lavish Attention," exhibition catalog. Maine Art Gallery. 2015.
Gettysburg Review, Fall 2012.
Little, Carl. "Philip Frey: In the Moment." *Art New England*, 2014
Kany, Daniel. "The Cultural Space of Painting," exhibition catalog. Courthouse Gallery Fine Art, 2014.
Little, Carl. "Fresh Ways," exhibition catalog. Courthouse Gallery Fine Art. 2011.
McAvoy, Suzette, "The Linen." *Maine Home+Design*, 2010.
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Carl Little, Arnold Skolnick. *The Art of Monhegan Island*. Down East Books, 2004.

EDUCATION

BFA (Painting) Cum Laude, Syracuse University, NY 1990
Columbus College of Art and Design, Columbus, OH 1986–1988



Pier and Patterns (Study), 2026, oil on panel, 5 x 7 inches



Coastal Portrait, 2026, oil on canvas, 20 x 20 inches



Cool and Warm, 2026, oil on linen, 12 x 16 inches

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