

Ogunquit Garden

Pemaquid Harbor Victorian

Havana in Bar Harbor

MaineHOME+ DESIGN

October 2008

Award-Winning Residence

MH+D Exclusive: Maine Designs
Take AIA New England

Modern Style meets
Shaker Simplicity
at a Kennebunk Architect's Home

MaineHOME+ DESIGN

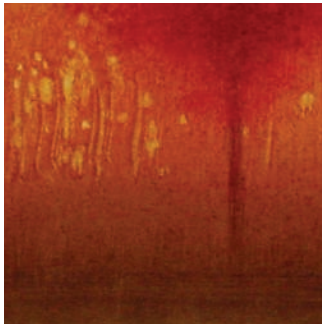
75 Market Street
Suite 203
207-772-3373

www.mainehomedesign.com

If whole or part of this article is reproduced online, we ask that
a link back to MaineHOME+DESIGN be placed. Thank you.

Transcending Nature

Michael H. Lewis, Alan Bray, and Dennis Pinette



*That which is named is only transient.
The nameless was there before the sky and the earth were born.
from the Tào-Tè Ching*

THE CANVAS
by Suzette McAvoy



Where Is My Spirit, No. 5, 2005
Turpentine wash on paper, 8" x 10"

For artist Michael Lewis, painting is “an invitation to extend the boundaries of ordinary reality...an invitation to search for harmony, equilibrium, and perhaps transcendence.” Over the past thirty years, he has been creating evocative landscapes that transport the viewer beyond the particulars of the external world to a timeless inner space that is at once more personal, emotional, and spiritual.

Since 1975, Lewis has been exploring a technique that uses small amounts of oil paint washed onto a paper surface with turpentine. By manipulating and brushing the thinned oil pigment, he achieves a wide range of sensuous, expressive surfaces. The remarkable luminosity of the finished paintings is derived from allowing the white of the paper to show through the thin layers of paint, in a manner similar to watercolor.

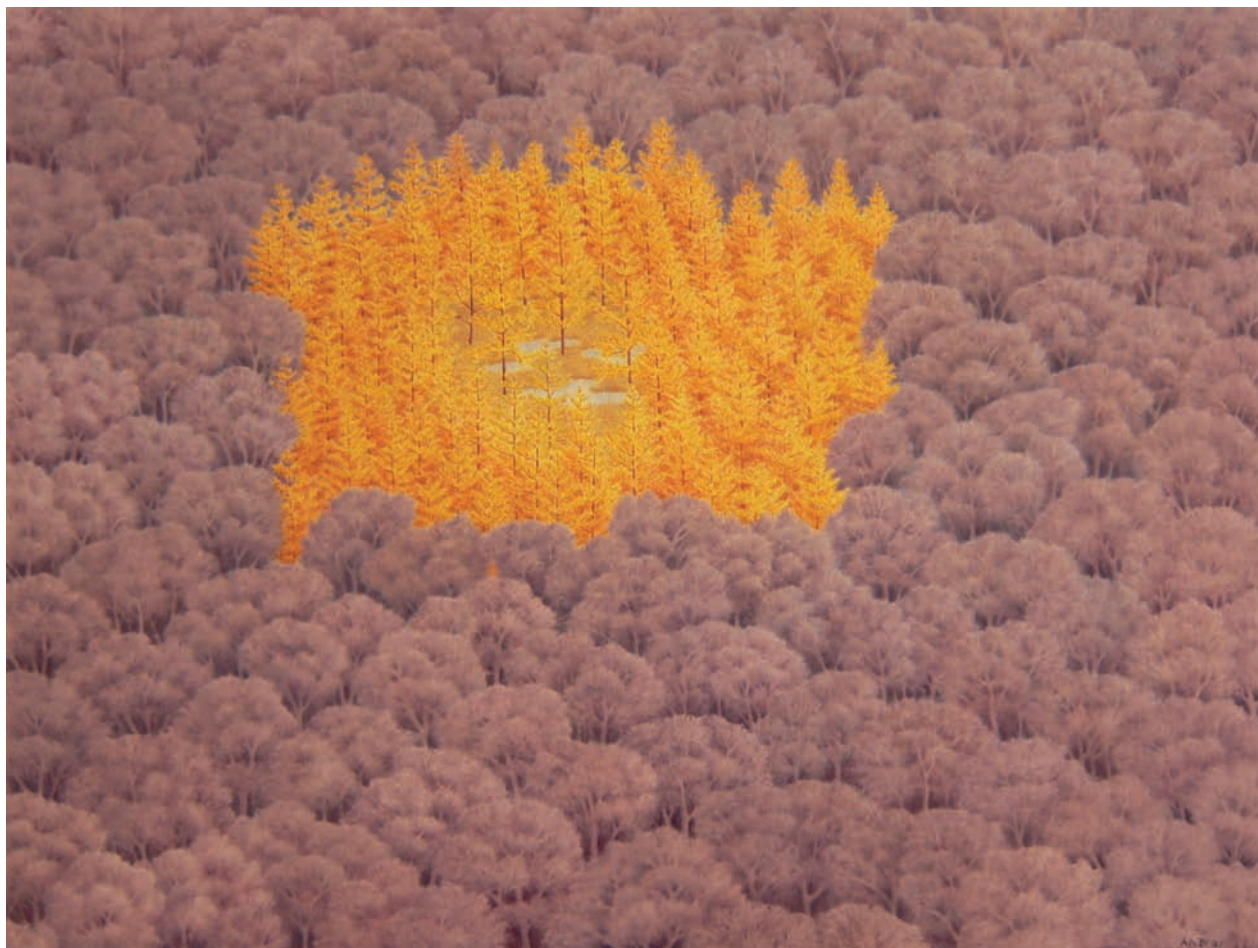
Exemplifying his aesthetic is the entrancing work *Where Is My Spirit,*

No. 5, one of a series of autumn landscapes completed in 2005. In the right half of the composition a single red tree pulses with color against a swath of shimmering, golden trees, their ethereal presence anchored by the dark band of color, created from a single sweep of the brush, that commands the foreground. The lyrical image is suggestive rather than descriptive; we can imagine such a scene in our mind’s eye as a place to restore and nurture one’s spirit.

Lewis says, “I begin by repeatedly visiting specific landscape sites. Later, in the isolation and comfort of the studio, I work from memory and invention rather than from studies or photographs. There is no pre-planning...the images arise like dreams.” Working in this intuitive and improvisational manner allows Lewis to embrace the changes that naturally result from the turpentine-wash technique he favors. And, in this way, the resulting landscapes embody the transient aspects of the natural world that are his favored motifs.



Michael H. Lewis has been teaching painting and drawing at the University of Maine since 1966, and has served as chairperson of the art department. Lewis exhibits his paintings at Aucocisco Gallery in Portland. More than twenty-five of his works are included in the collection of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.



Tamarack, 2008
Casein on panel, 18" x 24"

The tamarack tree is one of the only conifers to lose its leaves in the fall, and it does so gracefully, turning a rich autumnal yellow late in the season after its deciduous neighbors have gone bare. On one of his frequent hikes near his home in Sangerville, painter Alan Bray stumbled upon an island of glowing tamarack amid a sea of colorless deciduous, a scene that became the subject of a new painting.

Working in the demanding medium of casein on panel, Bray creates mystical images inspired by the phenomena of nature found in familiar places. The *New Yorker* has called his landscapes “cool, elegant, and blessedly devoid of prettiness...suggesting something of the poise and repose of Giotto or Mantegna.” The reference to artists of the Italian renaissance is apt, since Bray lived and studied art in Florence, Italy, in the early 1970s and earned a master’s degree in painting from the Villa

Schifanoia. “In Italy,” he says, “I saw art that I loved unabashedly and unreservedly. Art that was free of irony and cynicism, was deeply felt, spiritual, and above all honest.”

It was also in Italy that Bray found his true subject: the landscape of his childhood home, which he began painting from memory. On his return to central Maine in 1975, he continued to paint scenes found nearby, discovering them to be a far richer resource for his art than he had ever imagined. “I paint what is right around me,” Bray says. “Occasionally it’s a big subject, but more often it’s a bird’s nest or a farm pond.”

Highly attuned to the rhythms and structures of nature, Alan Bray’s mesmerizing paintings, such as *Tamarack*, display his poetic sensibility, keen intellect, and master craftsmanship. It is not surprising that he has earned a national reputation and inclusion in important collections throughout the United States.



Alan Bray was born in Waterville, Maine, in 1946 and grew up in Monson. In addition to his master’s degree from Villa Schifanoia, he studied at the Art Institute of Boston and the University of Maine. He is represented by Caldbeck Gallery, Rockland.

THE CANVAS

One fall morning in 1999, artist Dennis Pinette woke up with an irresistible urge to paint outdoors. The urge led him not only to the top of Moody Mountain in Searsmont, but to an ongoing obsession with plein air painting. Nearly ten years later, Moody Mountain is still one of his favorite locations for the variety of its scenery and its accessibility, for Pinette doesn't travel light. He brings, he says, "the whole nine yards," setting up a portable studio on the tailgate of his pick-up truck or, in colder weather, working on the dashboard inside the cab.

Because of the changes it brings to the landscape, autumn is Pinette's favorite season to paint in the Maine woods. Beginning in late September when the first hints of fall color appear and continuing through late November when the snow and cold finally drive him indoors, Pinette sets out to paint. He rarely has a particular scene in mind—rather he meanders until inspiration strikes. He likens it to a form of hunting. "You're going after something, you don't quite know what—that's your quarry and you have a certain amount of time to get it."



October Woods, 2004
Oil on gessoed rag paper, 30" x 30"

What he has gotten time and again are dynamic, vital, daringly painted landscapes that succeed in contributing something new to a much-painted subject. An example is *October Woods*, one of a series of works depicting densely tangled trees. Seen up close, their structure dissolves in a riot of brushwork. The allover quality of marks link them to abstract expressionism, while their brooding, poetic sensibility suggests ties to earlier painters, such as the late-19th-century romanticist George Inness. Confronting the challenge of plein air painting straight on, Pinette has found in the Maine woods an adversary worthy of his prodigious talent. **MH+D**



Dennis Pinette was born in Belfast in 1951 and received a bachelor of fine arts degree from Hartford Art School in 1973. A retrospective exhibition of his work was held at the Farnsworth Art Museum in 2003. His paintings are in numerous private and museum collections throughout Maine and New England, and he is represented by Caldbeck Gallery in Rockland.