



*Through July 7 —*

## **Frederic Kellogg at the Caldbeck Gallery**

by Christopher  
Crosman

Wednesday, June 27, 2018 5:34 P



**“Rockland Earthworks,” watercolor on paper by Frederic Kellogg**

Fred Kellogg paints what most of us don't see: a black plastic garbage bag along the side of a residential street, crumpled and torn, no doubt, by marauding seagulls ("September, Dunn Street"); a rusting remnant of Rockland's post-industrial decline ("Rockland Earthworks"); the barely visible silhouette of an anonymous figure in a distant view of a farm ("Beverage Farm").

After a half century of art masquerading as theory, and vice versa, it comes as simple relief to find a painter who delights in the act of painting for its own sake. And is good at it.

In watercolors and oils Fred Kellogg explores the everyday, unremarkable streetscapes of small New England towns, the banality of Interstate interchanges, or the lush vegetation of domestic gardens, urban parklands, or the blanching sunlight of Southern climes. The quiet in his paintings is palpable, a thing you may not see but will certainly feel. Kellogg clearly looks back to artists like Winslow Homer, Andrew Winter, Fairfield Porter and the Wyeths, but is an artist whose work also resonates and sits comfortably with his Maine peers: John Moore, recently featured in an exhibition at the Center for Maine Contemporary Art, comes to mind, as do such diverse painters of national and international esteem as Lois Dodd and Alex Katz, who similarly draw upon quotidian moments of otherwise ordinary occurrence.

Fred Kellogg joins a large and distinguished coterie of representational painters in Maine who have managed to convey something of the state's timeless allure and subtle, deep, inescapable beauty. A selection of Kellogg's mostly recent paintings is currently on view at the venerable Caldbeck Gallery, steps from the Farnsworth Art Museum, on Elm Street in Rockland. Owners Cynthia Hyde and Jim Kinnealey, who are accomplished painters in their own right, created Rockland's oldest and, arguably, Maine's most long-lived, consistently compelling gallery —

steadfastly showcasing contemporary art in Maine for most of the past four decades. Although not technically a “cooperative” gallery in the tradition of New York’s 10th Street scene of the 1950s and ’60s, it is very much a gallery by and for other artists; Jim and Cynthia seem to know every artist of consequence in Maine. For example, the Caldbeck was the only gallery in Maine where you could regularly see the work of Lois Dodd, Janice Kasper, Sam Cady and William Thon (when he was still living), among dozens of others, some nationally known, but most not. I digress; Fred Kellogg was among those artists whose work was nurtured by the Caldbeck and the place where it could be seen by other artists and the handful of collectors who were smart enough to pay attention (self-promotion has never been a Caldbeck strength — nor, for that matter, is it one for most of Caldbeck’s artists, who seem to share an abundance of New England reticence and rather-die-than-raise-my-own-hand modesty).

Fred Kellogg is largely self-taught and has been painting since his early teenage years. The son of Harvard University’s chaplain, he went on to become a successful attorney, and, at a critical moment in the country’s “culture wars,” he was lead counsel for the National Endowment for the Arts. In the bloody aftermath, the NEA survived and Fred turned his full-time attention to painting. In recent years, he has volunteered with numerous community organizations, notably as president of the board for the Farnsworth Museum. Along with his wife, Molly, and throughout their full lives of professional and personal community service to the arts, Fred has always thought of himself, first and foremost, as a painter. And so he is, as the current exhibition of his work at the Caldbeck fully confirms.

“Rockland Earthworks” is a small watercolor depicting the husk of a rusting, abandoned earth-moving machine on the outskirts of Rockland. The blocky masses of its hulking form do not really help much in the way of describing its former fearsome purpose, truly a

“monster” machine devouring the very land it rests upon. Indeed, the memory of Rockland as the seat of midcoast Maine’s heavy industrial past is as faded and distant as how this massive earth-moving machine once functioned. As an unknowable abstraction of a not-so-remote reality, the softly washed color and lightly touched surface seem entirely right, a fleeting memory, medium as message — the ghost in the machine. So, too, with many of Kellogg’s paintings where the artist stage manages our eye to see not just what’s there but what isn’t. Like time. Kellogg picks up where many of his antecedents left off. For instance, Edward Hopper’s early watercolors of Rockland subjects from his brief visit in 1926 often portray the least picturesque, least nostalgic, unblinking views of the city’s backyards and byways: the broken arm of a railroad crossing sign; odd, misshapen and unnatural rock formations of an abandoned quarry; the skeleton of a beached wooden sailing vessel adrift amongst weeds and equally decrepit wooden buildings.

Like Hopper, Kellogg is drawn to intimate, time-infused but otherwise unremarkable subjects, images that are both stick-pin precise in feeling and conceptually and compositionally unfurled and flowing — traversing moments that infer what went before and what will come next. Take Kellogg’s “Route One Elegy” or “Going West,” paintings that would have his viewer accept their own participation as casual hitchhikers. Becoming the artist’s fellow travelers we are invited to finish the journey from personal memory and experience (most of the paintings in this exhibition include streets, railroad tracks, pathways and other means of passage from one place to another). It’s a bit like waking up in the back of our parents’ car late at night or early in the morning — that moment between wakefulness and dreaming, the disorienting sense of dislocation and delight that many of us (of a certain age) might recall from childhood travels during annual pilgrimages to summer places like Maine.

Sometimes pictures are beautiful in odd, strangely affecting ways.  
It's what makes them unforgettable.

Christopher Crosman is a former director of the Farnsworth Art  
Museum.



GOING WEST oil on canvas, by Frederic Kellogg



ROUTE ONE ELEGY, oil on canvas by Frederic Kellogg