

# MAINE AND THE MODERN SPIRIT

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open water of the St. George River, she watched and sketched and experienced the wonder of that spectacular event. Many people watched that year and marveled at something so beautiful that it bordered on the edge of magic. *Total Eclipse: 11 p.m., September 26, 1996* is a record of the wonderment and awe she experienced on that memorable night. *Eclipse in Seven Stages, 1997* (page 28) is an imaginative conflation of the evening as the moon waxed and waned and seemed to move across the night sky. These paintings in particular have something unique, a sense of grandeur and simplicity that is the essence of the Maine experience.

**PAUL PLANTE** is another Maine artist whose work depends upon a watchful, patient relationship with the natural world and with his own artistic soul. He has evolved a highly personal format, a square of paper in which he establishes a fragment of life. Father Plante is a dedicated bird-watcher who has traveled across the globe to see the great variety and beauty of birds in their natural habitats. He is a Catholic priest and rector of a large parish with many duties and a busy professional and spiritual life. In mid-life he returned to art school to earn an M.F.A. and to develop his already established practice as a painter. This experience renewed his artistic vision and added a new dimension to his thinking and to his ministry. He is now widely known in America, and his work has been collected and shown in Europe and Canada.

Plante lives in the working-class town of Winslow, surrounded on all sides by the state's great inland forests and many rivers. The ordered and systematic structures of *Maine Favorites, 1999* and *Northern Cardinal, 2000* (page 31), reveal the disciplined and rigorous life the artist leads by practice and example. He offers a glimpse of each bird, focusing upon its most animate element—the eye—as it quickly and briefly catches our own. It is as though Paul Plante has endeavored to touch the essence of that living creature, its spark of life as it recognizes that same spark in us. Some birds are bright and sassy, some soft and vulnerable; some seem aware of us, others not. To see him at work at a small desk amidst his daily routine and many interruptions is to see an artist for whom the making of art is a revelation and a refuge. Paul Plante was born in Canada and came to Maine as a young man. In Maine he was able to discover the many dimensions of his spiritual vocation. He has also enjoyed an artistic adventure unique to this special individual and to this place.

**JANICE KASPER** is a quiet, reflective spirit who often employs a well-developed sense of irony and humor in her work. She has lived in Maine for many years and owns a house by a lake in a remote town near the burgeoning city of Belfast along the state's northern coastline. Kasper is also a gifted curator, a fine writer, and an archivist who serves in that capacity at several local museums. She was a mainstay of Artfellows Art Co-Operative which flourished in Belfast in the 1980s and early 1990s.



FATHER PAUL PLANTE

*Northern Cardinal*, 2000

Oil pastel on paper

40 x 40 inches

Caldbeck Gallery, Rockland, Maine



JANICE KASPER

*Endangered Species Act*, 1999

Oil on canvas

8 x 14 inches

Caldbeck Gallery, Rockland, Maine

A central figure in the contemporary community of Maine artists, Kasper practices a neorealist style which is more allied to veristic surrealism than to any of the usual nostalgic realist approaches. She is an avid environmentalist who opposes deforestation, clear-cutting, the hunting of moose for sport, and the pollution of Maine's waterways and fisheries. *Now You See Them and Now You Don't* are two canvases of 1989 protesting the widespread practice of clear-cutting in Maine's vast unorganized wilderness. Initially, Kasper's work may seem humorous and engaging in a light-hearted way. She seldom wears her heart on her sleeve. She is, however, a gifted and determined person who tempers her anger with common sense and cunning strategy. Through a process of life drawing and abstraction, Kasper achieves imagery that speaks clearly and patiently about important issues. Her work can be beautiful and poetic even as it is heart-breakingly sad, as in the small but potent *Endangered Species Act*, 1999 (page 31).

**DENNIS PINETTE** is another Belfast-area painter whose commitment to place has been unwavering, even as his artistic vision has developed and he has enjoyed a growing national reputation. He has painted the industrial waterfront of Belfast for many years. Pinette's canvases possess a haunting melancholy, a strange sense of time that recalls but does not revive the sober romanticism of Edward Hopper. Pinette is not precisely a realist because his use of paint is so tactile and sensual. His Maine is an evolving one, a place where change can be seen in its physical dimension. At times in his work, the pace and effect of physical change seem like a collision of opposing forces.

The most recent paintings of Dennis Pinette, his 1999 series entitled *Mountainside Fire* (page 32), have a breathtaking beauty in the midst of unchecked conflagration. They are virtually abstract equivalents of burning underbrush, trees and air choked with flames. They do not refer to actual events, but perhaps to a larger sense of transformation in contemporary life, something so sweeping and fundamental that it consumes everything in its path. Painted in Maine, his works have found a national audience because the condition they evoke and describe touches us all.

Finding abstract equivalents for the processes and moods of nature has always been a part of modern art. **RUDOLPH DEHARAK** came to Maine more than a decade ago to begin a new chapter in his already distinguished life as an artist. His imprint upon the visual landscape in America has been profound and continuous since the early 1960s. deHarak is one of America's foremost graphic designers. Practicing in New York City, he created the characteristic look for modern museum publications and installations, many corporate graphic identities, and a number of ubiquitous household items distinguished for their beauty and elegant simplicity. He also taught several generations of American designers who have made the deHarak signature style an enduring part of contemporary life.