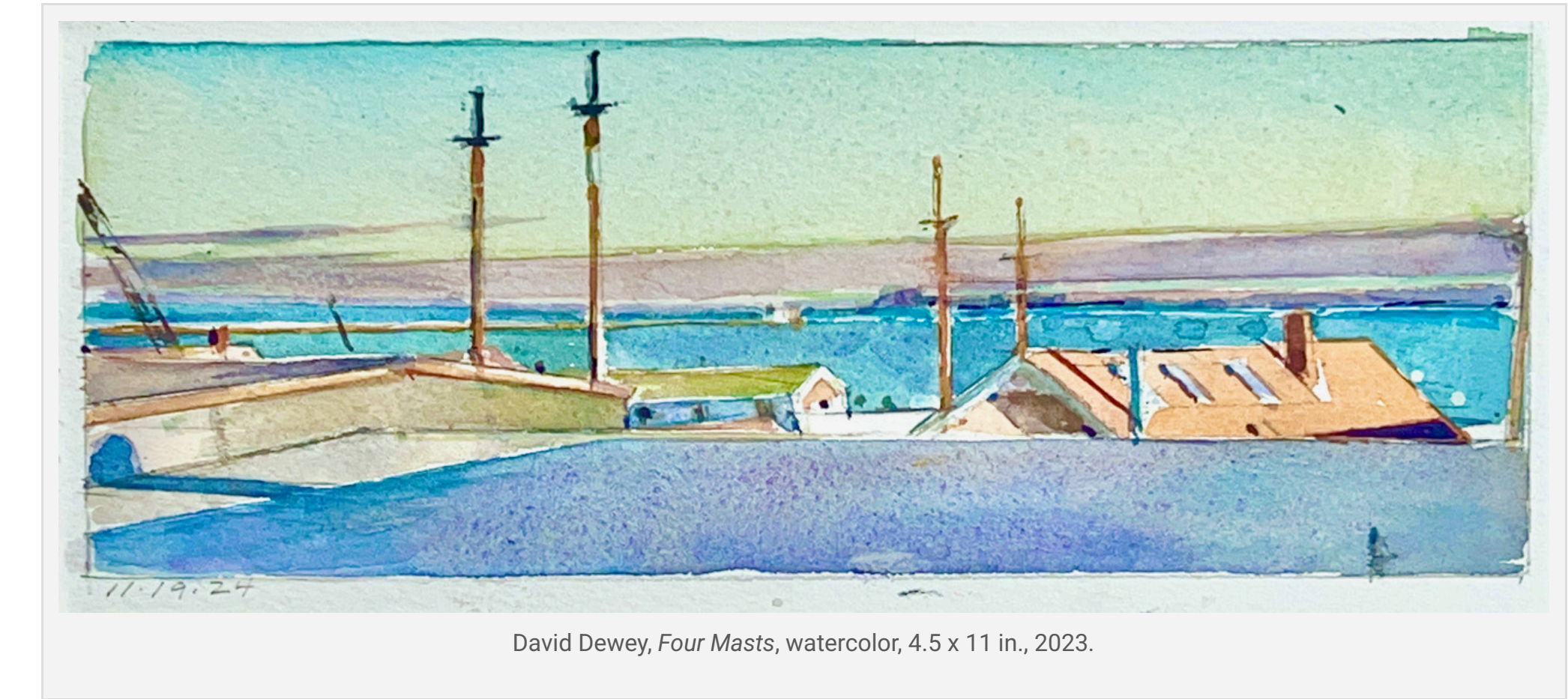


## David Whelan – David Dewey

Fall 2026, Features and Essays | 0 comments



David Dewey has painted subjects around his home in Rockland, Maine, for decades, often returning to the same scene at different times of day throughout the year to capture fleeting moments of light and shadow. I wondered if his watercolor paintings could also be considered a form of mapmaking, as not just a recording of the artist's environment, but also of his particular way of seeing.



David Dewey, *Four Masts*, watercolor, 4.5 x 11 in., 2023.

Some of Dewey's paintings are of Rockland's working waterfront, framing the harbor's radiant light with abstract shipyard elements. The vertical compression of *Four Masts* is characteristic of many recent works where forms squeeze inward toward the horizon like layers of compressed rock. The four upright masts in the center of the picture counter the composition's elongation. Like pins pushed into a map, the masts pierce our attention, marking the harbor's location.



David Dewey, *Fence*, watercolor, 6 x 9 in., 2026.

In *Fence*, we see the most ordinary of subjects. A chain-link fence bends gently across a yellow ground before meeting a distant tree line and dissolving into a dark blue woods. The colors here are electric, a simple stacking of yellow and blue. The fence acts like a suture, stitching ground to background. Borders are often established when mapping a territory. But here we see a border undone, a fence made porous by abstract brushwork and radiant color.

A common refrain in Dewey's newest work is markers such as posts, masts, and pilings. Centered in *Bright Harbor* is an obstinate signpost with an uncanny resemblance to a painting on an easel. It repeats the chimney forms of the distant manufacturing plant belching steam on a cold December day. The eye moves easily between post and plant through a wash of icy violet-blue. These backlit structures frame portions of the harbor which Dewey has left untouched, pure paper pulp, intensifying the sensation of harsh winter light. It's the kind of light that burns into your brain, inscribed immediately in memory.

Plein-air painters immerse themselves within the landscape. They take on changing weather, light, and an overwhelm of sensations and stimuli, which they endeavor to organize into a coherent picture. The best plein-air painters translate this sense of stability while also reflecting the impermanence of things.

Maps help orient ourselves to the world whether it's familiar or strange. Like a map, Dewey's compositions give us a sense of stability and discernment.

However, his fluid brushwork and expansive use of color work against this mapping tendency, expressing an elusive world outside measurement and boundaries.

Ultimately, Dewey is mapping more than just the places around his home or the way he sees the world. His paintings map that ineffable place where the external world and inner life meet.



Full view of image at top: David Dewey, *Bright Harbor*, watercolor, 6.175 x 11 in., 2025.

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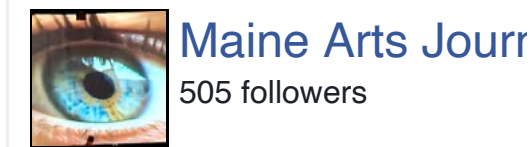
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