



C. POLSON

Aperto Fine Art

CHRIS POLSON

October 20 - December 10, 2023

Essay by David Houston



David Houston

Chris Polson and the Lyrical Landscape

I have been following Chris Polson's lyrical Maine landscape paintings for over a decade. These works are the result of years of close observation and a deep personal connection to nature but are not strictly topographically accurate or traditionally detailed and realistic. Instead, these paintings stress the felt qualities of being in the landscape rather than painting nature as a simple subject of objective visual representation. That is to say, these are distinctively personal works in the tradition of the expressionist landscape where nature is reinterpreted and presented through the subjective lens of emotion and feeling.

It is hard to think of American art without the dominance of landscape painting. It is intimately linked with our deepest dreams and aspirations, from the foundational mythology of manifest destiny and the westward expansion to our most recent thinking on the unfolding environmental crisis of global warming. There are, however, many places where nature is ever-present and offers such a distinctive topography that it inspires every generation of artists to

re-explore it for their time, and Maine is one of these.

The expressive landscape has many masters. Think of Van Gogh's last painting, *Wheat Field with Crows*, Edvard Munch's psychologically charged Norwegian landscapes, and the flaming color juxtapositions of Emile Nolde's ecstatic Northern German scenes, some of which were painted with the artist's hands and fingers rather than brushes. While these are all precedents for anyone that paints the landscape, the most important precedent for Polson is Marsden Hartley. Calling himself "the painter of Maine," Hartley painted what would become one of the archetypal modernist approaches to the expressive landscape in the same territory that Polson has revisited yet again.

This exhibition is a journey into the personal and the subjective and is based on three simple subjects: the forest, the forest stream, and the water's edge. In embracing the expressive landscape, Polson has invented his own painterly visual shorthand that mediates between emotion and nature. Like the above mentioned artists, expressionism relies on the arbitrary use of color and distorted or multiple perspectives as expressive tools. Since emotions are highly personal, artists continually adapt these tools to a deeply individual, almost solipsistic, purpose, which is to transcribe their "felt" response to nature to canvas.

The oldest work in the exhibition is the largest and most representational. *Blue Trails* (96 x 144 inches, 2004) is a winter landscape with topographically accurate details and a deep rational perspectival space. It is a painting that relies on mood and succeeds at

communicating the look and feeling of a cold, silent winter landscape. It functions as a point of departure for the artist's journey from the topographical to the expressive.

One of the smallest of the recent works is also one of the most expansive. *Field* is a mere 10x12 inches, but the use of an open composition and a tripartite layering of field, forest, and sky adds to the feeling of space in the work with a sharp contrast to the intensity of the orange foreground and deep green forest against the cool palate of the swirling sky.

Like Hartley, Chris Polson is a romantic at heart. The pastoral empathy of the approach in *Summer Oak* and *Ducktrap Colors* stands in sharp contrast to the more subjective yellow lines in *Ducktrap Before the Storm* and the electric pink in *Ducktrap High Water Spring Rising*. *Canadian Air – Chamberlain Lake* and *Ducktrap High Water Spring Rising* both succeed through the use of complex compositions that use multiple perspectives compressed into a poetic space that defies traditional representation.

Taken as a whole, this exhibition of Polson's lyrical paintings is a celebration of nature through the lens of emotion. That is what the expressive landscape is all about. Enjoy the journey.

David Houston is the Executive Director of the Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art in Biloxi, MS with a long and storied career as a curator, art historian, professor and author. "Houston was named Chief Curator of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art

in New Orleans in 2001. At the Ogden, he ... focused on the American South [breaking] barriers between art, music, popular culture, and the general public, expanding the vision of what an art museum could be. He next led the curatorial team at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, at the time of its opening in 2011. In 2013, he became Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Bo Bartlett Center at Columbus State University in Georgia... Houston led the Bartlett Center until 2019... He has taught at The University of New Orleans and The Brandenburg Technical University, Germany, and has authored more than 40 books, exhibition catalogs and articles on architecture, art, and photography."

The Ohr O'Keefe Museum of Art website, <https://georgeohr.org/new-executive-director-selected-for-ohr-okeefe-museum-of-art/>, retrieved October 6, 2023.



FIELD

2022, Oil on Linen, 10 x 12 inches



DUCKTRAP BEFORE THE STORM

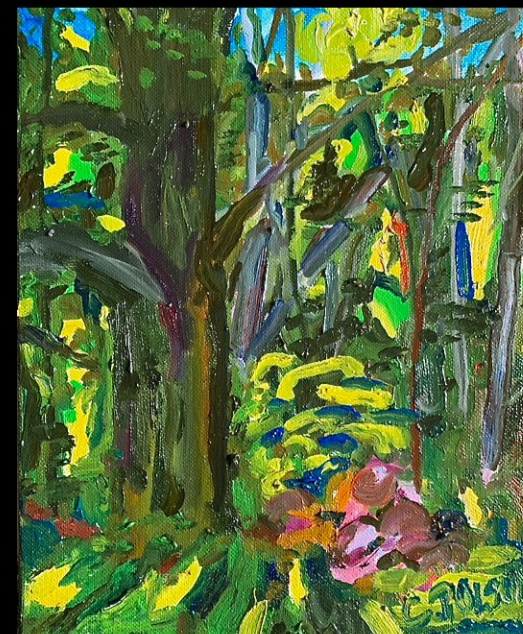
2023, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



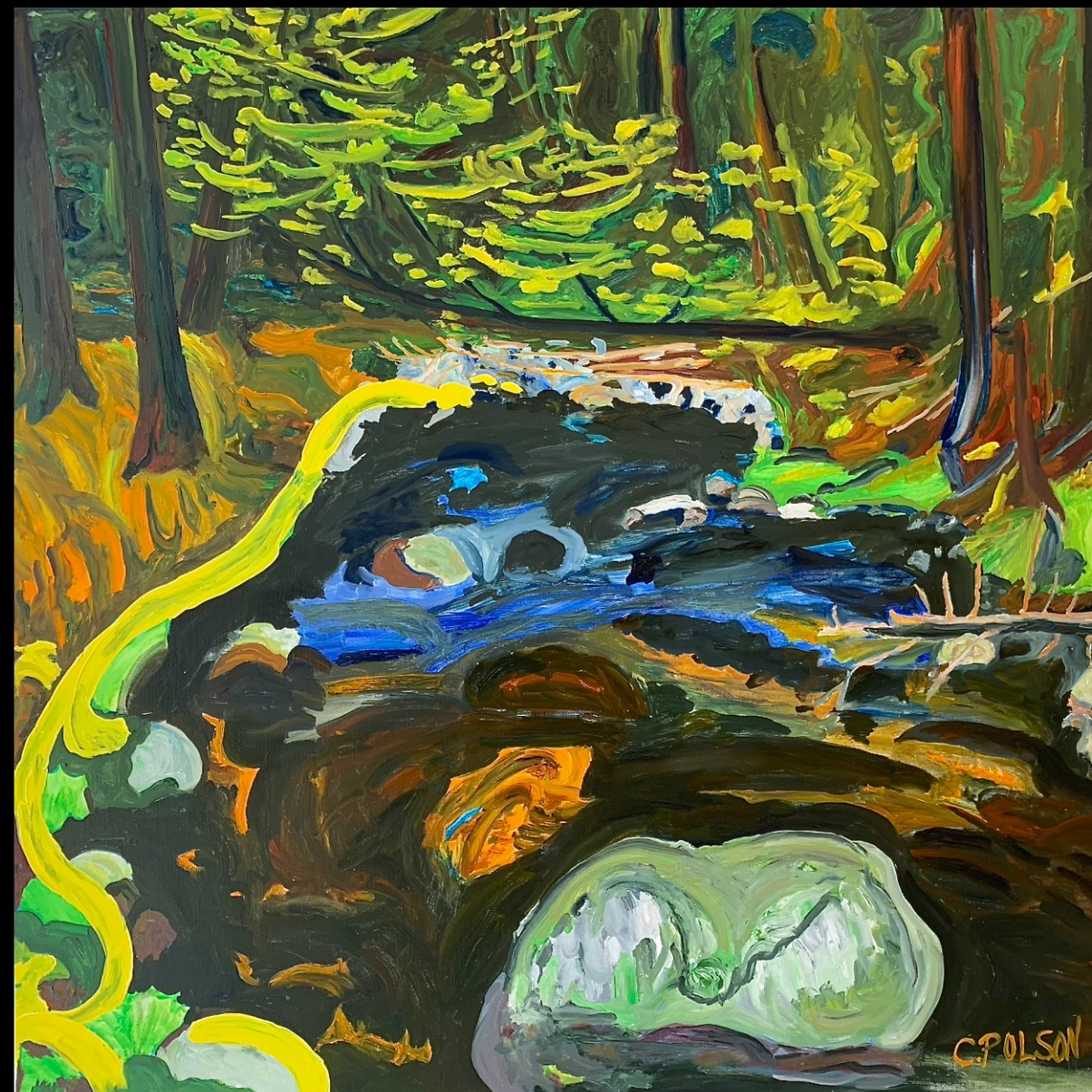
DUCKTRAP COLORS
2023, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



SUMMER OAK
2023, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches



DUCKTRAP GORGE
2023, Oil on Linen, 48 x 48 inches



BLUE TRAILS
2004, Oil on Linen, 96 x
144 inches



TO ACADIA FROM SULLIVAN
2023, Oil on Linen, 72 x 72 inches



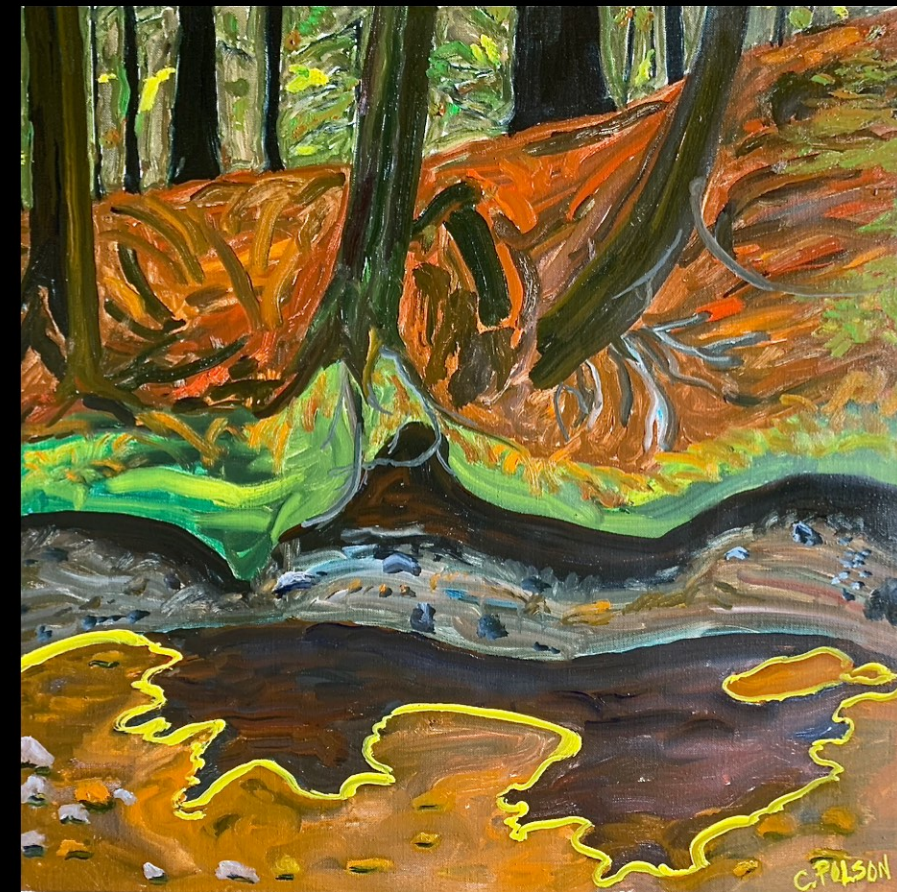
DUCKTRAP FLOWS AGAIN
2022, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



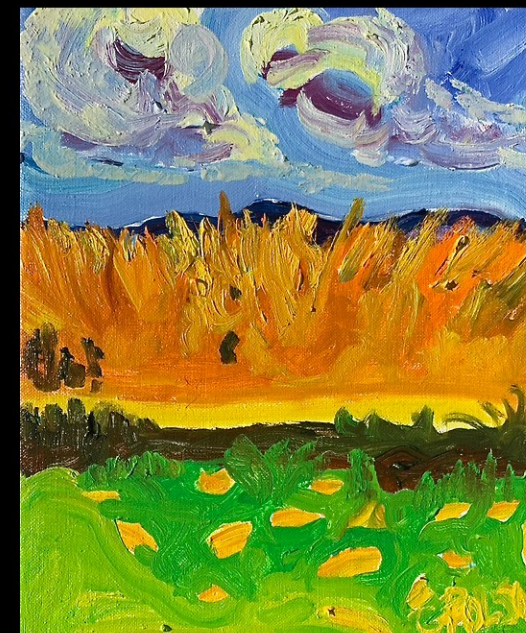
WATERSHED
2023, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches



DUCKTRAP ROOTS
2022, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



HERE IT COMES
2021, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches



LOW WATER DUCKTRAP
2022, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches

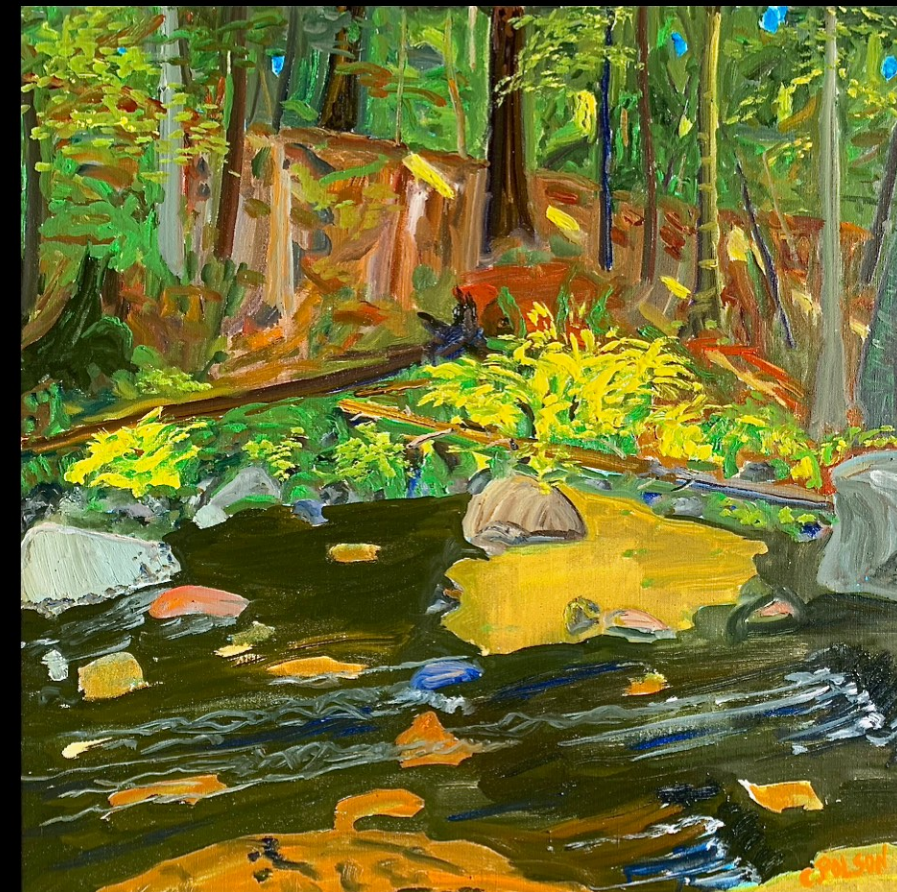


RUCKUS

2022, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches



DUCKTRAP GORGE #2
2023, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



DUCKTRAP HEAT
2023, Oil on Linen, 72 x 72 inches



C. POLSON

DUCKTRAP SCRAMBLE

2023, Oil on Canvas, 24 x 24 inches



DUCKTRAP HIGH WATER SPRING RISING

2023, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches.



CLARK ISLAND SOLSTICE
2023, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



CANADIAN AIR - CHAMBERLAIN LAKE
2023, Oil on Linen, 48 x 48 inches



YELLOWCAPS LINCOLNVILLE

2023, Oil on Linen, 24 x 24 inches



SUMMER SPARKLE
2023, Oil on Linen, 12 x 10 inches



LINCOLNVILLE
2022, Oil on Linen, 10 x 12 inches



CHRIS POLSON PROVENANCE

October 2023

Press

Zasada, John, “Aspen and Art – The Fine Connections”, 2 images, text, and back cover photo. Better Forests Magazine, Summer 2017.

Little, David, “Art of Katahdin”, 2 images and text, Down East Books, 2013.

Costigan, Lori, “Polson paints Maine’s woods, streams & lakes” The VillageSoup Citizen, June 30, 2004, pp. B-1, B-9.

Gold, Donna, Review, Art New England, August – September 1997, p. 36.

Thompson, Chris, “Closing the Circle” The Camden Herald, March 13, 1997, pp. B-1, B-8.

Exhibitions

2022 – 2023: Ongoing exhibitions at Aperto Fine Art, Bridgton, Maine.

2019 – “Creative Courage” Group show, Wiley’s Corner Grange, St. George, Maine.

2017 – “Chris Polson – An Exhibition of New Paintings” Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2014 – “Chris Polson – An Exhibition of New Paintings” Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2013 – “Selfies” Group show, Wallworks Gallery, Rockport, Maine.

2013 – “A Mountain Rises: The Art of Katahdin” Group show, University of New England Art Gallery, Portland, Maine.

2012 – “Chris Polson – A Show of New Large Paintings” Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2009 – “Chris Polson – A Show of New Large Paintings” Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2009 – “Small Works – Paintings by Chris Polson” Searsmont Town Library, Searsmont, Maine.

2008 – “Chris Polson – Landscapes”. The Belfast Framer & Gallery, Belfast, Maine.

2008 – “Katahdin: The Lake and Her Artists” Group show, The Jameson Art Group, Portland, Maine.

2008 – “Taking Different Trails: The Artists journey to Katahdin Lake” Group show, Bates College Museum of Art, Lewiston, Maine.

2007 – Group shows – North Light Gallery, Millinocket, Maine.

2007 – “Harvest 6” Group show – Water Street Artists at the Stable Gallery, Damariscotta, Maine.

2007 – “Chris Polson” A show of new paintings. Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2006 – Katahdin Lake Purchase Exhibition with The Trust for Public Lands – Portland, Maine.

2006 – Group shows – North Light Gallery, Millinocket, Maine.

2005 – Grand Opening Group Show – North Light Gallery, Millinocket, Maine.

2005 – “Chris Polson” A show of new paintings. Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2004 – “Chris Polson – Paintings at The Unity Centre for the Performing Arts” Unity, Maine.

2003 – “Chris Polson – Still Places” A show of new paintings. Twin Brooks Stretchers, Lincolnville, Maine.

2002 – “Chris Polson – Paintings of Lincolnville and Beyond” A special show of paintings in honor of the Lincolnville Bicentennial. Twin Brooks Stretchers Shop, Lincolnville, Maine.

2001 – Group Show. Christopher David Gallery, West Palm Beach, Florida.
1999 – Two group shows. Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, Maine.
1998 – “After Dark” Group show. Maine Coast Artists, Rockport, Maine.
1998 – Group show. Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, Maine.
1997 – “Studio Work – A group show of emerging artists” Between the Muse Gallery, Rockland, Maine.
1997 – “North Country Visions” College of the Atlantic, Bar Harbor, Maine.
1996 – Maine’s Massachusetts House Galleries, Lincolnville, Maine.

Front Cover

Ducktrap Heat

Title Page

Field

Back Cover (details)

Ducktrap High Water Spring Rising

Summer Sparkle

Lincolnville

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