

An abstract painting featuring thick, expressive brushstrokes. The color palette is dominated by dark teal, grey, and white, with some lighter blue and yellow accents. The composition is layered, with a dark teal background on the left and a more complex, layered structure of grey and white on the right. The overall effect is one of depth and texture.

ERIC AHO

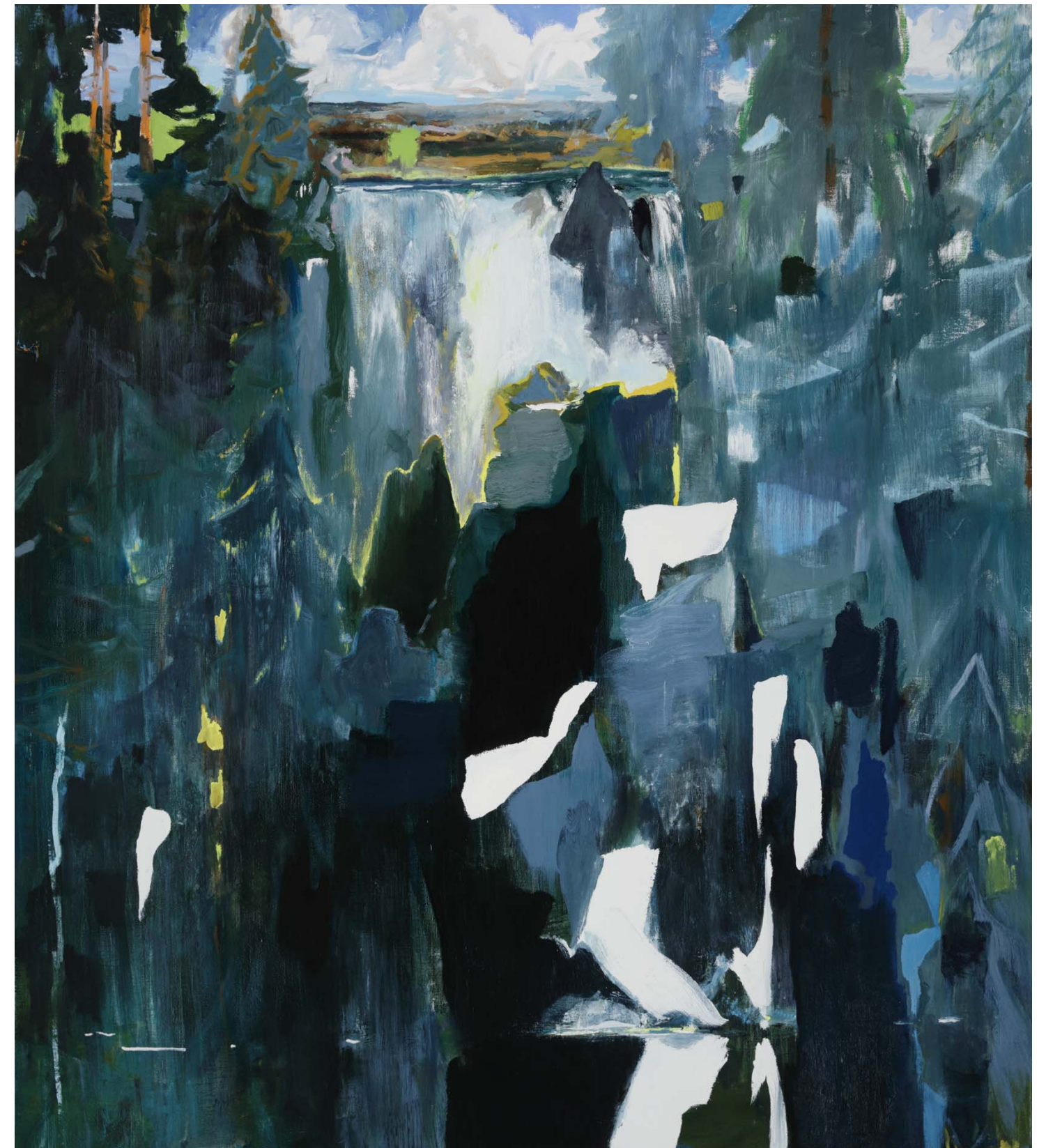


JACKET FLAP

ERIC AHO

source

DC **MOORE** GALLERY



SOURCE, 2019
Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches

source

A PIPE FLOWING WITH SPRING WATER juts from the ravine ledge. Someone recently inserted a pvc extension into the older, original pipe. Lots of locals fill water jugs here. Flinty and cold, it's good drinking water. A wooden barrel collects the overflow and itself flows over. On the other side of the road, running parallel, Sackett's Brook is framed by high ravine walls. Trees, hemlock with some beech and pine, lean over the stream. Those washed out in past floods and some felled from recent storms cross the brook like As, Hs, and Ts of a carelessly dashed message.

Sources of rivers, like those of ideas or feelings, defy location. Rarely does the river issue from a singular pool. A naturalist friend tells me it's most likely to form from a wetland soaked by an intricate network of subterranean streams and wells seeping downhill at an undetectable grade. This brook accumulates and unifies from a system of mountain freshets eroding a downhill path.

I'd always intended to paint the spring runoff and this year it was wonderfully frantic. I never had a plan. I knew I wanted the paintings to look like plein-air experiences. I wanted to remain in the woods, but nature's timetable is relentless. To engage with that tension, and determined to work like nature worked, I imagined carrying the trees and torrents, the atmosphere and weather into the studio with me. The paintings' iterations would emerge as remembered glimpses of the river I followed on my walks. They would mirror the seesaw growth and erosion between the woods and river: drawn then wiped-out, then drawn again; grown in the paint then uprooted; constructed then broken down; spilled then steered. Each could wend its own way toward a system based on what it is—the mystery of the woods and the new geography on the canvas.

THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER MONTHS of 1990—years before this new series of paintings—I set up my easel streamside at the base of a ravine, largely to avoid the July and August heat. Temperatures in the hemlock



SECOND HEADWATERS, 2019
Oil on linen, 78 x 70 inches



SMALL PATH IN THE MOUNTAINS, 2019–20
Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches

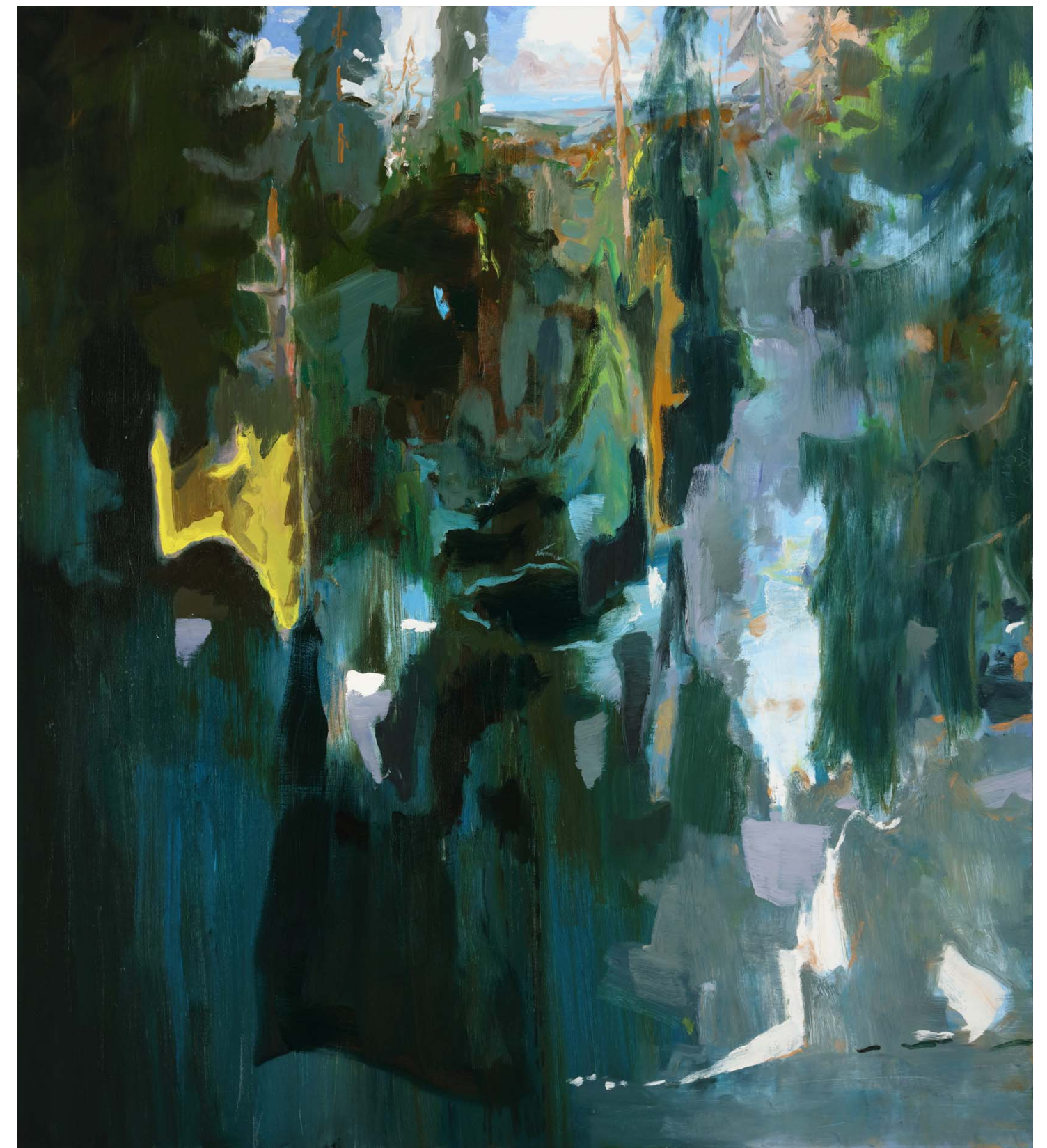
ravine were easily twenty degrees cooler than on the hill. Sharp contrasts of color in the dramatically dark and spot-lit forest excited my eye. It was a mysterious world of less light—neon green mosses, orange and scarlet banks, flashing ribbons of water, and ladder-like branches hit by piercing afternoon sun.

My intimacy with the surrounding terrain grows with each visit to the woods. The longer I remain, the more of me adjusts. Not just my eyes, my entire being is affected. The river cutting through the forest echoes a physical and psychological disconnect—a fissure of sorts—within me. There I am, a person standing inside another natural thing. I’m not separate from it, but I feel separate from it, glued in place by only the paint.

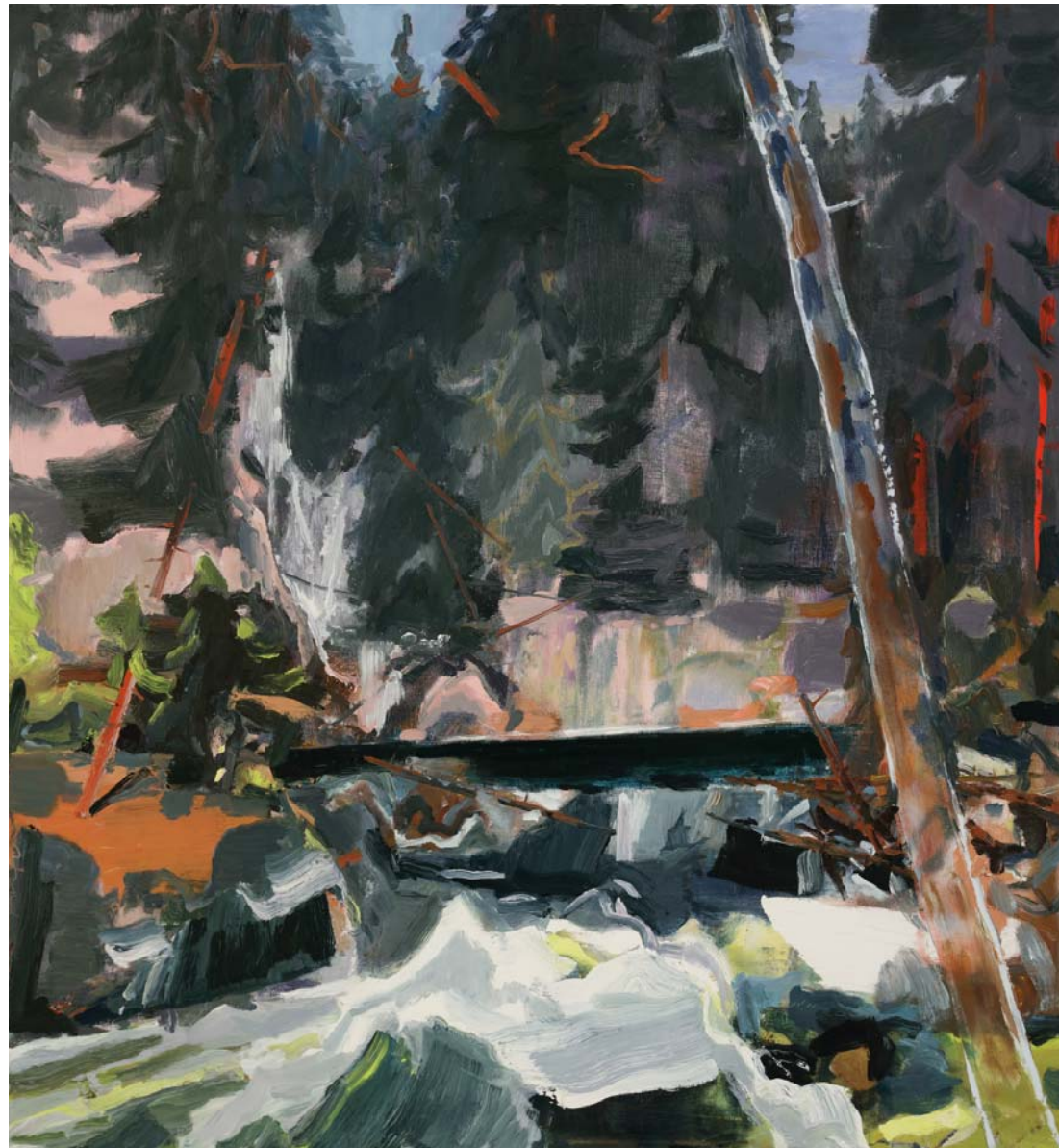
In the hemlock ravine, it was easy to think of the forest interior in architectural terms with its cathedral-like vaults and walls, foyers, corridors, and thresholds. Now these new paintings, invented and pieced together from memory, reveal another sort of interior—my own. Even my response to a recently blasted tree, its exposed flesh glowing brighter than anything else around, is physically and personally symbolic. Tree limbs and roots course like nerves and veins flow, pulse, breath, even sigh, recalling Walt Whitman’s allusion to the “respiration and inspiration” of the “distillation” outside the “perfumed rooms” of houses and their interiors. Multiple bodies now inhabit these sylvan rooms—mine, the water, and the work.

AS A CHILD, I spent a great deal of time in the pine woods of southern New Hampshire exploring Beaver Brook, a tributary to the Merrimack River Thoreau travelled. The brook runs on the southeast side of the postwar neighborhood where I grew up. It was a watershed abundant with deer, fox, weasel, and beaver.

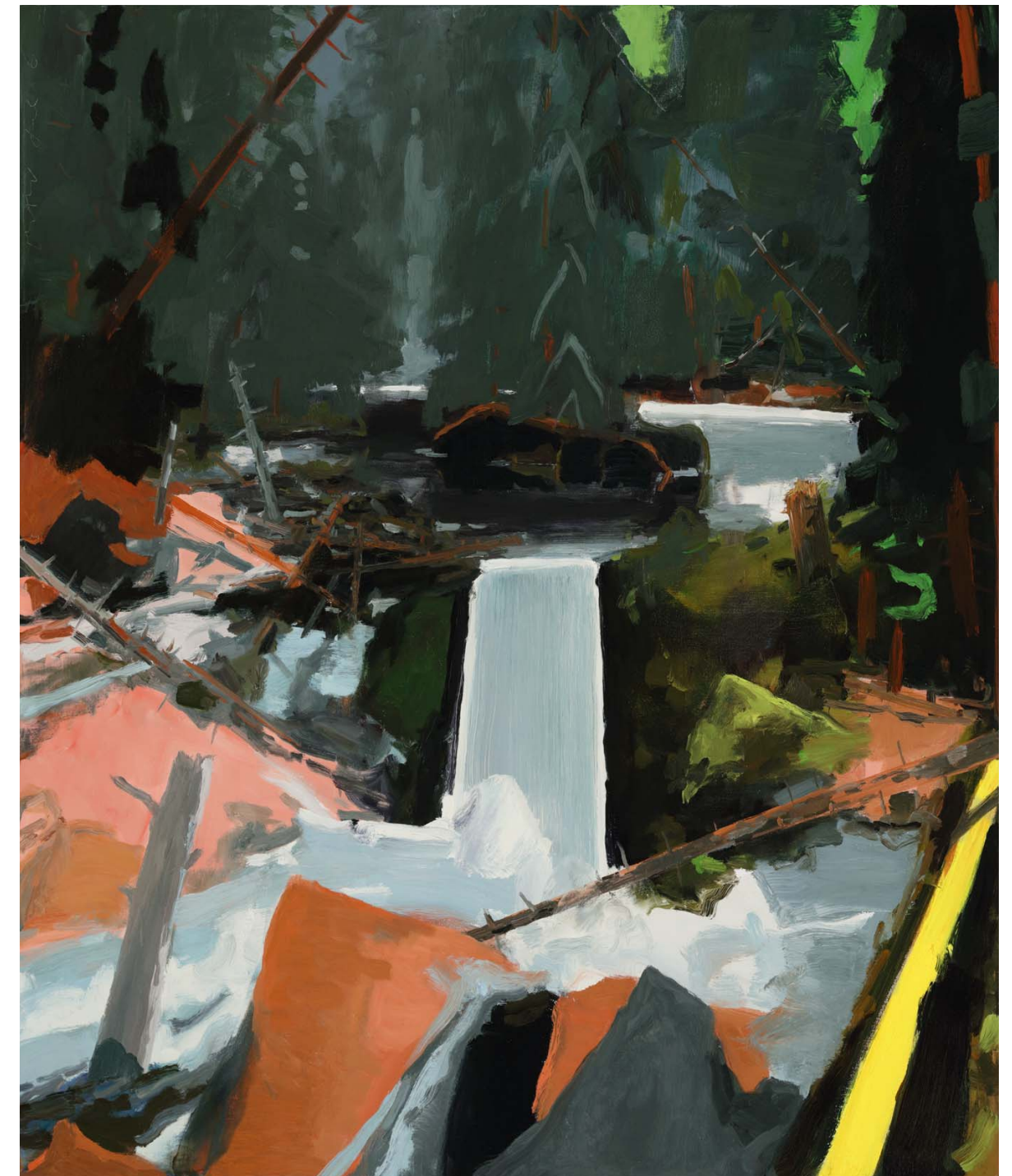
In spring of 1975, the river appeared pristine and was loud with the consonance of its rapids against the birdsong



PATH IN THE MOUNTAINS, 2019
Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches



DOWNSTREAM, 2020
Oil on linen, 52 x 48 inches



INTERIOR, 2020
Oil on linen, 60 x 50 inches



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Little Sunday Painting II

Little Sunday Painting V

Little Sunday Painting VI

Little Sunday Painting VIII

2019

Oil on linen, 10 x 8 inches

from the plentiful warblers and wrens, heron and hawks, and noisy kingfishers.

In summer there were good swimming holes as well as shallow water in places for wading and netting carp.

Neighbors hunted and fished the brook too. The Turcottes, a French-Canadian family in the corner duplex shared roasted squirrel—a dozen or so shot clean through the eye—turned on the spit one memorable early autumn afternoon.

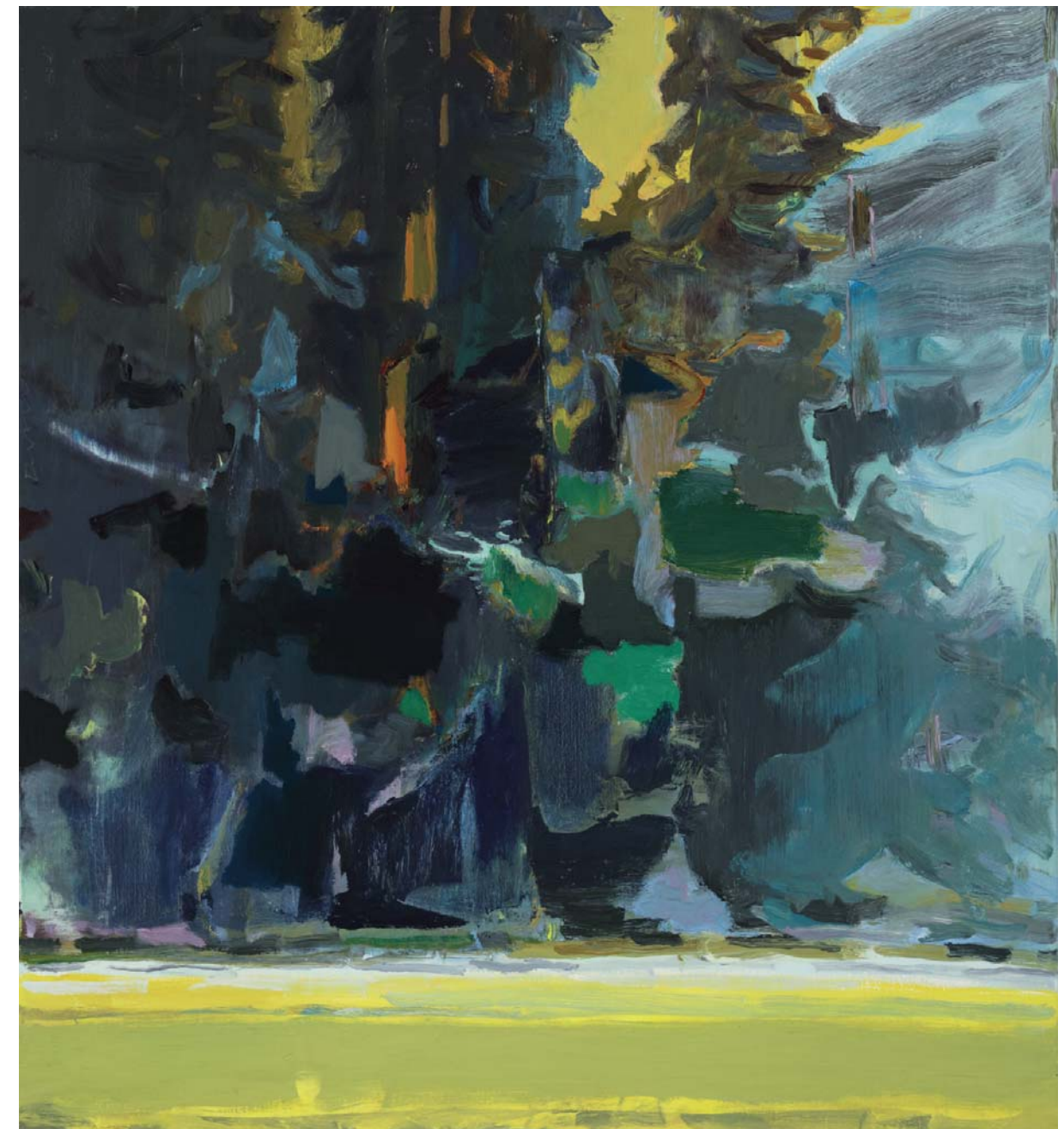
Once, in winter, I fell through the ice near the bank. I might have been eleven or twelve. The river there wasn't very deep, just up to my waist, but even so, it was cold and terrifying.

Sometime in late spring, when crossing the rocks and jammed-up trees on a narrow bend, I stepped on what looked to be a big half-submerged river rock. The boulder—an enormous snapping turtle, it turns out—gulped and disappeared under my soaked sneaker.

Another summer brought the occasion of a street party celebration of snapping turtle soup simmered in its shell over an open fire. Was it the same giant turtle I had stepped on in the river? I was relieved to think so; it was delicious.

IN MY RECENT PAINTINGS, I've consistently placed myself in the middle of the river, at the juncture of an interruption. This isn't a coincidence. The stream, it occurs to me, always represents a steady succession of events, a procession of time, whose confluence is ultimately our own consciousness. We bring to it whatever matters most at the very moment. The rapids and falls, themselves disturbances and disruptions, move over and around accumulated debris in nature as in life. The river-footing where I stand is uncertain. I'm downstream now looking back to the source.

These new works are vestiges of actual places, each unearthed, reshaped, and compelled by memory and



ACRE, 2019

Oil on linen, 52 x 48 inches

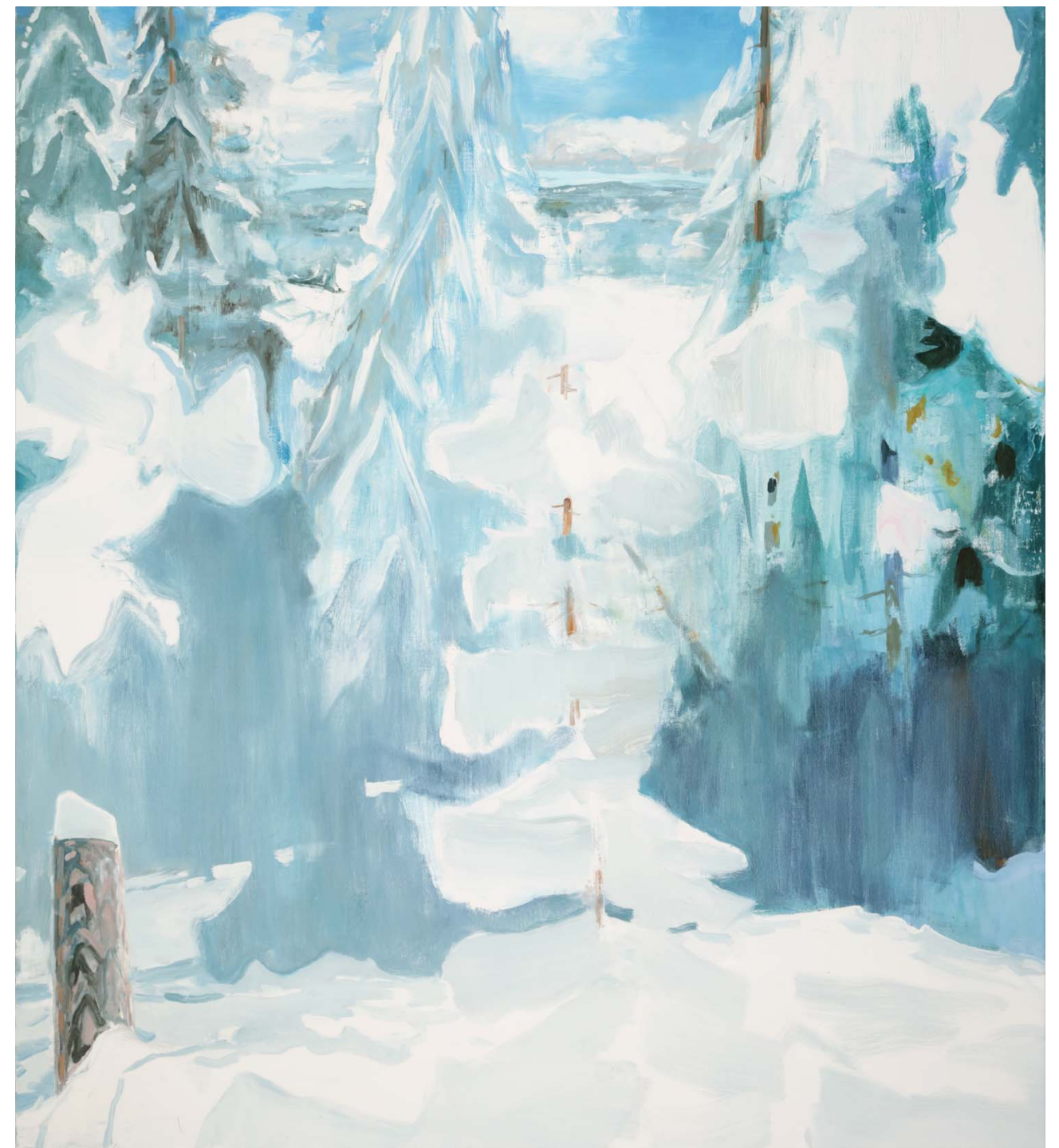


SMALL SUCCESSION, 2020
Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches

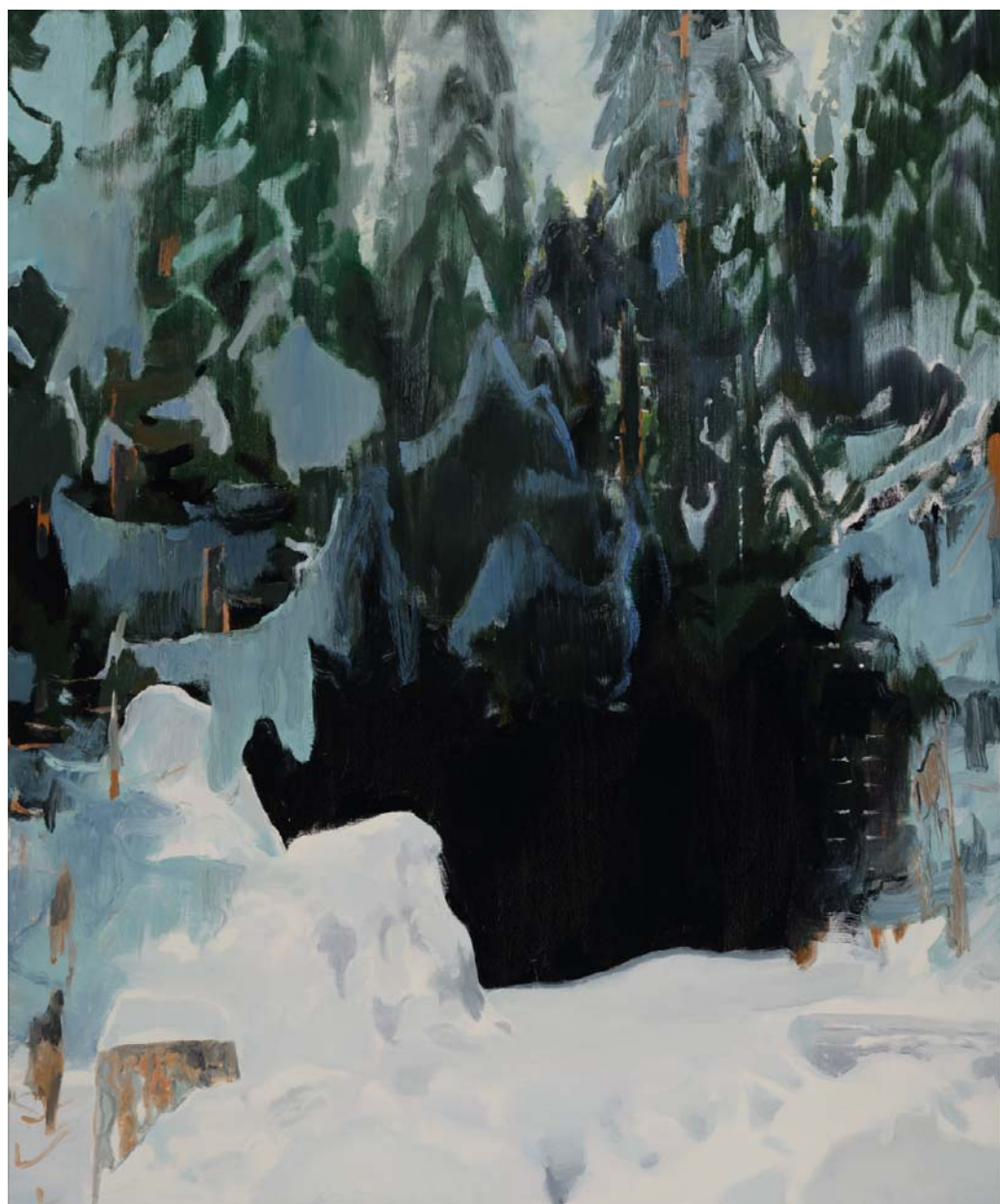
invention. They're immensities made intimate; painting them is an attempt to wrangle time and reality. My sense of both shifted abruptly this past spring. Of course, in painting, "realness" and "reality" are separate matters. Though related, the actual and the imagined fuse unexpectedly in the material binding me, nature, and the canvas. The paint, is again, the glue.

Always present in this reality is the free flow of my decades-long dialogue with other painters who have responded to the physicality of the river, especially Winslow Homer, Marsden Hartley, and the Canadian, Tom Thomson. In fact, Sackett's Brook, swollen by spring runoff, reminded so much of Hartley's *Smelt Brook Falls*, 1937 (St. Louis Museum of Art) that I made my own small version of it. The force of water, crashing and spraying, symbolized brute strength *and* sensuality for Hartley who traversed the Androscoggin River between Auburn and Lewiston, Maine in his youth. What you notice first about his elongated waterfall—more topographic autopsy than tourist attraction—is the true silvery quality of the fish the title implies. And yet, his shimmering cascade takes a further unexpected human twist; it's as if he's flaying the raw ligaments and tendons around this *body* of water—sinuous muscle straps span the breadth of his falls.

ONE OF THE STREAMS I FOLLOW flows into the glassy meniscus of a mill pond. Dark, while paradoxically warm and cool, its mirror-like surface is complicated by the strange light and reflections of overhanging and fallen trees. I love how ponds like this resist encroaching nature. Their dams and retaining walls are engineered to intervene the brooks and streams and here remain intact. Conversely, broken, uprooted trees crowd the plunge pool talus. Nearby, foundations of long-gone mill buildings are partially concealed in the overgrowth. The remnants remind me of the area's past industry; without sentiment, they pull me back to my work at the moment.



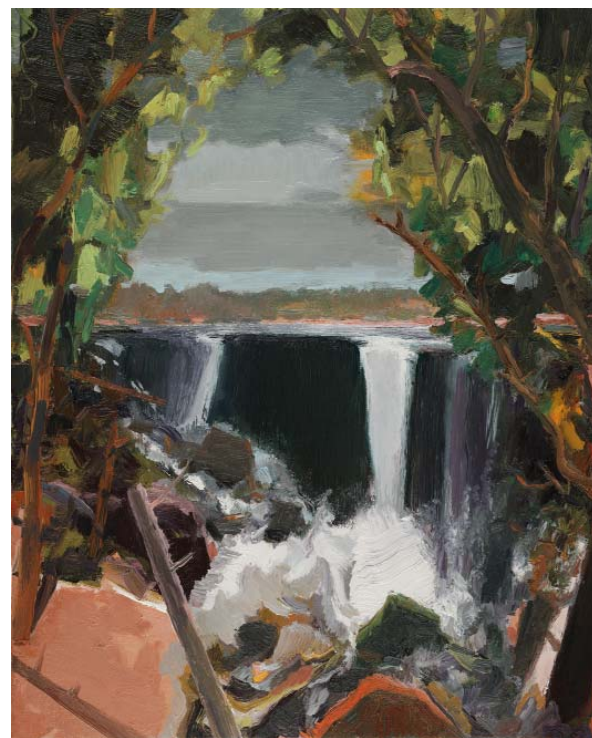
SUCCESSION, 2020
Oil on linen, 78 x 70 inches



SETT NO. 1, 2019
Oil on linen, 60 x 50 inches



ICE OUT (ALLAGASH), 2020
Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches



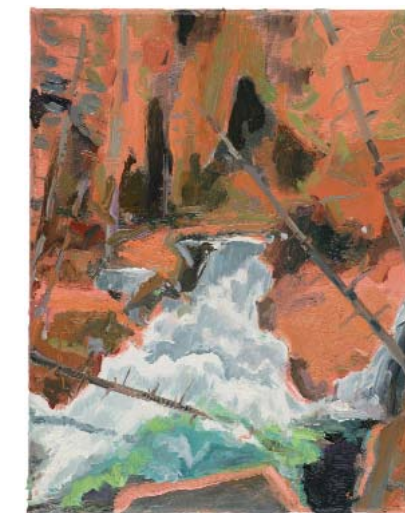
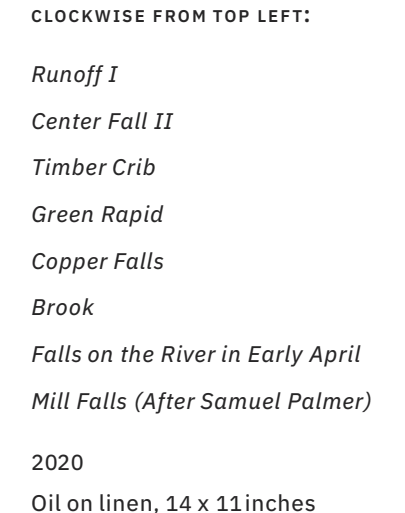
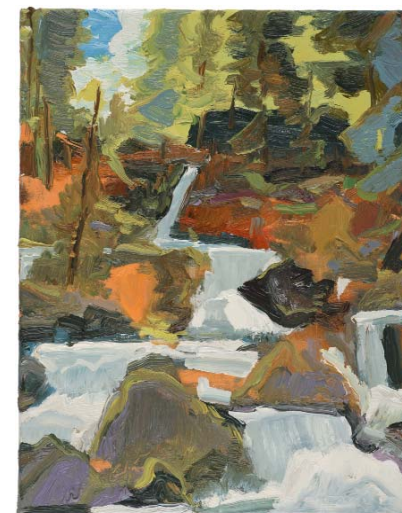
JOHN BURROUGHS' KINGFISHER, 2020
Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches

This work also reflects on those paintings Constable made on his return to his boyhood home in East Bergholt, England. A reproduction of *The Hay Wain*, 1821 (The National Gallery, London) glued to a wooden panel and yellowing under thick lacquer, had hung in my childhood bedroom. Later, when I was a student in London, there was great excitement about Constable. A large collection of his work had recently been given to the Tate and I really didn't understand the commotion. Of course, I didn't let on that I was clueless, but his paintings looked twee: quaint and sentimental. I didn't yet see them as the dynamic visual springboards I've come to love and rely on for my own work. Constable was just a dusty decoration. Maybe someone could've helped me see what I was missing, but I was too self-conscious to ask.

On the other hand, blind as I was to Constable, Samuel Palmer resonated. A generation or so younger than Constable, Palmer was just as beguiled by the rural culture of his local Kentish landscape. Where Constable fused science and modern industry in his sky-filled agrarian swaths, Palmer searched for a way to be closer to his personal spiritual beliefs. As such, his pictures were just strange enough to grab my post-adolescent attention. While pastoral, his works also elaborate universes of inventive marks that direct us through the hills and copses of his pictures. They're Romantic and very odd.

In some of my new paintings, while Constable ripples in the slow-moving water, it's Palmer who lingers in the trees over the mill pond. Painting the natural world is a unifying event—a fulfilling register of my own experience amid the *present-ness* of this landscape.

In a sense, the painterly cues I respond to straddle both Romantic and Modernist concerns. But, I try to paint the way I live. Just as I look back in time with one glance, in the next I alight, almost like the kingfisher perched above me, on this particular moment.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

- Runoff I*
- Center Fall II*
- Timber Crib*
- Green Rapid*
- Copper Falls*
- Brook*
- Falls on the River in Early April*
- Mill Falls (After Samuel Palmer)*

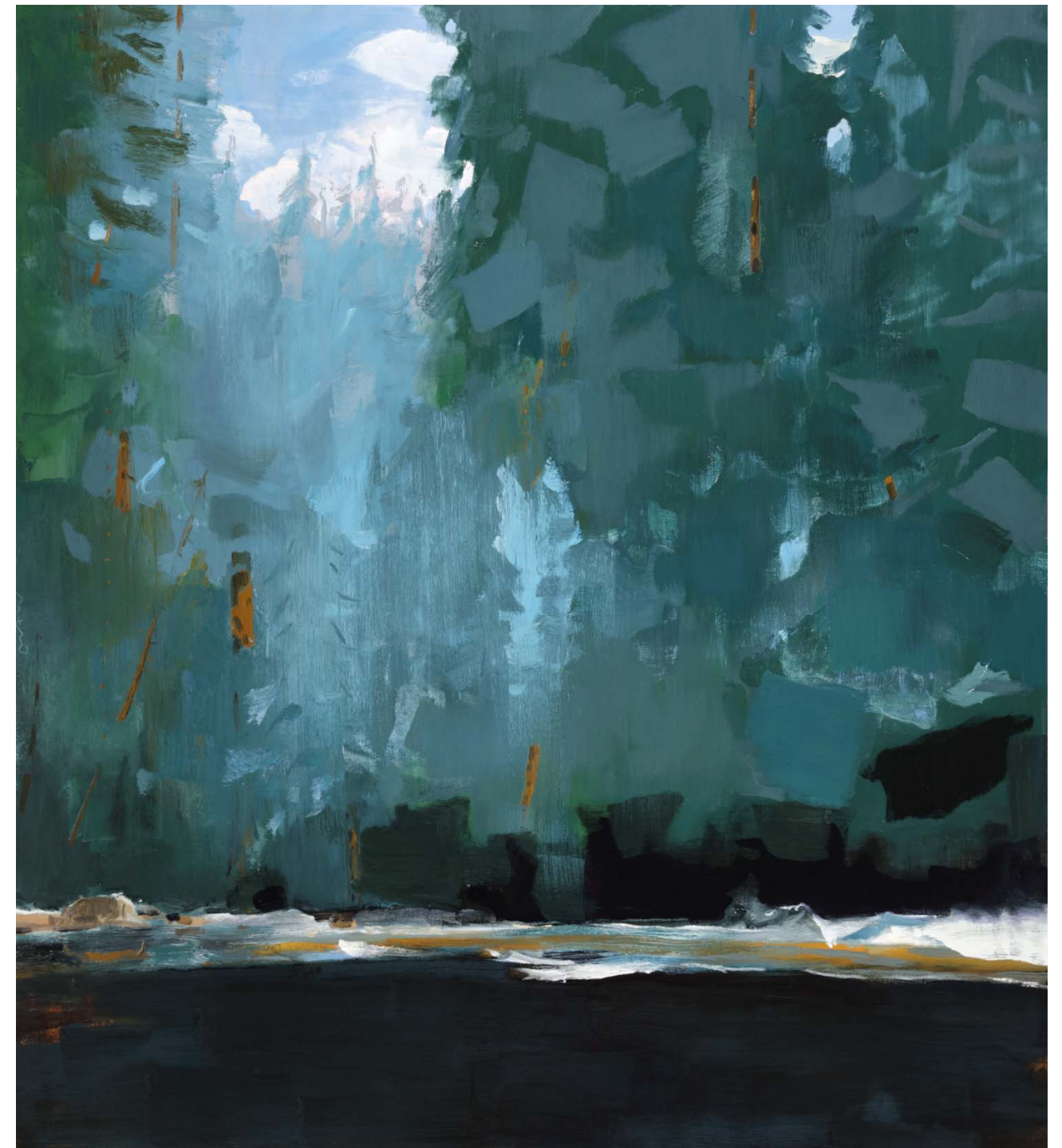
2020
Oil on linen, 14 x 11 inches



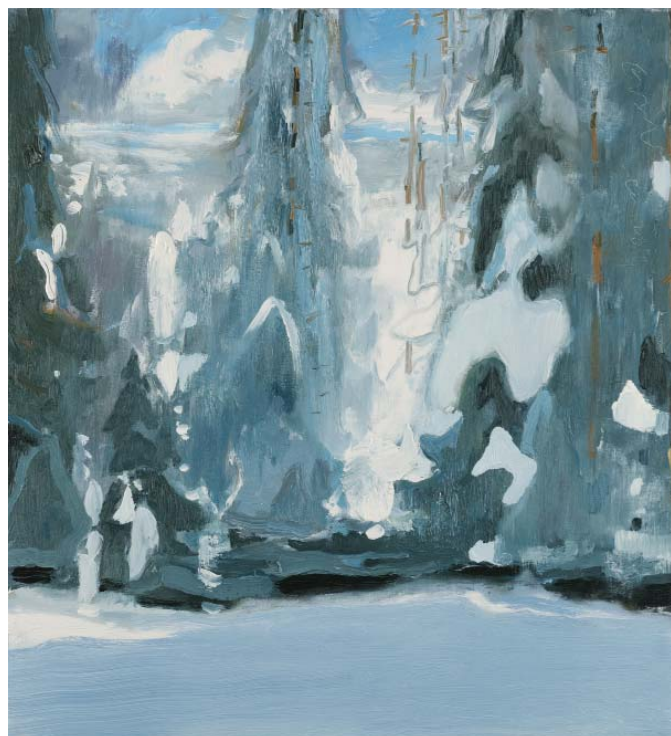
THE FIELD, 2019
Oil on linen, 20 x 16 inches

PAINTING THE LANDSCAPE is also about orientation in an environment while confronting its transience. Locating oneself in space and time is my preoccupation much as it was for early twentieth-century cartographers who studied how individuals inhabit natural space. As political boundaries seemed increasingly arbitrary, the individual became a new focal point in radical mapping strategies. The geographer Johannes Gabriel Granö (Finnish, 1882–1956) noted how our perception of full three-dimensionality, our spatial sense of the physical volume of objects around us, falls away after 150 meters [492 feet]. Beyond that, the view registers as flat. The intellect then kicks in to remind us that space exists between and around the trees, the river, and the hill. It's no longer "seen;" it's imagined. The origin of the familiar red dot on a map indicating "you are here" could likely be attributed to Granö who spent his career investigating just where we stood in space. He measured a person's direct physical connection to the world around them in a multitude of map systems based on the senses—the measured and recorded limits of our hearing, sight, smell. Granö measured the physical sensory limits of the individual—a boundary of the self.

Entering the forest pulls these boundaries toward you, and pushes your focus inward. You can't help but engage with yourself. I found myself responding to change. Witnessing it. Marking the cadence of the seasons with unrushed contemplation. What emerged was both a reward and a challenge of these past six months of uncertainty during the pandemic. New paintings continue to juggle exchanges between the wide-ranging contrasts of abstraction and representation, experience and memory, human physicality and natural phenomena. They start from what I notice, and while they resist conclusion, the painting is interrupted when something new, recognized as familiar, emerges.



PORTAGE, 2019
Oil on linen, 78 x 70 inches

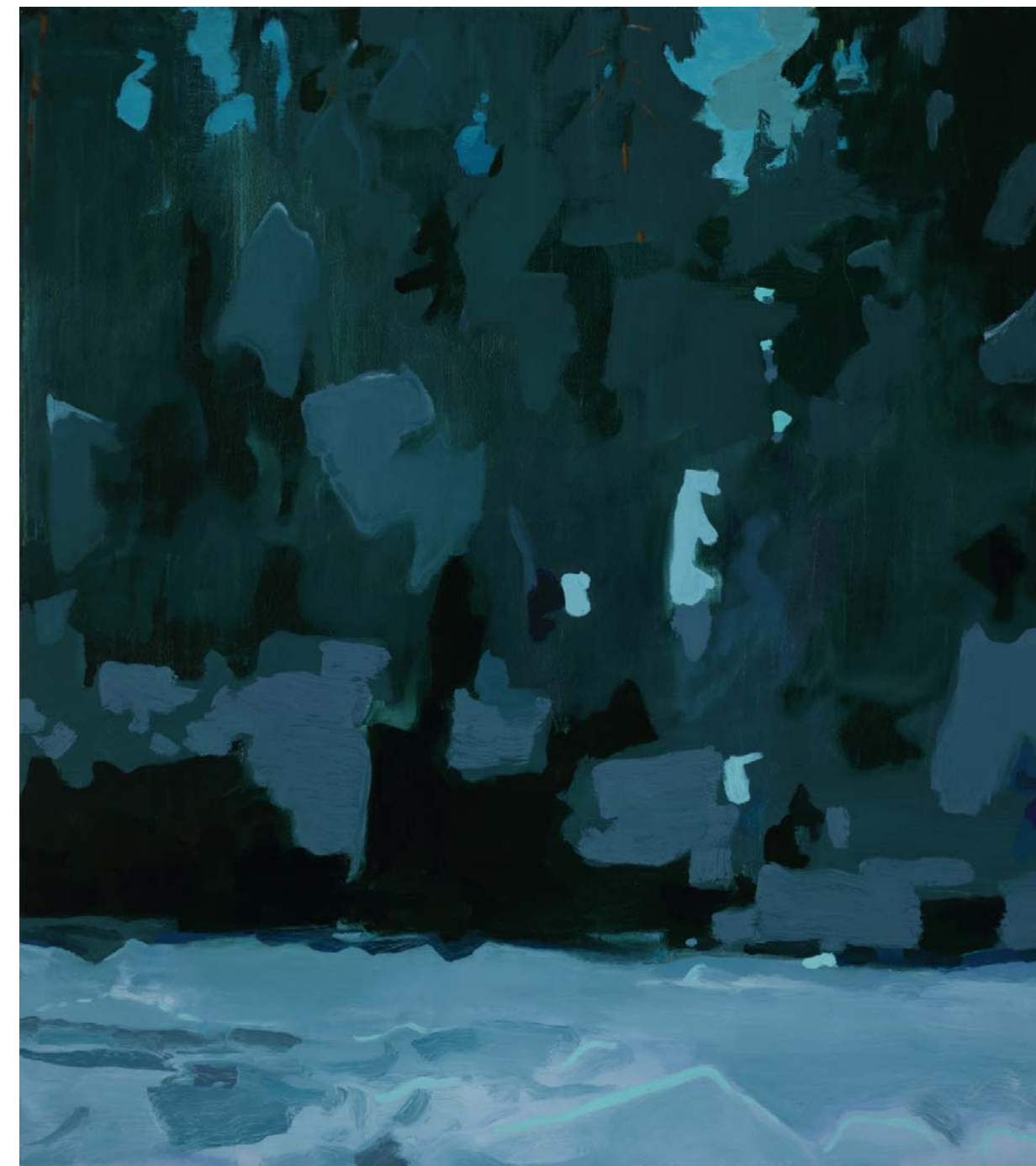


BOUGH, 2019
Oil on linen, 24 x 22 inches

I'M PHYSICAL WITH THE PAINT. Always have been. I push it around; I handle it. There remains something necessary and insistent about expressing the muscularity of the paint, that curiously, isn't about strength or the heroic. It's more awkward and protean than that, unguarded, even vulnerable. One can't help but see the fragility of the landscape on close reading of its spaces and forms while wrestling them into place on the canvas. Although this space is invisible, it oddly registers as familiar—imbued with human-like physical qualities. After all, seeing humanizes the landscape. Looking closely humanizes everything.

The closer we look and respond with the paint the more we, the landscape, and the painting coalesce. A spellbound trinity rooted in nature—at least in our imaginations—attached by the fatty, sinuous properties of the viscous oil color.

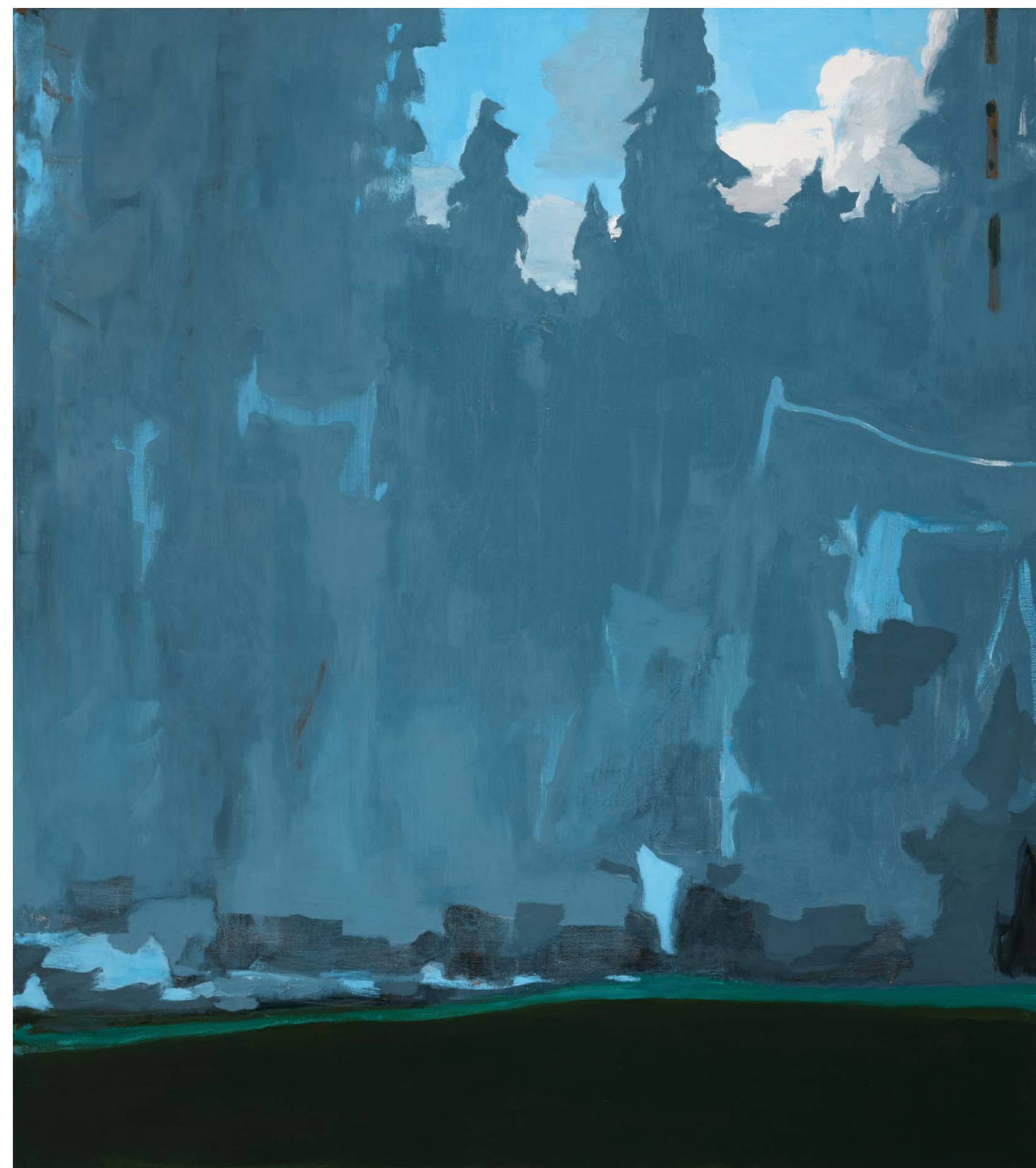
Standing before a canvas, like standing in the woods, as it turns out, is much the same. It takes a moment for the eye to adjust to less light in the forest as much as it does to quiet the mind. Is this what Whitman meant by “unminding”—to just look without disturbance?



NOCTURNE, 2020
Oil on linen, 68 x 60 inches



TRIPPING FIELD IV, 2019
Oil on linen, 52 x 48 inches



THE FIELD, 2019
Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches

ERIC AHO

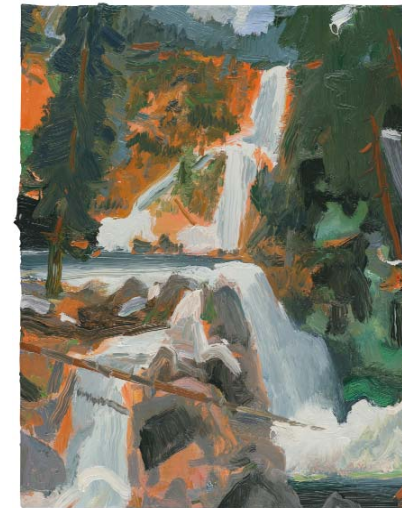
ERIC AHO IS AN AMERICAN ARTIST whose paintings are equally concerned with the physical immensity and intimacy of the natural world as much as with an ever-evolving process of extracting spiritual experiences discovered within it. His energetic, gestural painting process uses lively marks and swaths of color to create richly applied paint that morphs between abstract expanses and the contours of nature. Aho's work develops primarily from his own experience and memories of the landscape. He references broadly and freely from the history of art—responding to a wide range of works from Poussin to Constable, and from Winslow Homer to Ellsworth Kelly to inform his compositions. Aho has been called “one of the leading painters of the landscape and the environment of his generation.”

After studying at the Central School of Art and Design (now Central Saint Martins) in London, Aho received his BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design in Boston. In 1989, he participated in the first academic exchange of scholars between the U.S. and Cuba in over thirty years. Aho completed his graduate work at the Lahti Art Institute in Finland, supported by a Fulbright Fellowship in 1991–92, and an American Scandinavian Foundation grant in 1993. Another grant from the Foundation allowed Aho to travel to the Norwegian mountain regions of Setesdal and Telemark in 2003 to paint among the same forests, waterfalls, and mountains as the 19th-century Norwegian painter J.C. Dahl. In 2009, he was elected National Academician of the National Academy Museum. He received the Kendall Fellowship from MacDowell in Peterborough, NH in 2018.

Recent solo exhibitions include, *Eric Aho*, New Britain Museum of American Art, CT (2016); *Eric Aho: Ice Cuts*, Hood Museum, Hanover, NH (2016); *Eric Aho: In the Landscape*, Federal Reserve Board, Washington, DC (2013); and *Transcending Nature: Paintings by Eric Aho*, Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH (2012).

Aho's work is held in many permanent public collections, including, The Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH; The Denver Art Museum, CO; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, CA; Hood Museum of Art, Hanover, NH; Mead Art Museum, Amherst, MA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; National Academy Museum, New York, NY; New Britain Museum of American Art, CT; The New York Public Library, NY; Ogunquit Museum of American Art, ME; Springfield Art Museum, MO; Tufts University Art Collection, Medford, MA; and Wake Forest University Art Collection, Winston-Salem, NC.

Eric Aho lives and works in Saxtons River, Vermont.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Lodge Pole

Runoff II

Tributary

Mill Falls

Fallen Tree, Rapids

Sackett's Brook (After Hartley)

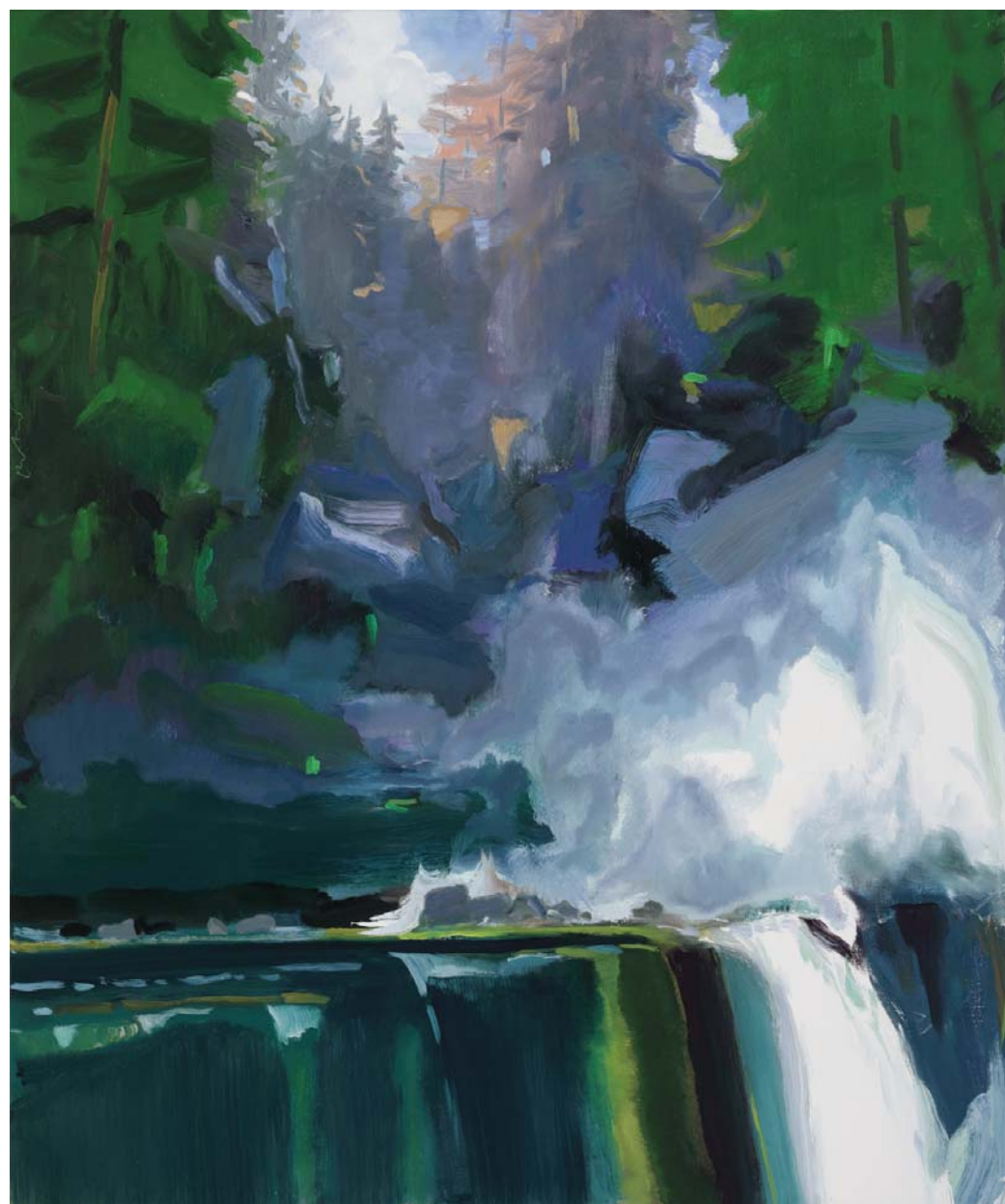
Fluorescing Rapids

Center Fall

2020

Oil on linen, 14 x 11 inches





FALLS ON THE RIVER IN EARLY APRIL, 2020
Oil on linen, 60 x 50 inches



RAPIDS AND FALLEN TREE, 2020
Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches

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Jacket: *Path in the Mountains*, 2019 (detail). Oil on linen, 90 x 80 inches

JACKET FLAP



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