

Artists Making Their Mark

There is a lot of superb art being made these days; this column shines light on a trio of gifted individuals.



Karen Blackwood (b. 1960)

Windswept

2014, Oil on canvas, 18 x 36 in.

On view at Tree's Place (Orleans, MA) through November 27

KAREN BLACKWOOD (b. 1960) paints the natural world around her, focusing especially on dramatic coastlines and sparkling harbors, serene woodlands, ponds and marshes, and tended fields and fallow meadows seen in various seasons. Though she is adept at depicting architecture, boats, and figures, most of her scenes eschew the man-made in favor of natural forms, sometimes even zooming in closely to admire a specific plant or tree.

Born in New Hampshire, Blackwood earned her B.A. in studio art from the University of New Hampshire, where she studied under Conley Harris and Sigmund Abeles. After taking classes at the Art Students League of New York, she became a successful art director at a leading advertising agency, but eventually gave up that hectic lifestyle by moving to Southern

California. There she spent 18 years focused on oil painting, first emphasizing portraits and figures, then shifting ever more toward landscapes in the spirit of the early California impressionists, who had good reason to work outdoors in the Golden State's pleasant climate. After four years in Michigan, Blackwood recently returned to New England, settling in Newburyport, Massachusetts, which faces the Atlantic Ocean 40 miles north of Boston.

Not surprisingly, Blackwood has been busy capturing the dynamic motion of waves and water on this windy coast, always prioritizing the atmospheric quality of light that helps convey her emotional responses to nature. Before setting to work, Blackwood quietly contemplates the subject, regarding it with both sharp observational skills and a depth of feeling that

helps her enter "the zone." This, she explains, is that "perfect state of being that sometimes comes while painting that allows the information to 'flow' intuitively through me, when the painting seems to paint itself and I lose all sense of time." When she paints indoors, this disconnection from the quotidian world is fostered by listening to music and referencing what earlier artists have painted in the same vein.

No matter how it is reached, Blackwood says that the zone's "lingering high makes me look forward to painting again." She adds, "It is an addiction, isn't it?" The impressive products of her addiction can be enjoyed regularly at Susan Powell Fine Art (Madison, CT) and Tree's Place (Orleans, MA).