

REVIEWS: *New Hampshire*

TRANSCENDING NATURE: PAINTINGS BY ERIC AHO

Currier Museum of Art • Manchester, NH • www.currier.org • Through September 9, 2012

The Currier Museum has chosen more than thirty works by landscape painter Eric Aho in an exhibition chronicling the artist's shift from dramatic images of the New England landscape to energetic, freely brushed compositions inspired by his response to nature. Aho's work has been collected by institutions throughout the country, including the Metropolitan Museum, the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, the New York Public Library, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

At the heart of Aho's mid-career work is a compression of sensations of the landscape combined with elements of autobiography and a constant awareness of the history of painting. Among the palpable presences in Aho's dialogue with art history, Cézanne, de Kooning, Rembrandt, and the giants of the Hudson River School, notably Thomas Cole and Frederick Church, loom large.

Since at least 2004, the date of the earliest work shown, Aho has interpreted the subjects of his paintings largely through abstract elements, particularly color, temperature, and

increasingly, the sensual, expressive power of paint itself. While still anchored in direct experience, Aho's recent work springs less from a response to the visible than from memory and sensation, and the formal relationships within the

painting itself. He cultivates a subjective sensory engagement that allows greater freedom for inspired simplification and visible mark-making, along with greater breadth of narrative and imaginative content.

Aho's most recent paintings are monumental in scale and employ bold and varied colors. In *Naturalist* (2012), the painter employs a personal language of color, composition, and gestural brushstrokes to interpret a mountainside as a riot of expressive color. Lush whites, yellows,



Eric Aho, *Naturalist*, 2011, oil on linen, 82 x 108". Image Courtesy of the Artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York. © Eric Aho.

and pinks reminiscent of the late work of both Cézanne and de Kooning suggest undulating light and sky-flooded foliage. From the bristling marks of white-pink and green alluding to skyward-reaching branches, a section of cobalt sky emerges, only to be tugged back toward the earth by scumbled umbers and soot-gray clouds. In its size and scope, *Naturalist* functions as a complex, integrated response to

the well-traversed subject of the White Mountain landscape.

Seen through the Currier's keen selection, Aho's work everywhere entices. It enmeshes light, earth, air, and human psyche in an animated, consummate whole. From modestly scaled landscapes sensitive to tradition yet committed to saying something new, Aho creates what are arguably among the best large-scale landscape paintings being painted today.

—**Christopher Volpe**