

# TRANSCENDING NATURE: PAINTINGS BY ERIC AHO

Currier Museum of Art  
150 Ash Street  
Manchester, New Hampshire

Through September 9

IT'S INDEED FITTING THAT THE CURRIER MUSEUM OF ART BE THE FIRST AMERICAN MUSEUM TO PRESENT AN EXHIBIT OF NEW ENGLAND LANDSCAPE PAINTER ERIC AHO'S WORK, AS HE GREW UP IN NEARBY HUDSON, NEW HAMPSHIRE. BUT HIS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRAVELS TO HIS HOMETLAND, FINLAND, AS WELL AS TO IRELAND AND NORWAY, ADDITIONALLY INFLUENCE HIS PAINTINGS.



*Guilford White*, 2008, oil on linen, 30" x 36". (Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York).

From his studio in Saxtons River, Vermont, he executes his more recent works — highly abstract and often monumental — a shift from direct to remembered observation, and from a naturalistic palette to bold, evocative color.

Acknowledged by some as one of the nation's top artists working today, Aho remembers visiting the Currier as a young boy and seeing works by Englishman John Constable, French Impressionist Claude Monet and American painters Jasper Cropsey and Charles Sheeler. The pieces struck a chord with the young man and he continues to be inspired and informed by them today, although his work cannot be categorized as

mimicking any of them. In fact, he says, such artists as Matisse, Cezanne and de Kooning influence his more recent works.

For more than 20 years, Aho has been painting the landscape. Early on he would create his work on site by direct observation, but over time he's osmosed into a more interpretive expression where he says he "draws from the heart with a loose hand." His intention is to paint what's real, not saccharine, he said.

Aho's art training began at the Central School of Art and Design, London, and later at Massachusetts College of Art, Boston. He earned a Fulbright Scholarship and numerous

other awards throughout his career.

With more than 30 major paintings in this exhibition, Aho's artistic journey is showcased over the span of his career. His earlier works — more representational — are smaller, often created en plein air, and are traditional pastoral landscapes. Contrast that with his more recent work where he creates from "delayed" observation/memory. Aho intuitively exhibits an innate sensitivity and ability to retain the time of day and nuances of light. Then he returns to the studio to render his memory and impression of the outdoors and "lets the painting tell me when it is done." The pieces are expansive and not the least bit representational, more abstract — yet recognizable as a place.

"Guilford White" is an excellent example of his earlier, more representational work. Pristine



*Daybreak*, 2011, oil on panel, 92" x 80" (three panels). (Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York).

morning snow in the foreground dazzles the eye while the white New England clapboard farm house juxtaposed against a dark forest adds deep contrast. And then there's the sky. Aho loves to capture clouds and sky — the more dramatic the better. This piece does not disappoint. The dark clouds on the left imply an impending storm, but as the eye travels to the right the clouds reflect the coral tones of the now-setting sun. Adding punch to this landscape are snippets of red in the painting — a front door, a couple of lesser buildings in the background, a shed to the right in muted red tones that bleeds off the piece. The impression is one you'd expect from a traditional landscape — serene, calm and peaceful.

Typical of Aho's more recent work, "Daybreak," is painted on a massive canvas (92 x 80 inches), and springs from a remembered "experience" or "impression" of nature, but is not an obviously distinctive object. But you still understand it as a landscape interpretation. The slashing, dappled brushstrokes in the foreground imply meadow flowers and shrubs, but as the eye wanders to the upper left area of the painting, one recognizes a tranquil mountain range and a beautiful eclectic rendering of transcending nature.

Linda Chestney