



# Plein Air Landscapes

October 10, 2011

by Pat Rogers

**DISPATCH - October 10, 2011 (Monday; 9:00 a.m.)**

## **Springs, NY**

If you're searching for peace and relaxation, then Ashawagh Hall might be the perfect place. During the three-day weekend, Plein Air Peconic (PAP) is presenting a group show of landscapes capturing the natural side of the Hamptons.



"Plein Air Peconic VI" is a benefit for the Peconic Land Trust (PLT). Many of the views depict lands preserved by the Southampton-based organization.

The show opened on Oct 7, 2011 and continues through today from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The exhibition presents art by 11 PAP members. Exhibiting painters are Casey Chalem Anderson, Susan D'Alessio, Aubrey Grainger, Gail Kern, Michele Margit, Gordon Matheson, Joanne Rosko and Eileen Dawn Skretch. Exhibiting photographers are Tom Steele, Kathryn Szoka and Ellen Watson.

Looking around the show, it was difficult to miss the diversity landscapes can take. What follows is a sample of some of the art on view with some insider information.

Gail Kern's art can be considered painterly realism. Her primary concern is presenting formal visual ideas instead of literal representations, she explains in her Artist Statement. "I choose to paint the large gestures of a landscape, not the fine detail," she said. "Light, color, and abstract composition are my primary focus."

The following painting was made last week on site, Kern said.



"Accabonac Harbor Tidal Wetlands" by Gail Kern. Courtesy of the artist.

"I began it before the wetlands started flooding-when it looked like water and solid land," she said. "As the tide filled the wetlands it gave me a wonderful pattern of pools and streams, which really made the painting visually interesting. Nature is always more interesting than anything I can dream up!"



"Bell Bluff with Sailboats" by Gail Kern.  
Courtesy of the artist.

"This is a portrait of the bluff which changes minute by minute with the transition of light, much the same way a face changes in shifting light," Kern said. "I spend a lot of time in that area on a sailboat, so it has great personal meaning for me!"

The following painting by Aubrey Grainger depicts Accabonac Harbor. "This is a place I love to paint and I have done it many times," Grainger said. "I especially love my fall version which is included in the show."



Artwork by Aubrey Grainger. Courtesy of the artist.

Kathryn Szoka presented images from her "Vanishing Landscapes" series and other photographs. The image that follows sprung from a request by the PLT, Szoka said.

"I was asked by PLT to photograph on Cow Neck preserve," she said. "While there are many beautiful vistas I was able to photograph, this end of evening image struck me as capturing the idyllic, otherworldliness of the site."



"Cow Neck Nightfall" by Kathryn Szoka.  
Courtesy of the artist.

"Wolffer is wonderful in any season," Szoka said about the photograph below.

“However, being partial to clouds, I enjoyed this particular afternoon at Wolffer in late September.”



“Wolffer under September Sky” by Kathryn Szoka. Courtesy of the artist.

Casey Chalem Anderson is a fan of color. Her paintings feature a bright palette that may or may not present when viewed. For Anderson, colors provide a “positive emotional charge.” She strives to make paintings that imbibe “a peaceful and expansive sensation for the viewer,” according to her Artist Statement.

Lately, she’s been making paintings where waves provide the perfect excuse to push the capacity of paint and see what it can do.



“Atlantic Gray Burst” by Casey Chalem Anderson. Courtesy of the artist.



“Morning Wave” by Casey Chalem Anderson. Courtesy of the artist.

“I think about how the ocean seduces and beckons with its sparkling beauty and at the same time strikes fear of possible danger,” Anderson said.

“I feel calm at the ocean, a sensation produced by the wide horizon line and the rhythmic pounding of the surf. And yet, danger seems to lurk when at any moment Mother Nature could unleash her full force. I love it! The paint is a vehicle to explore all of that.”

When photographer Tom Steele heads out with his camera, he’s never sure what he will find. Mostly, Steele searches for that fleeting moment when instinct and the light converge to create conditions for the perfect photograph.



“Atlantic Double Dunes” by Tom Steele.  
Courtesy of the artist.



“Osborn Barns” by Tom Steele. Courtesy  
PAP.

Susan D’Alessio has been thinking about drama and her paintings reflect this. The contrast of light and dark were always a part of her paintings. Lately, she’s been focused on coaxing the difference into her palette while choosing compositions that grab the eye.



“Pond of Pines / Napeague” by Susan  
D’Alessio. Courtesy of the artist.

“I choose to paint “Pond of Pines” because of the combination of the late day light and the shapes of the natural Napeague landscape,” she said. “The back-lit tree created interesting patterns on the dune. The browns and the warm greenish-grey of the sandy vegetation is a nice contrast to the calm pond and marsh land beyond. This creates a more dynamic landscape than the usual horizontal flatness of the marsh land and fields of the East End.”

In “Dune Beach View,” D’Alessio aimed to “capture the contrast of the warm fall-colored beach grass contrasted against the clearing blue-grey cloudy sky.”



“Dune Beach View” by Susan D’Alessio.  
Courtesy of the artist.

“This is a familiar view we see when walking toward the ocean beaches,” she said. “The horizontal composition and the color attracted me to this landscape at Dune Beach in Southampton.”

Ellen Watson made the following photo after being grabbed by the image of an unexpected bunch of beets left in a farmer’s row. The way that the light struck the vegetables gave her pause but it was the sudden realization of the fragility of life that enticed her to raise her camera.



“Beets at Balsam Farm” by Ellen Watson.  
Courtesy PAP.

“I was traipsing through the fields one day and saw this abandoned bunch between two rows,” Watson said. “Something about them in the particular light really struck me. I realized that someone had been there to pick them and then moved on, and they were forgotten.”

For Michele Margit, the larger the view, the better. Her paintings aim to impart the widest view possible. Curves of land, sand or water lead the viewer into sights unseen.



“Lazy Point” by Michele Margit. Courtesy  
PAP.

Gordon Matheson’s been painting along roadsides of the Hamptons for many years. It’s not uncommon for greetings to be shouted from cars zooming by the highway as he paints a view on an easel en plein air. The following two paintings also present personal triumphs of paint application over will until the perfect line or forms are created.



“View from the Bridge, Pussy’s Pond” by  
Gordon Matheson. Courtesy of the artist.

“View from The Bridge, Pussy’s Pond” is actually a view that I’ve been enjoying for 35 years,” Matheson said. “The most beautiful time of year for Pussy’s Pond is the fall and this painting captures the full colors of a brilliant fall day. The soft blue and grey sky, in turn, softens the old whitewashed bridge wall to where it seemed more Firenze than Bonaker. This eventually had the unintended result of making the painting more about the wall than about the foliage.”



“Ghost Ships at Fresh Pond Inlet” by Gordon  
Matheson. Courtesy of the artist.

“Ghost Ships at Fresh Pond Inlet” was originally painted on a chilly late-fall day: much too cold for sailing races,” Matheson said. “I added three loose two-stroke sailboats to save the space and put the painting away to be finished the following summer when the races would be back.”

“During the summer, I then spent a whole afternoon watching the races, drawing and painting three perfect sailboats, racing for home. But they looked way too perfect for the soft feeling of the painting. So I took them out and went back to the three ghostly sailboats trying to break out of the fog. “I had it right the first time and didn’t know it. Live and learn.”



“Wyndanch Early Morning” by Eileen Skretch.  
Courtesy PAP.

This is the sixth year Plein Air Peconic has exhibited together.

Based on artist interviews, it seems the group has hit its stride in discovering the best way to present their landscape art.

The current exhibition features larger pieces in the main gallery with a collection of smaller works presented in the side gallery.

Being enmeshed in the genre of en plein air for six years (and in most cases, much longer as individuals) means PAP artists are well-versed in capturing local landscapes.

While every artist brings their own perspective and captures different elements of the natural world, they are bound together for a love of landscape, said Margit.

More specifically, it is the landscape of the Hamptons that draws each artist to return time and time again and connects them to each other, said Anderson.



Exhibiting members of Plein Air Peconic. Not shown are Kathryn Szoka and Eileen Dawn Skretch.

**BASIC FACTS:** “Plein Air Peconic VI” is being held from Oct 7 to 10, 2011 at Ashawagh Hall. Proceeds benefit the Peconic Land Trust. The work is inspired by direct observation of farmlands, flower fields, salt marshes and beaches on the End End of Long Island. Ashawagh Hall is located at 780 Springs Fireplace Road, East Hampton, NY.

**Plein Air Peconic** was established in 2006 to exhibit the landscapes of the Hamptons and the North Fork. Working en plein air to capture vistas conserved by the Peconic Land Trust and other natural scenes, a portion of all sales are donated to the Peconic Land Trust to assist with their efforts. Each artist has exhibited widely outside of PAP. Information about the individual members and the group can be found at [www.PleinAirPeconic.com](http://www.PleinAirPeconic.com).

**Peconic Land Trust:** The Peconic Land Trust was established in 1983 to conserve Long Island's working farms and natural lands. Since inception, the nonprofit Trust has conserved around 10,000 acres of land on Long Island by working with landowners, communities, partner organizations and local government. Through conservation, the Trust also protects the unique rural heritage and natural resources of the region. [www.peconiclandtrust.org](http://www.peconiclandtrust.org).



"Accabonac" by Joanne Rosko. Courtesy PAP.

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