

Foreword

An Artist's Acadia: The Paintings of Phyllis Rees

Where so many painters of Mount Desert Island offer scenic vistas or well-known landmarks, Phyllis Rees follows a road less traveled, presenting segments of trailside nature that appeal to her eye – and to ours. There, in a flooded meadow or a rippling brook, she finds an essence that has its own special drama and remarkable beauty.

Rees often paints the confluence of water, sky, reeds and rocks that one finds at the water's edge. While remaining true to the motif, she takes license with the elements, allowing imagination to run with the various configurations in front of her. Sunlight on the water creates a shape resembling a continent. Pickerel weed casts calligraphic circuitry on the still water: the shadows of rushes reach into the sky, which is reflected in a lake.

Reflections play tricks with one's vision – what is surface and what is depth? Oftentimes, rocks provide orientation, as anchors to a composition that may resemble a mosaic or tapestry. Lily pads and leaves floating on the water also help orient the eye.

These visually intriguing sites lend themselves to an engaging abstraction. Rees' palette further transforms the literal into the poetic. Occasionally, her stylized approach brings to mind the work of Neill Welliver or Alex Katz. (She and Katz share some schooling: both attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture.)

We look into Rees' waters with the intensity of Narcissus, not looking for our own reflection but for the enchanting interplay found in an artist's Acadia. The shimmer of light and ripple effects catch our eye. We are thankful to be reminded of the wonders of gazing.

Rees is a conservationist; her paintings encourage us, in her words, “to take care to love what we see.” We share her regard for nature and thereby her desire to guard these marvelous things.

Carl Little