

Joanna Logue in the Press

Joanna Logue: Landscape Revelations

By Carl Little

For more than a century and a half Mount Desert Island has served as muse to landscape painters, from Thomas Cole and Frederic Church in the mid-1800s to a host of contemporary artists drawn to its transcendent reaches. Undaunted by this legacy, Joanna Logue, in her brief residency, has carved out a place in this rich continuum, developing her own language to create paintings that speak to a formidable sense of place.

Since moving to Maine two years ago, Logue has immersed herself in the landscape. She has walked the carriage roads of Acadia National Park, hiked mountains and explored remote ponds and marshes. She has favorite places, like Witch Hole Pond and the water meadow at Sieur de Monts Springs. She visits these sanctuaries and absorbs them.

And when Logue finds a motif that speaks to her, she makes a small plein-air gouache study, takes it back to her light-filled studio in Somesville and transforms it into one of her stunning oils. While maintaining the freshness and energy of what is essentially an emotional response to the natural world, she constructs a new vision, intellectually considered and visually compelling.

“I want the painting to draw the viewers in, I want them to be involved with, and seduced by, the painted surface,” Logue explains on a bright June morning, inviting a visitor to stand close to *Water Meadow I*. From a foot or so away, the painting is a complex and robust layering of marks, scrapes, and scars, some made with a trowel. As one steps back from the canvas, the surface coalesces into a stunning woodland scene, a lively mosaic of birches and foliage reflected in water.

If the plein air studies Logue makes capture the immediate setting, the paintings that follow distill and abstract the view to its essential shapes—a path through blueberry bushes, a line of birches against the sea. Indeed, for her the landscape is the departure point for abstraction. She could never start from nothing, as the Abstract Expressionists often did; she must have that foundation from which to make her forays into the non-representational.

After painting for thirty years in Australia, Logue has had to learn a new language in her Maine home. For one thing, she has moved from a tertiary palette to a more colorful spectrum,

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embracing the bright display of a New England autumn. The island landscape also has more contrast and is more intricate, requiring extra drawing. Adding a bleached wax to her medium allows Logue to push the paint around in order to capture the energy of the scene.

The solidity of the landscape also attracts the painter, be it an island edging into the view or rock outcroppings in the forest. In *Granite Country*, the gray stone serves as a kind of underpinning to the flux of nature, of bulrushes and birches and reflecting water. Logue is excited by this painting, a seminal piece and the launching point for future work.

In the end, Logue approaches each painting as a challenge to free herself of constraint. She never wants to stay with what is safe; she is always pushing through to something new. “I need the painting to teach me a new way of looking at the world,” she says. We look on in wonder, grateful to have this master painter re-engage us with what lies before us, in a manner both revelatory and brilliant.

Carl Little is a regular contributor to Hyperallergic and Art New England. His books include Edward Hopper's New England, The Watercolors of John Singer Sargent and, with his brother David, Art of Acadia.

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Interview with Suzette McAvoy for Maine Decor

An established landscape painter in her native Australia, artist Joanna Logue moved to Maine in 2017, with her husband Martin Pera, a top research scientist, for his new job at Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor. The couple settled in an historic house in Somesville on Mt. Desert Island, where the surrounding environment provides inspiration for Logue's expressively painted, color-saturated landscapes. Her views are not the spectacular vistas popularized by artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Church in the mid-19th century. Instead, Logue paints from *within* the landscape—the dense tangle of the deep woods, reflections on a boggy pond, and the changing colors of the seasons.

SM: Joanna, you've come to know the Mt. Desert landscape intimately in a relatively short time. How do you find your subjects?

JL: Living at the foothills of Acadia National Park has meant I can be out hiking most days and in the colder months I ski the trails. It is a fully immersed and absorbing relationship I have with the landscape. I can take in the minutiae of a pond or marsh, or the wider view across a meadow to a stand of birch or a mountain. I have always felt a deep connection with landscape and place and have used this as a point of departure for my painting practice. When I first came to Maine I built a studio and whilst this was happening I explored the island, climbing every mountain and walking every trail, sometimes making gouaches and drawings along the way. Although it will take some time to be called 'a local' I feel I know Mount Desert Island like the back of my hand.

SM: What are some notable differences between the Australian landscape and the landscape in Maine, and how does that translate to your work?

JL: My visual language has changed considerably since moving to Maine. The wooded terrain is particularly complex resulting in a lively painted surface. Being surrounded by water - not just the ocean - but marshes, pools and glacial ponds has added another element to my work. And the

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birch and conifer are different from the eucalypts I'm used to painting. The color is much more vibrant, particularly in the fall, unlike the muted, tertiary palette indicative of the Australian bush. I am still struck too by how marked the seasons are, unlike in Australia where seasonal changes happen slowly. Living in Maine is a painter's paradise.

SM: The surfaces of your paintings are really active and tactile. Can you describe a little of your process?

JL: My painting practice happens mainly in the studio using memory and studies I generally make en plein air. I make large paintings with many layers of thick paint which I then etch back into with a trowel. I revisit the paintings many times until the work holds a visceral memory or essence of a remembered place. When making a body of work the paintings form relationships and a visual language develops. I can borrow motifs and reference color, to continue building paintings - sometimes deliberately and sometimes unconsciously through a kind of osmosis. Although my departure point is inspired by a personal and particular 'place', my hope is the work transcends the specific and evokes a universal landscape. This is precisely what the Maine landscape stirs in me. It seems somehow timeless, symbolizing an archetypal wilderness.

SM: What's underway in the studio? Any upcoming shows or news you can share?

JL: Presently I am making an exhibition for my London gallery, opening in September and a show for the Dowling Walsh gallery, which will open in the fall. Both exhibitions will comprise of paintings inspired by the landscape in Maine. I am also working on a project whereby I am painting on linen patched together, which will take the form of roughly sewn quilts. I have often thought my paintings are reminiscent of tapestries or blankets. This quality has evolved since moving to Maine, where the landscape is bold but somewhat intricate, a complicated weaving of shapes, line, color and tone. The studio offers up surprises if one stays open to experimentation. The best thing about having a studio in Maine is I can enjoy the space and relatively uninterrupted time to develop new ideas.

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Joanna Logue was born in North South West Australia and graduated from the City Art Institute with a BA in Visual Arts and a Graduate Diploma in Painting. Since then, she has had 22 solo exhibitions and has exhibited extensively throughout Australia and internationally. She lives and works on Mount Desert Island in Maine and from her studio at Essington Park, Australia.

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Joanna Logue: Echoes

By Jessica Skwire Routhier

In just a few years, Joanna Logue has had to change almost everything about her way of working. She is still and always will be a landscape painter, but where she once painted with oils, she now uses acrylics. She learned her craft in the bright and open landscapes of southeastern Australia, where she is from, but she now spends most of her time in the northeastern most corner of the United States, on Mount Desert Island, Maine, where everything from the vegetation, to the light, to the change of seasons is entirely different. The move to Maine was anticipated and carefully planned, but the switch from oils to acrylics was more abrupt. After developing health issues from the toxic properties of the oil paints, Logue changed materials essentially overnight. The new work gathered here is her first exhibition wholly in this new medium.

Mount Desert is a very specific kind of place. In the summer, its largest village of Bar Harbor draws tourists from all over the world. Some 3.5 million people visit nearby Acadia National Park each year to hike its trails and take in its unparalleled views. Apart from the crowds, the park is a landscape painter's dream—and in fact it has played an important role in American art history, beginning with Thomas Cole and Frederic Edwin Church in the nineteenth century. And yet, when the visitors leave and the seasons change—and Logue marvels at how quickly and thoroughly they change in Maine—Mount Desert becomes a much quieter and more reclusive place. The summer sun and the brilliant autumn foliage that have inspired so many other artists, it turns out, are like a decorative scrim covering the more raw, more dense, more challenging landscapes that capture Logue's attention.

“It's such a complicated and intricate landscape,” says Logue, referring not to the spectacular, expansive vistas for which Acadia is best known but to the overlooked corners of the woods and marshes that are by contrast much more complex and changeable, more difficult to access both physically and intellectually. This, too, is part of the lineage of modern Maine landscape painting to which Logue now unexpectedly belongs. She had known of Marsden Hartley and Milton Avery before moving to Maine, but their landscapes have since become some of her strongest influences,

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as are contemporary Maine paintings by Lois Dodd, Alex Katz, and John Walker. She is fascinated by the balance between influence—of place, of other painters—and individuality. “How much of my way of seeing is influenced by what’s gone before,” she wonders, “or is it just my unique perception of the world?”

She begins her work with a hike out into the woods, sometimes just looking, sometimes with a camera in hand or the kit she uses to make gouache studies en plein air. “I’m loving this place with my eyes rather than my heart, unlike the emotional connection I have to the landscape at home,” she says. “I’ve had to get out there and intensely investigate and observe to understand the nature of this landscape. As a result, my way of seeing and drawing has really improved.” Back in the studio, she stores the photographs and gouaches in folders organized by theme and/or place name: “Witch Hole,” “Snow - Eagle Lake,” etc. She will often create a more fully realized version of the composition on paper or cradled birch panel before addressing it on a larger scale. Once transposed, the work becomes more expressive in nature. The actual landscape will have changed by then—each week in coastal Maine is like its own miniature season—but it has also changed in Logue’s mind and in her rendering of it. The studies made from real places are departure points. “Then my visceral memory kicks in,” she says. “It’s about finding a balance between a spontaneous approach to mark-making and the formal preoccupations around building a painting.”

She uses her folders and studies as a kind of library of forms and marks and colors, and freely mixes those sources in her large-scale works, composed of heavily layered marks laid down with large brushes and a concrete trowel she describes as her “favourite tool.” “I pastiche myself,” she says, often literally cutting and pasting elements together, inverting and rearranging them to create new compositions. She describes her process as developing a “language” she can use as she works on as many as ten large canvases at a time, constantly returning to add another motif, another layer, or to edit what she has already done. The literary metaphor is applicable in more ways than one; she often finds herself “letting go of nice passages to enable the painting to work,” the equivalent of the writer’s mandate to “kill your darlings.” “The role of the artist is to recognize what is serving the painting and what isn’t,” she says.

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She also sees her paintings as analogous to poetry, in that they begin with an idea or an image that is already familiar in some sense but encourage the viewer to see it in a different way. *May Snow*, for instance, evokes a late-season snowfall, where spring is already starting to burst through on the forest floor and around the rim of a vernal pool before the snow comes and complicates everything. What appears on canvas is not a literal rendering of an observed moment but an orchestration of abstracted motifs that stir up a memory of being in that kind of landscape, with all its visual and emotional complexities.

Is it just a coincidence that Logue is drawn to places with names like “Witch Hole” and “Breakneck Creek”? There is a certain depth and darkness to much of her work. She describes her *Wooded Trail* paintings as “spooky and mysterious.” Works like *Where the Birch Meets the Sea*, with its stand of slim white birches, have a kind of whimsical quality, a sense of both delight and possible danger. This is by design, Logue says, noting that her paintings have to be more than beautiful; they have to have something that stops and challenges the viewer. “My paintings need to be tough and innovative, but soft and seductive at the same time.”

Logue chose the title “Echoes” primarily for formal reasons, referring to the compositional devices that appear and reappear—doubled, flipped, rotated, mirrored—throughout the work. The word itself, though, has some of the same mutability as those changeable marks: echoes of home, of dislocation, of influence, of past work, of real-world landscapes that exist only for a moment before they change forever, and then change again. The magic of Logue’s painting is how she renders something as elusive as those echoes.

Jessica Skwire Routhier is a regular contributor to *Antiques and The Arts Weekly* and the managing editor of *Panorama*, the journal of the Association of Historians of American Art.

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Interview with Carl Little

Earlier in your life as a painter, what drew you to the landscape?

I was born in a small country town in Australia and grew up very close to nature. I suppose the landscape is what I identify with at a visceral level. When I finished art school it seemed natural to be painting the landscape.

What brought you to Maine?

I followed my husband who is a scientist with the Jackson laboratory on Mount Desert Island.

What were your impressions of Mount Desert Island when you first moved there? How did you set about learning the landscape?

When I first moved to Maine I was mesmerized by its beauty. Living at the foothills of Acadia National Park meant I was literally butted up against my subject matter. The landscape in Maine is very different to Australia. There is more contrast and color. It is quite an intricate and complicated landscape with lots of pools, water ways and marshes. Australia is arid and the palette is tertiary and subtle. I came to Mount desert island six years ago. I've walked nearly every trail in the park. I feel I know it like the back of my hand.

Tell me about a couple of your favorite places to paint on the island.

The places that have inspired me most are Witch Hole loop and Eagle Lake. This landscape is mysterious and has a timeless quality. I have made whole exhibitions about both these places.

Much of your recent work revolves around water: ponds, marshes, forest pools, a creek. What attracts you to this subject?

I like the reflective qualities of landscapes with water. Reflections offer up an echoing of lines and shapes encouraging a new way of looking and this inspires abstraction. I have done away with the horizon line since painting the forest pools and marshes.

Do you have a favourite season?

The thing I love about Maine is the prominence of all the seasons. I can't say I have a favorite season. It is special all year round.

Do you have a preferred palette?

I use a restricted palette which leans towards the monochromatic, however since moving to Maine I had to include primary color into my palette, especially when painting in the Fall.

What led you to mix wax with oil paint?

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I enjoy the opacity that wax brings to a painting and it enables me to push out extraneous detail.

One of your principal tools is the concrete trowel. How did you come to employ this tool? What does it allow you do that a brush doesn't?

When I use the edge of a trowel, I don't have the same control of line a brush might make. I like the variation of marks the trowel offers up.

You said in an interview that you sometimes start a painting with your eyes closed. What's your aim in doing this?

It allows me to start with an emotional approach, using memory rather than my intellect. I sometimes do this half way through making a work as well, to bring spontaneity back to a painting if it has become too contrived.

What's your painting schedule like?

10am to 6pm - six days a week

You have had several shows of your Acadia paintings in Australia. What has been the reaction?

I've had a major show every year in Australia since moving to Maine. People have responded very well which surprises me because the work has become quite specific and most Australians haven't been to Maine. Maybe the work has become universal.

You mentioned in a recent statement that with all the turmoil in the world you have found yourself questioning the relevance of landscape painting. How have you dealt with this doubt?

I'm still grappling with this particularly since the war in the Ukraine and all the anxiety and uncertainty around the implications for the rest of the world. Not to mention the climate crisis! I question how meaningful landscape painting is in this context but at the same time I feel enormously grateful that I can make paintings about this beautiful place and take solace in the healing power of nature.

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