

Jazz at Back Bay Grill

Joan Benoit Samuelson

Fine Art Photography

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Wissemann-Widrig, Fishman, and Irvine

The Challenge of the Ever-Changing Sea



Undoubtedly the richest vein in Maine art has long been paintings of the sea. The gauntlet was laid down in 1844 by Thomas Cole, the leader of the American landscape movement, when he first ventured to Mount Desert Island and described the coastline as “ironbound” with “threatening crags, and dark caverns in which the sea thunders.” From that moment to this day, artists have come to Maine to accept the challenge asserted by the sea.

For the three artists featured this month, the sea is a central motif in their work. Each has established a deep and intimate relationship with their particular stretch of the Maine coast, endeavoring to capture with paint and brush what writer Stephen May has called “Maine’s moving target.”

THE CANVAS
by Suzette McAvoy

THE CANVAS

NANCY WISSEMANN- WIDRIG

Nancy Wisseman-Widrig arrives in Maine around Memorial Day and stays well into October, an annual seasonal sojourn that began in the 1960s when she and her husband, the artist John Wisseman, found the cottage on Hawthorne Point

in Cushing that remains their summer home and studio. Hawthorne Point is at the southern entrance of Penobscot Bay; at its end is the Olson House, the subject of Andrew Wyeth's iconic painting *Christina's World*. The Point is also home to painter Lois Dodd, a close friend and fellow member of a long-standing weekly figure-drawing group, alongside whom Wisseman-Widrig often paints *en plein air*.

The painting, *Deeper Near Shore*, is a new addition to a series of paintings Wisseman-Widrig began several years ago, collectively called *The Sea Garden*, that record the play of light and reflection on the water of a tidal cove near her home. Making small-scale, on-site paintings almost daily (from which larger paintings are worked up in the studio), she adopts



Deeper Near Shore, 2007
Oil on canvas, 12" x 12"

in these works a radical perspective that flattens and elevates space, creating a cropped and compressed scene reminiscent of a Japanese woodcut. They are a testament to her belief that "A work of art should be an artist's most sincere statement. Each painting I begin with a desire to make something satisfying and true."

In *Deeper Near Shore*, Wisseman-Widrig looks down to paint the floating tendrils of seaweed at her feet, then sweeps across the expanse of water to the farther shore, where a lone lobster boat is caught in dark profile, silhouetted against the bright, white water. It is this transitory quality of light and the tapestry of reflections on the water's surface that are the true subjects of the painting—and Wisseman-Widrig's gift to the viewer.



Nancy Wisseman-Widrig received a master's degree in fine art from the College of Fine Arts at Ohio University. She is listed in *Who's Who in American Women* and *Who's Who in American Art* and has had more than thirty solo exhibitions of her work in Maine and New York. She is represented by Caldbeck Gallery in Rockland.



Evening Calm, 2005
Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 54"

ALAN FISHMAN

Alan Fishman was born and raised in New York City, but spent boyhood summers at camp in Maine. When the opportunity came to move to the state year-round in 1996, Fishman—a painter, poet, musician, and an avid sailor—jumped at the chance, purchasing a renovated 1880s barn in Belfast that serves as home and studio for him, his wife, the photographer Marcie Bronstein, and his son, Noah. Ever since, Fishman has kept a boat in Belfast Harbor, allowing him frequent access to the islands and waters of the Maine coast, voyages that have inspired many of his paintings over the past twelve years.

In *Evening Calm*, Fishman presents a poetic translation of boats at rest on their moorings in Belfast harbor. Never a literalist in his works, Fishman paints from remembered images rather than direct observation, endeavoring to create “musical

equivalents” for experiences that he has felt, imagined, and seen. In *Evening Calm*, he composes a nocturne graced with quiet notes of color, a visual ode of timeless serenity that echoes a line from one of his own poems: “Between the stars and sea, time rolls in.”

Fishman traces his artistic roots to Europe, where he spent many years living and teaching in Italy. He especially admires the work of Klee, Matisse, Monet, and Picasso, artists whose work bridges representation and abstraction. Reviewer Philip Isaacson has written of Fishman’s work, saying that “he paints the moment rather than the fact.” Fishman’s lyrical paintings reflect his many passions and pursuits. Expressing a love of color, texture, and form, as well as a rapt attention to and delight in the natural world, they are spirited additions to the long tradition of Maine seascape painting.



Alan Fishman is a professor emeritus of the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, where he was a member of the fine art faculty from 1967 to 1996. He received a bachelor of fine arts from Cornell University, with further study in Italy. His works can be seen at Judith Leighton Gallery in Blue Hill and Firehouse Gallery in Damariscotta.

THE CANVAS



Northern Sail, 2007, 40" x 30"

Private collection, Photo courtesy Firehouse Gallery

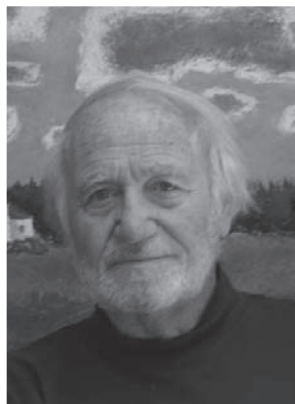
WILLIAM IRVINE

William Irvine came to Maine more than thirty-five years ago from a small Scottish town on the Atlantic, where he began painting at age 12, captivated by what he calls “the magic of painting, that doorway through which we can enter into other worlds, worlds intensified by the heightened sensibility of artists.” On this side of the Atlantic, Irvine settled in a small town on the Blue Hill peninsula, facing Eggemoggin Reach—that spectacular cruising ground that runs between the mainland and Deer Isle.

His intimacy with the sea runs deep, and it informs all of his work. Writing about his relationship to the sea, Irvine says, “My world revolves around the sea, its changing moods, the patterns of wind and surf, the eternal changing of tides, those magical islands that seem to move like ships through fog, the shore with

intimate coves, star fish and clam shells.” In *Northern Sail*, he presents a symbolic portrait of a small, rockbound Maine island that is crested with a dark crown of pine trees and watched over by an omnificent, wing-shaped cloud. To the left a small schooner makes its way along a bright blue track in an indigo sea.

The painting calls to mind, in both form and composition if not spiritual angst, Marsden Hartley’s small gem *Stormy Sea, No. 2*, from 1936. Painted after learning of a friend’s death in a fishing accident, Hartley’s painting is an elegy to loss and the ocean’s terrible power. In contrast, Irvine’s is a celebration of the harmony of the universe when nature’s beauty and energy align, as often happens in August on the coast of Maine. It is a testament to Irvine’s artistic aspiration “to fashion something beyond the particular, something that expresses the permanence of nature and our brief passage through it.” **MH+D**



William Irvine graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 1953. He exhibited his work in London before coming to the United States in the 1970s. He is represented in Maine by Judith Leighton Gallery, Firehouse Gallery, Greenhut Galleries, Courthouse Gallery, and George Marshall Store Gallery, among others.

Suzette McAvoy is the former chief curator of The Farnsworth Art Museum in Rockland, Maine, with more than twenty years of experience as a museum curator. She has lectured and written extensively on the art and artists of Maine, and has organized national traveling exhibitions of the work of Louise Nevelson, Alex Katz, Kenneth Noland, Lois Dodd, Karl Schrag, and Alan Magee, among other artists.