

# In search of solace, Anne Ireland goes to most natural places

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Anne Ireland is still married to the horizon, but her latest paintings explore the quiet, small spaces within the landscape: A stand of trees shading a secluded path; a still lily pond radiating the overhead sun; autumn leaves clinging to tree branches.

Those are the places she went in search of the solace and peace that she needed after the death of her son. She didn't make these new paintings about her son or her grief. She made them in celebration of her ability to find beauty and hope during the darkest times.

"Working in many ways has saved me over the past two years since my son died," she said. "It was a way of celebrating the beauty, mystery and magic of the landscape. I had this overwhelming feeling of gratitude for living, and I was sorry that David was gone and that he was not going to experience life."

She is showing two dozen new paintings at the Maine Jewish Museum in Portland through Sept. 10. Ireland calls the exhibition "Within the Landscape," because these paintings explore nature as a place within itself.

In this work, she found peace.

Ireland, who lives most of the year on a saltwater farm in West Bath, spent the past two winters in Florida. Her husband retired two years ago and

wanted to live in an environment where he did not have to shovel snow off the driveway, nevermind the roof. Ireland set up a winter studio in a building in Sarasota that she shares with other artists and began making paintings of home.



Anne Ireland working in her studio.

They represent her subconscious longing for Maine and feel like a warm embrace. Making the paintings fed her creative impulses and allowed her to convey joy and gratitude for living and for the natural beauty of her surroundings. They also helped get her through the winter and represent an emotional response.



"Lily Pond" by Anne Ireland, oil on canvas, 2017.

With this series, her palette is organic, her brushwork relaxed and her vision abstract. These paintings are intuitive and immediate, and quietly peaceful.

People who know Ireland may recognize these scenes from her home in West Bath and elsewhere, but she was less interested in capturing what those places looked like and "more about that feeling of a place."

For Ireland, place often represents peace, and peace was an unexpected and welcome result of her art process. They are personal, and also universal.

They range in size from 32 inches square to 8 inches square, and each feels like an invitation to walk inside and explore whatever is beyond the canvas. They're a bit dreamy and highly expressive, in oil and gouache.

Ireland made most of the paintings this past winter. "I'm not retired, so I work every day when I am there," she said. "Winter in Florida is my work season."

Nancy Davidson, curator in residence at the Maine Jewish Museum, said it was Ireland's colors that caught her eye when she looked at this work the first time. "Her work is unique and expressive, including the creative use of many colors that add everlasting exuberance," she said.

Ireland's son, David, was 29 when he died of a drug overdose in the fall of 2014. His death received attention locally and nationally. The Washington Post told his story as part of a larger examination of the drug epidemic in Maine.

The winter that followed his death was her first in Florida, and it was there and then that she began creating these Maine-inspired paintings that are based on the places she goes for quiet and peace.

Working hard and being focused helped her with her grief. "I think simply working, and working with no agenda, really, made me feel good," she said.

She concentrated on shapes, composition and color, and used color as a way to experiment with her moods, emotions and expression.

Because she was in Florida, Ireland painted from photos of Maine and doctored those photos to steer her away from her representational instincts. She began using colors that felt wildly vibrant and expressive – and unnatural.



"White Aspens" by Anne Ireland, oil on panel.



"Before the Fall" by Anne Ireland, 2017, oil on canvas.

She resisted "being seduced by the color of the place in any way" and allowed her imagination to dictate her direction.

It felt freeing and surprisingly reminiscent of her youth. Ireland's happy place is a 200-year-old farm in West Bath that opens up to the New Meadows River. It's a family place, where she came in the summers while growing up in New York. She was shy in New York, and felt confident and at ease in Maine. She had room to roam in West Bath, and few

rules. Her imagination dictated her routines. She looked forward to coming every year and moved here in 1985.

"I came to Maine every summer with no agenda. I thank my mother for that to this day," she said. "Those months still remain the source of all kinds of solace and peace and dreams."

It was that sense of innocent joy that Ireland hoped to capture in these paintings.

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