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"It is crucial," landscape artist Thomas Paquette says, "that we regain – literally – our senses, to see our place in this world, to know tacitly that the soil and rain, trees, animals, and rocks are the same as ourselves: here and deeply, really connected."

Landscape painting 'essential' in modern age

Painter finds connection with nature, classic style

By JOE PINCHOT
Herald Staff Writer

GREENVILLE – Thomas Paquette has nothing against the more modern forms of art – he has made conceptual art – but has found artistic satisfaction and commercial success painting landscapes, something artists probably have done ever since they discovered the manipulation of pigments.

"I appreciate what they're (other artists) doing, and I think it's important what they're doing," said the Warren, Pa., man, who often incorporates abstract elements into his works. "I find myself going back to this (landscape) because this is what moves me."

Paquette will show about 30 paintings in oil and gouache, a watercolor medium, Wednesday through Oct. 11 at Weyers-Samson Art Gallery in the Howard Miller Student Center, Thiel College, Greenville.

Calling the show "Itinerant Views" – "I travel a lot," he explained – he will display works from Greece, Colorado, California, his home state of Minnesota, Pennsylvania, New York and other locations.

One of 11 kids, Paquette said the cross-country camping trips his parents took him on taught him differences in landform, climate and vegetation.

"I had a very early love for nature and landscape," he said.

He also had an early love of art, but dropped out of art school.

"I was convinced that the best education was, basically, life," he said. "I thought I just needed to live a little bit."

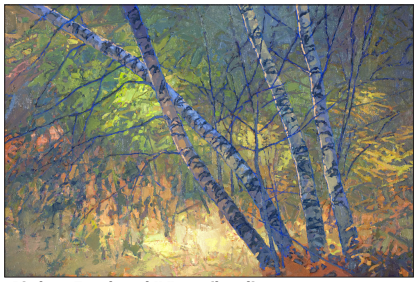
His "living" at the time was traveling the continent by hitchhiking and jumping freight trains.

An important event in his personal and artistic life occurred when he was in the Yukon, a wild, wide-open area of glaciers, forests and mountains in Canada, bordering Alaska. While hitchhiking, he was picked up by someone who called the area "a big wasteland," Paquette said.

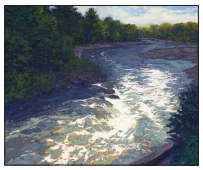
That attitude stuck with him – not as something to embrace, but as something to combat.

"I had to avoid getting to that place," Paquette said. "It became a talisman for me."

Through his paintings, Paquette, who went back to formal art training, tries to give his viewers a sense of the wonder that he experiences on his travels.



"Birches–Enveloped II," an oil on linen.



"To the Sea," an oil on linen

"Headlands," an oil on linen.

Paquette sees himself as part of the centuries-old tradition of landscape. In American terms, landscape painting evoked the spiritual view of God's creation, but also justified man's expansion into it. In the late 1800s, landscape painting became a teaching tool and a way to capture something for scientific study. He noted that Thomas Moran's paintings of Yellowstone helped prove that such a place existed.

"But, it is a very different world," he said. America has lost some of its wild places and mechanization and electronics "have seemed to liberate us" from the dependence on nature, Paquette said.

The societal disconnect from nature makes landscape painting "essential at this time," he said.

"It is crucial that we regain – literally – our senses, to see our place in this world, to know tacitly that the soil and rain, trees, animals, and rocks are the same as ourselves: here and deeply, really connected," Paquette said.

Paquette has been traveling up and down the Mississippi River for a series that he expects will take him another 18 months to complete, and has done a number of pieces in observance of the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service.

PAQUETTE WILL ATTEND a closing reception of the Thiel show from 3 to 5 p.m. Oct. 11, and will give a talk.

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October 13, 2016 10:05 pm (GMT +4:00)
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