



DECOR & STYLE ART AND DESIGN



2005, VII.VIII Two Birches Variant, 48 x 30 Oil on panel

ARTIST PROFILE

SURROUNDED BY NATURE

by Kathleen McMillen

Stephen Pentak paints nature at its most alluring and enticing. Captured in his studio, in his mind, and in his art, the movement of the sky, the movement of water, his universal images are both peaceful and challenging.

A painter of endangered places, Pentak is also a dedicated catch-and-release fisherman, spending time visiting pristine places where trout live. While observing the world around him, he experiences the experience of being surrounded by nature and often takes photographs of his surroundings. "I am surrounded by nature," says Pentak, "and I am surrounded by art." He has studied with artist Joseph Albers—whose angular shapes balanced with complementary colors influenced his work—and with painter Mark Rothko.

"Art is not an object, it is an experience."

Pentak was born in Denver, and spent his youth in upstate New York, where he grew up in the Hudson River Valley and the Adirondack Mountains. During this period, he developed a love of nature and a meditative and a life-long learning experience. His first exposure to art came from his father, who was a painter, and from his mother, who was a painter. He was influenced by the works of Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, George Inness and Winslow Homer.

Having set aside traditional brushes and pallet knives, Pentak uses a variety of tools to achieve the surface he prefers. He paints on birch panels because they are a stable surface for him to work on. He begins by applying layers and layers of paint, starting with crimson, violet, and finally blue or green. Each step either covers or adds to the previous layer, creating reflections and glare on the surfaces. The various layers of paint are left raw, revealing the process.

"I started out doing more conceptual, nonobjective minimalist paintings, but my interest in the outdoors evolved into my work. I sort of let it in there," says Pentak. "I'm not a landscape painter, you know it has representations of the observable world, but you never forget that you are looking at paint on panel applied with a brush, with a compositional structure. The duality takes you back and forth between the two worlds made with paint."

Pentak initially studied engineering and worked part-time as a surveyor. After a brief career in engineering, he lost his eye for seeing the land in geometric grids, which is still evident in his work.



2005, VII.V Creekside Variant, 48 x 43 Oil on panel



2005, VII.VI Willows at Elk Creek, 40 x 56 Oil on panel

strong, horizontal plane of the water and then breaks the placidity creates a tension that resolves itself, like breathing in and out—inh-

Despite limited subject matter, none of Pentak's paintings is like a same subject. It allows him to explore the idea completely and, like rigid guidelines. He also likes to keep his habits in check, so occasionally painted a series of old-growth sycamore trees in winter, which in order to explore the variety and complexity of the trees that, like birches, have short, thick or thin, straight or sinuous, and he was able to take advantage of figurative gestures.

By anyone's standards, Pentak is an established artist. He did his New York, and received his Master of Fine Arts in painting from Tyler Pennsylvania. Pentak also enjoys teaching, and is a full professor at Columbus. He is represented by a number of exclusive galleries and major public and private collections, and he has been widely exhibited.

Pentak paints in a large, off-campus studio where he also welcomed Columbus home since 1983, when he accepted a position as an artist-in-residence at the Columbus College of Art and Design. They have three children who are all in college. Pentak travels whenever he can to paint.

Observing Stephen Pentak's paintings requires audience participation; the scene into a meditative state where the day-to-day world falls away. Participation could allow you to be engaged in a theatrical performance; variety of players and audience constantly create a new and exciting experience. Senses experience the place; time becomes irrelevant.

Stephen Pentak is represented by Susan Street Fine Art, 415 South La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles. The opening reception for his one-man show titled, Stephen Pentak: New Paintings, will be held Saturday, November 17, from 6 to 8 p.m. The show will run through November 27, but his work is always available. The artist's studio is open Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. Phone 831-2000.

*Kathleen McMillen is an art consultant and broker to residential and
commercial clients.*



2005, VII.IX Willows and Phlox at Elk Creek (detail), 30 x 48 Oil on panel



2005, VI.X Phlox and Willows, 28 x 64 Oil on panel

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