

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. Capturing the essence of moving water, his universal images are both peaceful and challenging.

A painter of endangered places, Pentak is also a dedicated catch-and-release angler, spending his time visiting pristine places where trout live. While observing the world through the lens of a camera, he experiences the joy of being surrounded by nature and often takes photographs. He has collaborated with artist Joseph Albers—whose angular shapes balanced with color. “Art is not an object, it is an experience.”

Pentak was born in Denver, and spent his youth in upstate New York, exploring the Hudson River Valley and the Adirondack Mountains. During this period, he had a meditative and a life-long learning experience. His first exposure to nature was through the work of Thomas Cole, Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, George Inness and others.

Having set aside traditional brushes and pallet knives, Pentak uses a variety of brushes to achieve the surface he prefers. He paints on birch panel, which provides a stable surface for him to work on. He begins by applying layers of color, including crimson, violet, and finally blue or green. Each step either covers or reveals the previous reflections and glare on the surfaces. The various layers of paint are carefully framed. After all, those raw edges reveal the process.

“I started out doing more conceptual, nonobjective minimalist paintings. Over time, my interest in the outdoors evolved into my work. I sort of let it in through the back door,” Pentak says, “I see my paintings in two ways. There’s a duality in the landscape, 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. The compositional structure. The duality takes you back and forth between what is made with paint.”

Pentak initially studied engineering and worked part-time as a surveyor. 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—int

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 Columbus 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 artistic 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 Temple University in 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 welcomes visitors. He has lived in Columbus home since 1983, when he accepted a position as an art professor. They have three children who are all in college. Pentak travels worldwide to exhibit his paintings.

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

Stephen Pentak is represented by Susan Street Fine Art, 415 South Main Street. Reception for his one-man show titled, Stephen Pentak: New Paintings, will run through November 27, but his work is always available. Hours: Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. Phone 810-248-1345.

Kathleen McMillen is an art consultant and broker to residential art collectors. Phone 810-248-1345.



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