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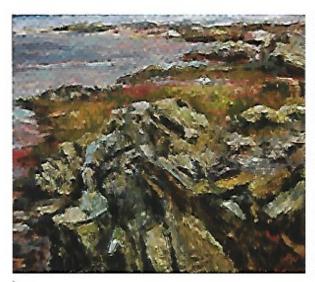
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CHARLES THOMPSON: EN PLEIN AIR PAINTINGS

University of New England at Biddeford Campus Center 11 Hills Beach Road Biddeford, Maine

Through mid-January

CHARLES THOMPSON HASN'T PUT BRUSH TO CANVAS IN A STUDIO - OR ANYWHERE WITH A ROOF AND WALLS, FOR THAT MATTER - FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS, INSTEAD, THE ARTIST HAS WORKED EXCLUSIVELY IN THE EMBRACE OF NATURE, PAINTING FROM HIS FIRST STROKE TO HIS FINISHING TOUCHES AMID TREES AND COASTLINES AND MEANDERING STREAMS - IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER, ALL HOURS OF THE DAY, ALL YEAR LONG.



Rocks, 2010, oil on panel,

"I love painting outside," said the Unlike other plein air painters, Although he's had opportunities it gives me."

longtime painter and art professor who often work part of the time to paint elsewhere, he prefers the at the University of New England in outside and finish up in the studio rusticity and beauty of Maine, Biddelard, where a selection of his by relying on snapshots or drawings, describing "the trees, the sky, the landscapes is on display through. Thompson prefers the entire process. Landscape, the rocky coast" that gets mid-January. "I love the information to be on site and in the moment, and a "rough and scruffy" look at low he'll often spend weeks habitually tide. It ultimately just feels different,

returning to the same spot at the same time of day until he completes a piece.

Working from a picture or a drawing just isn't the same - neither can fully capture the color, the light, the feeling of a place, said the Saco-based artist, who has been featured in dozens of solo and group exhibitions across the country and even in Rome.

And, he says, he doesn't mind battling the elements - and good thing, given Maine's bitter winters, mud season and black fly swarms. In fact, "I love to work outside in the snow," he said. (Except, he acknowledged, it's difficult in temps below 25 degrees, as the paints become stubborn and sticky.)

he said, as if the skies and clouds are somehow closer to the earth.

And although he's worked outside for just about three decades now, it hasn't always been in the calm and quiet of nature. In fact, in the beginning, it was quite the apposite: he started in the 1970s on the hectic and gritty streets of Philadelphia. Securing his canvases to street signs and wearing headsels to block out the noise, the graduate of Tyler School of Art created cityscapes amid "the dreaded exhaust fumes, and the street people who tried to stest my paint brushes." (To appease them, he learned to keep dollar bills in his



Actumu Fory, 2011, ell on panel

pockets.)

to replace buildings, and all signs landscape blushed with the pink and of man were gradually blotted out. Finally, after moving to Saco in 1991, the natural world completely took. If you look at them long enough, you over; Thompson began to work on can feel the different seasons, colors, plein air on the rugged coastline, on lights and states - water high and the shores of trickling brooks, beside low, clear and muddy, colored by the slands of trees hued with the colors changing sky, sometimes rushing and of autumn.

in his nine paintings now on display endless rotation. at the UNF Campus Center. Created at a handful of siles in Biddeford But ultimately, these aren'l your and Saco in different seasons and typical charming and photogenic at various times of day, they depict Maine locations — Thompson sunsels in pink and purple splashed specifically seeks out nooks and on rocks overlooking rippling ocean waves, hills dashed with snow in by every day. the still and clear winter, streams clustered by stands of trees in the "T've always tried to find mundane low light of fall with leaves bunched spots, rather than picturesque ones, up on their banks.

it in literally new lights. In "June them extraordinary." Vision," for instance, painted near Cascade Falls in Saco, a doubletrunked Iree lays like a bridge over a narrow waterway, the woods around lush with summer. Another untitled

piece brings a more surrealist quality to the same spot, showing the same Slowly, over the years, trees began downed tree, the entire surrounding purple shades of morning.

chappy, other times mirror-still and the rotation of growth, vibrancy This array of landscapes is represented and decay as seasons work their

hidden-away places that locals pass

to look at," he explained as he stood in paint-speckled clothes beside his In some cases, Thompson returns to array of paintings. "I really want to the same spot over and over, seeing take the ordinary things and make

Taryn Plumb

