

2017-04-30 / Front Page

## UNE professor paints present with past in mind



The painting, "Bay View Beach," one of seven "Lost Landscapes" featured in Charles Matthew Thompson's exhibit on display now at the University of New England Art Gallery in Biddeford. SUBMITTED PHOTO/Courtesy of University of New England

By ALAN BENNETT  
Staff Writer

BIDDEFORD — A local artist and University of New England professor of art is taking inspiration from the past and painting what he sees in the present.

Charles Matthew Thompson, who is the founder of the university's Department of Fine Arts, has opened an exhibit of his latest work, "Lost Landscapes," in the university's art gallery in the Jack S. Ketchum Library.

The exhibit, which opened Wednesday and runs through Aug. 1, is a collection of paintings depicting locations in the Biddeford-Saco area as they are now, but based on old photographs of those places from long ago.

"I've lived in Saco for about 25 years and I noticed a lot of changes occurring over the years that we've lived here, in terms of building and so forth," Thompson said in an interview on April 21. "That was one motivation."

Thompson said he began looking at books in Saco's Dyer Library when he stumbled across one he couldn't put back on the shelf.



Cataract Falls on Saco Island

come to life in Charles Matthew Thompson's artistic rendition of the iconic landscape, viewable at the University of New England's Art Gallery in Biddeford. SUBMITTED PHOTO/Courtesy of University of New England

"(It) showed photographs from the early 1900s of Saco Island and Bayview Beach and certain areas I had been frequently painting," he said. "I started putting two and two together ... all these changes kind of sparked the idea."

The result is a series of paintings completed in a style known as "en plein air," or completed "in open air."

It's a style popularized by French impressionist painters by the likes of Claude Monet, Camille Pissarro and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

"All my paintings are done start-to-finish outside," Thompson said of his style, which uses bright pops of color and broad strokes to convey movement and contrast with the early black-and-white photographs upon which his work is based.

Featured in "Lost Landscapes" are seven locations — with corresponding black-and-white photos for reference — completed over the last several months, with the intent of providing a historical record of the original locations contrasted with how they now appear from an artist's perspective.

Thompson said the goal is to start a dialogue about human impact on the environment.

"I hope (viewers) leave and think about (humans) and what we are doing to our environment and the importance of how we take care of our Earth and what we do to our Earth," he said. "One of the paintings I

did still has the (Maine Energy Recovery Co. incinerator) site and I think those kinds of things are problematic, and I hope people start thinking about those things."

In addition, he said, he hopes the exhibit will instill within viewers a sense of environmental stewardship.

"One of the major aspects of it is the awareness of our footprint on Earth, what we're doing to our environment and what we're doing to our surroundings," he said.

"Lost Landscapes" will be on display at the UNE Art Gallery in the Jack S. Ketchum Library on UNE's Biddeford Campus, through Aug. 1. The gallery is free and open to the public. Hours of operation: Sunday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. through May 1. Summer hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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**[Return to top](#)**