



Summoning the Twelve (detail), 2022, oil on canvas, 60 x 120".
Courtesy LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM.



Nature's PULSE

An artist finds his way back to representational painting with a new perspective achieved through a deep exploration of abstraction.

BY JOHN O'HERN

The beat of Ron Kingswood's own drummer is the pulse of nature. He was born in southern Ontario, Canada, where he studied art and bird ecology and ornithology, and now lives in the same province on the shores of Lake Erie. He grew up hunting with his father and his uncles, studying their catches closely and, later, painting watercolors of what he observed. Throughout his life he has spent time out of doors observing and experiencing the native birds and mammals, as well as the rhythm of the coming and going of their migratory cousins.

Established as a wildlife painter among other greats like his fellow Canadian Robert Bateman and the American Bob Kuhn who was born not far away in Buffalo, New York, he took a break from highly realized naturalistic painting.

Gauguin wrote, "A bit of advice, don't copy nature too closely. Art is an abstraction; as you dream amid

nature, extrapolate art from it, and concentrate on what you will create as a result."

For eight years, Kingswood turned to painting pure abstraction, inspired by painters like Barnett Newman, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, as well as by the geometries of Piet Mondrian that inspired him in his 20s and 30s and have never left him. "For me, wandering into the unknown was absolutely exciting and frightening," he admits. He abandoned the safe comfortability of wildlife illustration. "I believe when one guards him or herself and their work too tightly with all sorts of fears and apprehensions, the accidental and perhaps the incidental no longer breathes. The work no longer remains a thought or belief—it is suffocated by fear. You've got to release yourself from the safety and security of what you've known to discover where you're going. It was easy for me to stay focused on what was more of a spiritual journey away

from the commercial world because my wife, Linda, was working as a nurse. I didn't want to do calendar type of work. I had the freedom to do what I wanted to do. I could surrender my comfortability to gain fulfillment in the work."

In his personal journey into the unknown he cites Constantin Brâncuși, who left his apprenticeship to Rodin, commenting, "Nothing grows well in the shade of a big tree."

"I fell in love standing in front of the paintings of the New York school of abstract expressionists," he relates. "I wondered why I loved them. The scale was impressive, something I had never seen in nature painting. I did grass paintings with birds and began to think, 'Perhaps I don't need the birds.'"

Paintings like *Walpole Series*, 2009, are all about mark-making, although inspired by an island in nearby Lake St. Clair, and embodying his wish to maintain the feeling of landscape. "I wanted to paint as free as I could," he explains.

"Later," he says, "after eight years of non-objective painting—just for the love of painting—I wanted to see if I could push myself in using nature in a non-objective way, in an abstract sense. I felt ready to return to representational painting, with a sense of new ideas and scale."

Recently, I had the pleasure of reacquainting myself with his paintings, which I have admired for many years. LewAllen Galleries in Santa Fe



1



1
Mousing, 2017, oil on canvas, 48 x 44".
Courtesy LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM

2
The Promenade, 2023, oil on canvas, 36 x 44".
Courtesy LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM

3
Stream in Winter, 2015, oil on canvas, 72 x 64".
Courtesy LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM

4
Walpole Series, 2009, oil on canvas, 38 x 76".
Courtesy the artist

2



3



4

mounted, in effect, a retrospective of paintings from the past 20 years in its vast gallery space. Paintings such as *Summoning the Twelve*, 2022, at 5 by 10 feet commanded the space.

Mondrian came back to influence his compositions. "His paintings are so simple and beautiful," Kingswood relates. "They're about the architecture of a painting." The rectilinear format of *Mousing*, 2017, reflects the work of the Dutch modernist.

Vespers, 2020, is the third painting of the subject matter. "I wanted to push that line far to the left, have nothing in the landscape and have everything else jammed on the right." The ducks landing in





6

5
And Not One is Forgotten, 2021,
oil on canvas, 56 x 56". Courtesy
LewAllen Galleries, Santa Fe, NM.

6
Vespers, 2020, oil on canvas,
64 x 68". Courtesy LewAllen
Galleries, Santa Fe, NM.

7
Nightfall, 2023, oil on canvas,
52 x 52". Courtesy LewAllen
Galleries, Santa Fe, NM.



7

a marsh and the foreground grasses are tightly rendered and the storm between them on the horizon is and expressive flurry of brush strokes.

The horizontal line of light appears again in a more representational painting, *The Promenade*, 2023, in which he has pushed a pheasant into the background of a grassy field bisected by a shaft of early morning sunlight.

A master of color, he admires the subtlety of the grays of Matisse and delicately adjusts colors from what he observes to create the illusion of the color "feeling" right.

"Accidents" also happen. "When I'm working on an idea," he says, "and I've got things figured out and start drawing or painting, it changes. You have to be open to the accidentals. Which I don't know until I get to drawing with charcoal on the canvas."

He staples a large canvas to the wall, primes it and begins to draw his concept in charcoal. The large canvas "gives me leeway to edit or expand if I need more space. I hope the viewer looks at how I cropped the painting. It's not the typical animal in a landscape."

Kingswood cites Mark Rothko, who wrote, "The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity, toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer."

Commenting on *Vespers*, Kingswood observes, "It's more than a flock of ducks. Hopefully, it's a piece of art. Secondly it's nature. I am in the nature, looking at it in a different perspective."

His immersive paintings eliminate the obstacles, as Rothko wrote, encouraging us to observe nature differently and to experience our oneness with it. ●