



VIEW FROM THE RIDGE
LAURA WOOTEN



Second Street Gallery is a 501(c)3 nonprofit art organization that presents exhibitions of contemporary art and related education programs to Central Virginia. SSG receives funding from individuals, businesses, and foundations through its fundraising and membership and through local and national grants, including the Virginia Commission for the Arts.

VIEW FROM THE RIDGE
LAURA WOOTEN

December 4, 2020 - January 22, 2021

Curated by
Kristen Chiacchia



In late September of 2016, I made the life-changing move from Brooklyn, New York to Charlottesville, Virginia to take the position of Second Street Gallery's new Executive Director. Not only was I transitioning from a major commercial art gallery to a small non-profit art space; urban life to a small town; trading the North for the South; I was also moving to a place where I would have the opportunity to experience the four seasons for the first time in almost 20 years.

A commonly shared joke concerns New York City's quick switch to winter from summer and back again without any transition. It's a world with only two actual seasons: hot and humid summers, where the blistering sun beats down on the concrete jungle with no respite, and the grey, gloomy, cold, and windy winter months where much of the city seems plagued by Seasonal Affective Disorder.

Yet watching the seasons change in Central Virginia my first year here was a wholly different and thoroughly captivating experience—one that helped to ease the transition from my former life in New York City. I think the area's splendor is also what drew me to the work of Laura Wooten, particularly her *View from the Ridge* series. The striking beauty of Central Virginia's natural landscape is reflected in Wooten's paintings, which purposefully embody the intricate colors, forms, and locales that they are meant to evoke.

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to present Wooten's *View from the Ridge* series of painting in its entirety at Second Street Gallery. These 99 works, depicting winter, spring, summer, and fall, tell a story of our ever-changing landscape. I invite viewers to share in the journey of this incredibly rich body of work that is both quintessentially Virginian and evocative of the age-old idea that the only constant in our lives is change.

Kristen Chiacchia, Executive Director & Chief Curator, Second Street Gallery



Photos courtesy of Laura Wooten

Kristen Chiacchia received her BA in the History of Art & Architecture from the University of Pittsburgh and her MA in Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies at Columbia University. She also completed a Certificate in Appraisal Studies in Fine and Decorative Arts at New York University. Chiacchia is the Executive Director & Chief Curator of Second Street Gallery in Charlottesville, Virginia. Prior to joining Second Street Gallery, she was Director at Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art in New York, where she organized numerous exhibitions of works by contemporary artists and masters of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.



“No (one) ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river and (she) is not the same (person).”

—Heraclitus, circa 500 BCE (when every sentient being was presumed to be a man.)

LAURA WOOTEN practices a simple daily ritual: taking her dog for a walk along the street that leads to the winding entrance into her neighborhood. Each day, the same view presents itself as they reach the crest of the land’s rise. A long stretch of horizon crosses a rural thoroughfare below to meander over a piece of tended farmland, ultimately concluding at a distant, lavender-hued mountain. This scene awaits the pair’s circadian visit, offering the artist and her companion its silent, waiting inspiration and benediction.

Many neighbors come and go along this same route, likely also walking their dogs, and they would probably say, *Oh yes, I know that view from the top of the hill very well.* But here is the thing about that view (and countless others that nature in its grand beneficence offers): it is essentially unknowable, as Laura Wooten’s series of ninety 8-by-8-inch paintings of its many moods, stages, and secrets proves. Regardless of certain reliable formal attributes—that snaking road, those guardian evergreens and far-away mountain range—every passing moment is continually un-familiarizing it, envisioning a new portrait for itself by the painter and the poet.

Laura Wooten describes her own sensory experience, and the effort to capture it once back in her

studio, as feeling miraculous. The resulting richly textural series of seductive miniature portals of the place-across-the-way gives us her insightful inner awareness of place, time, light, temperature, atmosphere, hue, and form, as well as her keen ability to recapture and re-witness it all in paint, to expose and reinterpret that ephemeral miracle of a vista for each of us.

The style and temperament of Wooten's landscapes seem at first glance to be principally Western, retaining coincidences from the Romantic period's favored "pastoral" views of man's dominion (typically portrayed in tended, managed lands) or that period's alternative representations of the "sublime" aspects of nature—those proposing a powerful, unpredictable, and sacred (feminine) force at work. These paintings do contain both of those 18th-century avenues to landscape philosophy and poesy.



Photo courtesy of Stacey Evans

A plowed field and a paved road might suggest some manly dominion took place, yes—but moving forward through the story of art, no passing vehicle, sign, litter, or any other modern symbol of the individual freedoms and evidences of America’s own subsequently noisy, ironic “Enlightenment, etc.” will be found within these small, window-shaped memories—only the endless and potent evanescence of conditions and experience.

As the seasons turn in Wooten’s continuum of paintings, something else resides beyond the changes in leaf color and weather, and other such characteristics of time—something that is not very Western and is generally eschewed by Western art history. It is the very notion of experiential repetition. Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup Cans and Marilyns do not qualify for the kind of repetition that this series of explorations considers. This is consumerism of a different sort: hors d’oeuvres of the metaphysical served in a square realm with edges.

Wooten’s process is significantly more Eastern in approach, morphing repetitious observation into meditation, and then into revelation.

In Eastern thought, Chinese painting is the application of a philosophy that seeks to penetrate the profound—the mysteries of nature and the universe—rather than to constantly reward original expression and novelty. That type of painting has been described as one in which the artist, rather than precisely remarking on the landmarks and details of a scene, participates in the symbolic expression of nature’s gesture. Taoism, from which this philosophy springs, blends concepts of cosmology, correspondences, balance, and the relationship of human consciousness with the fluctuating rhythms of the universe.

Thus, in Chinese painting, artists traditionally return to the same scene—to listen to and observe its elements, fine-tune their own consciousness, and expand their sensitivity and skills to render the landscape full and glowing with quiet energy and mysticism. Mountains, old trees, forms and bodies of water, and shadow and light draw references to the harmonies of both nearby nature and the greater, intangible cosmos.

These are all phenomena that breathe oxygen and spirit into and from the topography of Laura Wooten's landscapes. The guardian evergreens guide the viewers' path and lift them upward above the plain of each painting to gaze deeper into its horizon, while terms shift and change: as green becomes orange becomes gray becomes pale chartreuse becomes green again. As the sycamores in the middle-distance fence line slowly grow from panel to panel to reach their branches toward each other's crowns, turning their proverbial shyness into intimacy. As the purple mountain calls to the clouds and they determine how to reciprocate. And as the ever-winding road laid before both artist and viewer, once asphalt, becomes a shimmering river or inviting path that Taoism might even call "The Way." It is a way that is made to be taken and followed, allowing each of these paintings to sample the idea of "qi," or "ch'i"—the inner, activating forces within all matter.

As John Voigt explains in his recent essay, "Qi in Chinese Painting": For thousands of years a fundamental method used in creating and evaluating (Chinese) paintings has been the artist observing, contemplating and communing with the qi of their subject—then having that qi fill their being—then leading and guiding that qi into their arms, hands and fingers into the controlling of the brush—then onto the paper, canvas, or silk, so that the viewer of the completed art object feels a sympathetic

resonance with the qi of the subject of the painting. At its highest manifestation this becomes a transcendental experience of exultation where the qi of the subject, artist, process, painting, and observer merge and become as one.

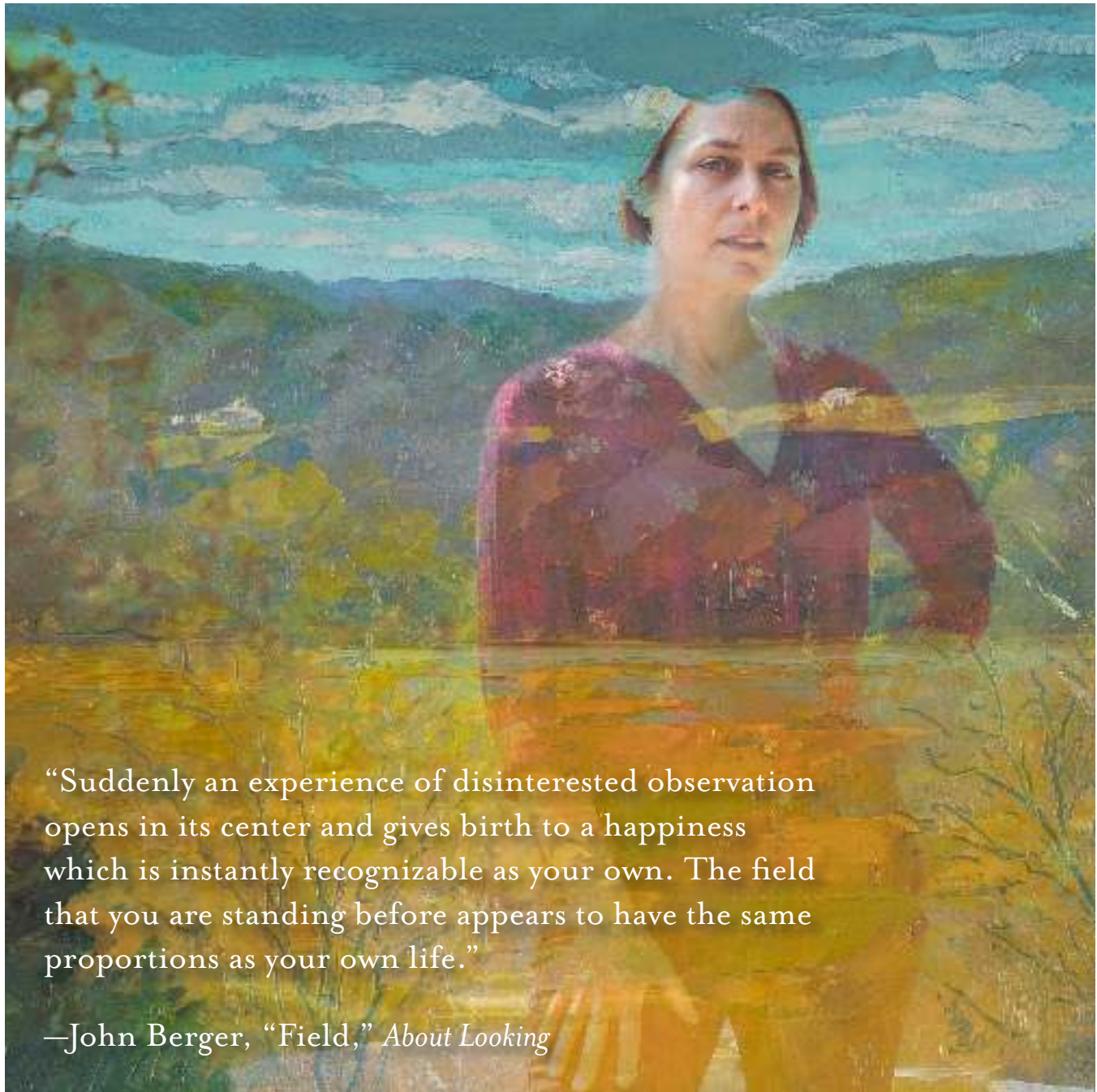
It is not too great a stretch to leap across eras, oceans, datelines, and hemispheres to suggest that Laura Wooten's current series of explorations into the transformative spirit of the land that beckons her brush and palette knife has an abiding correspondence with this ancient, abundant philosophy of art.

Deborah McLeod, Owner and Director, Chroma Projects Art Laboratory

Deborah McLeod is currently the owner and director of Chroma Projects in Charlottesville. She has served as curator for numerous art centers and art organizations throughout Virginia, D.C. and Maryland over the past thirty years. McLeod also regularly contributed art reviews and criticism to Baltimore City Paper, Art Papers, Style Magazine, and The Virginian Pilot Ledger Star during that period, and periodically published articles in Sculpture Magazine and Ceramics: Art & Perception. She is also the Curator/Organizer for FLOW: The Rivanna River Arts Festival.







“Suddenly an experience of disinterested observation opens in its center and gives birth to a happiness which is instantly recognizable as your own. The field that you are standing before appears to have the same proportions as your own life.”

—John Berger, “Field,” *About Looking*

THE VIEW FROM THE RIDGE has captivated me for over a decade, inviting me to pause with my dog at the same spot each day. We follow the neighborhood sidewalk around a bend, begin our descent of a long, steep hill, and there it reveals itself: a shimmering, beckoning tableau. As the start of 2019 approached, I began returning to the studio to put down my impressions. Over the course of the year, 90 small works were completed. Each painting began with a specific recollection of color, light, and weather but evolved in its own direction. Some paintings retained the fresh immediacy of the moment, while others conflated multiple days or blurred into the distillations of memory and imagination. The field across the road displayed a range of soft grays in the winter, an exhilarating chartreuse in the spring, deep saturated greens in the summer, and a radiant golden glow in the fall. Each season brought new colors and atmospheres. Each hour, new glances of sunlight and shapes of shadow. Each moment, a unique opportunity.

Despite my penchant for exuberant high-contrast color palettes, I soon learned to embrace the subtly shifting neutrals of foggy mornings and overcast skies. The springtime provided translucent glazes of warm rain, then playful splashes of clear pink. Painting patiently through the monotonous greens of humid summer days, I was startled one morning to find vivid stripes of red-orange clay, my palette unexpectedly invigorated by a freshly plowed field. As the leaves began to fall in autumn, caught up in the sweep of the wind, my brushstrokes took on new and unfamiliar rhythms. Each day I felt inspired and expectant, grateful for whatever gifts might be offered. Observing the mercurial atmospheres of the outer world and the fickle weather of my own thoughts and emotions, I found myself able and willing to tenderly examine both the outer and the inner landscapes. It was from this centered place that I could always make the next painting.

At the close of the year, I was not ready to leave the view behind. After so many miles of walking and witnessing, this landscape had papered the background of my mind, embossed with the imprints of meditation, rumination, and reflection. Both naturalistic and surreal imaginings overlaid the vista in the landscape of my consciousness, an inner world built from the assimilation of nature, memory, and dreams. In 2020, the series continued onto larger square panels that held the potentialities of fire and flood, the most delicate of springs and the starkest of winters—an increasingly volatile yet urgently beautiful world. Giant evergreens stand aside, holding back the curtains, unveiling a pageant of color and emotion that emanates from the inseparable vibrations of nature and human life.

Laura Wooten, October 2020



1



2



3



5

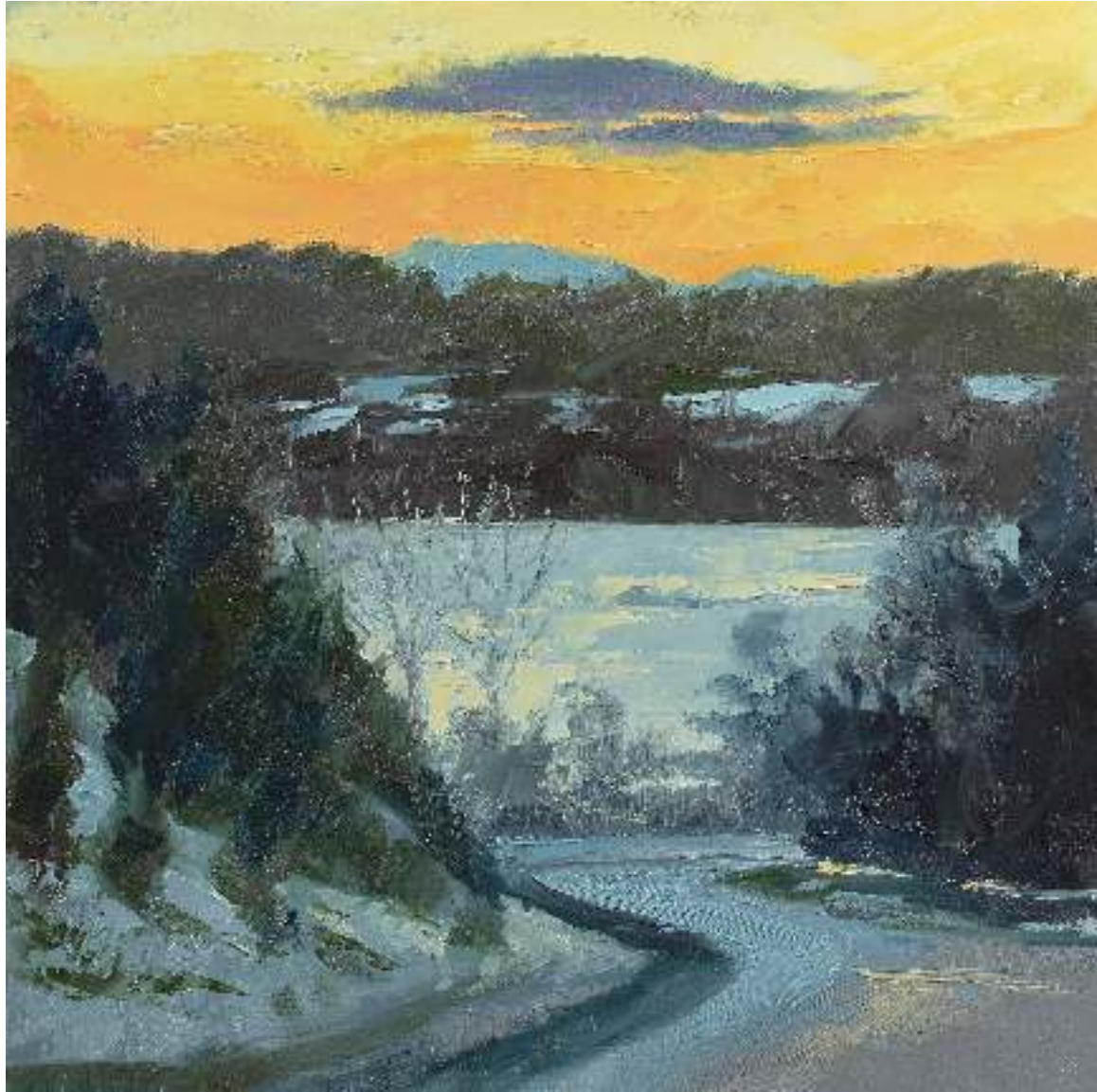


6



7







8



9



10



12



13



15



16



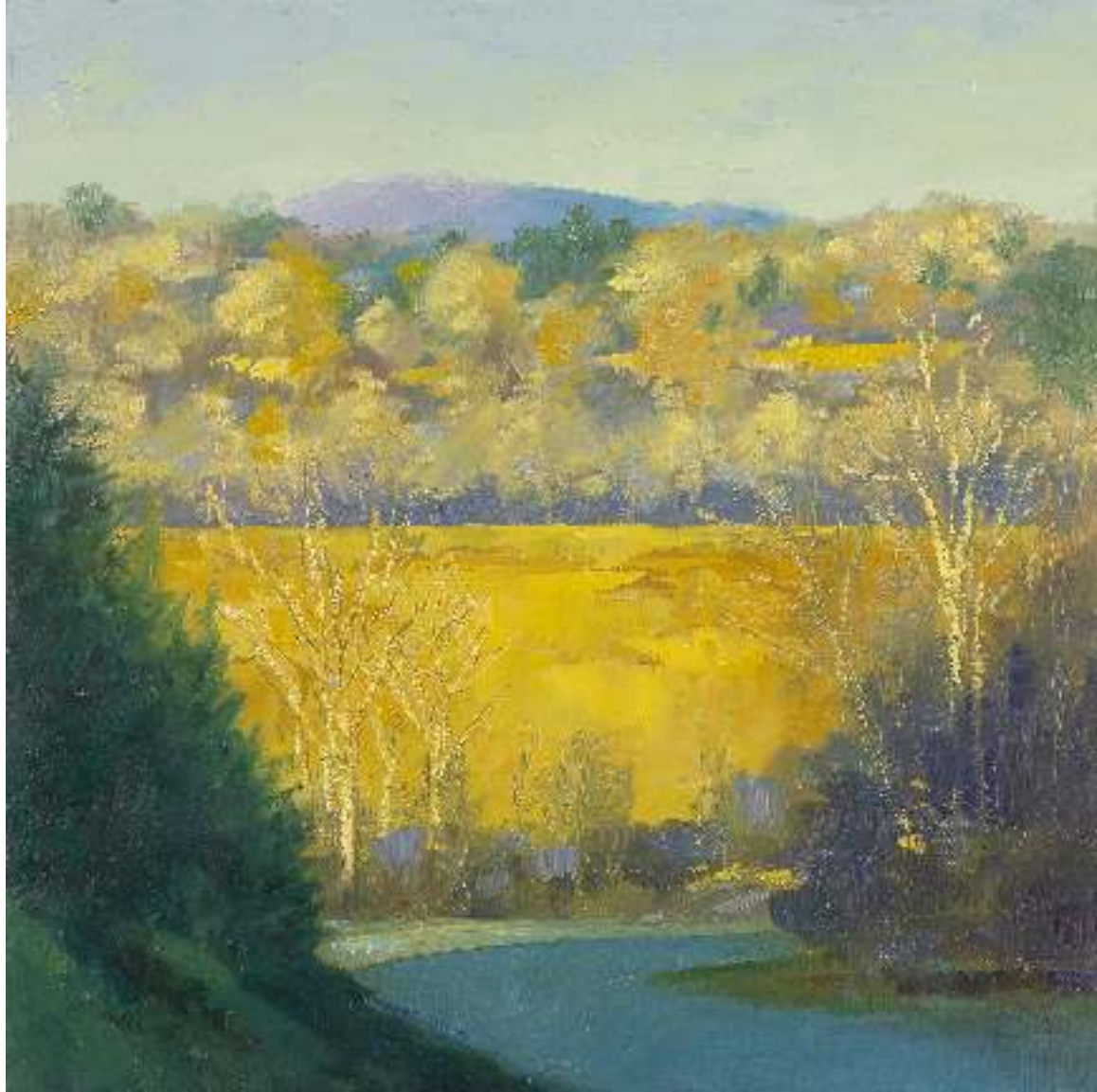
17



18



19







Detail of *Ochre Stillness*



21



22







Detail of *Silver and Gold*



Detail of *Tundra*





27



28



29



30



31



32







33



34



35



36





Detail of *Arrival*



39



40





42



43



44



45



46



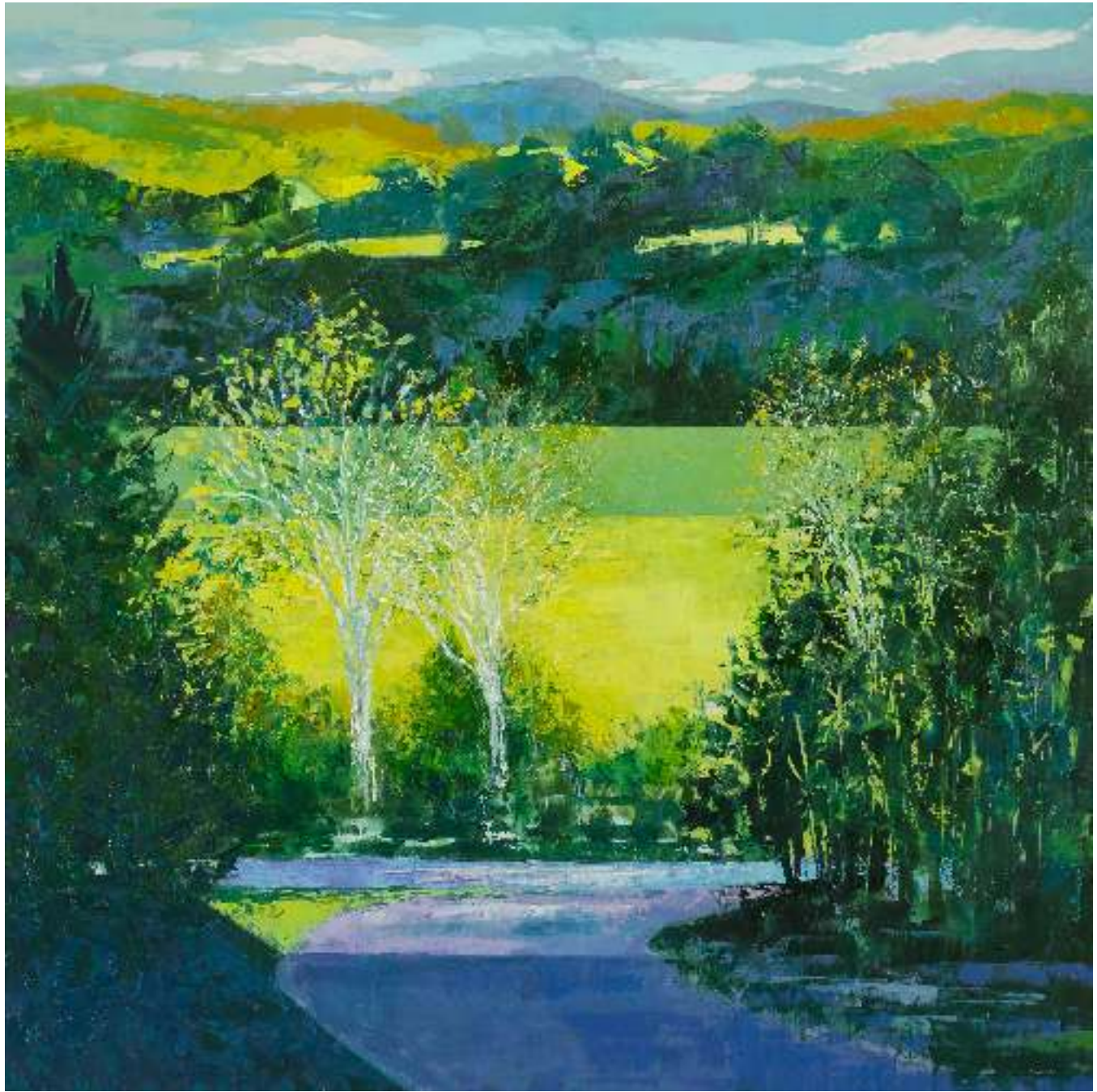
47



48

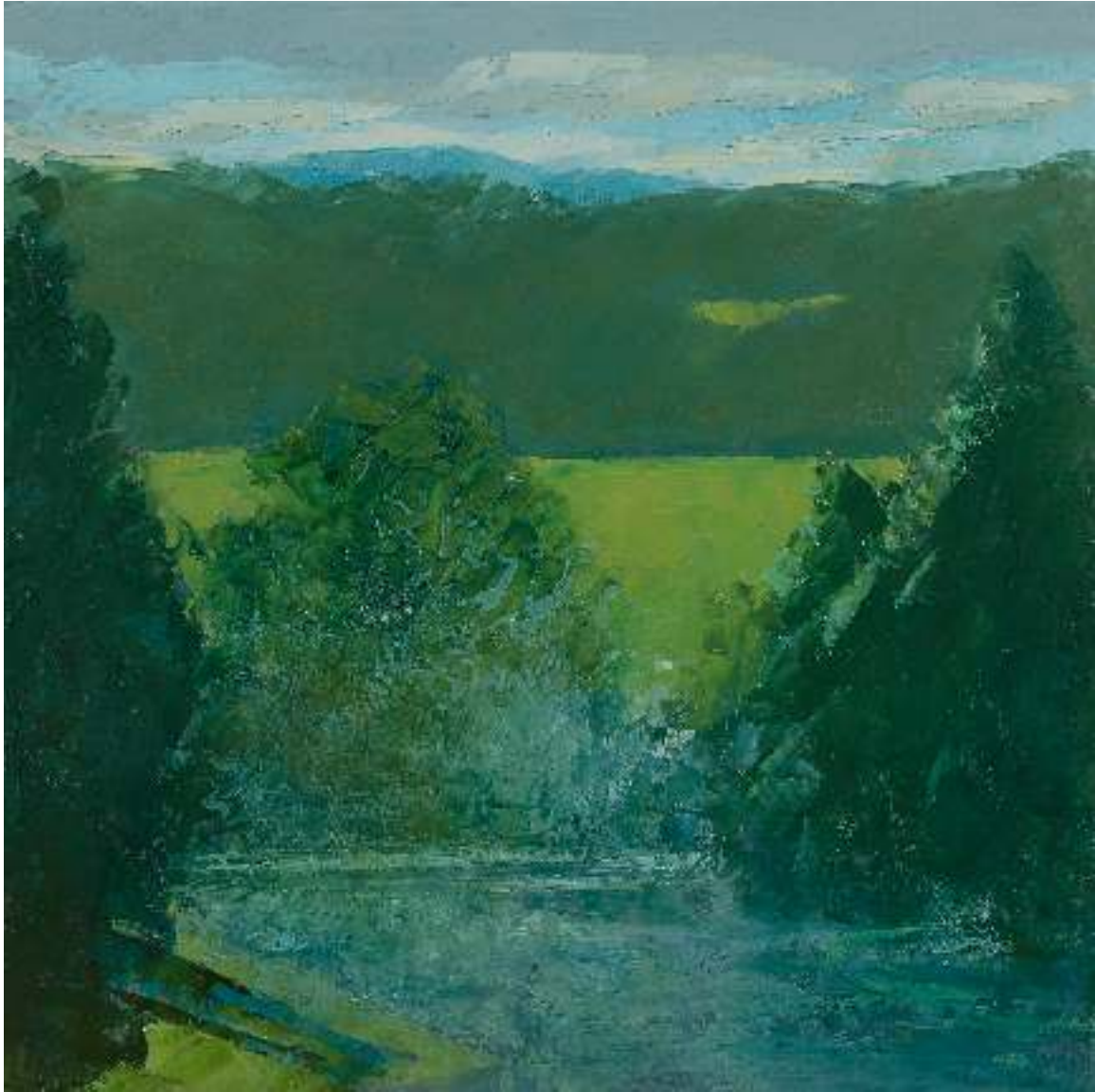


49





Detail of *Leaning In/Leaving Out*





51



53



54



55



56



57



58



60



61



62







64



65



Detail of *Meadow Music*





67



68

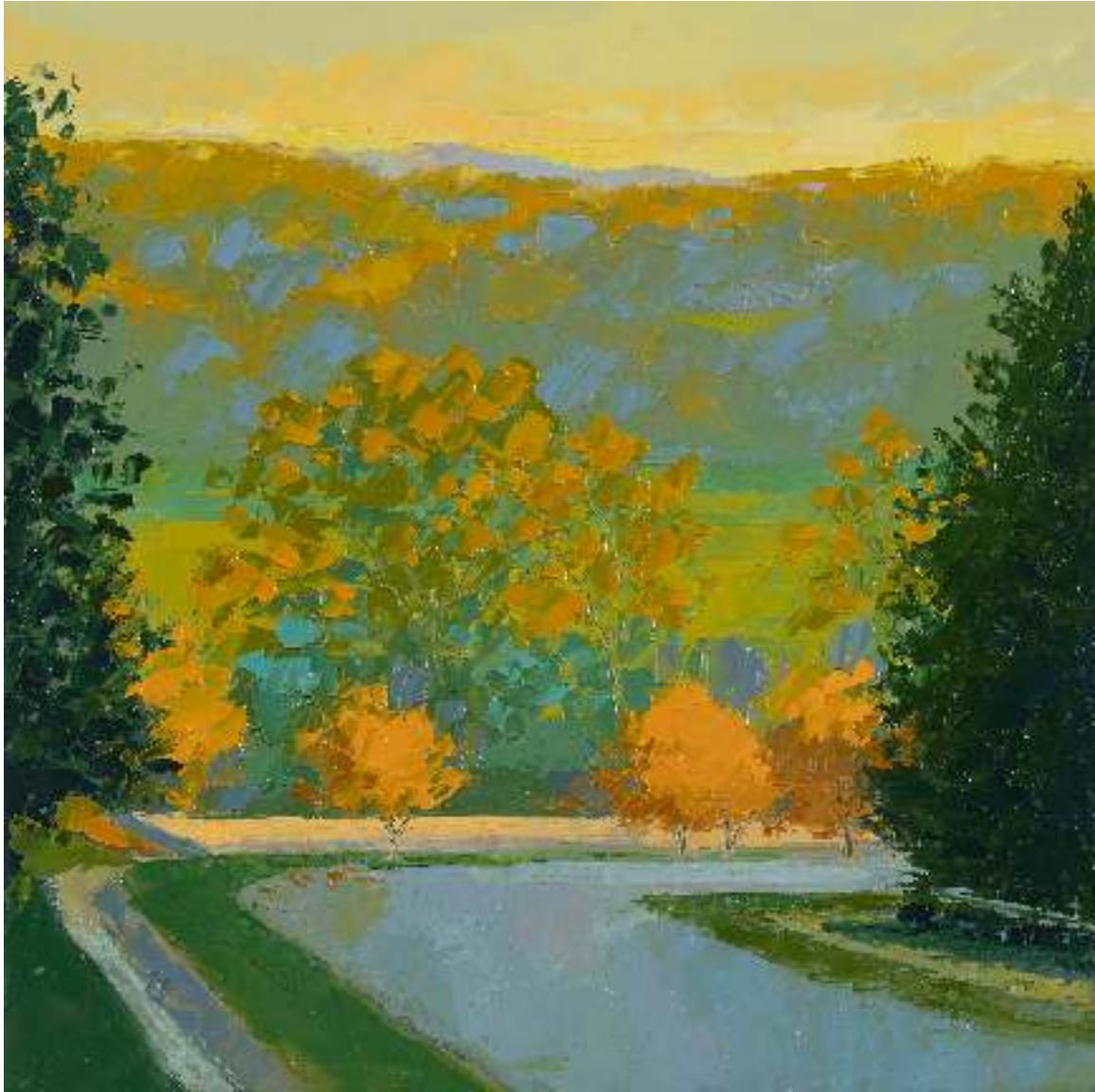


69



70







72



74



75



76



77



78





80



81



82



83







Detail of *Autumn Fire*



86



87





89



90



91



92



93



94



95



96



97



98



EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Laura Wooten: View from the Ridge

December 4, 2020 - January 22, 2021, Second Street Gallery

WINTER

View from the Ridge No. 1-22, 2019, oil on panel, 8 x 8 inches

1. *View from the Ridge No. 1*
2. *View from the Ridge No. 2*
3. *View from the Ridge No. 3*,
Collection of Paul Takayanagi and Deak Wooten
4. *View from the Ridge No. 4*
5. *View from the Ridge No. 5*,
Collection of John Grant and Stacey Evans
6. *View from the Ridge No. 6*
7. *View from the Ridge No. 7, Anonymous Collection*
8. *View from the Ridge No. 8*,
Collection of Robin Kimbrough-Melton
9. *View from the Ridge No. 9*,
Collection of Robin Kimbrough-Melton
10. *View from the Ridge No. 10*
11. *View from the Ridge No. 11*
12. *View from the Ridge No. 12*
13. *View from the Ridge No. 13*
14. *View from the Ridge No. 14*
15. *View from the Ridge No. 15*
16. *View from the Ridge No. 16*
17. *View from the Ridge No. 17*
18. *View from the Ridge No. 18*
19. *View from the Ridge No. 19*,
Collection of Bill and Jessica Mauzy
20. *Ochre Stillness*, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches
21. *View from the Ridge No. 20*
22. *View from the Ridge No. 21*
23. *View from the Ridge No. 22*
24. *Silver and Gold*, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches
25. *Tundra*, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches

SPRING

View from the Ridge No. 23-40, 2019, oil on panel, 8 x 8 inches

26. *View from the Ridge No. 23*
27. *View from the Ridge No. 24*
28. *View from the Ridge No. 25*
29. *View from the Ridge No. 26*
30. *View from the Ridge No. 27*
31. *View from the Ridge No. 28*
32. *View from the Ridge No. 29*
33. *View from the Ridge No. 30*
34. *View from the Ridge No. 31*
35. *View from the Ridge No. 32*
36. *View from the Ridge No. 33*
37. *View from the Ridge No. 34*
38. *Arrival*, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches
39. *View from the Ridge No. 35*
40. *View from the Ridge No. 36*
41. *Great Flood*, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches
42. *View from the Ridge No. 37*
43. *View from the Ridge No. 38*
44. *View from the Ridge No. 39*
45. *View from the Ridge No. 40*

SUMMER

View from the Ridge No. 41-63, 2019, oil on panel, 8 x 8 inches

- 46. *View from the Ridge No. 41*
- 47. *View from the Ridge No. 42*
- 48. *View from the Ridge No. 43*
- 49. *View from the Ridge No. 44*
- 50. *Leaning In/Leafing Out, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches*
- 51. *View from the Ridge No. 45*
- 52. *View from the Ridge No. 46*
- 53. *View from the Ridge No. 47*
- 54. *View from the Ridge No. 48*
- 55. *View from the Ridge No. 49*
- 56. *View from the Ridge No. 50*
- 57. *View from the Ridge No. 51*
- 58. *View from the Ridge No. 52*
- 59. *View from the Ridge No. 53*
- 60. *View from the Ridge No. 54*
- 61. *View from the Ridge No. 55*
- 62. *View from the Ridge No. 56*
- 63. *View from the Ridge No. 57*
- 64. *View from the Ridge No. 58*
- 65. *View from the Ridge No. 59*
- 66. *Meadow Music, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches*
- 67. *View from the Ridge No. 60*
- 68. *View from the Ridge No. 61*
- 69. *View from the Ridge No. 62*
- 70. *View from the Ridge No. 63*

FALL

View from the Ridge 64-90, 2019, oil on panel, 8 x 8 inches

- 71. *View from the Ridge No. 64*
- 72. *View from the Ridge No. 65*
- 73. *View from the Ridge No. 66*
- 74. *View from the Ridge No. 67*
- 75. *View from the Ridge No. 68*
- 76. *View from the Ridge No. 69*
- 77. *View from the Ridge No. 70*
- 78. *View from the Ridge No. 71*
- 79. *Carnival, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches*
- 80. *View from the Ridge No. 72*
- 81. *View from the Ridge No. 73*
- 82. *View from the Ridge No. 74*
- 83. *View from the Ridge No. 75*
- 84. *View from the Ridge No. 76*
- 85. *Autumn Fire, 2020, oil on panel, 30 x 30 inches*
- 86. *View from the Ridge No. 77*
- 87. *View from the Ridge No. 78*
- 88. *View from the Ridge No. 79*
- 89. *View from the Ridge No. 80*
- 90. *View from the Ridge No. 81*
- 91. *View from the Ridge No. 82*
- 92. *View from the Ridge No. 83*
- 93. *View from the Ridge No. 84*
- 94. *View from the Ridge No. 85*
- 95. *View from the Ridge No. 86*
- 96. *View from the Ridge No. 87*
- 97. *View from the Ridge No. 88*
- 98. *View from the Ridge No. 89*
- 99. *View from the Ridge No. 90*









LAURA WOOTEN is a painter focused on our human connection to the landscape. She earned her undergraduate degree in Art and Architecture at the University of Virginia and continued on at UVA as an Aunspaugh Post-Baccalaureate Fellow in Studio Art before earning her MFA from American University. Wooten attended a summer program in Perugia, Italy, at the Accademia di Belle Arti Pietro Vannucci, where the panoramic Mediterranean landscape took hold of her imagination. Her landscape paintings have been exhibited across the East Coast, including juried exhibitions at the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Biggs Museum of American Art in Dover, Delaware; the Bowery Gallery in New York City; and the Mosesian Center for the Arts in Boston. Her 2019 solo show, "Spirit of Place: Landscapes Real & Imagined," was exhibited at Chroma Projects in Charlottesville, Virginia. She has also participated in numerous group shows locally, including exhibitions at Second Street Gallery and Les Yeux du Monde. Wooten has taught painting and drawing at the University of Virginia and Piedmont Virginia Community College and has served as a guest lecturer and critic at the University of Virginia School of Architecture. Through a close observation of the natural world, with layers of memory and invention, she explores the inner and outer landscape of our experience and how it might be shared.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

LAURA WOOTEN: VIEW FROM THE RIDGE

Curated by Kristen Chiacchia

Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, Virginia

December 4, 2020 - January 22, 2021

Second Street Gallery would like to acknowledge the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts for their generous support of the 2020-2021 exhibition season.



Introduction by: Kristen Chiacchia

Texts by: Deborah McLeod and Laura Wooten

Catalogue design: Madeleine Rhondeau

Edited by: Kristen Chiacchia, CM Gorey, Lia Norton, and Meghan Smith

Printing: T&N Printing

Publication © 2020 Second Street Gallery

All artwork © by the artist

All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-0-578-80091-2

Second Street Gallery

115 Second Street SE

Charlottesville, VA 22902

PHOTOGRAPHY:

Courtesy of Stacey Evans

Photography.

Images on page 5 are courtesy of
Laura Wooten.



