



'Late Vermillion Light'

The Wildling Museum photos

The Art and Challenge of Keeping It Wild

NOW AT THE WILDLING MUSEUM IN SOLVANG, LANDSCAPE PAINTER THOMAS PAQUETTE SHOWS ART FROM HIS TRAVELS IN PURSUIT OF UNSPOILED AREAS AROUND THE U.S.

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent



'On Nature's Terms: Paintings by Thomas Paquette Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act'

When: through May 26

Where: Wildling Art Museum, 1511-B Mission Dr., Solvang

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday (closed Tuesday), 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

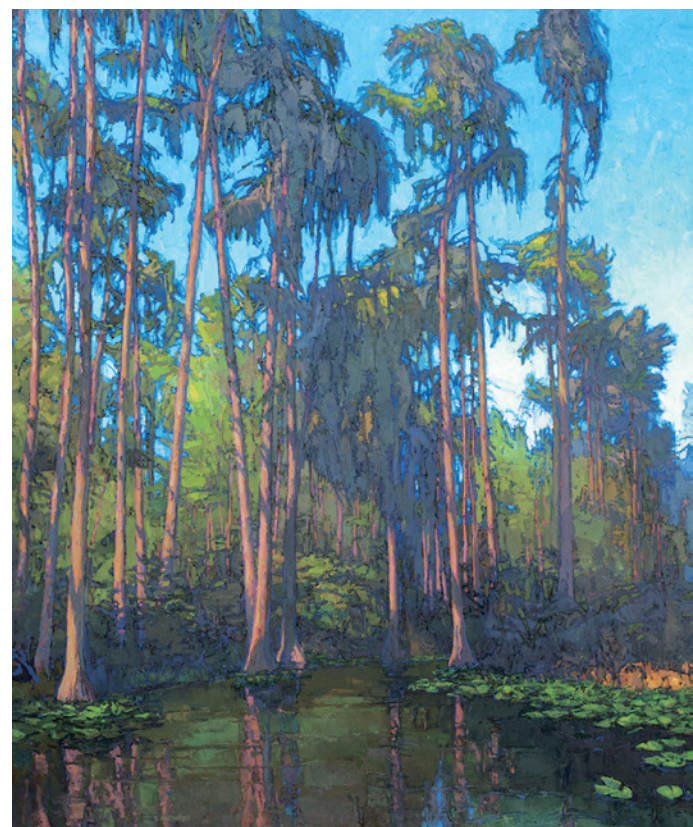
Information: 688-1082, wildlingmuseum.org

Nature lovers of all stripes and purposes know about the urge to explore the great outdoors, especially the sparse portion of the world as yet unspoiled by human intervention. Artists and photographers of the landscape-fixated sort have an even greater urge to visit earth's wilder outposts, and that is the subtext of a fascinating new exhibition at Solvang's Wildling Museum, with the long, but data-filled title, "On Nature's Terms: Paintings by Thomas Paquette Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act."

As the title succinctly explains, this is a show with at least two principle players. Ostensibly, the key player is veteran landscape painter, Thomas Paquette, based in a rural part of Pennsylvania, who has been artist-in-residence in National Parks, including Yosemite. But his landscape subjects in this show, from around the country, coast to coast and north to south, relate directly to the Wilderness Act of 1964, which has helped make precious deposits of nature untouchable to destructive outside interests (i.e. the current rush to develop oil resources within U.S. borders).

LBJ was the noble presidential soul under whose White House watch the Wilderness Act, encompassing the long-standing National Park system along with National Forests (such as our own Los Padres National Forest) and other protected wilderness patches in the U.S. was implemented. California is second only to Alaska in terms of wilderness acreage under protection and while the Act isn't as well known as it should be, it touches home in the region. The closest designated wilderness area to Solvang is the San Rafael Wilderness.

Needless to say, Mr. Paquette's painting exhibition, boasting numerous large works and accompanying smaller studies, fits neatly within the newly expanded and relocated Wildling Museum's walls in a space dedicated to the juncture of nature and art. He lends his sensitive eye and easy-going, painterly style, with a daubed, mottled and palpable surface and vision of the grand plan of a particular setting, in official "Wilderness" areas, including his own, nearby, Allegheny National Forest.



'Cloaked Cypress'

Closer to this coastal outpost, he shows a few California-based paintings, illustrating the inherent diversity of natural life and flora in the states. "Rising Tide of Fog" takes in the dramatic sweep and blissfully remote beauty of Big Sur, peering down from a high perspective on the tree-filled region to the fog-blanketed ocean below. In another painting dealing with natural wonder not so far north of us, "Witness" is a naturally tall and vertical "portrait" of a looming



'River Island'

Sequoia tree.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the continent, "Cloaked Cypress" depicts a humid clutch of trees in the Florida Everglades. Water is the main compositional attraction in the painting titled, "Border Aerie," with the crystal clear and cool lake expanse of the Minnesotan Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Wilderness, as such, is well attuned in this exhibition, but Mr. Paquette also capitalizes on the integral role of what's overhead, and especially the bedazzlement of impressive cloud formations in a given scene. Clouds grab our eye in different ways, from the wintry Wyoming image in "Shards of

Winter" to the almost sculptural and volcanic-looking cumulus consuming much of the composition in the aptly named Coloradan painting "Beyond Mile High."

On the museum's back wall, he asserts a more formal eye in his conceptual pictorial designs. "Equilibrium," from the Georgian, Cumberland Island Wilderness, is a cleverly conceived vertical depiction of the three balanced elements of sand, sea and sky.

And from yet another corner of the Wilderness Act's umbrellas protection agency, the Arizonan, Vermillion Cliff Wilderness is captured through the artist's striking, layered, horizontal

painting. Here, long late afternoon light washes over and refracts the color palette of the bold plateaus and atavistic rock formations of the Southwestern topography. There is both a visual drama and a peaceable nature connected to the painting, like many in this room, a sensibility and nature appreciation far from the madding, modern and urban realities we're forced to face in the day-to-day.

In the end, the latest Wildling show strikes a rich chord with the institution's core agenda, related to the act – available to all, artist or otherwise – and the art of taking in and respecting wilderness, while the sun shines on it.



'Witness'

The Wildling Museum photos



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