



THOMAS PAQUETTE

Life on the Mississippi



In 2016 to celebrate the centennial of the U.S. National Park Service, Thomas Paquette planned a small series of paintings featuring the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, a 72-mile expanse going through the “Twin Cities” of Minneapolis and St. Paul. As he began to paint the area, Paquette’s interest in the river began to grow. He decided to embark on a much larger project, one that included paintings from along the entire 2,320-mile waterway.

Thomas Paquette: America’s River Re-Explored is a 45-work traveling exhibition that culminates with a showing at

Dubuque Museum of Art in Iowa from April 27 through July 28, after having been on display at Watermark Art Center and Minnesota Maine Art Museum. The paintings not only show the diversity of the terrain along the river, from source to gulf, but also highlight the artist’s techniques. Some of Paquette’s works are detailed and other paintings are more abstract, yet they all capture the qualities of the rushing river and the life that exists in the region.

“Even on paintings where I get into lots of detail, I scrape out a lot of areas over the course of painting and rework things

‘from scratch’, preserving a sense of immediacy,” he explains. “What I’m looking for is a barely reined in energy, because what I saw is still happening in front of my eyes on this canvas; it’s like reliving the moment. Even the ones that are very detailed are made to have a lot of energy, color and brushwork.”

To capture the source material for his paintings, Paquette spent time driving along the river, taking photos of his various stops and sometimes painting studies that he brought back into the studio. Each work he created is evocative of the places



1
Alma's Buena Vista,
oil on linen,
40 x 60"

2
Palimpsest,
oil on linen,
36 x 48"

3
Cross Traffic,
Dubuque,
oil on linen,
24 x 30"

4
Fishing Reverie,
oil on linen,
22 x 32"



2



3



4

he visited, but also an evolution of his photos and experiences. "When you bring [your references] into the studio and you work on the painting, it evolves in its own way to reflect experiences," Paquette says. "It's not evolving to try to replicate the photograph, and sometimes what I paint is so incredibly different because I'm imbuing it with my feelings and my memories of the place that are deeper than

the photograph."

In *Alma's Buena Vista*, the largest piece in the show, Paquette depicts the sprawling river from a vantage point above the river's edge. *Fishing Reverie* is a work that evokes the life of people who live near the river, one where they can go out and enjoy the waterway at any time of day. Paquette also paints urban regions, such as the city of Hannibal, Missouri, where

Mark Twain was raised. It is spotlighted in *Kitsch Stop*, depicting a diner's parking lot and its oversized root beer mug that capitalizes on the author. Another of his pieces, *Cross Traffic, Dubuque*, shows a bridge that goes over the river in the same city that his final show will take place. ●

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