

Frederic Kellogg

Works in Oil and Watercolor

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June 17 – August 13, 2017



American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center
WASHINGTON, D.C.



Frederic Kellogg, *Self Portrait* (detail), 1990, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"
collection of the artist

FOREWORD

JUST A FEW YEARS AGO E. A. CARMEAN, JR., former Curator of Twentieth-Century Art at Washington's National Gallery of Art, suggested I take a look at the oil paintings and watercolors of Frederic Kellogg. When E. A. talks, I listen. He is not just an authority on Modern visual art. He is a great story-teller AND a generous contributor to local and national arts institutions and publications.

I was intrigued first by Kellogg's paintings and sketchbooks, and quickly became fascinated by the personal, very "Washington" story behind them. He grew up with an artist father who became a friend of Andrew Wyeth in Maine. Kellogg considered an art career, but the spirit of social activism in the 60s drew him to public service. Following Harvard Law, he moved from Boston (where he was Assistant U.S. Attorney) to DC in 1973 to serve as Advisor to U.S. Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson (who, coincidentally, was also a watercolorist) right before Richard Nixon's infamous Saturday Night Massacre, now part of Washington lore.

Kellogg resigned from the Justice Department with Richardson, and became admired locally for representing artists including Yuri Schwebler and Carroll Sockwell, and Nesta Dorrance, director of the Jefferson Place Gallery. Kellogg became Legal Counsel to the National Endowment for the Arts in 1986, and continued his painting studies with artists like Jack Boul at the Washington Studio School. By 1992 he was a full-time artist, and for the past twenty-five years he has divided his time between painting in Maine and Washington, DC.

As E.A. richly describes in his essay *Frederic Kellogg and Tradition*, Kellogg's art is firmly situated within the great American tradition of Realism, but his style fluctuates between the more precise work of Andrew Wyeth and Richard Estes, and the looser approach of Fairfield Porter. Consistent throughout his artistic production is the freshness of his engagement with the scene present before him. Kellogg's work is new in a way that all great art is new. It is alive. We complete the work now as we are moved by the painterly vision of the artist. On behalf of American University's community of students, friends, and neighbors, I welcome *Frederic Kellogg: Works in Oil and Watercolor* to our museum.

Jack Rasmussen

Director and Curator
American University Museum
at the Katzen Arts Center
Washington, DC

Frederic Kellogg and Tradition

E.A. Carmean, Jr.

...its long stretches of shore were all covered by the great army of pointed firs, darkly cloaked and standing as if they wanted to embark... sunshine struck the outer islands and one of them shone clear in the light and reveled itself to us in a compelling way to our eyes."

—SARAH ORNE JEWETT, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, 1896



[1] Frederic Kellogg, *After Rain*, 2013, watercolor, 9" X 14", private collection

JONATHAN JONES, the London *Guardian's* art critic, is a reliable cheerleader for the latest trend in the art world, whether serious or sheer folly. He recently wrote of the Tate-Modern's exhibition *Ten Days Six Nights*: "Prepare to forget everything you thought exhibitions were about. Looking at still, silent art objects? Get real, daddio."¹

He may be on to something. This past Winter, the Philadelphia Art Museum put up a glorious show entitled *American Watercolor in the Age of Winslow Homer and John Singer Sargent*. Presumably to attract attendance to the exhibition, the museum's information website included an imbedded "Presentation" altering reproductions of defenseless works of art by making parts of them move. Coming "alive" by computer gimmickry, a Winslow Homer sailboat jerks in rolling waves and an alligator painted by John Singer Sargent grows more menacing by raising his head.

This is a sad misunderstanding of how works of art come alive. Paintings—and music, literature and dance—do so by their aesthetic presence, measurable in their mysterious ability to effect or move us. They can also come alive—to alter or increase their aesthetic presence—by insights brought by new works.

T.S. Eliot

T. S. Eliot's landmark 1931 essay *Tradition and The Individual Talent* presents his argument for the deep interconnections between tradition and the new work of art. His central observation holds that our experience of art is different from other forms of experience. I understand this to mean that in our initial viewing of a work of art—or hearing music or reading a poem—we cannot (honestly) determine in advance that we will be moved aesthetically. Rather, genuine art offers and directs our response, literally has a power over our authority. And further, Eliot's position holds this experience is different from either the "shock" or "bewilderment" or even "boredom" we experience with non-art objects or events.

Eliot's text suggests three kinds of art objects:

- (1) "Novelty" objects, or things with no connections to art's traditions; indeed, their sole *raisonne d'être* lies in being independent; for Eliot, Marcel Duchamp's exhibited *Fountain* urinal would not be art.
- (2) Genuine art, objects at once new and also *within* art's tradition.
- (3) What might be called "Repetitions," or in Eliot's proposition, "...to conform merely would be for the new work not to conform at all, [for] it would not be new and would therefore not be a work of art."

Further for Eliot, genuine works of art are "alive," open to the enlightenment of the new... here, at length:

"[When] a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all works of art that proceeded it. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives [and then] the whole exiting order must be, if ever slightly, altered... the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past."²

Frederic Kellogg

This brings us to the art of Frederic Kellogg (b. 1942). One might say Kellogg was to the traditional American picture-making-manner born. His father was an Episcopal chaplain at Harvard and Radcliffe, with a summer position serving Christ Church Dark Harbor on Islesboro Island in Maine. Father Kellogg was also an amateur watercolorist, and he, young Frederic and family became friends—picnicking—with another island artist, Andrew Wyeth and his family. Indeed, Wyeth's *Southwest Breeze* is a portrait of Kellogg's mother; at Summer's end, Father Kellogg would take Wyeth watercolors back to Cambridge, offering them for purchase by his (lucky) friends and colleagues.

Despite this rather special grounding, following Groton and Harvard, Kellogg became a lawyer. After serving as Assistant U.S. Attorney and Attorney Advisor to Elliot L. Richardson (of Watergate fame) in the Justice Department, in 1986 he linked to art by serving as the legal counsel to the National Endowment for the Arts. Drawn to painting, he also studied with Jack Boul and other figures who were leaders in Washington's art community.



[2] Frederic Kellogg, *Beverage Farm*, 1967, early Wyeth-inspired watercolor, 13" X 19", collection of the artist

Kellogg met with early success. Since 1992, having become a full-time painter; he now goes half the year to paint in Maine, centered on his studio in Thomason; the other half, he works in Washington, although his sketch-book can open anywhere (Fig. 3).



[3] Frederic Kellogg, *Three Sketchbooks*, collection of the artist

Four Forms

It is important to see how Kellogg's work belongs within—and extends—what could be called a river of traditional American landscape, figural and still-life painting; a broad, quarter-millennium course flowing from John Singleton Copley and Thomas Cole to Milton Avery and Andrew Wyeth.

To approach his own art, we will consider a quartet of works representing four general directions. For focus, we will concentrate on landscapes, although these observations hold for his other depicting genre as well.³

Kellogg works by a combination—or not—of sketches made in his constant-companion notebook, of watercolors done *en plein-air*, or in the studio from notes, or in oil on canvas painting, sometimes drawn from one or both of these two other media. All three forms are included in this exhibition.

Pellucid Light

We might expect a relatively new artist to work toward gaining a skilled vocabulary and a sophisticated voice. Kellogg's first mature pictures afford a heightened and accomplished realism. Although some of these scenes, portraits, and still-life compositions seem to belong to the general camp of so-called *Photo-Realism*—the work of Richard Estes comes to mind—such "Hyper-Realist" paintings share a certain mechanical definition and often resulting "cold" tone; these characteristics are absent from Kellogg's pictures.



[4] Frederic Kellogg, *September, Dunn Street* (version 2), 2016, oil on canvas, 54" x 54", collection of the artist (cat. no. 1)

His striking *September, Dunn Street* [Fig.4] is a classic example of what the artist achieves. In addition to the early interest in Wyeth, Kellogg also admires the work of Edward Hopper, who had painted in Ogunquit and on Monhegan Island. Yet, comparing one of Hopper's "house" pictures—here, *Haskell's House* (1924, from down-east Gloucester, Massachusetts) [Fig.5]—with *September, Dunn Street* underscores informative distinctions.

Hopper's art—whether with figures or solely architectural—continually evokes a sense of *setting*, that the image is an element in story-telling. For example, Hopper's house in the National Gallery picture interestingly precedes Alfred Hitchcock's of a similar build-

ing in his film *Psycho* [Fig. 6], where it functions almost as a character in this murder mystery; it was ascribed by the director as "mysterious. . . I thought that type of architecture would help the atmosphere of the yarn."⁴ By contrast, Kellogg's white houses are presented as clear statements of "factual" vision, this objectivity strongly underscored by the clear, white light found in Maine on certain Summer days and more often in Autumn.



[5] Edward Hopper, *Haskell's House*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of Herbert A. Goldstone 1996.130.2



[6] Film still from *Psycho*, 1960. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Produced by Shamley Productions and Alfred Hitchcock. Distributed by Paramount Pictures. Copyright Universal Pictures

Luminism

This most striking characteristic, in *September, Dunn Street* along with other works in this exhibition, connects Kellogg's paintings with a definition affixed to a few—and broadly shared by more—19th Century works gather under the name *Luminism*.

For brevity, to quote definitions: "a style of landscape painting...[with] meticulously crafted realism and a technically precise rendering of atmosphere..." and "concealing visible brushstrokes. Luminist landscapes emphasize tranquility and often depict calm, reflective water..."^{5a} Kellogg's pictures, including *Cove at Criehaven* [Fig. 7] extend and amplify such Luminist landscapes as *Beach at Beverly, 1869/1872* [Fig. 8] by John Frederick Kensett; sharing what American art scholar/ museum director E. A. Powell calls Kensett's "quietism, making pictures of mood that depicts a poetic experience of nature."^{5b}



[7] Frederic Kellogg, *Cove at Criehaven*, watercolor, 8" x 11", private collection



[8] John Frederick Kensett, *Beach at Beverly*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Gift of Frederick Sturges, Jr. 1978.6.5

These effects can also be found in related pictures by non-Luminist painters, including Thomas Eakins in his extraordinary *Max Schmidt in a Single Scull* [Fig. 9] and shared by Kellogg in his own Eakins homage rowing picture, *Pen Williamson* [Fig. 10].

It is Kellogg's "objective vision"—found across the body of his work in its various styles and subject matter—which further ties him to historic Luminism's unique aesthetic pairing; art historian Barbara Novak's description



[9] Thomas Eakins, *Max Schmidt in a Single Scull*, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase by The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift, 1934. 34.92



[10] Frederic Kellogg, *Pen Williamson*, 1995, oil on canvas, 60" x 72", collection of the artist (cat. no. 2)

of this 19th Century realization—"The ideal emanated from the core of the artist's sensibility... Actuality quietly encysted a nucleus of abstract idea. [Luminism was] a synthesis of the real and the ideal..."—can also be said of Kellogg's *September, Dunn Street*.⁶

Summing Colors

Interestingly, Kellogg also works in different part of the tradition river. As in *Elliot Street Shadows* [Fig. 12], another townscape, flat areas of one color stand for larger areas of a scene or figure; in a "higher realist" depiction, these subjects would be rendered in many interwoven colors and shapes. Here, one or a few summary hues stand for whole zones of the vista.

In these works, the colors are often mixed with white paint, engendering a commonality of tone across the surface. I would argue that this enrollment is also an unexpected extension of the pellucid light of 19th Century Luminist painting and Kellogg's own "objective" pictures. Here, this "white" is equally pervasive, but now exists *within* the colors, a luminosity underscored by the absence of detail.

Differing from Luminist pictures, however, this unity of color also keys to the exclusion of deeper space in these pictures. As such, Kellogg is partly indebted to the landscapes and figures of Maine artist Fairfield Porter; openly so, with Kellogg's occasional "homage" pictures like *Porter Boathouse* and *Porter Family House*. (cat. nos. 8-9)



[11] Winslow Homer, *Warm Afternoon*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon 1994.59.24

But Kellogg's "strokes" of color are more obvious and, due to their physical presence, less picturing. In these respects, Kellogg's works even have unexpected links to such pictures as Willem DeKooning's 1957-1961 abstracted landscapes.

A third kind of Kellogg picture combines and tempers the previous two forms, adding a drawing by forming masses. In the light-filled *Cove at Criehaven* [Fig. 7], he uses broad zones of color—white-grays along the shoreline and beach, with blues for shore and ocean; different greens for vegetation and tall trees. The profiles of these zones serve as drawing, visually establishing the sense of dimension and thus space.

Maine painters—including Kellogg—have a lodestar artist in Winslow Homer. Here we consider his 1878 watercolor *Warm Afternoon* [Fig. 11]. Homer's shapes—pace the reclining figure and foreground sheep—are also of solid color, albeit outlined with drawn profiles. But in this comparison, we can realize that Homer's landscape trees are as abstract as Kellogg's. [Figs. 12, 13]

Homer creates deeper space by *repoussoir* devices, with his nearly abstract hillside sheep almost serving as stepping stones to the color-band-enhance horizon line; so too in *Cove at Criehaven* [Fig. 7] uses a deep blue to posit the far ocean line; his shoreline—with its Jewett-worth "tall firs"—enhances the setting- out of seascape space.



[12] Frederic Kellogg, *Elliot Street Shadows*, private collection (cat. no. 14)



[13] Winslow Homer, *Warm Afternoon* (detail)



[14] Frederic Kellogg, *Bridge at Waldoboro*, collection of the artist



[15] Frederic Kellogg, *Bridge at Waldoboro*, private collection (cat. no. 13)

Grand Compositions

Fourthly, a few of Kellogg's pictures in each of the preceding categories give us views of far greater amplitude (His group portrait *Fourth of July* exists in the same relation to his individual portraits, including *Beth Collins*). As in both the notebook sketch here of *Bridge at Waldoboro* and its following watercolor [Fig. 14, 15] this expanded scene looks over water to two sloping hillside and on to a bridge before a far distant slopes punctuated with a red barn, worthy of Corot's "spot of red."

This rich mixture of elements—architecture, trees, river banks and now, a cloud crowded sky—first brings to mind not an American master, but rather the great English landscaper painter John Constable's *The White Horse* [Fig. 16]. Here the complexity of pictorial touches in these works suggests something like the interweavings of the color threads in a tapestry, while at the same time they also remain true to the visual luxury of scenes the two artists have selected. Thus *Bridge at Waldoboro* also reads as "new" participant in a long history of this lineage.



[16] John Constable, *The White Horse*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Widener Collection 1942.9.9

American Art holds a rich run of objective depictions, the core of a rich American legacy of landscape, portrait and still-life paintings. Frederic Kellogg’s pictures take from and add to that tradition. Good job.

E. A. CARMEAN, JR. is an art historian and canon in the Episcopal Church. A former curator and department head at the National Gallery of Art, his exhibitions and publications range from *Nature and Focus: Looking at American Painting in the Nineteenth Century* [Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1972] to *Frank Stella: Architecture into Painting* [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2007].

Works in Oil and Watercolor

NOTES

- 1 Jonathan Jones, “From Imagine Moscow to Ten Days Six Nights,” *The Guardian*, March 17, 2017
- 2. T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. 1921
- 3 Under “landscapes,” are included cityscapes and town scenes. This is not to say Kellogg is opposed to modern art; indeed his private collection formed with his wife Molly, includes important, museum-exhibited abstract paintings.
- 4 Alfred Hitchcock, Hitchcock/Truffaut. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1983. p.269
- 5a and b E.A. Powell III, “Luminism” in Wikipedia.
- 6 Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, Praeger, 1969) p. 117.



1 *September, Dunn Street (version 2)*, 2016, oil on canvas, 54" x 54", collection of the artist



2 *Pen Williamson*, 1995, oil on canvas, 60" x 72", collection of the artist



3 *Dupont Circle*, 1998, oil on canvas, 70" x 70", collection of the artist



4 *Evergreen*, 2000, oil on canvas, 72" x 72", collection of the artist



5 *Control Yourself*, 2001, oil on canvas, 72" x 144", collection of the artist



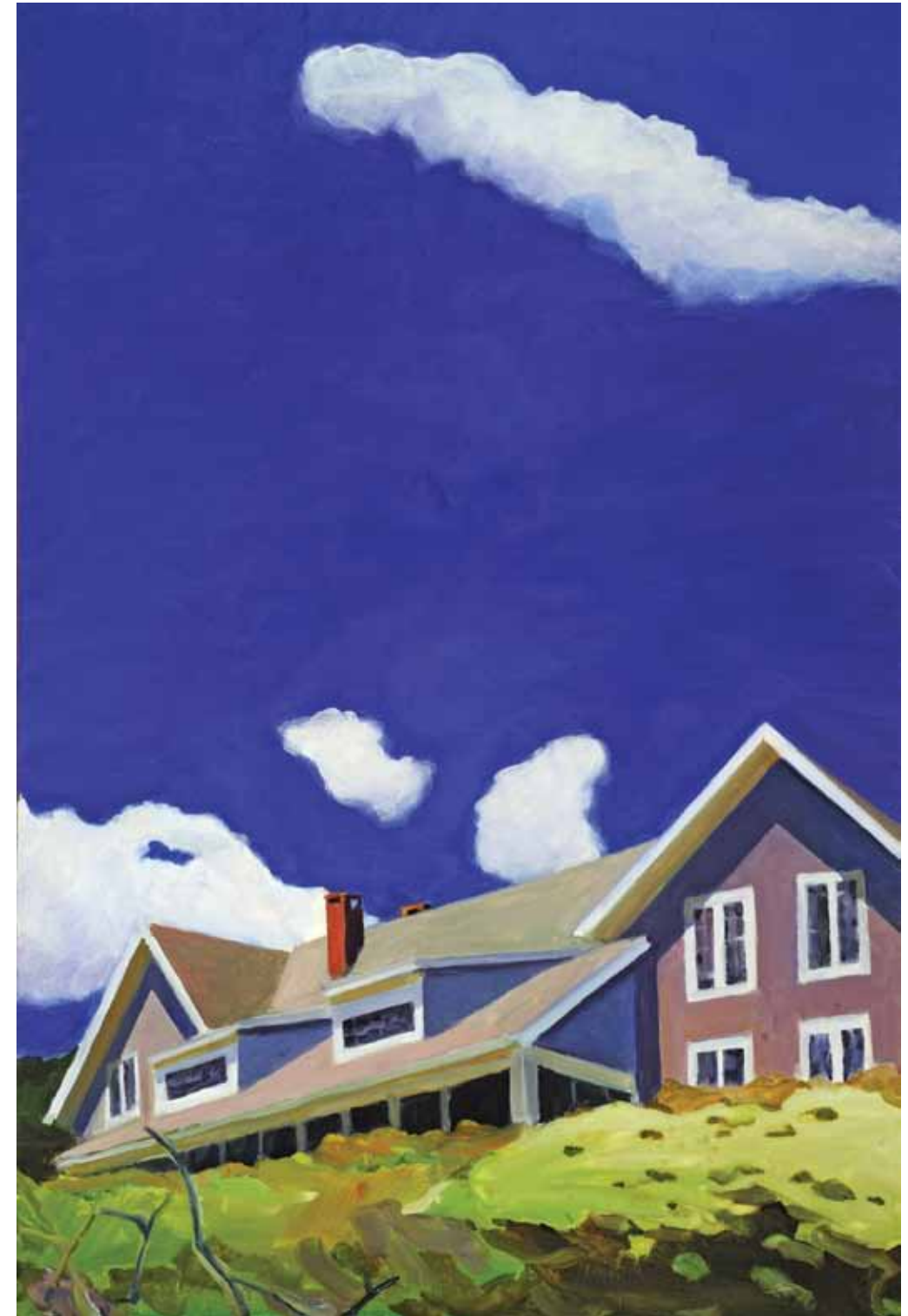
6 *Morning Paper*, 2000, oil on canvas, 36" x 72", private collection



7 *Route One Elegy*, 1999, oil on canvas, 54" x 54", collection of the artist



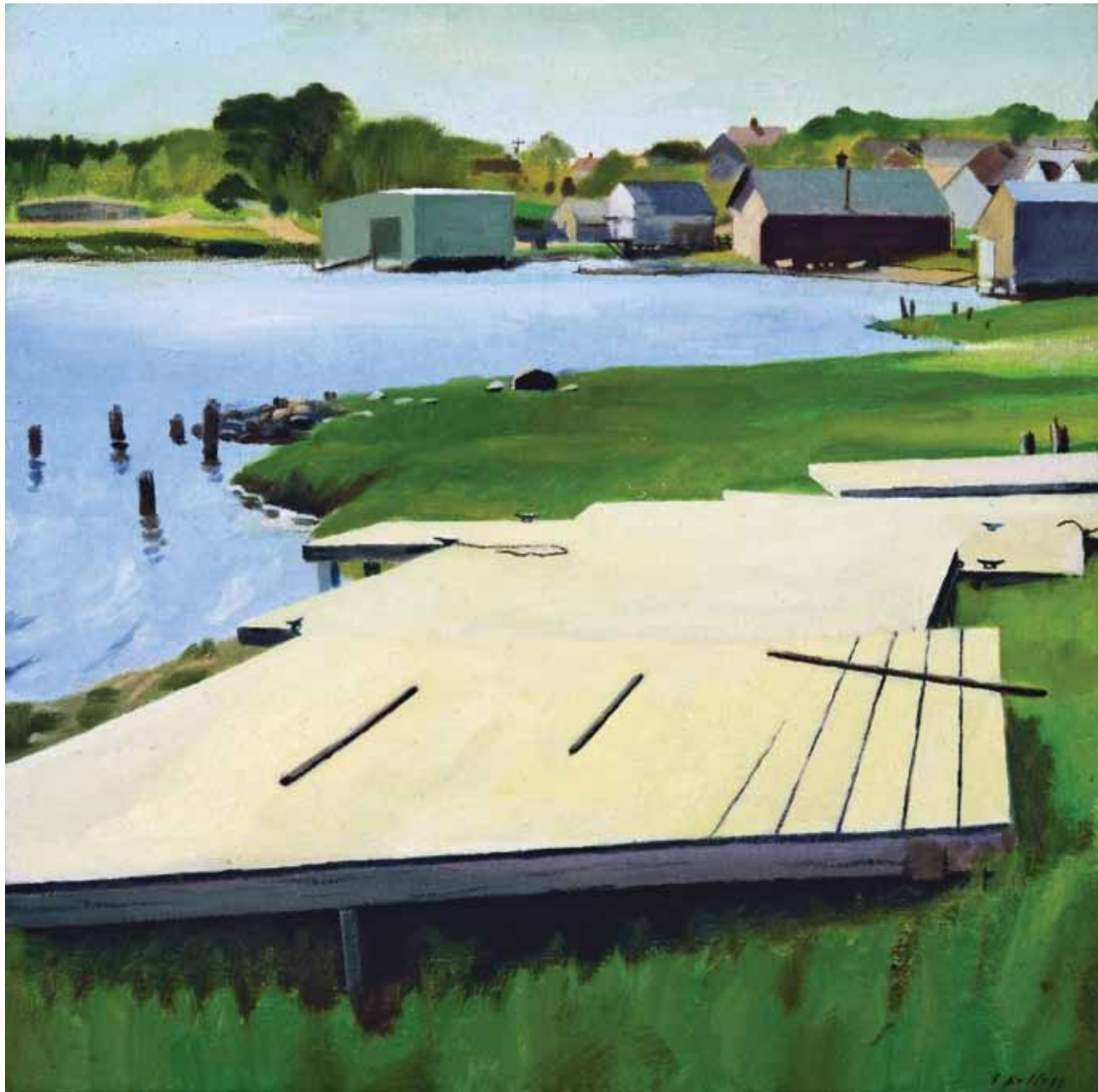
8 *Porter Boathouse*, 2012, oil on canvas, 12" x 12", collection of the artist



9 *Porter Family House*, 2012, oil on canvas, 30" x 20", collection of the artist



10 *Island*, 2005, oil on canvas, 48" x 96", collection of the artist



11 *Spring Tide*, 1999, oil on canvas, 12" x 12", collection of the artist



12 *Path Through Woods*, 2012, oil on canvas, 12" x 24", collection of the artist



13 *Bridge at Waldoboro*, 2013, watercolor, 17" x 21", private collection



14 *Spring Elliot Street*, 2014, watercolor, 17" x 21", private collection



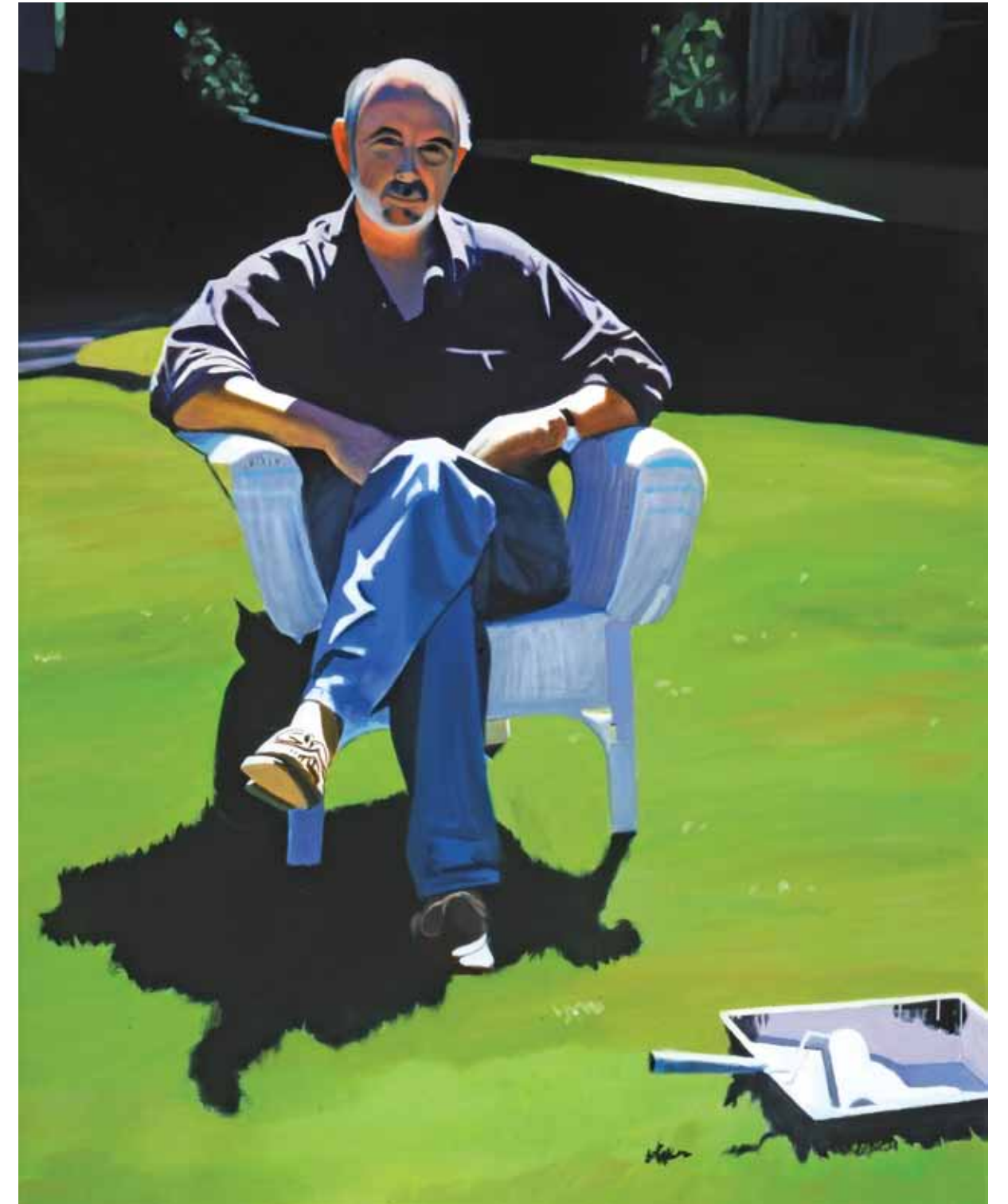
15 *Fernald Farmhouse*, 2008, watercolor, 22" x 30", collection of the artist



16 *Wind From the River*, 2015, watercolor, 11" x 15", collection of the artist



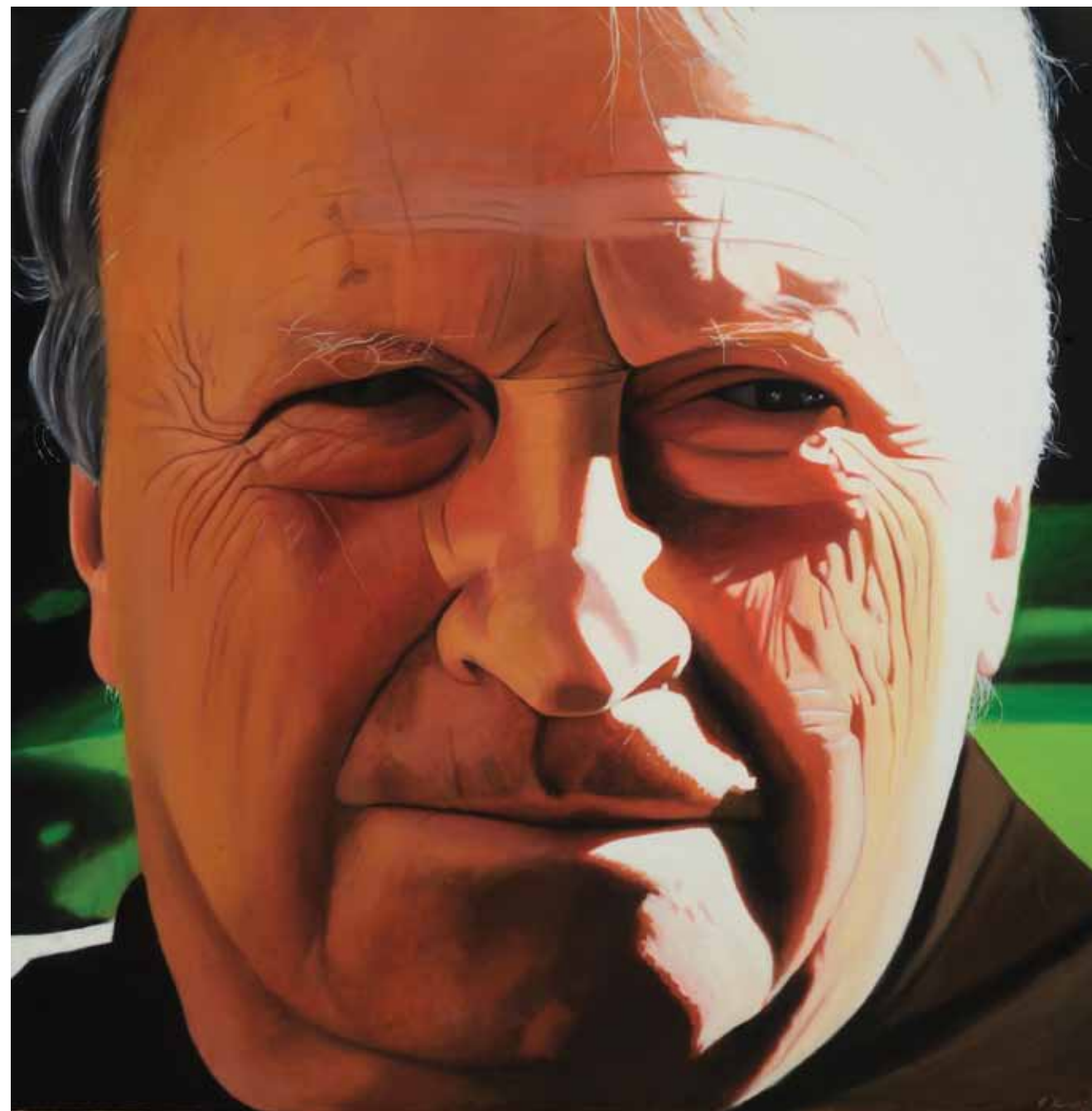
17 *July Fourth*, 1996, oil on canvas, 36" x 48", collection of the artist



18 *Chris Crosman*, 2001, oil on canvas, 60" x 48", collection of the artist



19 *Departure*, oil on canvas, 39" x 48", collection of the artist



20 *John Chandler*, 2001, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", collection of the artist



21 *Still Life with Lamp*, 2008, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", private collection



22 *Night Window*, 2000, oil on canvas, 36" x 28", collection of the artist

First published in conjunction with the exhibition
Frederic Kellogg: Works in Oil and Watercolor
June 17 – August 13, 2017
American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center
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ISBN: 978-0-9982944-4-5



Frederic Kellogg, *Sketchbook, Bridge at Waldoboro*, 2012, watercolor, 8" x 10"

On the cover: Frederic Kellogg, *Cove at Criehaven*, 2013, watercolor, 8" x 11"



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