

M A I N E

T. Allen Lawson

The Art Of Truthful Expression

By RACHEL WOLF

ON THE WALL OF T. ALLEN LAWSON'S studio hangs a quotation in the artist's own handwriting, copied while reading Willa Cather's *Song of the Lark*. It says, "Artistic growth is, more than anything else, a refining of the sense of truthfulness."

The search for authentic expression drives this much-honored painter. Lawson grew up in Wyoming with a love for drawing and painting. He found encouragement from an eighth-grade art teacher, who gave him his first exhibition in the 1970s. Early on, he developed the discipline of painting outdoors every day. "The longer I've painted, the more I think I've trained backwards," he says. "I was taught in the field long before painting in a studio."

To continue his formal training, Lawson attended the American Academy of Art in Chicago and the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts in Connecticut, but returned to his beloved Wyoming to develop his career in the shadow of the Tetons. Having traveled to all 50 states as well as to most of Western Europe, at age 42 he reflects on his journeys as they relate to his artwork. "I wouldn't give up that experience for anything, but am at a point now where I am thinking about that elusive question: What is art? It's not what you frame and hang on a wall. It's our language — what we use to express ourselves."

This ability to express himself caught the eye of Sarah Boehme, curator of Whitney Gallery of Western Art at Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. "T. Allen Lawson is one of the most talented of American landscape painters," she notes. "He has an extraordinary compositional ability; his images are wonderfully balanced in shape, color, and mood. He is still young, and I think has a very promising future due to his outstanding talent and his dedication to painting."



T. ALLEN LAWSON





ROCKPORT ROOFLINE
2004, OIL ON LINEN, 24 X 26 IN.



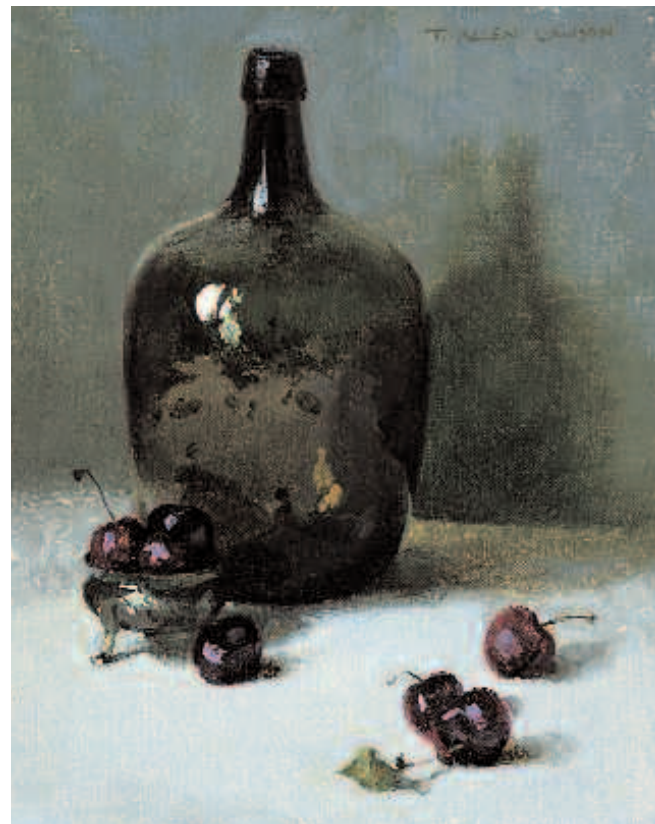


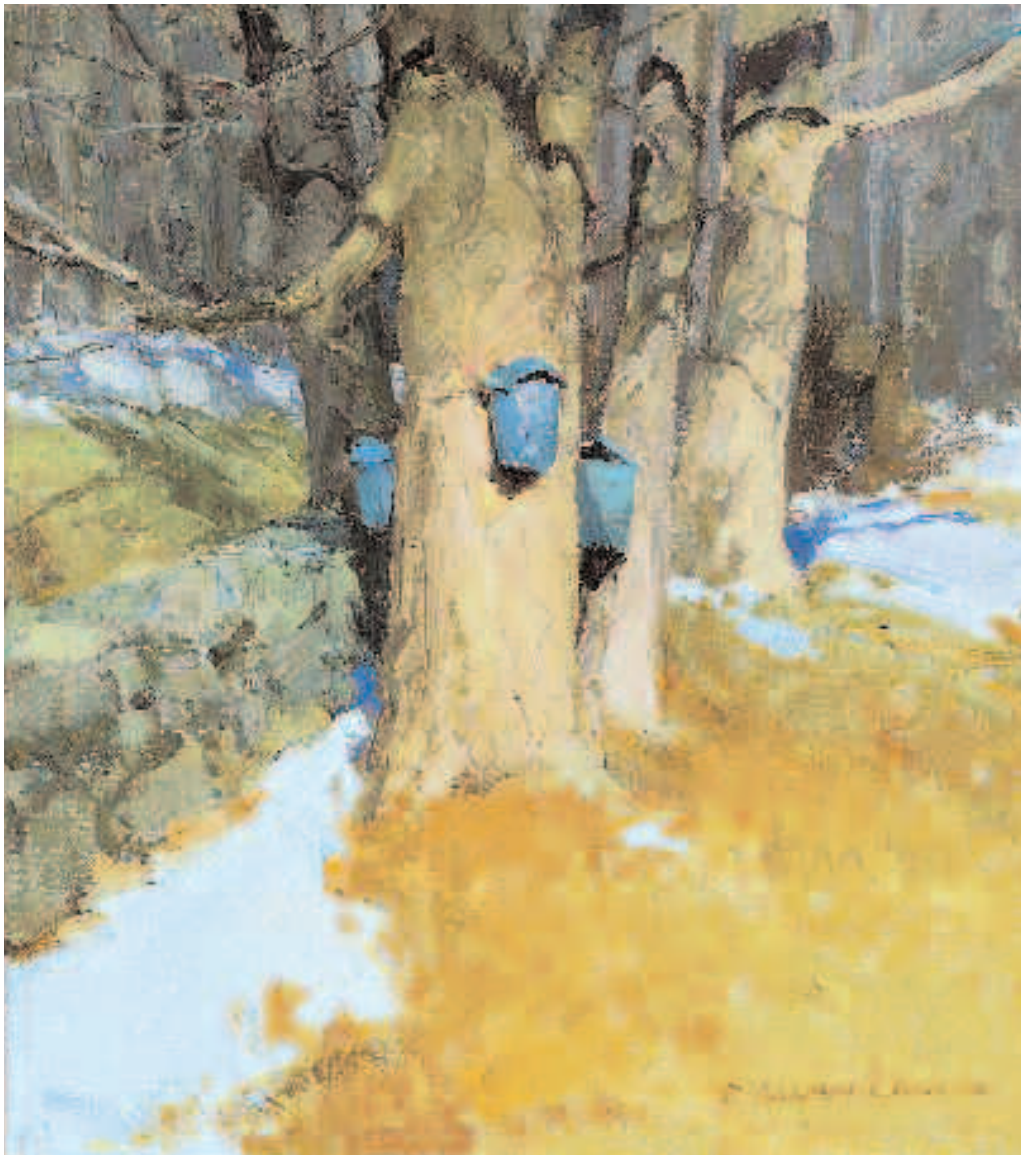
ARTIST PROFILE



SUMMER ON THE ST. GORGE
2005, OIL ON LINEN, 9 x 10 IN.

STILL LIFE WITH CHERRIES
2004, OIL ON LINEN, 10 x 8 IN.





SUGAR TIME
2004, OIL ON LINEN, 10 X 9 IN.

FOLLOWING FOOTSTEPS

Lawson's promising future became steeped in the past when he took a 6,000-mile pilgrimage of discovery with fellow artist and friend Geoff Parker. Between 2001 and 2003, the two Western-born plein-air painters retraced the journey of Lewis and Clark for an exhibition in honor of the bicentennial of that historic 1804 adventure. The resulting exhibition, *Capturing The Missouri: Lewis & Clark Revisited*, comprises 52 oil paintings that depict the natural evolution of the expedition route some 200 years later.

To prepare for the demanding journey, Lawson studied the seven-volume set of Lewis and Clark's journals that were first published in 1904. He read the day-to-day entries as he and Parker followed the Missouri. Utilizing the historic journals as part of his painting experience exemplifies Lawson's view that a mature artist is intimately connected with his subject. "If you know the differences between an oak and

a poplar, a spruce and a pine, even down to the needles ... you are able to paint that tree with more conviction, even if done with a few broad strokes," he explains.

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME

Having painted much of this "diverse and magnificent country," as Lawson calls it, he was enthusiastic about painting his own "back yard" for his next show, *Variations On A Theme*, which ran at the Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, earlier this year. For *Variations*, he partnered with fellow artists John Felsing and Skip Whitcomb, and each of the artists painted the area in which he lives.

With his wife and three children, Lawson had moved to Maine four years ago, but the Lewis and Clark project had kept him traveling, and he found little time to paint his new surroundings. When the concept for the *Variations* show emerged, Lawson jumped at the chance to paint his new environment.

ARTIST PROFILE



THE WELCOMING COMMITTEE
2005, OIL ON LINEN, 30 x 35 IN.

The couple had purchased 50 acres of woods, on which they had built a house and cleared some pastureland. “The woods are much tougher in Maine,” Lawson says of the Maine terrain. “My respect for the Yankee has risen considerably. What you work hardest at, you love the most. I took the opportunity to really paint what is important to me. These works are more a portrait of me than anything else I’ve done. Everything that I painted I helped design, build, clear, plant, or move.”

Bringing his art closer to home, both literally and figuratively, became Lawson’s focus. He took a step back from some other major commitments in order to grow as an artist. “The transition from painter to artist comes when you cross the line of painting what you see to painting what you feel about what you see,” he says. “If everything that you do is for the market, it won’t work. I’ve been fascinated by some of the many private studies by Andrew Wyeth that were never meant to be seen by the public.”

Variations collaborators Felsing and Whitcomb are excited about Lawson’s development, which was a side benefit

to the *Variations* project. The once elusive authentic expression for which he had been searching began to materialize more clearly in this work.

“I see Tim going in a new direction,” observes Felsing. “In our conversations, I can see Tim searching. It’s a very exciting time to watch where he’s going. He’s got a lot to say.”

Whitcomb as well has noted Lawson’s artistic evolution. “I’ve watched Tim evolve over the years. He’s started singing with his own voice now. He’s becoming quite mature, but he’s going to be a student of this process till the day they put him in the ground. He is a dear friend, and one of the greatest outdoor painters.”

Once the *Variations* project was complete, Lawson created more new work for a traveling show called *From Sea To Shining Sea: A Reflection Of America*. The two-year endeavor produced 94 paintings by 47 of America’s finest realist and impressionist painters. Many of the works were produced during paint outs that spanned the nation from coast to



JANUARY ON THE BIG GOOSE RIVER
2000, OIL ON LINEN, 10 X 14 IN.

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, WINTER 2003
2003, OIL ON LINEN, 14 X 12 IN.

coast. Of the collaboration, Lawson says, “It benefits all artists to help one another — it raises the whole profession. A wise person once said, ‘You can only be as good as yourself.’ Nobody else can do your best work.”

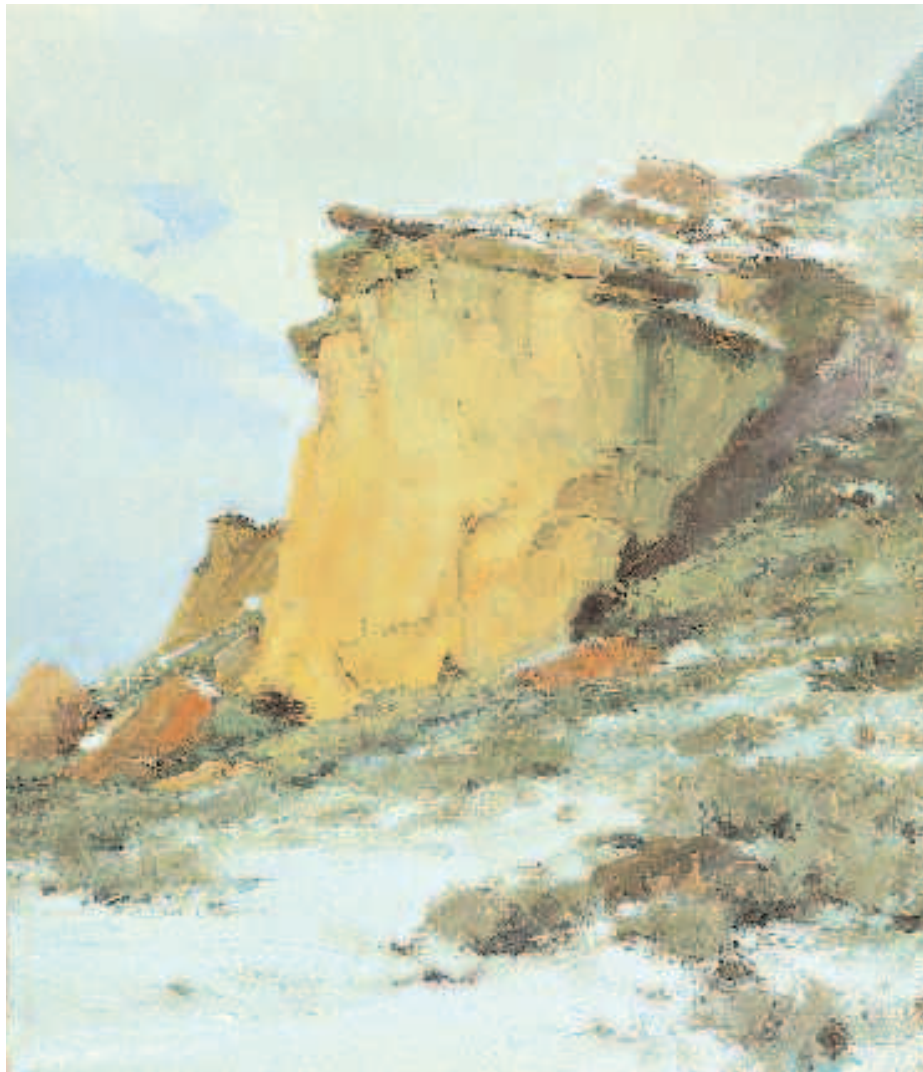
CONTINUING TO GROW

After so many years of painting exclusively outdoors, Lawson says he looks forward to experimenting in the studio with techniques that can’t be used outside. “I’ve started to experiment with texturing the canvas, building up the surface with large brushes, palette knife, or fingers. I want to say more in my art.”

That continuing theme — truthful expression through art — has enabled Lawson to view other artists in a new light. “When I was younger, studying in Old Lyme in the thick of Twachtman country, I thought he was one of the most overrated painters ever. But over the past 17 years, I’ve evolved to where I can see the heart and soul in his work, the love for the places he painted. I love



ARTIST PROFILE



SANDSTONE AND SAGE (FIELD
STUDY)

the subtleties and nuances, the texture and excitement. I've never seen a landscape the way John Twachtman painted it, but it's the way he *felt* it."

As well, Lawson strives to teach his students to put their heart and soul into their work. "As teachers we ask: What are you trying to say? It comes down to a visceral feeling: Does it feel right? I find it more and more difficult to paint a place that I'm not familiar with. I can get a solid example of what the area looks like, but when I'm really enjoying the process, it's with things I love."

In turn, Lawson hopes that galleries will strive to educate collectors about the artistic process. The fact that artists grow and change, he believes, rather than produce a static product, is the most fascinating part of art collecting.

"I define art as the space between the viewer and the painting," he explains. "It's the magical translation between the viewer and the rectangle that hangs on the wall. Unless something of the person that created the work is there, there's nothing for the viewer to take away." ■

RACHEL WOLF is the contributing writer for *Plein Air Magazine*.

ARTIST DATA

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| <i>Name:</i> | T. Allen Lawson |
| <i>Birthdate:</i> | August 3, 1963 |
| <i>Birthplace:</i> | Sheridan, WY |
| <i>Home:</i> | Rockport, ME |
| <i>Influences:</i> | Ned Jacob, the Wyeth family, Emil Carlsen, John Twachtman, Gustav Klimt, Edwin Austin Abbey, Sorolla, and Zorn |
| <i>Values:</i> | \$2,500-\$27,000 |
| <i>Galleries:</i> | Simpson Gallagher Gallery, Cody, WY Gerald Peters Galleries, Santa Fe, NM, and New York, NY Ten High Street, Camden, ME Easton Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA Carol Craven Gallery, Martha's Vineyard, MA |
| <i>Website:</i> | www.tallenlawson.com |