



*Brought Into*  
**FOCUS**

A new retrospective at the Booth Western Art Museum has allowed T. Allen Lawson to stand back and see his work from a new perspective.

By Michael Clawson

*The Nursery Tree*, 2017, oil on linen mounted on panel, 35 x 32"



*The Salt Lick*, 2017, oil on linen mounted on panel, 26 x 28"

**L**ast year T. Allen Lawson began a work that was made up of 11,520 individual squares of paint, each one an individually mixed color on a half-inch square. Like pixels on a computer screen, *Mosaic* looked almost abstract when viewed up close. But viewed from further and further distances, the work blossomed to life. It was only at about 70 feet away that the final image, a top-down view of a pile of leaves, finally emerged with stunning clarity.

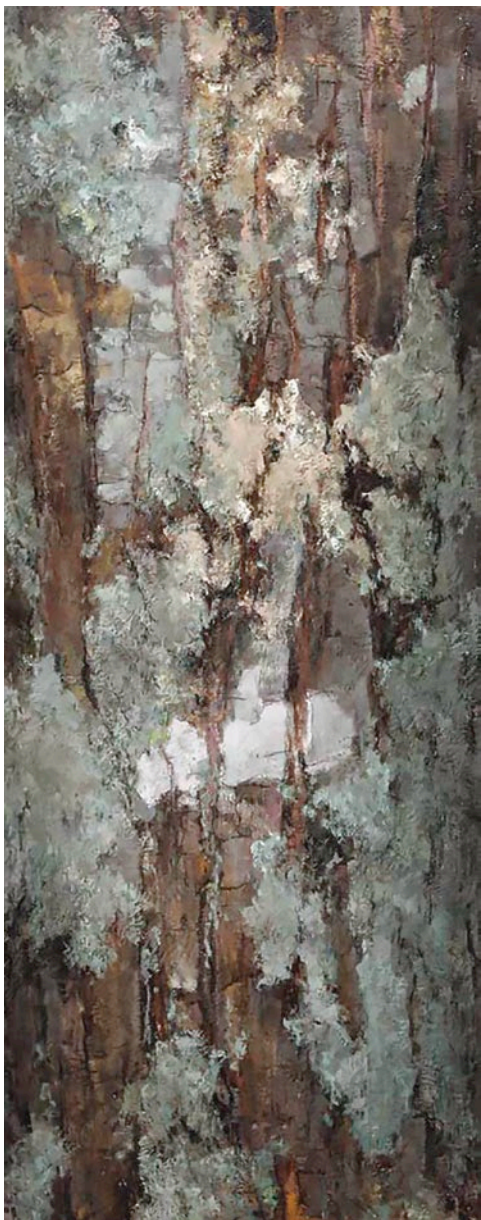
*Mosaic* is not only a magnificent experimentation with color and design, but it serves as an appropriate metaphor for any artist and their work, especially on the occasion of a midcareer retrospective as they look back on where they started and on the road that led them to where they are today. For Lawson, on the occasion of his own retrospective at the Booth Western Art Museum, time has been kind.

"Painting is constantly a struggle. Balancing the harmony and the subtlety of your work, you just get so involved in all of it that sometimes you are blinded by obvious aspects of what you're working on. You become too close to it. But then, at a distance, it all starts to make more sense," Lawson says. "After five or 10 years, you can look at it again with a fresh set of eyes, and without the worries. You see it all with a new perspective."

The retrospective, titled *Mood and Tone: The Art of T. Allen Lawson*, is now on view at the museum in Cartersville, Georgia, and runs through April 28. The show features 66 works from Lawson's career, including many from his private collection that have not been exhibited before. "I've never had this many paintings in one place before," Lawson adds.

"Me at 25 years old and me at 55 years old, we're the same people. The DNA is the same. But my outlook and perspective is much broader, my ability to put

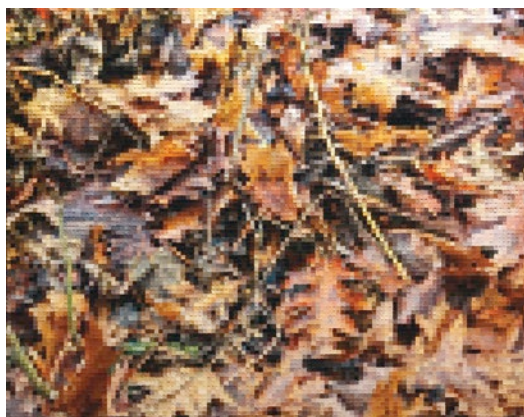




*Red Oak*, 2011, oil on panel, 30 x 12"



*Bernadette*, 2014, oil on linen mounted on panel, 30 x 21"



*Mosaic*, 2018, oil on board. Collection of the artist





*South Brooks Two-Track*, 2018, oil on panel, 9½ x 10"

things into my painting is more sophisticated and it goes deeper and richer. I hadn't developed it and acquired it at 25 yet," Lawson says. "I can relate it to my wife. Did I love my wife when I married her? Yes, but today that love is so much stronger, so much deeper and we have bonded over our shared experiences. You can't begin to comprehend that sort of love and passion when you first meet your wife or someone you first become in love with. That power is so raw, but it changes and develops over decades. Painting is very much the same way as you move through your career. You learn things that a younger painter could never duplicate."

Some of the works in the show, including early landscapes, will allow Lawson to look back on where he came from. He was raised in Sheridan, Wyoming, but after graduating high school ventured off to other places, including the American Academy of Art in Chicago, Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts in Connecticut and eventually, after lots of traveling, to Rockport, Maine, where he lived for 17 years. Two years ago the painter moved back to Sheridan, to a ranch that he says has the potential to be his Kuerner Farm, the famous Pennsylvanian ranch property where Andrew Wyeth painted nearly a third of all his work over a 77-year span.



*Wracked*, 2010, oil on linen mounted on panel, 36 x 40"

It's all these places—Chicago, the East Coast, Wyoming, Europe—that are reflected in Lawson's work, whether it's in farm scenes with sheep and cattle, or marine scenes with boats and harbors, or rural country homes with satellite dishes and snowmen, or desert scenes with towering cliffs.

"This truly is a retrospective, because you'll get a lot of his subjects from throughout Maine, but also subjects from around the world and from around the West, including his *Prix de West* winner [*The Nursery Tree*]. You'll see oils, drawings, mixed media pieces, the mosaic that looks like a Chuck Close-type painting...you'll see just how experimental of an artist he is," Seth Hopkins, executive director at the Booth Museum, says about the artist, who often goes by Tim. "For representational artists who do sublime subjects, it can be very easy to get in a rut, but Tim keeps it all so fresh by experimenting on whatever he feels like. *Mosaic* took three years to complete, but he did it because he felt it would be

challenging and because it would inform his other work."

And although Lawson is often considered a Western artist, Hopkins draws a larger circle around the painter and his work. "How many Western artists have galleries in London? Well, Tim does. And it's because he's an international artist who does things in the West, not exclusively a Western artist. People find him all around the world because of the quality of his work," Hopkins says. "His work has a sheer beauty to it, but also a lot of formal qualities of art, whether it's the abstract design, which he places a lot of emphasis on, or the attention to detail or his ability to edit his work, which is something that George Carlson admires of him. In the show we have his *Bark* series. They're close-up paintings of bark. They're done in a realistic style, but the more realistic he paints them, and the more detail he adds in, the more abstract they become. And yet they look like physical pieces of bark. He uses different methods, including wire brushes






*January's Deposit*, 2017, oil on linen mounted on panel, 9 x 10"

and sanding down and painting in layers. You don't really see brushstrokes, and there is no impasto, but there is a paint quality that comes through that is just magical."

Tim Newton, chairman of the board at the prestigious Salmagundi Club, says Lawson's work has a delicate nuance to it that isn't seen with other artists. "His work has a universal subtlety, and he's very quiet and sophisticated in his portrayal of everyday things," Newton says. "He regards his subjects as really the essence of life, these things that you might otherwise walk past, and yet he engages with them in a meaningful if not spiritual way."

It's that connection to one subject in particular, the land, that most excites Lawson these days, especially as he settles comfortably into the ranch that he's lived on for two years. The ranch primarily trains horses, and although Lawson has nothing to do with the day-to-day operation he injects himself into the scenes as often as he can. "My biggest job right now

is to stack hay on the feed truck. It's just such a magical place. Not a day goes by since we've been here that I don't count my lucky blessings," Lawson says. "I'm so excited I get to paint it. There are so many pictorial possibilities, and I do see it as my Kuerners or even my Olson House, where Andrew Wyeth painted for so many years. I will never run out of material, nor will I ever repeat myself. It's about as perfect a place as an artist could ask for." 

## Mood and Tone: The Art of T. Allen Lawson

Through April 28, 2019

Booth Western Art Museum, 501 Museum Drive,  
Cartersville, GA 30120

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